

CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

15th Meeting, 2023, Session 6

11 May 2023

Culture in Communities

1. The Committee is undertaking an inquiry focused on the idea of a ‘place-based approach’ to culture within communities in Scotland, with the aim of understanding good practice and barriers to place-based cultural policy.
2. The [call for views](#) on this inquiry opened on Friday 17 February and closed on Friday 7 April. It received 57 submissions which are available to view [online](#). The themes arising from these submissions were [summarised by SPICe](#).
3. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from—
 - Jemma Neville, Director, Creative Lives
 - Sarah Latto, Policy Officer, Volunteer Scotland
 - Alison Reeves, Deputy CEO and Scotland Manager, Making Music.
4. This will give the Committee the opportunity to consider the role of volunteers in developing culture in communities.
5. The following papers are attached—
 - Annexe A: SPICe briefing
 - Annexe B: Written submissions from Creative Lives and Volunteer Scotland.
 - Annexe C: Supplementary written submission from Creative Lives.

**CEEAC Committee Clerks
May 2023**

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Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

11 May 2023

Culture in communities

Introduction

This will be the fourth meeting during which the Committee will take evidence on its inquiry on culture in Scotland's local communities.

The Committee undertook a call for views earlier this year and [responses can be found online](#). On 20 April, the Committee took evidence from representatives from [the local authority/ALEO sector](#), on [27 April](#), the Committee heard from academics and the National Performing Companies, and on 4 May the Committee took evidence from a panel of arts and cultural organisations and representatives from the Culture Collective programme.

This week the Committee will take evidence from organisations with a focus on volunteers and grassroots participatory activities.

This paper will summarise some of the evidence the committee has gathered on the value and role of volunteers, it will also highlight themes from the evidence sessions on 20 April and 27 April.

Initial findings from the 2021 Scottish Household survey have been released since the last SPICe briefing paper to the Committee for this inquiry. Some of the relevant findings of this are summarised in this paper.

Value and contribution of volunteers

A theme from the committee's submissions was the value of committed volunteers in organising and maintaining the cultural scenes in their local communities. This was both set out explicitly and implicitly through respondents describing the work that they do in their communities. Creative Lives additional submission stated, "volunteer-led, community-based creative groups exist in every corner of Scotland, but many may operate below the radar." It said—

“Scotland has more than 10,000 volunteer-run creative groups bringing vibrancy, imagination, fun and connection to every community across the country. From choirs and amateur drama groups, to sewing circles, poetry slams and ukulele bands. The individuals involved in these groups selflessly give up their time and energy to deliver a range of creative activities that promote community cohesion and resilience.”

The submission from Volunteer Scotland echoed this and said, “when considering the availability and variety of cultural activities in local communities, it is important to acknowledge that the vast majority of such activity is dependent on the efforts of volunteers.” Volunteers cover a wide number of roles in community based creative activities, including organising and management. Volunteer Scotland’s submission noted that in a challenging financial climate these roles bring their own stresses. The submission from Station House Media Unit said—

“Key to the success of our organisation and our facilities are our volunteers who are passionate about the organisation and give freely of their time to ensure the aims of the organisation are delivered. This contribution ranges from leading and informing the strategic vision of the organisation as trustees, to volunteering to host the breakfast show on the organisation’s community radio station from 6am in the morning. This commitment and passion from local community members, including their roles as mentors, means that the building can be open as a free and welcoming community resource seven days a week, from 6am to midnight, without the need for dedicated staffing at all times - enabling the organisation to dedicate the valuable staff resource at times when it is most impactful.”

Conversely other submissions, for example from Moray Council, noted that if there is a lack of volunteers, this can impact on activities taking place. Volunteer Scotland’s submission stated—

“Our research exploring the impact of the cost of living crisis on volunteering also explored the reasons why many organisations are experiencing volunteer shortages. It found that many individuals are experiencing practical barriers to volunteering, such as the need to work longer hours or not being able to afford travel expenses, as well as worsening mental health and wellbeing or increased apathy in the face of the current perceived state of ‘permacrisis’.”

Volunteer Scotland quoted a figure of around 5,000 voluntary organisations in Scotland supporting culture and the arts, its submission said—

“Despite the proliferation and clear benefits of volunteer-led community-based cultural activity in Scotland, volunteering is facing considerable challenges at present. Whilst the £2 million Creative Communities Fund has undoubtedly promoted community based cultural activity, it represents the tip of the iceberg. 46 projects have been provided financial support through the project since 2020, representing about 2% of the total number of community-based arts and culture organisations in Scotland.”

Creative Lives’ submission said—

“There is growing optimism in the volunteer-led, community based creative sector. 91% of creative groups from across a diverse range of artforms representing everything from visual arts and crafts through music, singing, drama and dance, to writing, photography and film have expressed their confidence in the sectors’ ability to deliver activities that promote greater connection with others in the community, that maintain or improve mental health and wellbeing, and boost learning or share skills. ...

“Governments should recognise the diversity and scale of culture in Scotland, by acknowledging that creativity extends far beyond the boundaries of the professional and publicly funded arts sector. Locally based, volunteer-led creative groups should be given equal consideration to other cultural bodies whenever culture in Scotland is being considered.”

One of the of the Committee’s aims of the current Committee’s work is to explore how culture and participation in cultural activities can flourish in our local communities. Focus will naturally be drawn to existing activities or organisations and how these are maintained or grown. How new groups and activities are established, and what supports this can be overlooked but is a crucial part of ensuring a thriving scene. A submission from Bill Macaulay from the Heart of Scotstoun Music Group explained how from very small beginnings he had set up a music group. He said—

“What’s needed basically is someone to take the reins, kick start it, enthuse others. Most organisations are happy to give you space if you reciprocate their help with entertaining their groups.”

Professor Stevenson also picked up on this topic on 27 April, stating that when organisations are setting up projects, they assume that the audience that they are targeting are doing nothing. Instead, when people participate in something new, they need to stop doing an activity they already engage in, and this needs to be considered when planning cultural opportunities.

Volunteer Scotland made several recommendations in its submission. These were:

- that Scotland’s Culture Strategy reflects the significant contribution of volunteers in the provision of community-level cultural activity.
- that the cumulative health and wellbeing benefits of participating in both cultural activity and volunteering should be reflected in the Culture Strategy, with particular emphasis on the importance of ensuring access in community settings.
- that the Culture Strategy references the close correlation to legislation and ambitions related to Community Wealth Building and Community Empowerment.
- that the Culture Strategy should increase the resource for community-level volunteer-led cultural activity, reflecting SCVO’s calls for Fair Funding and supporting sustainable, inclusive volunteer participation in line with the Volunteer Charter.

Funding for volunteer-led activities

Creative Lives additional submission set out the findings of a survey of people involved in community and volunteer-led creative activity. Some of the challenges included increasing costs and access to venues. It also noted that for these groups a very small amount of money can make a significant difference and set out some examples of the work funded through a “micro-grant” scheme.

The Committee received a submission from Craignish Village Hall and this highlighted the challenges in managing a venue and seeking public funding with limited resources. Craignish Village Hall also noted that the annual cycle of funding from Creative Scotland is also a challenge. How small grant schemes are administered and their effectiveness and outcomes measured, while not being overly bureaucratic may be an issue to seek clarity on.

On 27 April, Professor Stevenson noted that the current funding landscape was complex, and that it was very hard work for community groups to apply for the required funding from multiple different places. He also explained that funding for projects was easier to find than funding for the essential overheads of community spaces and organisations. Professor Miles noted that there was a need to support volunteers to access funding opportunities and to successfully apply for what is available.

One suggestion that the committee has heard several times is that participative creative work be considered and funded separately from professional arts which are largely intended to be consumed by audiences. Professor David Stevenson suggested that creative and cultural activities could be considered more as we do sport, where the policy aims and interventions to support participatory and community-level sport are not the same as those to support high level or professional sport. The Stove Network’s submission also suggested that community and participatory arts should have a distinct funding stream.

In a [submission to the Committee’s pre-budget work in 2021, Making Music](#) noted that “leisure time music making is a large and [prior to the pandemic a] thriving sector that requires little direct investment and groups rarely draw on available arts or voluntary sector funding.”

Places and people

Creative Lives’ submission said that around 10% of voluntary groups owned their own premises and that activities took place in a wide range of venues, such as “in libraries, community centres, church halls, village halls, shops, cafes and pubs; with a few groups meeting in their own homes or outdoors.” The Committee [took evidence from two academics on 27 April](#). Professor Stevenson and Professor Miles said that if communities had access to appropriate resources, then cultural interactions would then happen.

The issue of access to venues was raised by Making Music’s 2021 submission. It argued for “financial support for the network of community halls, centres, arts

spaces, concert halls etc that provide the rehearsal and performance spaces for leisure time music (and other art form) groups.” Later in that submission, Making Music said—

“Support for our sector does not need to come through direct investment. But the investment in communities is vital for the infrastructure that support us - public transport, cultural venues, community halls.”

