



Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Tuesday 8 September 2026
3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Initial meeting with Cabinet Secretary for Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic

1. The Committee is taking evidence from Màiri McAllan MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic.
2. The session will focus on the culture aspects of Ms McAllan's portfolio. The education and languages elements of the Cabinet Secretary's portfolio fall under the remit of the Education and Gaelic Committee.
3. The culture element of the Cabinet Secretary's brief includes:
 - policy and support for culture, creative, arts, and architecture industries and festivals, supporting the creative workforce
 - Museums and Galleries Scotland and cultural collections
 - broadcasting and screen
 - Creative Scotland, national performing companies
 - intangible cultural heritage.
4. This paper briefly sets out the relevant commitments in the Programme for Government published on 1 September 2026. The paper identifies some of the potential key issues across culture policy in the coming years.

Programme for Government

5. The recent [Programme for Government \(PfG\) was published on 1 September 2026](#). This set out what the Scottish Government wants to achieve before the next Scottish Parliament election in 2031.
6. In relation to culture policy, the PfG included:
 - In addition to increasing the culture budget by £100m by 2028-29, relative to 2022-23, the Government will provide a further £50m funding by the end of the Parliament
 - expand opportunities for cultural participation, including introducing a Youth Culture Pass, and creative career paths

- design and deliver a National Performing Company for Traditional Music
- pilot a Scottish Artists Minimum Income “alongside delivering all our other commitments to the sector”

In the current Parliamentary year, the Government said it will:

- Establish Screen Scotland as a distinct organisation, separating it from Creative Scotland
 - Support the refurbishment and reopening of the People’s Palace and Winter Gardens
 - Make the Expanded Festivals Fund permanent
 - Actively engage with the BBC Charter renewal process
 - Work with partners to “explore every opportunity for a faithful reinstatement of its iconic Mackintosh Build”.
7. Under plans to “substantially reduce the number of public bodies”, the PfG also stated the Government would “Assess the potential to simplify the management of our national cultural assets.”

A Culture and Arts Bill

8. The PfG did not mention developing a Culture and Arts Bill in the current Parliamentary session.
9. The [SNP Manifesto](#) said:

“Culture and Arts Bill

Culture and creativity are central to Scotland’s identity, and our thriving creative sector has a reputation for excellence. We value the many vibrant contributions they make to Scotland’s life, economy, and to our international reputation. By the end of the next parliament, we will consult to develop a Culture and Arts Bill, learning lessons from other European countries with similar legislation.”

10. The manifesto did not explain what such a bill would include. [Culture Counts’ work](#) in this area may provide some pointers to what such a bill might aim to achieve. A background briefing published in October 2025 said:

“Ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament election we’re calling on politicians to commit to supporting the sector over the next five years by backing our calls for new legislation which could:

- Deliver long-term security for cultural investment, supporting participation in and benefit from the culture sector for everyone in Scotland

- Recognise culture as key to achieving wider public outcomes by enshrining the need to consider the impact of new policy developments on the sector
- Establish statutory duties for public bodies to plan for and support culture, and establish requirements for reporting on culture to improve planning
- Improve access to culture and cultural assets by overcoming geographic and demographic barriers to participation and opportunity. This could include resource and framework to support local authorities' cultural planning
- Grow the economic and social impact of the sector through facilitating creative experimentation, collaboration, innovation and entrepreneurship
- Protect current funding streams and explore initiatives to unlock and encourage new sources of investment for the sector, aiming to bring Scotland in line with European average cultural spends of 1% of total govt expenditure."

11. The idea of an Arts Act was also raised by the [Session 5 Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee in its 2019 report, Putting Artists In The Picture: A Sustainable Arts Funding System For Scotland](#). That Committee said:

"The Committee has recommended that the Scottish Government work with local authorities to create a new policy framework to support the arts. The Committee recommends that the new framework should include a requirement for local authorities to plan for culture and to take account of local and national priorities in doing so. The Committee's view is that the Scottish Government should consider using new legislation, such an 'Arts Act', to establish the new policy framework and to work with COSLA and local authorities in developing it."

12. The Government did not take forward the suggestion from the Session 5 Committee.

Potential areas of discussion

13. The Committee could potentially explore with the Cabinet Secretary:

- More details on the relevant aspects of the Programme for Government.
- The plans for a Culture and Arts Bill, including its purpose, content and timing.

Potential key issues in Session 7

14. This section explores some of the potential key issues in the culture, heritage and broadcasting policy areas in the coming years.

