



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 7 October 2021

Session 6



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CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
7th Meeting 2021, Session 6

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

*Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)

*Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Angus Robertson (Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture)

David Seers (Scottish Government)

Bettina Sizeland (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 7 October 2021

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:32]

Decisions on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Welcome to the seventh meeting of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. Members might wish to note that Mr Golden is attending the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee this morning and will join us a little later.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Are members content to take item 3 in private?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Do members also agree to take consideration of our pre-budget scrutiny report in private at future meetings?

Members indicated agreement.

Pre-budget Scrutiny 2022-23: Culture Sector

09:32

The Convener: Item 2 is pre-budget scrutiny of culture sector funding. As part of its pre-budget scrutiny, the committee has been looking at the continuing impact of Covid-19 on the culture sector and its longer-term future. Today, the committee will hear from the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture on the evidence that we have heard over the past month. The cabinet secretary will be joined by David Seers, head of sponsorship and funding, and Bettina Sizeland, deputy director for tourism and major events at the Scottish Government. We hope that the officials will join us at some point this morning.

I invite the cabinet secretary to make an opening statement.

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Thank you, convener, and good morning to you all, including Sarah Boyack, who is joining us remotely. Convener, I also thank you for this, my first taste of the pre-budget process and the opportunity to discuss the culture sector.

As the committee will be well aware from the evidence that you have seen, the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the culture sector harder than most. In July, 70 per cent of organisations in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector reported a decrease in turnover, compared with 31 per cent of businesses in the overall economy.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Scottish Government has provided £175 million to the culture, heritage and events sector. That is far more than we have received, or are still due to receive, in consequentials for cultural recovery from the United Kingdom Government. The provision of that support has been a lifeline to Scotland's venues and organisations, in particular to the freelancers who are such a crucial part of the creative economy.

The culture sector is not alone in facing a fragile recovery; the same is true of travel and tourism, for example, with the premature end of furlough as a support from the end of last month. However, the impact of the pandemic is such that it will take some time for cultural activity to return to former levels, with the added factor of the new barriers that Brexit is causing to artists working in one of their biggest markets—the European Union.

Despite that, culture has continued to play a vital role in people's lives during the pandemic through its positive effect on mental health and by

bringing people together in different ways. We have seen an acceleration in online performances and an increase in the proportion of people, particularly among the under-45s, who engage with culture digitally.

As you heard in your earlier evidence-taking sessions, the pandemic gives us an opportunity to view things with fresh eyes and perspectives. We are preparing plans for cultural recovery and are not merely seeking to return to the status quo. As so many cultural organisations and freelancers have demonstrated during the pandemic, there will be new ways of doing things—for example, new opportunities to build world-class businesses in the screen industry, which has such potential to grow in terms of employment and skills; new opportunities to reconnect communities across Scotland using the convening power of culture and events; and new opportunities to enhance Scotland's international profile through cultural diplomacy and exporting our best cultural products and services. Our cultural recovery plan will be at the heart of economic and social transformation to ensure that we build a fairer, greener Scotland with equal opportunities for all.

As your predecessor committee heard, the final budget in the previous session of Parliament was intended to stabilise core funding for the culture sector in the midst of the pandemic. We are now at a different stage where, with many cultural organisations not yet being out of the woods, we can nevertheless start to plan for recovery. The first budget in the new session of Parliament, for the coming financial year, will exist in the context of that transition. We have committed in the programme for government to three-year funding deals for culture organisations that are core funded by the Government in order to aid their recovery, and further decisions on that will be taken as part of the budget to be announced on 9 December.

I am sure that the committee is only too well aware of the challenging outlook for all public expenditure and the tough negotiations that I and my Cabinet colleagues will face before final budget decisions are taken. I will welcome the committee's views on future priorities in our discussions this morning and in the letter that you will send me as a conclusion to the pre-budget process.

The Convener: Thank you, cabinet secretary. The programme for government's three-year funding commitment for core-funded organisations, which you mentioned in your opening remarks, has come through as a theme in all the work that we have done, including our discussion with community organisations. Will you say a little more about your vision in that respect?

What difference will it make, and how will it impact on community-based organisations?

Angus Robertson: I am delighted to have been joined by David Seers, head of sponsorship and funding, and Bettina Sizeland, deputy director for tourism and major events, who are very much involved in such considerations at a technical level in the civil service.

A degree of at least medium-term financial security seems an obvious and understandable demand from organisations. It allows people to concentrate on their core cultural roles instead of having to spend what many might feel, when measured against their wish to deliver culture, to be a disproportionate amount of time securing funding. As a result, our three-year approach will be hugely beneficial to the organisations that will be impacted by the change.

This is very much work in progress, and I do not know whether the colleagues who have joined me have anything to add. I should also say that this is the first time that I have taken part in pre-budget proceedings at a Scottish Parliament committee. I will endeavour to answer every question that you have, but we might hit areas where I do not have specialist knowledge. If so, I will defer to civil service colleagues. I will also be happy to write to the committee to fill in any gaps and I will, of course, be happy to come back to the committee at any stage.

The Convener: That is helpful—thank you. I do not know whether your officials want to say anything on three-year funding.

Bettina Sizeland (Scottish Government): Good morning, everyone. I apologise for being late—we were sat outside for about half an hour. Anyhow, we are here now. It is lovely to meet you all.

To add to what the cabinet secretary said, I note that the programme for government, which is the plan for one year, sets out our initial thinking on short-term recovery. We are currently working on a Cabinet paper that will set out our thinking on short-term recovery for the sector and longer-term recovery and renewal to ensure that we protect our core cultural organisations and ensure that we continue to grow world-class opportunities that are available to all.

The Convener: Thank you. We will move on to questions from committee members.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the committee and the technical staff for enabling me to join you virtually this morning.

Cabinet secretary, many of the cultural organisations that we have spoken to recently are grateful for the support that they have received during the last few months, but they highlighted

two issues. First, they are worried about the coming months, not just in the pandemic but in the period after that, and they are finding it incredibly hard to plan ahead without multiyear funding. That relates to venues both large and small, many of which have lost their reserves because they had to use them before they got funding.