Community Leisure UK’s submission also noted that maintaining community assets can be costly. It said—

“Across the local public culture sector, the age and condition of some cultural venues and facilities and associated maintenance costs also require consideration, with investment needed into these venues, particularly reflecting the role of the sector to support progress towards net zero. Where there are listed buildings, planning permission and investment for decarbonisation proves even more challenging.”

During evidence on 27 April, Professor Miles noted that any community space can be used for culture, including shopping centres and outdoor spaces. The important aspect for him was that the spaces used were accessible to the whole community. Professor Stevenson built on this idea during his evidence, stating that we need to widen the idea of what cultural spaces are. He mentioned school halls, religious spaces and parks, again emphasising the importance of using places that people already use to join together. Professor Stevenson argued for supporting local small spaces where people already meet and are creative. He also discussed the fact that the closure of community halls and spaces are a threat to creative activities, and that it is important to value existing assets.

Access to venues also requires transport links to be in place. Professor Miles highlighted the difficulty in accessing community spaces, especially schools, as it could be difficult for groups to handle the bureaucracy required to gain access. He noted that a lack of access to community spaces is a real barrier to cultural participation.

One way of maintaining community assets is to bring them into community ownership. There is a trend of more assets being brought into community ownership in Scotland. Volunteer Scotland’s submission noted that managing these assets is a challenge. Its submission stated—

“The Scottish Government is committed to community ownership of such places and spaces where volunteer-led cultural activity takes place. This is demonstrated through ambitions related to Community Wealth Building which holds the ‘socially just use of land and property’ as a core pillar. However, the community groups that seek to own and sustainably manage community spaces are finding the level of responsibility challenging.”

ART27’s submission was critical of the functioning of a volunteer committee running a local community centre. Volunteer Scotland provide [training opportunities](#) for the sector. Professor Stephenson highlighted the value in ensuring diversity in the

boards so that organisations reflect the variety and diversity of cultural interests in the community.

Professor Stevenson also noted that networks of volunteers are an asset to the wider cultural sectors which may be at risk. He said—

“The touring network that works to support touring across Scotland is vital. I did work with the touring network. It is an ageing network of, essentially, voluntary producers who do the work of connecting: opening up the halls, making sure that someone has somewhere to stay and ferrying people in cars where there are no buses. However, it faces a challenge in that a lot of those people are saying, ‘I am too old’, or, ‘It is time for someone else to pick this up’, and moving on. If there are no young people with the time, because they are too busy trying to find work or their work is very short term, we lose that network, which is part of the infrastructure.” ([27 April 2023, Col 15](#))

Place-based approaches and local planning mechanisms

Taking place-based approaches is a key pillar of the Culture Strategy for Scotland. In [2019 the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed to adopt](#) a “Place Principle to help overcome organisational and sectoral boundaries, to encourage better collaboration and community involvement, and improve the impact of combined energy, resources and investment.” Key to this principle is the consideration of the potential of people, physical and natural assets in a place and understanding how these interact and how policy can work within this existing framework to improve outcomes.

Integral to this will be to recognise the activities that take place in the voluntary sector or that are dependent on volunteers. Creative Lives submission stated—

“Policy discussions on place-based activities such as 15/20 minute neighbourhoods should be inclusive of the volunteer-led creative sector, recognising their use of local venues as creative hubs at the heart of local communities.”

A theme from a number of submissions, including Creative Lives, was the need to map provision and participation. At a local authority level, this should lead to better planning and interventions from local government. Some local authorities have mapped the assets in their areas, or are planning to do so. However, as noted above, the concept of a place where culture happens is a broad one and Professor Miles told the Committee on [27 April](#)—

“During the understanding everyday participation project that I mentioned, we collected our own data on assets because official sources were so inaccurate and did not encompass the wider definition of culture that we use. We found that there is more participation, of the broad cultural type that I am talking about, in rural and peri-urban communities than in urban communities and city centre residential areas.” (Col 14)

Rebecca Coggins from Dumfries and Galloway Council told the Committee on 20 April that there is a need for local authorities to be responsive and reflect the desires of potential audiences/participants across diverse communities. She said that the role of the local authority can be to facilitate others' work and to help link the creative sector to other policy areas.

Some of the local authority or ALEO representatives noted that there were, or going to be, local authority networks to bring together creative and cultural organisations. Kim Slater from Moray noted that culture encompasses a wide range of activities and actors and this diversity means it is difficult to bring "all of them together so that we can collectively move the cultural theme forward" ([20 April 2023](#), col 10). The extent to which volunteers are supported to attend and contribute to these networks was not set out.

Community planning partnerships are intended to enable public bodies to work together along with local communities to design and deliver better services. The Committee heard on 20 April that there was a mix of experience in relation to how and whether culture policy and the interests of the creative sectors was represented at the CPP level. Kirsty Cumming from CLUK said—

"It is not about our members being on community planning partnerships per se but about a mechanism for a cultural voice locally. ... For me, it is about having somebody who can give a representative opinion on behalf of the community, as the voice of culture—not necessarily one organisation or one service, but a mechanism through which people can feed into and take things back from those opportunities." ([20 April 2023, col 27](#))

When it is sometimes challenging for professions and officials to feed into local community planning, it may be even more distant from community-based creative groups. The panel may be able to shed some light on the extent to which the interests and the work of volunteer and community-based organisations is considered in strategic local planning or cultural plans.

Cultural scenes or ecosystems are interconnected and integrated, this applies to human capital as well as physical assets. For example, professional musicians, artists or educators are employed to support and lead amateur groups.

On 27 April, the Committee heard from two academics. They provided the Committee with a wide definition of 'culture' and challenged traditional views of what community cultural participation may look like.

Professor Stevenson said that culture occurs naturally in communities that have the resources that they need, and that policy needed to start from the assumption that people are intrinsically cultural. He cautioned that some cultural policies define the types of culture people should have access to and then seek to remove barriers to participation in these. However, this form of policy making does not take into consideration what it is that people want to access in their communities.

Professor Miles noted that communities have a lot of expertise that culture policies may not identify properly. He said that policy should support existing interests and activities taking place in the spaces that people were already using.

National Performance Framework and the Scottish Household Survey

The concept of participation in the [Culture Strategy for Scotland](#) is broad. Under a subheading of “A broad view of Culture” it stated—

“People engage in culture in a huge range of different ways: formal and informal; historic; traditional; and emerging and it is often through culture that social networks and relationships are formed. For many people in Scotland, culture is a self-determined part of everyday life and it is often through local, community-led culture and heritage where the greatest transformations can occur. ...

“Cultural engagement and participation is currently measured relative to more formal and established forms of culture, many of which are free and accessible. However not everyone participates in these forms of cultural engagement. People engage in cultural activity in many different ways and how that is measured and reported must be reconsidered to better reflect the nature and breadth of cultural engagement.”