Linking increasing budgets to strategic purposes and outcomes

Culture strategy

15. There is a current [Culture Strategy, published in 2020](#). The strategy is organised around three “ambitions”.
- ‘Strengthening Culture’
i.e. how policy can support the creation of culture through funding or in-kind support to the sector.
 - ‘Transforming through culture’
i.e. recognising the value culture can have to supporting outcomes in other policy areas – for example in supporting health, education, and tourism.
 - ‘Empowering Through Culture’
i.e. participation and supporting culture at community levels.
16. Since the publication of the 2020 strategy there have been a number of pieces of work on how the strategy will be operationalised and outcomes measured.
17. In 2020, the Government established a [National Partnership for Culture](#) (NPC) “to support the implementation of the Culture Strategy”. The NPC [published its final report in March 2022](#). This included recommendations under the areas of: Education and Learning; Community and Place; Health and Wellbeing; Fair Work; and Data and Evidence. The [Government’s response was published in September 2022](#). This response was, to a large degree, framed around work at the time to “develop a refreshed Culture Strategy Action Plan”.
18. Work on a refreshed Action Plan [was announced in May 2022](#). The Scottish Government published a [refreshed action plan](#) for the culture strategy in December 2023. The action plan was organised under four chapters and three of the chapters relate directly to the three ‘ambitions’ in the 2020 strategy. The fourth was a chapter on a chapter on ‘Resilience’. There were few firm timescales against any of the actions. The actions tended to point to more policy-making work being done, rather than outputs of this work. An example is that the Scottish Government committed to “scope the creation of another Youth Arts Strategy”. One action was to publish the [International Culture Strategy](#) which was published in March 2024.
19. On 20 June 2024 the then Cabinet Secretary provided [an update on the action plan in a letter to the predecessor Committee](#). The letter set out the work that the Scottish Government has undertaken to date under the four chapter headings. The letter said that “the Scottish Government will provide a further high level progress report to the Committee at the end of the 2024-25 reporting year.” The predecessor committee followed up with the Government in its pre-budget work in 2025. The Government said that it intended “to provide a further update on our achievements in culture within the last Parliamentary period, alongside a forward look to our strategic priorities for the remainder of the current Parliamentary term in due course.”

Budget Scrutiny in Session 6

20. The Session 6 Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee focused on the arts and culture elements of the budget consistently over five years. That Committee's scrutiny had some consistent themes across Session 6, these were:

- The ongoing financial context for the culture and heritage sector, and the impact and distribution of additional funding provided by the Scottish Government
- Multi-year funding, particularly for directly funded organisations
- Strategic approaches to funding decisions
- Mainstreaming and cross-portfolio funding
- Alternative funding models

21. The Scottish Government [published the budget for 2026-27 on 13 January 2025](#). In relation to arts and culture, a key message of the Government's budget document was, "[the Scottish Government has] honoured our commitment to the culture sector with an increase of over £70 million compared to 2023-24, progressing well towards our commitment of a £100 million per year increase by 2028-29." As noted above, the Government plans to increase culture funding by a further £50 million by the end of the Parliament.

22. These increases were broadly welcomed by the sector. There were questions raised about the distribution of the additional funds to date. The majority of the additional funding for arts and culture over the past years has been put into Creative Scotland and its multi-year funding. It is not clear how or why the Government has chosen to divide the additional money in this way or how these decisions are based on the Government's overall priorities and strategy for culture in Scotland. In the previous Committee's final pre-budget report, the Government was asked to set out "in detail what progress it has made towards adopting a strategic approach to the delivery of funding for the culture sector over Session 6". It's [second, more detailed, response to the Committee's report said](#):

"The Scottish Government has increased multi-year funding to the sector through Creative Scotland meaning that more organisations than ever before enjoy the financial security that enables them to focus on their creative output and engagement and plan over longer timescales.

"After just six months, the £4 million Museum Futures Programme is already demonstrating real promise in shifting mindsets and approaches across the sector. This real-time, evidence based 'test and learn' approach is crucial to shaping effective strategic plans for the sector's future.

"Together with the learning taken from other major initiatives such as the Festivals Strategic Partnership and the Creative Scotland Review, this work will play an important role in informing a coherent, long term strategic direction for culture in Scotland.

“The Scottish Government is supportive of multi year funding in principle as evidenced by the Fairer Funding Pilot which gives selected organisations a commitment to two years of funding and early grant notification in 2025-26 and 2026-27. Sistema Scotland and the Youth Music Initiative are part of this pilot and an evaluation of this approach is underway.”

23. The Government said that it has continued to deliver against the 2020 Culture Strategy and particularly that the Museums Futures programme had been developed with this strategy in mind.
24. It is unclear how progress in relation to outcomes supported by the 2020 Culture Strategy should be measured. This was a theme of the recommendations in the NPC report in 2022. The Government’s additional response to the previous Committee’s final pre-budget report noted, “Scottish Government-led work exploring how best to measure progress towards delivery of the Culture Strategy and approaches to data and evidence gathering and reporting for the sector was put on hold pending the outcome of the Creative Scotland Review.”