The second issue, which is slightly different, is about smaller groups. Although they welcome the funds that were available, many feel that the application forms were totally inappropriate because of their complexity and length. In some cases, filling them in was actually stressful, and in other cases it was just not possible for organisations to fill them in, given their lack of professional support. Will you and your officials comment on those two issues?

Angus Robertson: I will reflect on the focus group evidence that the committee took, which I have read in full. There were some helpful insights from those who took part in the process, particularly on the approach to budgeting and drawing down Scottish Government funds. There are definitely lessons to be learned.

Members will understand that there is a balance to be struck between ensuring that funds are disbursed on an equitable and logical basis—so that the organisations that are in charge of disbursement can then satisfy people such as you as to how that operates—and at the same time trying to do that in a way that is not disadvantageous to smaller groups.

I am cognisant of the fact that, the larger an organisation gets, the more capacity and experience it will have to enable it to satisfy the criteria for financial applications. Sarah Boyack mentioned smaller organisations that do not have comparable capacity to apply for funds. There was some feedback in the focus group evidence about people having to make multiple applications and being turned down, then finally being accepted and receiving lesser sums than they had applied for. It is helpful to understand that that is the reality for many people in the process.

Examples were also given in evidence to the committee in which people said that the system that they were involved in worked well, so I do not take the view that the system is not working; I think that it is working. However, as we move forward, I am keen to discuss the issue with colleagues. The paper that Bettina Sizeland described is, at its heart, about how we help the cultural sector to bounce back. If people are finding it difficult to access funds, they will find it incredibly difficult to bounce back. I want to discuss that with officials as part of the wider cultural recovery approach that we will take in the months ahead.

09:45

We should definitely listen to the voices of those who have given evidence to the committee. To my mind, that is a really good example of the symbiotic relationship that I hope we have with you as a Scottish Parliament committee. You can identify the lived reality in cultural organisations so that we as the Government can listen to them and work out whether the systems that we have in place are as fit for purpose as we can make them.

It is a two-part answer to your two-part question. I am aware of the issue and I thank you for the evidence on it. I am considering the issue together with colleagues as part of the cultural strategy that we are considering right now. Our work has to be guided by continuous improvement and, if we can make improvements, we should do so.

Sarah Boyack: That is helpful. The process has to be robust and transparent, but it also has to be workable for smaller groups, given their resources.

The first part of my question was about multiyear funding, which I think you mentioned in your opening remarks. Large and small venues and organisations that do touring events have to plan ahead, recruit staff and so on, so multiyear funding is a big issue. Did you say in your opening remarks that you are thinking of moving towards that? If so, is that only for Scottish Government funding or would it involve Creative Scotland funding as well? I understand that Creative Scotland is doing a review—that was raised with us in evidence. Will you or your officials comment on multiyear funding and whether it will fit with Creative Scotland funding?

Angus Robertson: I will have to defer to David Seers on that question. We are keen to make the three-year funding approach workable. I ask David to comment on the detail of that.

David Seers (Scottish Government): There was a Scottish National Party manifesto commitment for a three-year deal for organisations that are core funded by the Scottish Government, which includes Creative Scotland. As I believe the committee has heard from Creative Scotland, it has been doing a review of funding in response to the criticisms that it received last time it put together a portfolio of regularly funded organisations. In the context of that review, we need to discuss with it how a three-year funding deal gives it certainty of funding and how it, in turn, passes that certainty on to the organisations that it funds.

Angus Robertson: I am happy to write to the committee to outline further details on the issue. Sarah Boyack probably wants to know the extent to which that certainty will then roll out to the organisations that receive Creative Scotland funding. As I am sure that she will appreciate, I am

in a slightly awkward position in that we have agencies that are funded by the Scottish Government but are—rightly—at arm’s length from it. There is not ministerial direction on everything that they do. If there was, that would be a cause for concern for Sarah Boyack, for me and certainly for the agencies. However, between us and Creative Scotland, which I know has given evidence to the committee, we can provide supplementary background information that will, I hope, fill in any gaps that Sarah Boyack might feel that there are on the question.

Sarah Boyack: That would be useful, given the evidence that a large number of organisations have given us in the past few weeks.

The Convener: I have a supplementary question. Mr Robertson, you mentioned the round-table session that we had with smaller cultural organisations. It was a very diverse group of cultural organisations, many of which also work in the wellbeing area of community involvement. One thing that they pointed out was that other funders have been very dynamic in their response to Covid—they have been proactive in contacting organisations and keen to get help out the door. However, many of those cultural organisations feel that they are at a distance from Creative Scotland and do not have the same relationship with it. Will you ask Creative Scotland to reflect on that?

Angus Robertson: To answer that specific question, yes, we will. Your more general point about cultural organisations being able to access other potential funding streams from other parts of Government underlines one of our central considerations in relation to cultural recovery and the Scottish Government’s approach to it. Rather than simply understanding culture and the arts in isolation in the Government’s culture directorate—I hope that we do not do that—we must think of culture more generally as having an impact across people’s lives and across the Scottish Government’s work.

I am giving a sneak preview here—I must be careful not to do too much of that—when I say that one significant consideration with regard to the recovery strategy is about mainstreaming the importance of culture right across the Scottish Government. An example of that is the impact that culture has on health, which you cited in your question. One advantage of taking such an approach is that it will show how different funding streams are disbursed and what people’s different experiences are. It will also enable us to work out whether people have different experiences because the criteria are different, or whether it is just to do with the nature of the agencies and organisations that are involved.

In my view, that is a perfect example of why we should take a cross-Government approach

whereby we view culture as relevant to all areas of Government. If we are able to do that better in some parts of Government, we can learn to do it better in others. That would definitely be a learning—to use an Americanism—from the process that I think would be beneficial to cultural organisations that have perhaps had a different experience.