The [National Performance Framework’s culture outcome](#) is—

We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely

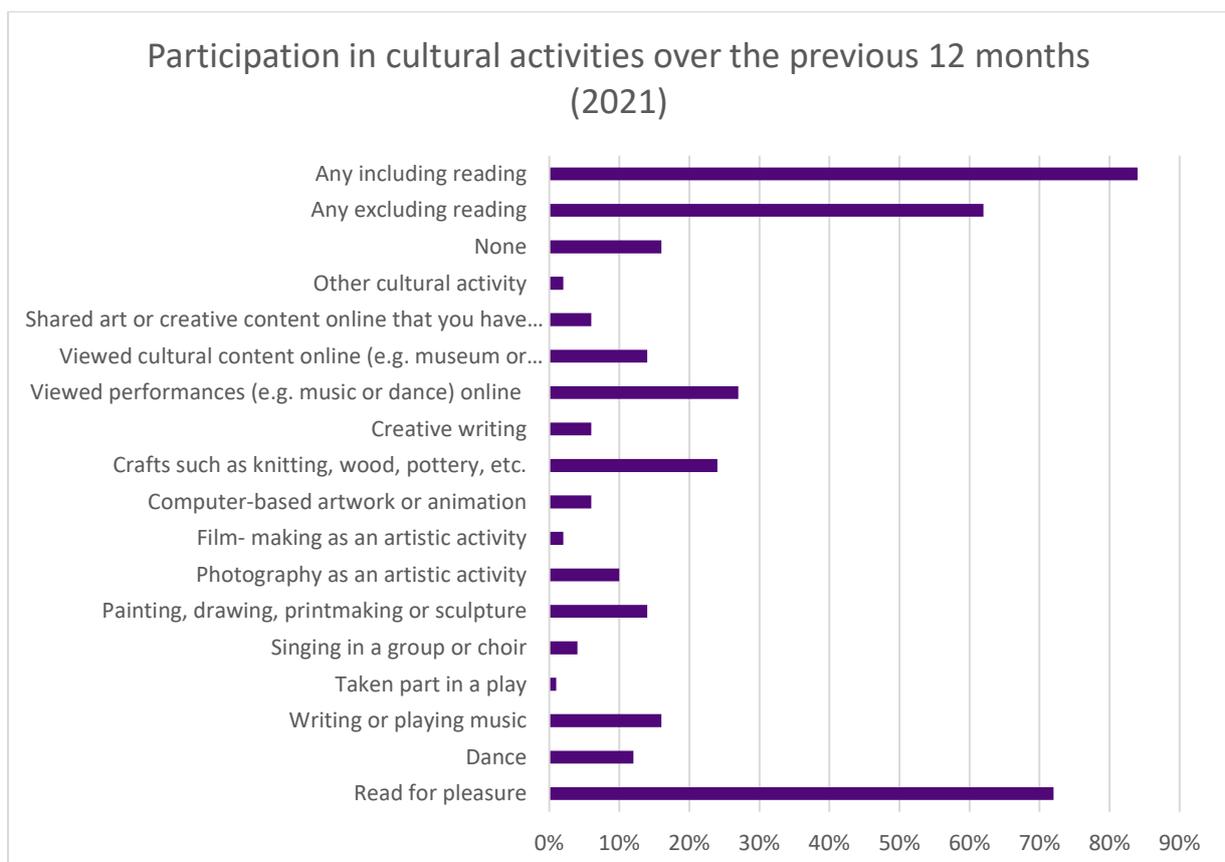
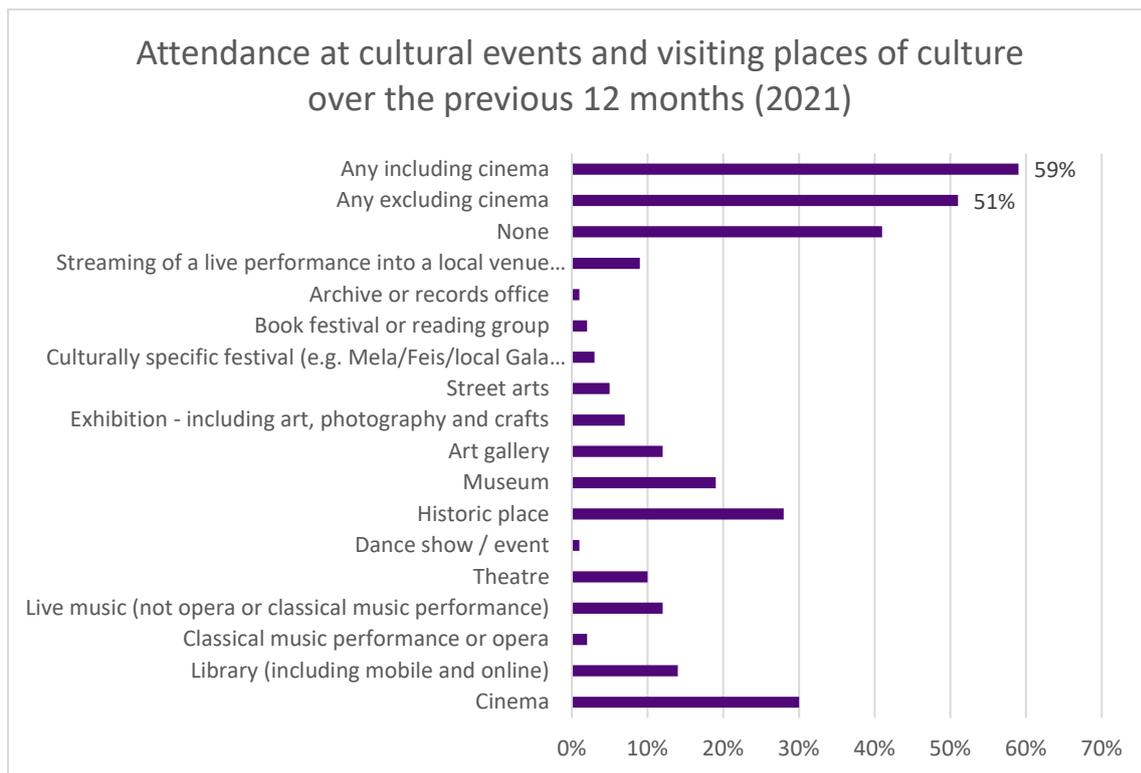
This has four indicators underneath it. Two of which¹ are:

- Attendance at cultural events or places of culture
- Participation in a cultural activity

These two indicators are measured by the Scottish Household Survey. The SHS collects data on attendance in a wide range of places/events and activities.

The latest available data from the SHS is from 2021 and [the summary was published on 25 April 2023](#) along with data tables. The main findings in terms of attendance and participation are set out in the following two charts. This data shows the percentage of respondents who had attended

¹ The other two indicators are: Growth in the cultural economy, and People working in arts and culture.



The SHS also breaks down this data by a variety of characteristics. This shows that:

- women attend cultural places and participate more than men

- people without a disability attend cultural places and participate more than people with a disability
- people over 45 tend to attend cultural places and participate less, although the picture is not clear-cut
- levels of attendance and participation are correlated with measures of deprivation (i.e. people from less deprived areas are more likely to attend/participate)
- There is little difference in the overall attendance and participation by urban and rural classification.

Charts setting out these data are included in Annexe A to this paper.

The SHS included questions on respondents views of culture. The results are set out below.

Views on Culture and Heritage (2021)

View	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Culture and the arts make a positive difference to my life	34%	29%	18%	10%	7%	2%
Culture and the arts are not really for me	8%	14%	13%	22%	42%	2%
Culture and the arts make a positive difference to my local community	26%	36%	20%	6%	3%	8%
There are lots of opportunities to get involved in culture and the arts if I want to in my local area	17%	31%	22%	14%	6%	10%
It is important to me that Scotland's heritage is well looked after	71%	22%	5%	1%	0%	1%
The heritage of my local area is well looked after	41%	35%	12%	5%	2%	5%

The SHS also asks respondents about their satisfaction with local authority libraries, museums, galleries, theatres and concert halls.

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, all face-to-face interviewing for the SHS was suspended and replaced with telephone/ video interviewing for both the 2020 survey and the 2021 survey. As a consequence the results from 2020 and 2021 are not directly comparable to SHS results from previous years.

The Committee’s work in this inquiry is cross-cutting. The Committee has expressed an interest in how community-based cultural policy might be measured. Part of the answer could be in the NPF’s indicators under the Communities outcome. The Outcome under Communities is:

We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe

The indicators under this outcome include:

- The number of assets in community ownership
- Perceptions of local area

The number of assets in community ownership has been steadily growing over the past 15 years. It was recorded as 711 in 2021 which was 7.2% higher than in 2020.

The perceptions of local area metric is again based on SHS data. In 2021 96% of respondents rated their neighbourhood as either a very good or fairly good place to live. The SHS asked more detailed questions about people’s views on their community.

The table below sets out to what extent people agreed with statements beginning “This is a neighbourhood where...”.

<i>This is a neighbourhood where...</i>	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
... people are kind to each other	50%	38%	8%	2%	1%	2%
... most people can be trusted	46%	37%	10%	3%	1%	2%
... there are welcoming places and opportunities to meet new people	21%	33%	13%	21%	9%	3%
... there are places where people can meet up and socialise	28%	34%	9%	18%	9%	1%

... people from different backgrounds get on well together	31%	44%	14%	3%	1%	5%
... local people take action to help improve the neighbourhood	33%	35%	14%	9%	4%	5%

Respondents were less likely to agree to the third and fourth statements which are in relation to there being places where people can meet. The SHS also breaks down responses to these questions by age of respondents, SIMD, and 6-fold urban/rural classification. For those two questions the respondents age did not seem to be a strong factor as to whether they would agree or strongly agree. Respondents from the most deprived two SIMD quintiles were less likely to agree to those statements that others but respondents from the third, fourth and fifth quintiles responded similarly. SIMD was more of a factor in the responses of the other four statements with respondents from more deprived areas being less likely to agree.

The picture in relation to the 6-fold urban/rural classification is quite complex and is set out below. The percentages shown in the table are of people agreeing with statements about their neighbourhood strengths.

Percentage of people agreeing statements about their community, by 6-fold urban/rural classification (SHS 2021)

<i>This is a neighbourhood where...</i>	Large urban areas	Other urban areas	Accessible small towns	Remote small towns	Accessible rural
... people are kind to each other	84%	87%	91%	94%	95%
... most people can be trusted	78%	82%	90%	94%	92%
... there are welcoming places and opportunities to meet new people	50%	50%	65%	57%	62%
... there are places where people can meet up and socialise	62%	56%	72%	65%	66%
... people from different backgrounds get on well together	76%	74%	76%	83%	79%
... local people take action to help improve the neighbourhood	62%	63%	79%	73%	84%

The SHS also provides data on volunteering. In 2021, 27% of respondents reported having volunteered for an organisation or group in the previous 12 months. Of these, 30% said they volunteered with groups and organisations working on 'local, community or neighbourhood' issues and 5% on 'Culture and heritage'.

**Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), and Laura Haley,
Researcher, SPICe**

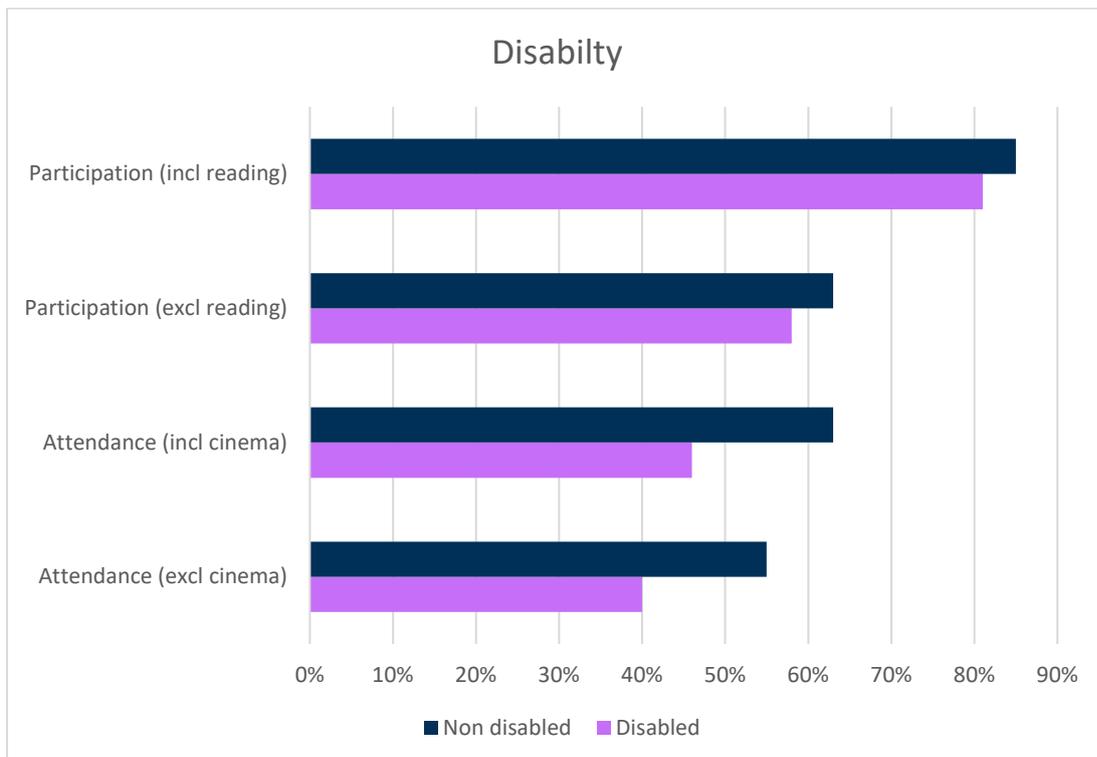
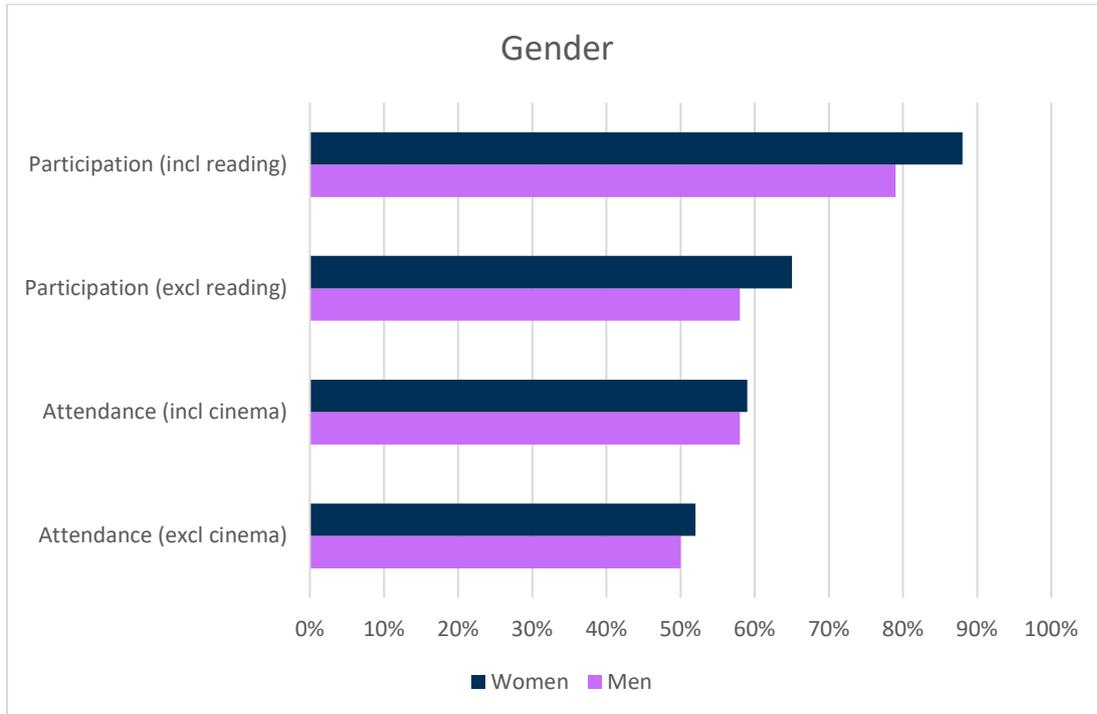
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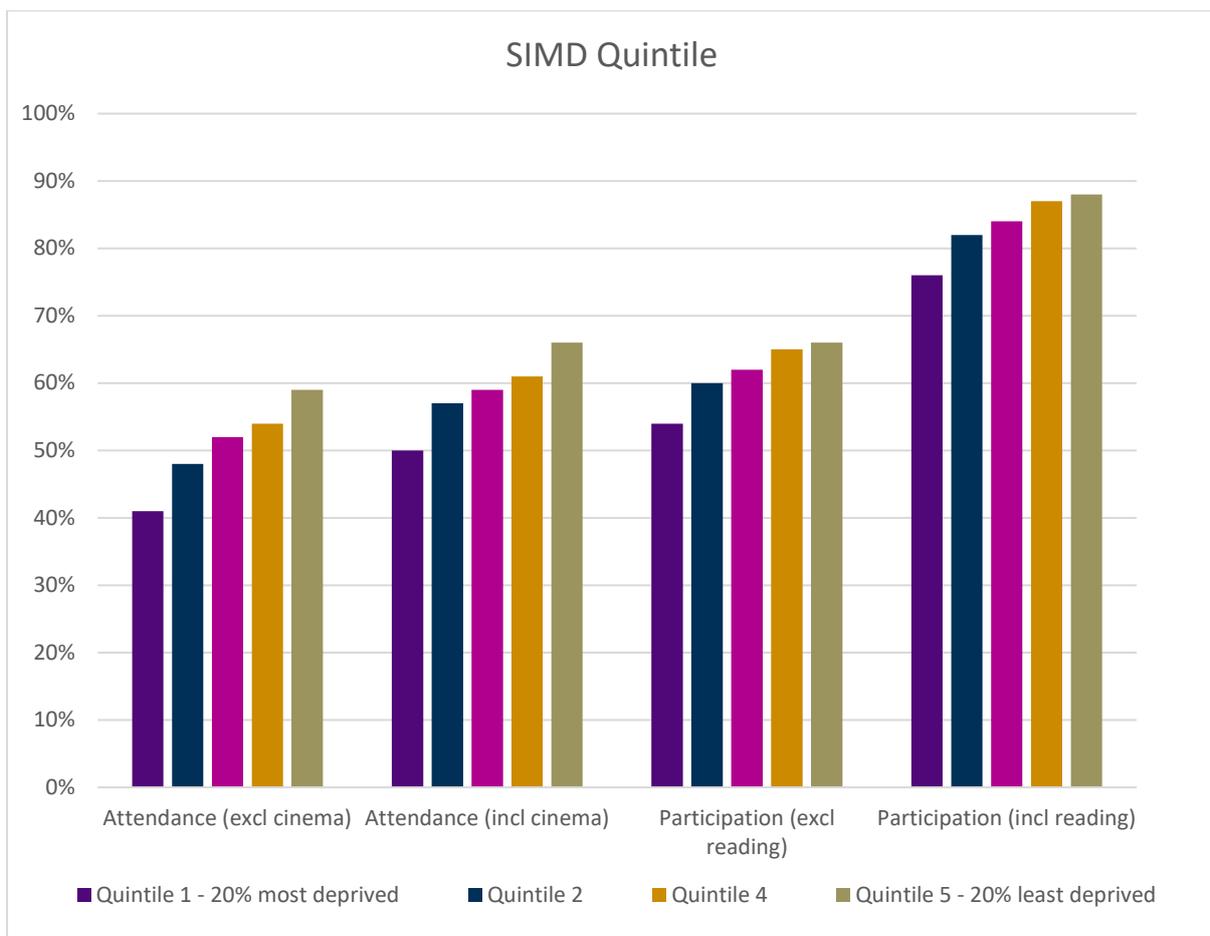
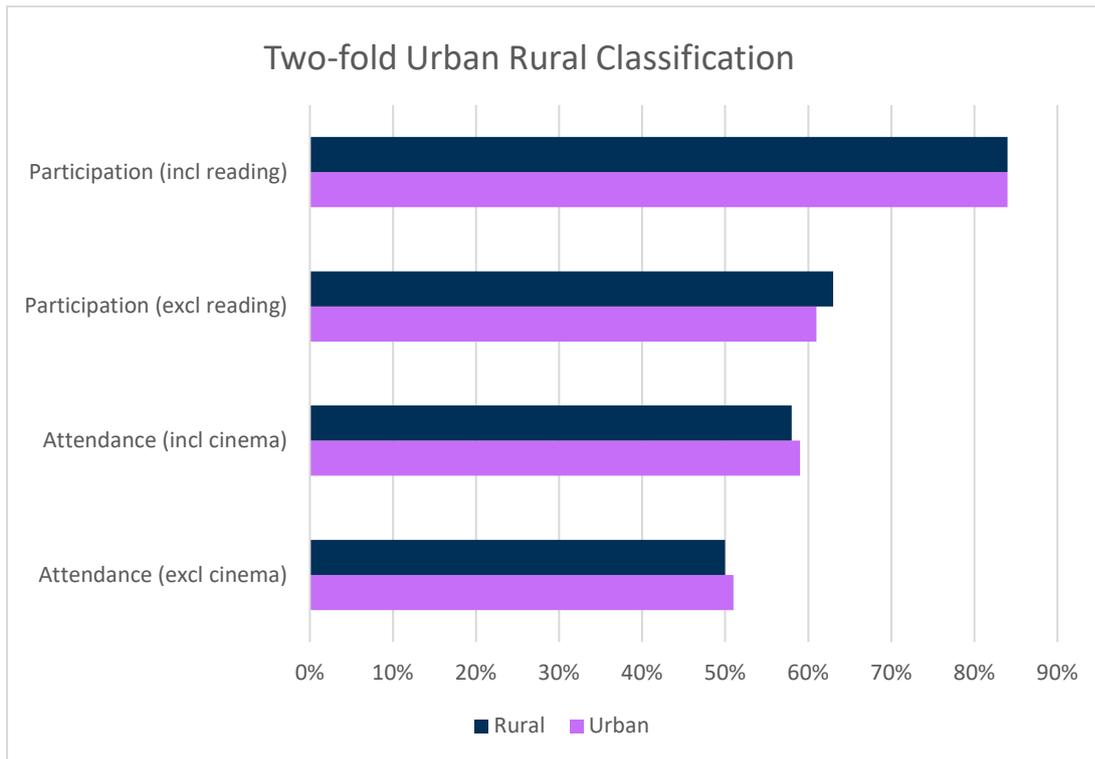
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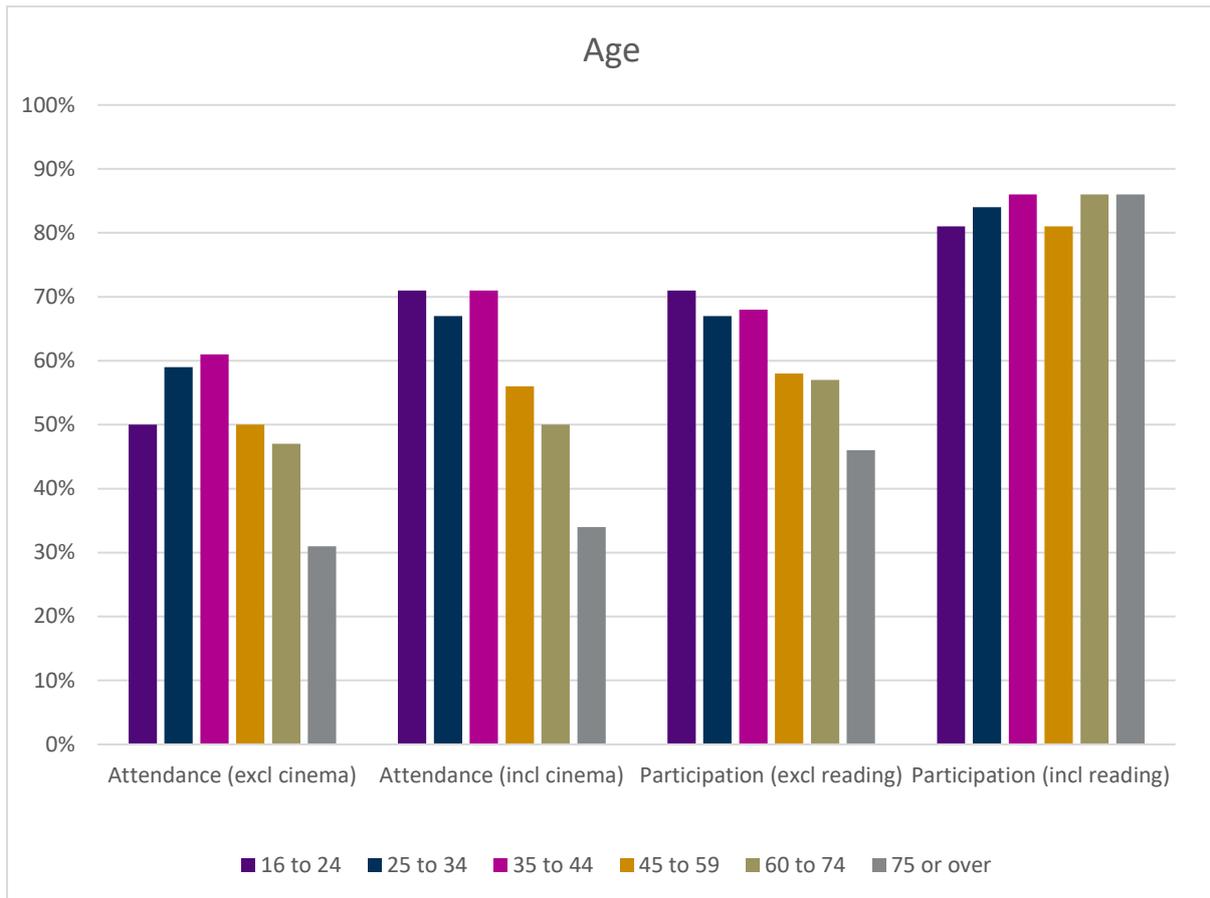
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Annexe A: Cultural participation and attendance by sub-group