Potential areas of discussion

25. The Committee could potentially explore with the Cabinet Secretary:
- How effective the Culture Strategy has been in framing the Government’s policy and resource choices.
 - What success will look like in 2031 for people in communities across Scotland, including those working in the sector, those attending events or participating in arts or cultural activities as well as the Government and its agencies.

Review of Creative Scotland

26. In November 2025, the Scottish Government published the report of the [Independent Review of Creative Scotland](#). The report of the review and its 36 recommendations were organised under five themes:
1. Creative Scotland’s purpose, functions and structure
 2. Governance and leadership within Creative Scotland
 3. Creative Scotland’s performance
 4. Creative Scotland’s finances and distribution of funds
 5. Collaboration, relationships and partnerships
27. Shortly after the publication, the [Session 6 Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee took evidence from the author of the report, Angela Leitch](#). In a letter to [the Committee on 4 December 2026, Creative Scotland said](#), it would “communicate more in due course as we develop a more detailed response to each of the recommendations set out in the report.” [The then](#)

[relevant Cabinet Secretary told Parliament](#), “consideration is being given to the recommendations, and the Parliament will be updated in due course.”

28. The then Cabinet Secretary wrote to the predecessor Committee on 24 March 2026 in which he said that he “welcomed the Review’s recommendations” and “accepts the principles underpinning them” and that the Government would work with Creative Scotland in taking forward the response to them.

Potential areas of discussion

29. The Committee could potentially explore with the Cabinet Secretary:

- Progress in taking forward the recommendations of the review of Creative Scotland.

Local authorities’ role

30. Local authorities play a key role in the arts, culture and heritage sectors.

31. Many local authorities’ culture and leisure services are delivered through arms-length external organisations. Local authorities can support culture in a range of ways, including:

- Library service
- Museums and Galleries
- Venues large and small (e.g. the Usher Hall, village halls)
- Grants to local organisations (e.g. festivals, performing companies, local independent museums, community arts groups)
- Linking culture with other services (e.g. education, community planning)

32. The PfG indicated that the Government would pursue reform of the structures of local government.

Potential areas of discussion

33. The Committee could potentially explore with the Cabinet Secretary:

- The role for local authorities to support culture and heritage in the communities they serve and the interaction between these functions and national bodies, such as Creative Scotland.

Governance of Historic Environment Scotland

34. In 2025 a number of governance issues at Historic Environment Scotland came to light. A new Chair, Sir Mark Jones, was appointed in September 2025.

35. [In December 2025, Audit Scotland published a Section 22 report](#) on the governance of HES. This found that HES must “put strong controls in place to

prevent fraud and ensure value for money after unacceptable weaknesses were found in its governance.”

In June 2026, [HES published an independent organisational and cultural review](#). This report’s Executive Summary explained:

“Recommendations have been made on aligning operating plans more closely with strategy, improved target setting and simpler procedures, particularly around people and workforce issues. There is significant scope to manage resources more effectively, moving emphasis from a predominantly short-term focus to more strategic medium term resource planning and delivery. In the same way, HES should play a more effective national leadership role and drive more productive partnerships. The most important recommendations arising from the review, however, are those relating to improving governance, oversight and accountability, together with the steps necessary to transform executive leadership. These will have the greatest impact on future organisational health, wellbeing and performance.”

36. Earlier this summer, [Sir Mark Jones resigned as Chair. The Government appointed Ronnie Hinds as an interim chair on 13 July 2026](#), with the intention that Mr Hinds would serve in this position for a year. In the first week of September 2026, it was reported that the Chief Executive Officer, Katerina Brown, resigned and that the Chief Operating Officer, Stephen Uphill, would take on the responsibilities of the CEO.

Potential areas of discussion

37. The Committee could potentially explore with the Cabinet Secretary:

- An update on the governance issues in Historic Environment Scotland and progress in responding to the Section 22 report.

BBC

38. The BBC is constituted through a Royal Charter. The current BBC Charter began on 1 January 2017 and ends on 31 December 2027.

39. [Schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998](#) reserves broadcasting and specifically the BBC. Nevertheless, the work of the BBC interacts with a number of devolved policy areas, including: screen production; music; news; education etc. In the past recent years, the BBC has attended a Scottish Parliament committee to discuss its annual accounts of the previous financial year.

40. On 16 December 2025, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (now the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport) published [Britain’s Story: The Next Chapter - the BBC Royal Charter Review](#), a Green Paper and public consultation on the charter renewal process. The Scottish Government has a consultative role in the Charter renewal process and the Scottish Parliament may have a ‘take note’ debate on the content of the draft Charter and Framework Agreement.