The Convener: I want to make sure that I did not misrepresent the evidence that we took. The point that was made was not so much about different Government funding streams; it was about funding from other funders such as the Big Lottery Fund, the Robertson Trust and other bodies of that nature.

Angus Robertson: Understood. The last time that I gave evidence to the committee, I had benefited from the experience of having recently visited the Postcode Lottery. I was interested to note that that organisation has regular community-accessible events, at which people who are interested in drawing down funding can learn about the process and get an understanding of the best ways to apply. They are almost helped through the process. The default position is, “We wish to support community organisations.”

Another lesson that we can look at is how bodies furth of Government do the work that they do. Obviously, we are the Government, so it is public money that we disburse. Therefore, we are in a quite different position. If we lowered our standards for financial compliance, transparency and so on, the committee would, rightly, be the first to say, “Hold on a second.” I would not want to do that, but I am seized of the opportunity that we have to learn lessons of best practice, and not just from within Government.

I have widened the scope, convener.

The Convener: Thank you. I will bring in Dr Allan.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am curious about some of the issues that were touched on by a number of the organisations that gave evidence to us in relation to coming through the experience of the pandemic. I am thinking of museums and historical sites, in particular. Can you say anything about how the budget will reflect some of their experience? Obviously, emergency funding has been provided but, as has been mentioned, a number of organisations have talked about the challenges ahead, not least the challenges that have been presented for the fabric of sites and buildings through their not being in use. What is your thinking about how to help that sector?

Angus Robertson: I am sure that the committee will have been well advised about the real and the projected loss of income among a

variety of cultural organisations, including those that are funded directly by the Scottish Government. That issue is very much at the forefront of our minds.

I will make a general point. On one hand, we have an opportunity here—I am speaking for the Government, but any influence that members could have on the public in this regard would be welcome. Obviously, we need to help those organisations directly, but they also receive support from the public—from visitors to their sites, in the case of attractions and historic buildings for which the likes of Historic Environment Scotland have responsibility. I am keen for us to be as imaginative as possible about how we can drive up their income to help to fill the gap that the pandemic has caused.

There are two sides to the issue. First, there is what the Scottish Government can do, and I think that you know the headline numbers. We have shared the information with you and some of you have asked parliamentary questions, in response to which we have detailed the amount of money that the Scottish Government has provided to help with that. At the same time, one area where we need to do more is in encouraging the public to make the most of those cultural sites, which will help with economic recovery and income for the organisations.

On Dr Allan's specific point about the material state of some of the cultural real estate—I am sure that that is not quite the right way of putting it, but by that I mean all the places of historic interest—we know that, because Scotland is a historic nation, many of those places are very old. We have stringent health and safety standards, correctly, for people who visit old castles, stately homes and historic sites. That has been reviewed in past months, and I understand that the recommendations from the review process are being discussed by the HES board this month. You will probably be able to get more specific information on that soon.

On the fabric issues, I am sure that we all agree that we would wish for these places to be able to open fully as quickly as possible. That hangs together with my more general point about encouraging public access to and uptake of our cultural sites. There is more information to come on that question, but we are very much seized of the difficulty that some organisations are facing because of the drop in income.

Dr Allan: On the specific point about Historic Environment Scotland and its historic real estate, you will be aware that a number of us have asked questions about that. I will not ask about specific sites but, if the board is meeting to discuss that, are you hopeful that we will get back to something

like the number of sites that were open pre-pandemic?

Angus Robertson: In all candour, I cannot answer that question. I am not privy to the report that is being presented to the board. That is an example of the separation of powers, if you want to call it that, in the culture sector. I will be very interested to learn what the conclusions are. I will want to be assured that everything is being done to ensure that the restoration of the sites can proceed at pace. I am keen—as I am sure Dr Allan is—to ensure that the appropriate safety standards can be maintained for visitors to those sites. I cannot give a sneak preview of what the board might learn, because it is for the board to learn before me, my colleagues or, indeed, committee members. However, I will endeavour to ensure that you have as much information as possible as quickly as I and you can receive it. That might be in response to a parliamentary question, or we can write to you to share that information.

Dr Allan: I am grateful for that.

I want to return to the issue of how the budget will recognise new ways of doing things. Again, I am thinking about the museum sector. There has been support for the things that the museums sector and the galleries sector have been doing in the digital sphere. The situation has not been of their making, but they have made the best of it. To think more positively about the opportunities that those sectors have, will the budget recognise the fact that museums and galleries are doing things differently? I am thinking about not only the move to digital but the fact that they have plenty of stuff in their vaults that nobody ever sees. I am sure that they have been thinking about how to bring that to a wider audience.

10:00

Angus Robertson: The short answer is yes. Expanding on that, it behoves us all to support those who are delivering this—whether that is the management of museums or other cultural organisations—to reimagine the cultural recovery that we are all in favour of. We should not simply seek to go back to where we were pre-Covid; we should realise that much has changed. You made the point that we are enjoying and consuming culture in ways that we did not do before, and that should make a difference to our thinking about our policy and budgetary approach. We are alive to that and in the middle of that process. When we come back to the committee at the stage when budgets have been agreed and processes have been gone through, I will be more than content to share with you and reflect on the extent to which we have been guided by an awareness of those changes.

In passing, I note that I have been keen to say to civil service colleagues and cultural organisations that we are not the only people in the cultural and arts world who are going through this. Every other country in the world is having to grapple with the impact of the pandemic and many countries have experienced a similar impact, with a lack of public access to facilities, a drop in income and concern about how one recovers or intends to recover. I have been keen to impress on everybody who is involved that we should be trying to learn lessons from elsewhere as well as from here. There is not a monopoly on common sense in Scotland, so I am keen to work out the best way in which we can learn and emulate best practice from elsewhere. Given that we are in this process, I will be happy to feed back to the committee on what we have and have not learned, to ensure that we can do this as well as we can.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): You have given a hint about what a cultural recovery could look like and what the benefits could be across society and the work of Government. I want to push you a bit more on that. The national outcome for culture says:

“We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely”.