These charts have been produced using data from the 2021 Scottish Household Survey.







Written submission from Creative Lives

Creative Lives is a registered charity that was established in 1991. We champion community and volunteer-led creative activity, and work to improve opportunities for everyone to be creative. In particular, we celebrate and promote people expressing themselves creatively with others, recognising the benefits this can bring.

One million Scots are regularly engaged in creative activity through their participation in the 10,000 volunteer-led, community based creative groups in Scotland.

There is growing optimism in the volunteer-led, community based creative sector. 91% of creative groups from across a diverse range of artforms representing everything from visual arts and crafts through music, singing, drama and dance, to writing, photography and film have expressed their confidence in the sectors' ability to deliver activities that promote greater connection with others in the community, that maintain or improve mental health and wellbeing, and boost learning or share skills.

However, the current cost of living crisis is a major concern to our sector and may result in less availability of creative activities as the cost of materials, utilities and venue hire charges increase. And so too does the cost of transport and digital connectivity which are also essential in allowing more people to participate in creative activity alongside others.

The affordability of local venues continues to be a barrier for many groups, as are concerns about the longer term viability of venues run by local councils or arms-length culture and leisure trusts, which may be subject to closure.

Local authorities and those in decision-making positions should look to ease the burden of bureaucracy on volunteer-led creative groups and take an enabling approach to working with their local creative organisations who may be able to help keep venues open or share the use and maintenance of assets.

Councils should map local creativity to better understand its widespread impact and its potential as a resource to boost community resilience, esteem and worth.

Small micro grants schemes should be made available to volunteer-led groups, for whom larger grants may be inappropriate. Small sums can go a long way in sustaining creative activity.

Governments should recognise the diversity and scale of culture in Scotland, by acknowledging that creativity extends far beyond the boundaries of the professional and publicly funded arts sector.

Locally based, volunteer-led creative groups should be given equal consideration to other cultural bodies whenever culture in Scotland is being considered.

Policy discussions on place-based activities such as 15/20 minute neighbourhoods should be inclusive of the volunteer-led creative sector, recognising their use of local venues as creative hubs at the heart of local communities.