41. The Session 6 Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee undertook an inquiry into [Broadcasting in Scotland](#) and the Charter Renewal earlier this year. It [published its report on 20 March 2026](#).

Potential areas of discussion

42. The Committee could potentially explore with the Cabinet Secretary:

- The level of consultation between the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport and the Scottish Government on the Charter renewal process.
- The priorities for the Scottish Government in the Charter renewal process.

Supporting the screen sector

43. [Screen Scotland's strategy](#) was published in March 2024 and runs to 2030-31. This set out a range of work and outcomes that Screen Scotland seeks to achieve over this period. The strategy covered:

- Support for productions
- Business support
- Skills and education
- Cinemas and audiences
- Advocacy and policy influence

44. The Strategy stated:

“Economic growth remains a strategic priority, delivering many of the opportunities talented people need to realise their potential here in Scotland. Creative origination and the development of audiences for film and TV from Scotland are equally overarching aims, however, developing new work from Scotland, as opposed to simply made in Scotland, is our ideal strategic outcome. It delivers additional benefits including the strengthening of local IP generating companies, culturally relevant stories, and even greater opportunities for Scotland based creatives.”

45. Broadcasting and the screen sector are going through periods of significant market changes. Consumption and viewing habits are changing significantly with more people watching more programmes on on-demand services, including Netflix, Prime, and YouTube.

46. Screen Scotland is currently part of Creative Scotland. The independent review of Creative Scotland recommended:

“Given the high profile of Screen Scotland, nationally and internationally, it should be supported to have a clearer sense of identity and the ability to act and market itself more independently within the umbrella of the national body. There should be clear delegation to the Screen Committee for delivery of its

strategy, with this set out in its terms of reference to enable Screen Scotland to operate at the pace required.”

47. As noted in a previous section, the Programme for Government stated that the Government’s intention would be to establish Screen Scotland as a separate body. The PfG also announced plans to “substantially reduce the number of public bodies to create a system that is integrated by design and that improves service delivery.”

Potential areas of discussion

48. The Committee could potentially explore with the Cabinet Secretary:

- The benefits of Screen Scotland being a standalone agency and the proposed timescales for such a change.

Data

49. Under the previous National Performance Framework, there was an outcome for culture, “We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely” and under this outcome, were four indicators covering attendance and participation in culture, economic growth, and employment in the sector.

50. The National Partnership for Culture’s final report (2022) argued that the measures under the previous NPF were “relatively narrow quantitative indicators, which are being used to measure a largely qualitative outcome”. The NPC recommended “a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures, which seek to evidence tangible and meaningful change” cultural outcomes.

51. The Scottish Government is in the process of refreshing the NPF (for more information on this process, see a SPICe blog [What’s Changing in Scotland’s National Performance Framework and Why It Matters](#)).

Scottish Household Survey

52. The Scottish Household Survey asks questions on culture, including on attendance and participation in cultural events and activities. The questions ask whether the respondent has done ... in the past twelve months. The latest available data is from the 2023 SHS. Data from the 2025 SHS is due to be published in October.

Table 1: Cultural Attendance (%)

	2018	2019	2022	2023
Any (excluding cinema) in the past 12 months	74	74	65	69
Any (including cinema) in the past 12 months	81	81	74	76

Would like to attend cultural events/visit cultural places more	n/a	51	52	40
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Table 2: Cultural Participation (%)

	2018	2019	2022	2023
Any (excluding reading)	53	52	51	50
Any (including reading)	76	75	75	74
Would like to participate in cultural activities more	n/a	39	31	23

53. Attendance and participation were on the whole lower in 2023 than prior to the pandemic, but showed improvement compared 2022. There also appears to have been a drop in the appetite to attend or participate more.

54. There are differences in responses for different demographic groups. Around 30% of respondents in the 2023 SHS were disabled. The gap in cultural attendance (including cinema) was 22ppts (disabled: 60%, non-disabled 82%); however the gap in cultural participation (both including and excluding reading) was 4ppts.

55. There is a clear relationship between both attendance and participation and area-level deprivation and income levels. In the gap between cultural attendance in the fifth most deprived areas (in SIMD) compared to the fifth least deprived areas was 26ppts (excluding cinema) and 21 ppts (including cinema). For participation the gaps were 21ppts (excluding reading) and 22ppts (including reading). Similar patterns can be seen looking at participation and attendance across net income bands.

Potential areas of discussion

The Committee could potentially explore with the Cabinet Secretary:

- Progress in developing measurements to evaluate progress in the cultural sectors and scene across Scotland.
- How the Scottish Government's policies are supporting access to cultural opportunities for everyone.

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SPICe

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