That is a great outcome, but it perhaps does not describe what, for example, an organisation such as Sistema Scotland does, which is much more about community regeneration, health and ensuring that there are excellent outcomes for school leavers. How do we ensure that the wider work of organisations such as that is captured in the way that budgets are constructed, as well as in the national performance framework?

Angus Robertson: That is a well-timed question. I welcome Mr Ruskell to the committee. I think that he is aware of the announcement that the Scottish Government made this week on funding for Sistema, which has been warmly welcomed by that organisation. I am sure that all members know intimately what Sistema does and how it literally transforms the learning experience of young people but, for anybody who is watching the proceedings, I note that it is an excellent example of a primarily culturally focused intervention that indisputably has an impact on the more general quality of people’s lives and, hopefully, as a knock-on consequence, on their opportunities in life.

Mr Ruskell’s point is, in its own way, an optimal example of the point that I made in my sneak preview, which you have kindly invited me to give even more insight on—forgive me, but I will have to resist that. I reiterate the point, because Sistema is a good example of a project that has an impact across Government responsibility. I am keen that the benefits are understood among

colleagues whose primary responsibility might be health, education or justice. I am sure that many of the benefits are understood, because we are parliamentarians representing a constituency or a region, so we are aware of the impact that some projects have. However, I genuinely hope that mainstreaming that thinking across Government will help to deliver on the aspirations that we have in the culture strategy and the programme for government. Sistema is possibly one of the best examples of that.

Forgive me, but I am not going to show any more leg on the creative recovery strategy. I am sure that we will come back to that and I hope that it will be worthy of the ambition, because it should be.

Bettina Sizeland: The culture strategy was published in February 2020, just before the pandemic. It still provides a good platform and framework to deliver recovery. The vision and outcomes are still relevant, although some of the actions need updating. Stakeholders throughout Scotland worked for over three years to produce the strategy and it is still a relevant guiding document for recovery.

Mark Ruskell: Sistema has been an incredible success. I have been aware of it and its work in Stirling from the outset.

Many creative and innovative organisations throughout Scotland, particularly social enterprises, are working on town centre regeneration, for example, by turning empty shops into hubs for creatives. They are doing some incredible innovative work, but it does not always fit the criteria for charitable giving or even Creative Scotland funding. I know a number of organisations, such as Made in Stirling, which the First Minister visited a year or two ago, that have struggled to access funding from Creative Scotland because they do not easily fit the criteria, as what they are doing is holistic—they are working on regeneration and multiple outcomes.

I sense that that could be the case for other organisations that are working on, say, health through music or other group activities that benefit people with autism and do not necessarily fit any single set of funding criteria. That is where the buck stops. I am interested in how the budget and cultural strategy will unlock that creativity. For me, it is about 20-minute neighbourhoods, urban regeneration and everything that we need to happen in our communities.

Angus Robertson: I will answer that in two ways.

First, I will comment on social enterprises and the example that you gave of urban regeneration. The programme for government commits the Scottish Government to recognising

“the importance of place in Scottish culture, and to support communities to celebrate and preserve their heritage”.

It also says:

“this year we will start work on designing a National Towns of Culture scheme, to be launched over this Parliament.”

We are thinking about that and how it can best incorporate the efforts of all kinds of organisations. It gives an opportunity to listen to advice such as that given by Mr Ruskell to ensure that the approach is as broad as the ambition might be in the cultural recovery strategy to ensure that things are joined up. I am taking that down as a mental note and action point, because it is a specific point on urban regeneration and understanding culture in the broadest of senses. It is a good example.

On the second part of the question, I refer back to the much-mentioned cultural recovery strategy that we are unable to talk about in greater detail. I think that Mr Ruskell will be keen to know how tangible the ambition of joined-up Government is to include organisations that might not, on first reading, be thought of as being cultural organisations. I do not know the answer to the question. I am keen to make it happen and for my colleagues to think about it.

No doubt, the committee will want to come back and ask whether the cultural recovery and renewal strategy is fit for purpose and whether it fulfils the ambitions that I have shared with the committee, as well as meeting your priorities as individual members and collectively as a committee. That will be a worthwhile process, when we get to the stage of the Government agreeing the strategy and seeking the views of the likes of this committee.

The Convener: I have another supplementary question. El Sistema is well known, but in my area there is a local organisation that has been working with young people for more than 22 years and that receives the bulk of its funding from the youth music initiative. In the previous session of Parliament, I was the convener of the Education and Skills Committee, which carried out an inquiry into music tuition in schools. We now have a link-up between culture and education. If we are offering more opportunities for young people to do music at school, will there be a review of how the youth music initiative can support schools and third sector organisations that might pick up some of that work outside school times?

Angus Robertson: I should first declare an interest, having attended Broughton high school, which is a specialist music school in Scotland’s state system. I was a normal school pupil and not in the music unit, but I had the benefit of being around people who were. In general, the school had a tremendous musical aspect in the education

of pupils, which encouraged some of us, me included, to play for the Edinburgh secondary schools orchestra. I do not claim to have been a tremendous violin player—I was at the back of the second violins—but it was great to be part of that.

I am sharing with you my personal experience to show that I understand how transformational music in the broadest sense is for young people and the importance of encouraging music tuition and its take-up. I am delighted that, in its programme for government, the Scottish Government included commitments on that, and that those have been and are being taken forward.

That is another example of the cross-Government approach between culture and education. The committee needs to know that I am keen on supporting that. My officials know that I am keen to understand how the commitments on which the Scottish Government was elected are delivered. I want music tuition to go from strength to strength. I want take-up to be possible for kids everywhere, and not just for those who have the good fortune, as I happened to have, of being in a school with a particularly strong musical tradition. There are places where that is less the case. We have good organisations such as El Sistema that deliver among the most deprived communities, but there are other communities that perhaps fall between those positions. We have to try to ensure that we impact on young people’s lives as best we can right across the country.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I want to persist on the issue of mainstreaming. The committee heard interesting evidence from Museums Galleries Scotland about how museums, through their work, encourage public health and—perhaps more obviously—education. We have been talking about cross-portfolio working for a long time. It has been 10 years since the Christie commission report was published. I want to drill down into how the Government drives that agenda now.