Everyone should have the right to access creative activities in their own communities. In communities where creativity is nurtured, innovation, resilience and belonging can flourish. We believe that this right to access creative activity should apply “for all without distinction” (The Charter of the U.N. art. 1, para. 3) and that these rights should apply to those living in Scotland who do not currently have UK Citizenship.

Written submission from Volunteer Scotland

Volunteer Scotland is Scotland’s national centre for volunteering. We believe that volunteering should be an enjoyable, rewarding and fulfilling experience for the volunteer; that volunteers have the right to be safe and protected in delivering their volunteering roles; and that to derive health and well-being benefits from volunteering requires regular and meaningful contributions of time.

We advocate on behalf of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in relevant policy.

When considering the availability and variety of cultural activities in local communities, it is important to acknowledge that the vast majority of such activity is dependent on the efforts of volunteers. In the Scottish Household Survey results for 2020, 7% of Scotland’s formal volunteers helped within culture or heritage organisations, and 25% helped with local community or neighbourhood projects. Cumulatively, this represents a significant number of people supporting local cultural activity in Scotland.

Creative Lives exists to champion community and volunteer-led activity and works to improve opportunities for people to be creative. They refer to volunteers as the ‘unsung heroes’ of community cultural events and state that:

‘It’s no secret that the voluntary/amateur arts sector is populated by thousands of participants – the singers, dancers, painters, crafters and more who get creative purely for the love and fun of it. But none of those activities happen without volunteer time and effort.’

The Pittenweem Arts Festival in Fife is a fantastic example of community culture, as the longest running and largest community-based visual arts festival in Scotland. The festival is organised by a committee of volunteers and ‘depends’ on volunteers for a range of other tasks year round. This festival brings approximately 20,000 people to the East Neuk of Fife each year, having an important impact on the local economy.

Another example of volunteer-led cultural activity can be found in Caithness. Dunbeath Preservation Trust operates a Heritage Centre which preserves and displays items of local historical and cultural significance, as well as hosting art exhibitions, book launches and other cultural activities. It also provides a raft of educational services to local schools and to further educational establishments, as well as supporting local archaeological surveys. The Trust engages volunteers in a range of roles, including gardening and events as well as being governed by a volunteer board of trustees.

These examples represent just two of the 4973 voluntary organisations in Scotland supporting culture and the arts, 2050 of whom are community groups. As such it is vital that Scotland's Culture Strategy reflects the significant contribution of volunteers in the provision of community-level cultural activity.

Volunteer-led community-based cultural activity also has additional benefits that contribute to Scotland's wellbeing. Research undertaken by University College London during the Covid-19 pandemic found that:

“Engaging in art, nature, exercise, music, creative, expressive, social or philosophical activities can elicit stimulatory benefits such as heightened emotional, cognitive and sensory processing, increased social interaction, adoption of healthy behaviours, promotion of physical movement and activity, and decreased stress hormone responses.”

Participation in volunteering also has tangible health and wellbeing benefits. In a report published by Volunteer Scotland in December 2018 we found that regular volunteering can alleviate depression, anxiety and stress, and reduce loneliness and social isolation. Volunteering can also have a significant impact on physical health by promoting healthy behaviours, helping to maintain a level of physical activity that promotes independence and improves volunteers' ability to cope with illness. There is also clear-cut evidence that those subject to exclusion and disadvantage in society have the most to gain from volunteering. Although there are wellbeing benefits for those most included and most advantaged in society, they tend to be much more modest.

With this in mind, the cumulative health and wellbeing benefits of participating in both cultural activity and volunteering should be reflected in the Culture Strategy, with particular emphasis on the importance of ensuring inclusive access to both in community settings.

Despite the proliferation and clear benefits of volunteer-led community-based cultural activity in Scotland, volunteering is facing considerable challenges at present. Whilst the £2 million Creative Communities Fund has undoubtedly promoted community based cultural activity, it represents the tip of the iceberg. 46 projects have been provided financial support through the project since 2020, representing about 2% of total number of community based arts and culture organisations in Scotland.

In a report published in January 2022, Creative Lives found that the transition back to indoor creative activity following the pandemic was being stifled by a lack of accessible and affordable venues. Prior to the pandemic, community-based creative activity largely took place in spaces like schools, church halls, libraries and even pubs. The majority of creative groups do not own their own buildings (approximately 90%).

This is an issue that has also been raised for community-based volunteer activity. Indeed, the lack of affordable and accessible community venues pre-dates the pandemic. In a discussion exploring motivations and barriers to volunteering in 2019, the Scottish Volunteering Forum identified that lack of affordable spaces for grassroots

activity was a particular challenge. One volunteer in attendance had set up a peer support group for people with mental health issues but stated that this would not have been possible if he hadn't been donated use of a room in a local college.

The Scottish Government is committed to community ownership of such places and spaces where volunteer-led cultural activity takes place. This is demonstrated through ambitions related to Community Wealth Building which holds the 'socially just use of land and property' as a core pillar. However, the community groups that seek to own and sustainably manage community spaces are finding the level of responsibility challenging. In a recent meeting of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, the Chair of Largo Communities Together said that:

"What is difficult for us now is that we are growing lots of things but relying on volunteers. Board members are trying to do operational work while having full-time jobs. I have a full-time business. We are going to run out of capacity. How do we take the step to providing more services at community level without having to call on more volunteering by the same few people? We also want to provide jobs, which are needed in our community."

This experience is reflected in wider evidence. In research carried out by OSCR in November 2020, it was found that many trustees were experiencing fatigue, particularly given that their voluntary trustee responsibilities were often additional to the challenges presented in their paid work. This is further reflected in our analysis of OSCR's Scottish Charity Survey results, which found that the recruitment of trustees is increasingly becoming an issue. In fact, charities reporting recruitment of trustees as an issue increased from 17% in 2016 to 29% in 2020 – an increase of 12%.

The cost of living crisis is adding significantly to the strain faced by many voluntary organisations and volunteers. The most recent Third Sector Tracker, developed by SCVO and the Scottish Government, has found that 93% of third sector organisations experienced rising costs from August to December 2022, and 58% reported increased demand for their services. This unsustainable situation is compounded by the fact that many organisations have also experienced cuts to funding in recent months.

Our research exploring the impact of the cost of living crisis on volunteering also explored the reasons why many organisations are experiencing volunteer shortages. It found that many individuals are experiencing practical barriers to volunteering, such as the need to work longer hours or not being able to afford travel expenses, as well as worsening mental health and wellbeing or increased apathy in the face of the current perceived state of 'permacrisis'.

In the face of these challenges, both for community owned or managed assets/spaces where cultural activity takes place and those groups that rely on them, we recommend that the Culture Strategy explicitly references the close correlation to legislation and ambitions around Community Wealth Building and Community Empowerment.

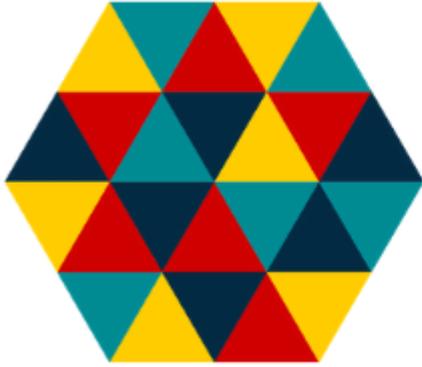
We also recommend that funding for community-based arts and culture identified through the Culture Strategy – such as the Creative Communities Programme - should

be increased. Funding arrangements should also reflect SCVO's calls for Fair Funding and have a particular focus on supporting sustainable, inclusive volunteer participation in line with the Volunteer Charter.

In conclusion, culture in Scotland's communities has an existential reliance on volunteers. Committees, made up of volunteers, facilitate a considerable amount of cultural activity in Scotland; from annual arts events to heritage centres. Quite simply, culture in communities would be significantly reduced without volunteers.

Volunteers, and the organisations that they support, have faced considerable challenges in recent years and it is vital that the Culture Strategy reflects this. We have made the following recommendations:

- that Scotland's Culture Strategy reflects the significant contribution of volunteers in the provision of community-level cultural activity.
- that the cumulative health and wellbeing benefits of participating in both cultural activity and volunteering should be reflected in the Culture Strategy, with particular emphasis on the importance of ensuring access in community settings.
- that the Culture Strategy references the close correlation to legislation and ambitions related to Community Wealth Building and Community Empowerment.
- that the Culture Strategy should increase the resource for community-level volunteer-led cultural activity, reflecting SCVO's calls for Fair Funding and supporting sustainable, inclusive volunteer participation in line with the Volunteer Charter.



**Creative
Lives**

Consultation Response
Culture in Communities

March 2023



[Creative Lives](#) is a registered charity, established in 1991. We champion community and volunteer-led creative activity, and work to improve opportunities for everyone to be creative. We celebrate and promote people expressing themselves creatively with others, recognising the benefits this can bring.