Angus Robertson: That is a great question. I have to be absolutely clear that, as somebody who has been in the Scottish Parliament only since May and who has been a cabinet secretary for only a few short months, I do not have personal insight into the 10-year horizon that Mr Cameron talked about. However, I spend probably more than half of my working day on Teams calls with colleagues across Government discussing how Government is joined up, and I certainly get the impression that there is a genuine effort across Government to try to make that work, whether it is in relation to the economy or elsewhere.

10:15

We are about to embark on that in the cultural sphere. I can reflect on the fact that there is a sincere effort to make that approach work in other areas. I give Mr Cameron the assurance that I am keen to ensure that it works, and he will want to be sure that it is working. Only when we can come back and he can interrogate the extent to which it is taking place will I be able to answer that question. However, I can say that my intention is to try to make it work, and perhaps bringing the insights of a relative newcomer will be helpful in that.

It bodes well that everybody who I speak to seems to think that it is a tremendously good idea. If people were not aware that there are benefits in working beyond the culture and arts silo, we would be in difficulty. The fact that people recognise the health and education benefits as well as the possible benefits for the justice system in certain settings makes me optimistic that, if we can harness the awareness and willingness to do something, we can really make that approach deliver. However, the member will need to satisfy himself that that is what will actually happen once we have launched the strategy and we are getting on with delivering it.

I again go back to the symbiotic relationship between the committee and the Government. Perhaps I am a hopelessly idealistic newcomer in this regard, but you need to know that the work that you do influences people like me and my civil service colleagues. Your considerations are important because we have different time constraints and time limitations. For example, the thoughtful approach that you were able to take recently in your focus group work was absolutely invaluable. I leave that thought with the convener and deputy convener. It is a way in which you can influence the Government and ensure that it delivers. I am keen to work with you on that as we jointly try to deliver a joined-up approach.

Donald Cameron: I am grateful for that answer. It strikes me that we all share the ideal, but we never quite realise it. I suppose that, ultimately, the question is about how we get a general practitioner to prescribe a trip to a museum, a local theatre show or whatever. How do we get that to happen? That is sort of a rhetorical question.

Angus Robertson: It is a good kind of question. We could probably come up with a list of questions like it, against which a joined-up approach could be measured. I am not trying to introduce a whole series of new metrics—I am looking at the speed with which my civil service colleagues here are writing notes about my suggestion. However, the issue that Donald Cameron raises is a case in point. I suspect that, if people furth of the culture and arts world are encouraged to open up

pathways so that people can get the benefits of our cultural institutions, some will be quicker than others to do that. To what extent does one have to pull and to what extent does one have to push for that to succeed?

We are talking about a cultural change—in the small c sense—in how we see culture. With hand on heart, I cannot honestly say that I know exactly how that will turn out. However, I know that we do not have an alternative, because we need to encourage kids, particularly those from deprived communities, to learn that cultural institutions and offerings are for them as much as they are for anybody else.

Creative Scotland has deduced from some of its research a statistic that only 30 per cent of people know how to access information on cultural events. That is probably surprising for those of us who go to such events and who know where to look. If we take that at face value, we have to accept the profound disconnect with a significant part of society. That is why we need a joined-up approach, with doctors prescribing or encouraging such activity, or schools helping kids to go to places that they would never normally go, instilling in them the sense that it is worth going back, and encouraging them to go with their parents. As I said, there is no alternative. That is another example of where good thinking on the committee's part will encourage us to think about how we can deliver that across Government.

Donald Cameron: I will move on to a completely different point, which is about the spread of funding across local authority areas. A few weeks ago, we received evidence from Creative Scotland in which it emerged that the funding is disparate. For instance, Edinburgh gets £51 per capita, Glasgow gets £34, Dundee gets £21 and Aberdeen gets £4.67. The five areas with the lowest per-capita funding are all areas surrounding Edinburgh and Glasgow. There is a huge variety. I realise that Creative Scotland is an arm's-length organisation and that there is an issue about the number of applications and how many awards are made thereafter. However, what can the Government do to encourage a greater spread of funding, or perhaps a greater range and number of applications, and then funding awards across Scotland? As I say, there seems to be a huge variety.

Angus Robertson: There is a conceptual point about understanding the feedback on that. I think that everybody here will appreciate that, just because a particular body is headquartered in—for the sake of argument—Edinburgh, that does not mean that all its cultural work is undertaken in Edinburgh. We have cultural organisations that set great store by the fact that they tour, but that is not borne out in the headline figures on the disbursement

of funds to particular organisations. That creates the impression that all the money is centred on Edinburgh, for example, which is not the case.

I speak as somebody who lived for a great length of time in the north of Scotland and who was able to enjoy all kinds of national companies and other companies that are headquartered in Edinburgh or Glasgow performing in places such as the Universal hall in Findhorn or Elgin town hall. That underlines the point that we have to be careful in understanding where money is disbursed to.

A second point is about how we encourage organisations that are currently not funded to seek funding. That goes back to something that we discussed right at the start, so I do not want to go round the houses again on that. One thing that the committee might be able to help us with is understanding whether there is a slew of organisations across the country that wish to be funded and that are not being funded for a particular reason. If that is the case, I would like to know about it. I do not have a sense of systemic underfunding of organisations that are based outside the cities.

It is probably undeniably the case that some cultural organisations could do more work elsewhere in the country. Mr Cameron will know that funding streams have been made available and are being disbursed right now to allow performers and people in the arts scene to reach different parts of the country. I encourage anybody who is watching the meeting to do so if they want to.

Point 1 is a conceptual point—it is not the case that the money is spent only in the local authorities in whose areas the organisations are headquartered. Secondly, I am not aware that there is a whole series of organisations that are based elsewhere and are not funded or are underfunded. Thirdly, we need to ensure that we reach the whole country.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Thank you for coming to see us today. I will go back to Donald Cameron's first question. My friend is a retired GP, and they would have loved to have been able to prescribe hugging a tree or going to a cultural event. However, there is a requirement to change people's perception of what they will get when they go to a GP. In some respects, perhaps the pandemic has opened up different doors. I had the privilege of attending an art show in Oban that resulted from work that people had been doing throughout the pandemic. There are ideas sprouting up throughout Scotland, and I hope that we, as elected people, and the Government can expand on them.

Cabinet secretary, I will go back to something that you said in your opening statement about the vibrancy of the screen industry in Scotland. There are studios in Leith and Glasgow, the BBC is across Scotland and there is Channel 4. I am interested to know how the budget will support skills in the industry and locations across Scotland, including our wonderful scenery?

Angus Robertson: I would be happy to do the entire evidence session on that subject because we should all be very encouraged by and excited about it.

The funding is the remit of Screen Scotland, which is funded through Creative Scotland, which is in turn funded by the Scottish Government, and we lay great store on what is happening. As an organisation, we are very enthused, as I am personally, about the quality of Screen Scotland, what it is currently doing, what it is able to do with the resources that it has and what we are planning to do.

I have numbers in front of me that tell me that we have been funding production growth—allowing more film and television projects to be undertaken in Scotland—since 2015 and that £9.9 million has been funded. The estimated economic benefit to Scotland as a return is £140 million. Therefore, the benefit of the Government encouraging that particular sector is massive.

Studios were mentioned. Ten years ago, we did not have a single one, and now we have facilities at Bath Road in Edinburgh, in West Lothian—being used for the second series of “Good Omens”—and in Cumbernauld, which are being used for “Outlander”. We are very pleased that the facilities in Glasgow that are used by the BBC are remaining in the BBC structure. We also have the Kelvin hall, into which the Scottish Government has, for good reasons, put a lot of money in order to be able to produce there.

Notwithstanding that we now have those sites, which are being used and are booked back to back, it is hugely encouraging that we are getting more interest and a demand for further facilities. We absolutely need to grab that opportunity with both hands.

10:30

Some aspects are perhaps less obvious than those that we might read about in the newspapers. We might read of another big-ticket film taking place in Scotland—I am looking forward to as much of that as possible—but understanding what happens below that, and what the Scottish Government and our agencies can do, is going to be key in ensuring that the benefit of that development is realised as widely as possible.

In that context, the most exciting prize of all, in some respects, is in skills and training. The Scottish Government puts funding in, through Screen Scotland and other funding routes, to training in different skills. That is another example of where the Government needs to be as joined-up as it can be.

Skills are being developed through the work of Screen Scotland. Edinburgh Napier University has a creative centre, which I reflect on because I had a conversation about it this week with the principal, that is developing skills that are mission critical for the screen sector. Edinburgh College is developing craft skills—we cannot overlook this bit, as it is really important—so that, when productions come to Scotland, we have people who are able, for example, to build the sets. That means that we need brickies and plasterers who can work in a film environment. It is very well-paid work, but it needs people who have that kind of experience.

I had the good fortune of being able to visit the Bath Road studio during the filming of “The Rig”. The set was incredible. It was huge—that is one of the advantages of the facility. I was watching a helicopter landing indoors, in a studio. It is amazing what they can do.

It was put to me that one of the reasons that they could make such a production was that they could use the workforce from the Royal Lyceum theatre, which was not operating at the time because of the Covid lockdown. In that sense, it was a happy circumstance, because the people who work in set design at the Lyceum were able to continue working. However, when the Lyceum is back up and working, what happens with the next Bath Road production, “Anansi Boys”? I am sure that they have great people to do that, but I am just trying to illustrate that one of the things that we in Government need to do—and that the committee can help with, in fostering an understanding—is to get things right for the industry. We must support more productions to come here; help to provide the facilities that will enable the industry to emerge out of the market failure of the past; work with broadcasters, streaming services and other commissioners to bring more work to Scotland; and do what is needed to provide people with the skills to support production. Getting all of that right will be a virtuous circle.

Scotland has amazing scenery as a backdrop to films. However, albeit that we wish for Scotland to be represented as a backdrop in plenty of films, the even bigger prize for us, as technology develops, is the filming here of anything that is set anywhere. As a cultural offering, that is a massive prize for us.

I put down a marker on an additional point. For decades, we have exported those who are our brightest and best in the industry. That includes the talent that we all know; just think of all those Scottish performers who are now based in New York or Los Angeles—or London, for that matter. However, added to that are all the people who might not be known—directors, producers and people who work on the shop floor, so to speak—who have gone where the work has taken them. We now have the prize of a full career opportunity, for life, based in Scotland.

Sorry—I have spoken about the matter for quite a while, and I could speak longer about it. I hope that I am giving you a flavour of the fact that Screen Scotland’s work will be transformational. It is a new string to our bow when it comes to culture and the arts in Scotland, and we should grab with both hands the opportunity that it brings.

I would be happy to hear about anything that you find out through your work that suggests that we should do more or less of some things, or do them differently.

Jenni Minto: I look forward to the sequel.

As you know, I represent Argyll and Bute. We need to think about getting some of the spend and the skills development outwith the central belt and to consider how colleges and universities could support that skills development. You are right to say that support is needed in every area, from make-up to set design to floor management and so on.

A lot of the evidence that we took stressed the importance of culture outwith the central belt, which Donald Cameron touched on. I was heartened to hear your comments on that. I want to underline how important small community groups and museums are for what they add to the community and for their role in bringing visitors to the area. That should not be forgotten in the Scottish Government’s budgeting process.

Angus Robertson: That is a point well made and well noted. I want to give an example of the fact that our cultural producers are not just based in our cities. I pray in aid the fact that one of the biggest movers and shakers behind season 2 of “Good Omens” is based in Skye, which is a good example of the fact that it is perfectly possible to be a talented writer or director, or possessor of many of the other skills that Jenni Minto has highlighted, and to still work in that sector while living outwith the central belt. That is one of the advantages of our being a small country.