We work with communities, organisations and creative individuals as a voice for positive change, to improve and expand the landscape in which creative participation can take place. We aim to address inequalities in access to creative participation, promote inclusivity, connect people and communities, and seek to increase awareness of the links between creativity and wellbeing.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation, and our response is shaped directly by the results of our [Big Conversation annual survey](#), together with our day to day interaction with the leaders of creative groups, on the challenges they face. The most recent findings of the survey found that:

- ***A majority of volunteer-led creative groups are struggling with increased costs.***
- ***Despite the increased cost of living and the lingering effects of the pandemic, optimism about the future of voluntary creative activity is now at the highest level since 2017.***

91% of respondents to our survey reported that they were currently involved in a creative group or a national network of creative groups, with a diverse range of artforms represented, from visual arts and crafts through music, singing, drama and dance, to writing, photography and film.

They told us that being involved in creative activity within their local community:

“Helps me in terms of emotional and physical wellbeing. Helps us all to form connections and friendships, to share our lived experience, and to learn new skills.”

“I love being able to share my joy of crafting with other people and watch them flourish and grow in confidence.”

“Having something to look forward to each week to get away from the stresses in life.”

“Seeing people embrace their creativity in ways that aren't often enough encouraged by the mainstream.”

We believe their views and testimony will provide useful insight for the committee to consider with a particular focus on local volunteer-led creative activity.

The Big Conversation survey also measures levels of optimism among creative groups. Voluntary creative groups are characterised by their positivity, scoring on average over 4 on a scale of 1 to 5 when asked about how optimistic they felt about the future of their groups or activities.

Despite the cost of living crisis, this year the figure was an encouraging 4.4 out of 5, up a little from 2020 (4.2) and a pre-pandemic survey in 2018 (4.35).

Scotland has more than 10,000 volunteer-run creative groups bringing vibrancy, imagination, fun and connection to every community across the country. From choirs and amateur drama groups, to sewing circles, poetry slams and ukulele bands. The individuals involved in these groups selflessly give up their time and energy to deliver a range of creative activities that promote community cohesion and resilience.

Our survey found an increase in the number of hours that people contribute for free to creative groups. Of those that volunteer their time each week, the average number of hours was 9. This is an increase from 2020, where the average was 7.05 hours per week, which in turn was up from 6.3 hours per week in 2018

There can be no doubt that volunteer-led, locally based creative groups represent the true backbone of culture in Scotland, yet it is one of the most overlooked parts of our cultural landscape.

Through our work we know that our sector provides valued opportunities for creative participation and we can demonstrate why taking part in creative cultural activity improves social connectedness and wellbeing.

We also believe that our sector needs to be enabled to access public spaces which can be used to combat key social challenges by generating practical support, increasing social capital, while also becoming cherished places where creativity can flourish.

Our consultation response sets out the key issues facing community-based, volunteer-led creative groups, demonstrates the contribution we have made as a charity to ease these issues and presents some ideas for the committee to consider which we believe would offer community-based creative groups hope during this time of challenge.

1. Increased Costs

Volunteer-led, community-based creative groups exist in every corner of Scotland, but many may operate below the radar. In recent years these groups have faced a range of complex challenges; the ongoing impact of austerity, Covid-19, and current cost of living crisis.

74% of respondents told us that they'd experienced increased costs for materials and equipment as well as venue hire, utilities and insurance. Nearly half (49%) of groups support people experiencing financial difficulties. Many groups were providing warm spaces and free hot drinks; collecting for foodbanks, knitting hats and gloves; and others have moved to a pay-what-you-can model or were waiving costs entirely.

Micro-grants

One of our key contributions to easing the challenges created by increased costs in 2022 was the delivery of 54 micro-grants (£300 each) to volunteer-led creative groups. This funding was made possible through the support of the Scottish Government via the Scottish Community Alliance's 'Pockets & Prospects' fund. The micro-grants supported the return to face-to-face activity after the pandemic, as well as contributing towards purchasing materials, renting space and transport costs to mitigate the cost of living crisis. This was a light touch and flexible approach to funding which was able to reach grassroots groups for whom large grants would be inappropriate or inaccessible.

Here are just two examples from the 54 recipients of our recent micro-grants:

RIG Arts from Greenoak used their micro-grant to make vital capital improvements by renovating their unit into a fit-for-purpose community arts studio to support their wide range of participants including autistic young people, low-income families, the elderly, people with mental ill health, and disengaged youth.

Sewing2gether All Nations are based in Paisley and work with members of the refugee and asylum seeker community, primarily supporting women who wish to practice English and build new friendships. They used their micro-grant to support a Travel Empowerment Programme, seeking to engage with some harder to reach families, isolated women with no English language skills, arranging to bring them into their base by taxi and begin building relationships. The financial situation of those navigating the asylum system is precarious, and non-essential travel is unaffordable.

For consideration

We have demonstrated how a little can go a long way. We would encourage the Committee to explore further the need for a regular funded micro-grant programme for community-based and volunteer-led groups. Small pots of money enable groups in our sector to both thrive and survive, providing true value for money and a major social return on a small investment.

2. Local Venues and creative places

As a legacy impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, many local venues and facilities have remained closed. Those that have reopened are now more expensive, which is seeing local groups 'priced out' of their own local communities.

Just 10% of voluntary creative groups own their own venues, the majority meet in a variety of different venues across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Respondents to our survey reflected this diversity, with activities taking place in libraries, community centres, church halls, village halls, shops, cafes and pubs; with a few groups meeting in their own homes

or outdoors. Just under a fifth (18%) of groups still had an online element to their activities.

In late 2022, we hosted three 'Creative Assemblies' in North Ayrshire, Scottish Borders and Aberdeenshire. Attendees at each event highlighted the concerns of the sector in relation to the accessibility of local places/venues.

Respondents from North Ayrshire said that the area suffers from a lack of venues, especially ones for large audiences and for exhibitions.

In Aberdeenshire the geography of the area proved a challenge. In lacking a central area, arts activity tended to be quite localised making collaborative working difficult.

Those in the Borders felt there was an unreliability of access to venues.

These are scenarios common to local groups across the country. Finding appropriate and affordable venues is an increasing challenge, some groups have found that they have had to increase their subscriptions, although many groups feel that they're unable to charge their members any more. Some groups are having to come up with new ways to raise funds, such as seeking new sponsorships or donations; holding paid exhibitions or online art sales.

In late 2021, as indoor creative activity resumed after the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, we surveyed groups to gather evidence about the issues facing creative groups and venues in the UK and Ireland. Through this survey we have established that there is a wide cost range in hiring venues for creative activity with the average cost across the UK being £22 per hour, with a range from 'free' to £100.

Local authority-owned spaces in Scotland are often operated via arms length trusts. Community Leisure UK (CLUK), the membership association that represents these trusts, reported that of the 19 charitable Culture and Leisure Trusts in Scotland interviewed in November 2022, 63% are in "*discussions and planning*" relating to the closure of local venues including community halls, theatres and libraries. They highlight increasing energy bills, local authority pay awards and depleted reserves as adding to the financial pressure.

Participants in the three Creative Assemblies also highlighted various issues relating to poor public transport and/or traffic infrastructure which can make it very difficult for people - especially older people or lone women - to get home at night after taking part in a group. Decreasing (or in some

rural areas, non-existent) bus and train services in the evening effectively preclude some people from taking part in anything outside their own living room. Even a 'local' venue that's a 20-minute walk away can be out of bounds for somebody walking home in the dark at 9pm.

Make 'Spaces for Creativity'

In our 2021 'Spaces for Creativity' survey, 95% of venue respondents reported that they would like to attract more creative groups to their venue.

We are currently working to create a short guide to help venues host creative groups in a way that promotes mutual benefit. The venue requirements for most creative groups are modest; venues should be accessible, affordable and flexible. These three considerations should be at the heart of any new policy designed to open and sustain community based venues.

The current review into the Community Empowerment Act should seek to deliver a simplified process, with policies that enable community-based creative activity to rebuild and thrive, rather than the current case where bureaucracy and complexity adversely impacts on the ability of people to practise their creativity together.

Many local authorities face reduced budgets and are going through a period of significant challenge. Rather than take a solely fiscal based approach to setting their budgets, Councils should explore new creative wellbeing models of partnership with creative community groups.

For consideration

The communities we belong to, live, work, play and grow old in are the primary source of our physical and mental health which affects the kind of life we are able to live. We believe that everyone should have the right to access creativity activities in their own communities and that in communities where creativity is nurtured, innovation, resilience and belonging can flourish.

'Place-based' cultural policy can only be achieved by gaining a true insight into the role of creative networks at the most local level. We need to recognise the diversity and scale of culture in Scotland. Government(s) must acknowledge that creativity extends far beyond the boundaries of the professional and publicly funded arts sector.