In reflecting on the issue that you raised, another point that comes to mind is the importance of commissioning in Scotland. That is where the likes of Channel 4, which has one of its commissioning hubs in Glasgow, have great

potential. That means having somebody on the ground who understands the independent sector—Channel 4 commissions others to produce content for it. Even if the commissioning hub is headquartered in Glasgow, it should know about—I know that it does—and be interested in the skills that exist throughout the country. It is important that commitments are received from—in this case—UK-based public service broadcasters, whether Channel 4, the BBC or others, to commission in Scotland, and I have impressed on their chief executives that that should happen.

Incidentally, one of my concerns, which I am sure that many members of the committee also have, is about the prospects for the future of Channel 4. Should Channel 4 be privatised in the way that is proposed and the model under which it operates be changed without any guarantees for the protection of the likes of the commissioning structure that is now based in Scotland for the first time, we have the potential to lose the gains that I have outlined. That is one of the key reasons for my hoping that the UK Government reconsiders that privatisation. It has done so previously, so I hope that it will understand that, if one wants to ensure that different parts of the UK reap the benefits of screen and television production, and one wants to level up in a variety of places, cutting our footprint in different parts of the UK will be extremely detrimental.

Mark Ruskell: I am interested in what you said about the phenomenal opportunities that exist to bring production to Scotland. I am thinking about the rest of your portfolio and the Scottish Government's aspiration to develop its footprint and its linkage to the rest of the world, particularly through the new hubs that you plan to set up. Does that work feed directly into the work that Screen Scotland needs to do to reach out and bring in production, as well as ensuring that the best of Scottish talent can move and take part in productions abroad?

Angus Robertson: Absolutely. Let me start in a place that people might not have thought of. We could start in the US, but I will come back there in a moment. I have been discussing with some members of the committee the Scottish Government's plans for an expansion of our network that includes Copenhagen and Warsaw. I will give a concrete example of why a direct presence in Copenhagen matters. You do not need to be the biggest fan of Scandi noir to understand that one of the most successful broadcasters in the world to produce content in recent years has been DR, the Danish public broadcaster.

What DR has been able to do, individually and in co-production, often with its Swedish and Norwegian neighbours, is produce content in a

language that is spoken by only 5 million people. We have all been enjoying series such as "Borgen", "The Bridge" and a variety of other series that have been massive hits. That is a classic example of why I think that, notwithstanding all the other sensible reasons for us having a presence in the Nordic and Baltic regions, we can learn from the best practice of a country that has been tremendously successful. What has it been doing that has meant that a country the same size as Scotland, with a national broadcaster, which we do not have in the same way, has been able to make commercially successful productions and export them? The number 1 place that I want to learn from is Denmark, so having a presence in Copenhagen is a very good idea.

Of course, it is much more than that. There is a Scottish Government office in Washington DC that works closely with our Scottish Development International presence in other parts of the United States. In addition, Screen Scotland regularly has a presence in the US when it deals directly with people in the film industry about the changing landscape, if we want to call it that, of screen production in Scotland. That operates on the basis that we have permanent representation and a wider network that is joined up with the Scottish Government and our agencies.

An additional thought that fits in with my portfolio relates to our diaspora, part of which includes some of the most successful people in film and television in the world. They just happen not to be based here. We know that we have great fortune that somebody such as Brian Cox, to pluck an example out of the air, can one week be making the hit series "Succession", and the next week can be filming something in Dundee for BBC Scotland because he is personally committed to that. I want to make sure that people in our diaspora who work in the sector are fully aware of what is going on here, because a great many of them have moved semi-permanently somewhere else. That is their life choice; they have the good fortune to work in an industry that has taken them to LA or wherever it might be. They operate in a sector in which they have great influence and can help to promote what we are doing here in their own way. That is something else that is on my list.

Yes, there is the formal work and the efforts to have a greater footprint, and what they can add as part of our endeavour. It is then about using the networks of people who are part of the Scottish diaspora or affinity Scots who can also play a part.

I have just had another thought on that. In recent years, a number of people have come to Scotland to make films or television series. They are not from here, and when they have gone back to wherever it is they have come from, they have

shared immense praise with their colleagues. We need to do everything that we can to capitalise on the good will that we see growing in the film and TV industry to get maximum effect in Scotland.

There are massive upsides at the moment, and I encourage the committee to develop its interests in that.

10:45

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

Throughout the pandemic, there has been a significant impact on events organisations and theatres, which are most dependent on income earned through in-person attendance. It is great to see them returning to putting on performances, and I am sure that everyone will enjoy the panto season. Naturally, there is still a degree of uncertainty and a weak appetite to take a risk to book a show for next year and to do long-term planning. How could the Scottish Government help to support them to make production bookings and assist with that long-term planning?

Angus Robertson: First, I understand that you were attending another committee meeting at the start of these proceedings, Mr Golden, and that you are a new member of the committee, so welcome to the committee—I look forward to working with you.

At the beginning of the meeting, I made a statement in which I outlined the massive Scottish Government spending that has been undertaken, which, in great measure, is way beyond the funding levels that we have received in consequentials from the UK Government. Our ambition is to put the funding in place to support recovery right across the cultural sector. As Mr Golden will understand, there are several funding streams available, and I appreciate that different venues are treated in different ways. Therefore, some might feel more uncertain than others. I totally understand that.

Members must forgive me, as I do not know whether the point that I am about to make is one that I made before or after Mr Golden was able to take part in our proceedings, but one of the things that lie in our hands is the ability to encourage the speediest recovery possible of the arts and culture scene. It worries me that some organisations think that they will not get back to their pre-pandemic financial position for up to five years. We should be doing as much as we can to minimise that period.

We have made funding streams available. As those come to the end of their natural life, we must think about the resources that we have and whether any targeting is required in specific areas. Therefore, if Mr Golden has examples, I will be keen to hear whether there is a gap between the

intention of funding streams and the delivery for particular outlets. However, I am very focused on thinking about what we can do to encourage maximum public take-up of the cultural offering; whether that offering is part of the pantomime season or the Edinburgh International Festival matters not. What matters is that people go, that they feel that they are safe and that our cultural offering can bounce back.

Mr Golden asked specifically about production bookings. I do not know whether there is anything behind his question that he wants to add, but anything that Government and Government agencies can do to encourage participation in and support of the cultural offering is a large part of our way out of the situation. Government does not do culture. It is for us to support people who do culture to do culture, if that makes sense. I am keen that we are as innovative as we can be to drive up cultural participation, which means more people in theatres and at events, more income for those organisations and a quicker financial recovery. In the meantime, we are continuing to fund venues and organisations to a significant degree, to help them to find their feet again.

Maurice Golden: I would like to explore another area—that of partnership working, particularly with local authorities. We have looked at Creative Scotland funding on a geographical basis, but what are your thoughts on having mandatory local authority cultural reporting and publication of a strategy, so that there is transparency? In that way, we could see which local authorities are proactively embracing culture to embed it in communities.

Angus Robertson: I reviewed some of the figures before I came to the meeting. I observed that, in general terms, cultural spending by local authorities has remained in place, which is positive. I commend people who work in local government, because they have a great deal of demand on their budgets.

There is always an opportunity for partnership working. However, I would put down one marker in the conversation, having said to Mr Golden that it is not for the Scottish Government to do culture. Instead, we support culture, and we help cultural organisations that are much closer to the front line. That arm's-length separation is there for a reason. I am sure that Mr Golden would be the first to tell me that it would not be a good idea for local government to be directed or to remove its ability to set budget priorities and make budget decisions.

He talked about publishing a report and having an understanding of what is being done, and there is definitely something in that. Of course, we answer questions in the usual way about information that the Scottish Government holds. I

need to defer to colleagues on the degree of understanding that we have on a council level. That would be answered through partnership working and working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and I think that that would be hugely valuable. I am sure that a lot of that happens at present. Do colleagues want to add anything on that point?

Bettina Sizeland: The only other thing to say is that we met the cultural conveners earlier this year, and we intend to meet more to find out what more we can do with local authorities. As the cabinet secretary said, over 2021, local authorities are spending £577 million on cultural activity, so they do take it seriously.

Angus Robertson: I would add to that, because another little yellow Post-it note for us to take away in relation to our cultural recovery and renewal strategy is about exactly the point that Mr Golden makes: co-operation. It would obviously be a good thing that, right across the Scottish Government, we think about how culture and the arts is mainstreamed in all our thinking. However, there is absolutely no reason why we would not encourage that broader understanding to also involve local authorities, which have a delivery responsibility and which, as my colleague has just pointed out, spend a significant amount of money on culture.

The Convener: It is worth noting that the arm's-length external organisations are quite different across the country. I have experience of trying to drill down into such areas, so I know that it can be problematic. Ms Boyack has a final supplementary question.

Sarah Boyack: Thank you, convener. I missed the past few minutes of the meeting because of technical problems, so I appreciate being able to come in. For the cabinet secretary's information, when the committee took evidence a few weeks ago, we were given a really interesting suggestion about how we can support freelancers and about making stronger links with schools and communities. The suggestion was that that would be good for both access to culture and sustaining employment in a particular area.

You mentioned your own experience in school, cabinet secretary, so that issue about skills and confidence and access to musicians and artists for young people in school is really important. I just wanted to add that to the conversation that you will have with colleagues over the next few weeks when you discuss budget issues. It might also link to the per cent for art scheme.

Thank you for letting me come back in, convener. I do not expect a lengthy answer today.

Angus Robertson: I am not going to give a lengthy answer to Sarah Boyack, but her point is

well timed and well made. In my circle of friends, there is at least one person who works in the cultural scene as a freelancer in the arts environment. He delivers his work to younger people, to older people in care settings and in other environments. What we are able to do to allow freelancers to take part fully in the cultural recovery and renewal process should definitely be part of our considerations. I say this with a smile on my face, but I should probably declare that any such decisions that I would make would not be for the benefit of any friend of mine who might be active on the scene.

The general point is well made. What we found at the beginning of the Covid experience was that freelancers were not covered by Government support measures, which is another reason for our taking the issue away and thinking as best we can about them, what they do and what they offer.

The Convener: Mr Ruskell has one small very final question.

Angus Robertson: The last word.

Mark Ruskell: I have one final Post-it note, convener.

A lot of what we have been discussing has been about wellbeing, and you have heard a lot of comments from members on that. I am interested in finding out how, in future, the Government will reflect on culture's contribution towards a wellbeing economy and whether that will happen through the wellbeing bill or consideration of, for example, a future generations commissioner. Indeed, I have been very struck by the work of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales on the Welsh language. That is perhaps for further consideration and reflection, but do you have any early thoughts on those two pieces of work, which the Scottish Government has committed to looking at?

Angus Robertson: Surely it has to be committed to all those things. If our ambition is to be joined up and to mainstream thinking about culture in the arts and its impact across Government, that should be considered in all the work that we do. The question is: are we making the most of and encouraging an understanding of that?

I am not mentioning this because a member of the Green Party has asked the question—I am just finishing off a thought—but I remember seeing a slightly tongue-in-cheek description of prescribing culture and the arts for health reasons as tree hugging. I know that that was meant humorously rather than seriously, but I simply point out that, 10, 15 or 20 years ago, it would have seemed rather odd or out of place to suggest having a discussion about the relationship between culture and the arts and health. Thank goodness that is

no longer the case, which is why I know that the comment about the health benefits of culture and the arts was made humorously.

Regardless of our politics, I think that we are ready as a culture to understand the important role that this plays. I know that we are just at the start of the parliamentary session, but I think that it will be the session in which we really begin to make this happen. That encourages and enthuses me, as I am sure it encourages and enthuses you.

The Convener: That concludes members' questions, and I thank the cabinet secretary, Mr Seers and Ms Sizeland for their attendance this morning.

10:58

Meeting continued in private until 11:15.

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