Encouragement should be given to local authorities to work with Creative Lives to connect with a broader range of voices, map activity and support increased participation in arts and creativity at grassroots level through our [Creative Citizens](#) project. This process would help uncover and engage a wider range of grassroots creative voices, map and record relevant grassroots creative groups and identify gaps that represent unmet cultural needs.

By mapping locally based creative assets and understanding their work, Local Authorities can unlock the great potential that exists within the volunteer-led creative sector to support community wellbeing. Local creative groups embody the principles of community-driven change, collaboration, and empowerment. Through their efforts, they can create meaningful change at the local level and contribute to a broader movement for social and cultural transformation.

By building the right supporting infrastructure and the capabilities/capacity of voluntary creativity groups, Local Authorities will see a development of soft resilience to take on social challenges at the local level and will deliver a boost to community connection and wellbeing.

Scotland should create a place-based approach to culture that is focused on responding to an individual community and its geography, resources, strengths and talents. Place-based cultural policy is important because it helps to build and strengthen community identity and cohesion by celebrating and preserving local cultural traditions and heritage. As a strategy it will be of great importance to promote cultural vitality, local economic and skills development and creative placemaking.

Local creative groups should be central to any local discussion on place-based policies in their communities which would promote creativity and innovation in the arts at a local level

Any place-based approach to cultural activity should also seek to fully promote cultural diversity and encourage the participation of marginalised groups in cultural activities, which can lead to increased social inclusion.

3. Social Isolation

A survey carried out by [The Mental Health Foundation in 2022](#) found that more than three-quarters of adults in Scotland (78%) say they have felt lonely at some point in the last year and that a quarter of adults in Scotland (25%) say they felt lonely some or all of the time in the last month.

When asked what could help tackle loneliness, 56% said making it easier for people to find groups, clubs or places where they can meet others in person. 49% said providing affordable ways for people to interact with others in-person/join social activities. 46% said new or improved community-based clubs and activities in the local area where people can meet in person.

Social isolation and loneliness in Scotland is now recognised as a public health crisis and a shared social responsibility between Government, local government, NHS Scotland, communities, the private and third sectors, and all of us as individuals.

Our sector is well placed to support the mission of building stronger social connections while bringing the added evidenced benefits of creative activity.

When we asked people why they joined creative groups, or why they'd like to, company, relationships and positive social interaction was an important factor for many:

- *I get to meet people I wouldn't necessarily meet in my daily life. I also got to share my skills, learn new skills and relax.*
- *Friends. Sense of achievement. It's nice to be part of the local community, getting positive feedback from an audience who have enjoyed a show is the icing on the cake.*
- *Meeting new people, developing confidence and new skills that can be transferable to other aspects of your life.*
- *I think collaborative art is the best kind and there is so much insight and greatness to be gained together.*
- *Meeting others with similar interests, being creative with others, being part of a team, working together on something that can't be done alone*
- *The main benefits are knowing that I have made a positive difference in someone's life, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem to others. Or just sharing a conversation or a cup of tea is an opening of the heart... Seeing others happy makes me happy!*

- *Singing with my choir leaves me feeling buoyant and relaxed. I have also met some fabulous people and I know I could call on many of them in a time of crisis - as they could with me.*

Many approaches to tackling social or public health issues in Scotland can become too national and centralised. More impactful change can be made by taking a bottom up approach.

For Consideration

Small, local groups and organisations foster a feeling of belonging. By bringing together individuals who share common goals and values, local groups can build social capital and create opportunities for collective action. This means that local creative groups across Scotland have the potential and the power to transform the social isolation that exists within our communities into social connectedness if they are properly enabled and supported by Government(s).

Additionally, local groups can serve as models for other communities and organisations. They can demonstrate effective strategies for addressing social and cultural issues and provide inspiration and guidance for others seeking to create positive change. By connecting with other local groups and sharing their experiences and insights, these groups can contribute to a broader movement for social transformation.

Beyond the topic of social Isolation, it is now well evidenced that peoples' arts activity is linked to longevity and other positive health outcomes across different life stages, including:

- More positive health and social behaviours in children and young people
- Better mental health in adulthood
- Lower risks of depression and dementia in later life
- Lower levels of chronic pain and frailty, and even a longer life.

The 2017 '*Creative Health*' report emphasised three key messages:

- 1. The arts aid recovery and help people to live longer and better lives*
- 2. The arts can help to tackle major problems in health and social care such as ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health*
- 3. The arts can save money in health and social care.*

Arts activities in healthcare have also been found to save health services money, with an estimated SROI of between £4 and £11 for every £1 invested in arts on prescription.

Much of this work is carried out by the professional arts sector. In 2021, Creative Scotland mapped the provision of arts-related activity led by one or more professional artists, created with explicit artistic and health or artistic and wellbeing objectives, and designed to enhance the health and/or wellbeing of those with a health related condition or illness, the wider public, and the healthcare workforce.

They identified 119 organisations delivering arts and health provision in Scotland. There is a clustering of provision in Glasgow City, Edinburgh and across the central belt, and more limited provision in local authority areas including Highland, Moray, Angus, Perth and Kinross, Aberdeen and Dundee, largely reflecting variations in population size across the country.

Social prescribing of creativity activity and referring individuals to a range of local, non-clinical activities or services is an important approach to self-management of mental health.

However, many people who are offered such advice often need a little bit of persuasion to attend or participate in new groups. Even when the person has expressed an interest in doing so, there can be tangible barriers to overcome first, for example, transport, accessibility issues and financial implications. Therefore additional consideration should be given to the role of locally based, voluntary arts and creative groups in this area. By being rooted in local areas, these groups remove some of these barriers and also have greater authenticity and long term sustainability within their community. Local groups should be supported to be at the heart of local strategies, utilising their creative skills and talents to help deliver improvements in local wellbeing.

4. Unmet Cultural Need

Scotland's culture strategy aims to "recognise each community's own local cultures in generating a distinct sense of place, identity and confidence"

Yet, political discourse often talks of the arts and culture as an ecosystem, which fails to fully recognise that voluntary creative groups are often disconnected and isolated from the wider arts sector.

Part of our strategic work is to build strong connections and relationships to support participation in creative cultural activity. We aim to connect all these parts in a movement of local, regional and national networks, in order to develop a more mutually-supportive environment for creative cultural activity.

However there can be no doubt that there are sections of our society whose cultural needs go unmet.

There appears to be little local or national coordination in how best to identify unmet cultural needs. In our view, identifying unmet cultural needs requires a collaborative effort between community members, leaders, and organisations. By working together, it is possible to identify areas where support is needed and develop strategies to address those needs. We would suggest as a starting point, holding focus groups to gather information about the cultural practices, beliefs, and values of a particular community, with questions tailored to identify areas where the community feels their cultural needs are not being met or where gaps in provision can be identified.

Local authorities should continue to invest in local arts development officers who would be key in helping to develop a systematic approach of listening and responding to the views, needs and desires of communities of place and interest.

Efforts should be made, founded on theories of social capital and asset-based community development, to overcome barriers to involvement, including addressing:

- Lack of awareness: Many people may not be aware of the creative activities happening in their local community, or may not know how to access them. Better communication of creative activities at local level should be provided by Councils.
- Cost: Participation in creative activities now comes with an increased financial cost. This can be a barrier for people with low incomes or limited financial resources.
- Transportation: Lack of reliable and affordable transportation can make it difficult for people to attend community-based creative activities.

- Social or cultural barriers: People from certain cultural or social backgrounds may feel excluded or unwelcome in certain creative activities or environments.
- Language barriers: People who do not speak the language of the community may have difficulty accessing or participating in creative activities.
- Physical or cognitive disabilities: Physical or cognitive disabilities can make it difficult or impossible for people to participate in certain creative activities or access certain environments.

Addressing these barriers can involve strategies such as improving awareness of community-based creative activities, such as our [Creativity Map](#), providing financial assistance, offering flexible schedules or remote participation options, improving transportation, promoting inclusivity and diversity in creative environments, providing translation services or materials, and ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities

In 2022 we initiated a community engagement project to investigate the needs of creative groups led by and for people of colour. This was done to better support and champion the diverse needs of Scotland's creative groups. The knock on effect of this work will continue to be used to build a richer picture of creativity in Scotland to help inform the progress of making creative activity a right and necessity for all, especially those from marginalised groups.

At our recent [Creative Lives Awards](#), the group 'African and Caribbean Elders Scotland (ACES)' won an award for their work in planning and facilitating three, free, public oral history events online to mark Doors Open Days, Black History Month and International Men's Day.

Their event broke down traditional barriers and under-representation, allowing speakers to reflect on a variety of topics ranging from love, education and parenting, to immigration, the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement and fighting injustice. Sharing their experiences and knowledge with new listeners reinforced a sense of community while recording this important part of Scottish history, heritage and culture for future generations.

The success of this, and other local groups who serve minority communities, demonstrates the benefit of creative activities that specifically support Black and people of colour individuals within their local areas to raise awareness of social issues within these communities to provide support, togetherness and encouragement.