



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

# Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 3 October 2024

Session 6



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**CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE  
22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting 2024, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

\*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

\*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)

\*Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

\*Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con)

\*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Shona Riach (Scottish Government)

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

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

James Johnston

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



# Scottish Parliament

## Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 3 October 2024

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]*

### Pre-budget Scrutiny 2025-26

**The Convener (Clare Adamson):** Good morning and welcome to the 22nd meeting in 2024 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. We have only one agenda item this morning, which is evidence on funding for culture, as part of our pre-budget scrutiny. We are joined by the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson. He is accompanied by Shona Riach, who is director of external affairs and culture at the Scottish Government.

I invite the cabinet secretary to make an opening statement.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Good morning, all of you, and thank you for inviting me to discuss the Scottish Government's funding for culture in 2025-26, as part of your pre-budget scrutiny. I am delighted to see some familiar faces across the table, and I extend a warm welcome to the committee's new members and thank them in advance for their contributions to the invaluable work of the committee.

All of us are here because we are passionate supporters of the culture sector, and we value the artists, the creative producers and the cultural workers who generate so much for our local and national economies. Of course, their contribution and the value of culture go beyond mere pounds and pence. Culture and creative expression are the very essence of who we are as individuals, as distinctive communities and as a nation. Cultural participation and engagement is fundamental to the wellbeing of people across Scotland and is vital in allowing us to make meaningful connections with other nations on the world stage.

As culture secretary, I regularly speak to many of the cultural organisations that I know are ploughing a significant amount of their time and resource into responding to the challenges of the much-changed operating landscape that we find ourselves in, post-pandemic and post-Brexit. I was particularly appreciative of the recent dialogue that I had with trade union representatives from the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Scottish

Society of Playwrights and Equity about how the on-going pressure is affecting their members, and I was pleased to be able to update them on the progress that the culture fair work task force is making.

I am hopeful that the new Administration at Westminster heralds a new era of collaboration across the four nations of the United Kingdom, but we cannot escape the fact that the cost of living crisis and inflationary pressures, on top of our already depleted public finances, make for a challenging fiscal outlook across the board. The Scottish Government has been forced to make significant in-year savings and do more to ensure that it can reach a path to balance in the current and successive years.

I fully appreciate that the sector is very concerned about public funding for culture and about what the immediate and longer-term future holds. The sense of uncertainty and deep frustration has been underlined in the written submissions and oral evidence that the committee has gathered to date. I thank everybody who has taken time to articulate their concerns and to share their experiences and their thoughts on what future support for the sector should look like.

From the outset, I reassure the sector and the committee that I am doing everything within my power as the cabinet secretary for culture to get the best budget settlement that I can get for culture and the arts. As we set out in "A Culture Strategy for Scotland", the Government recognises the intrinsic value of culture and the transformational impact that it can have on people right across Scotland. That is why the First Minister restated our commitment to increasing funding for culture so that it is £100 million more annually by 2028-29. That cross-Cabinet commitment has enabled more than £15 million of additional moneys to be released to the culture sector already in 2024-25. That has included the provision of an additional £6.6 million to Creative Scotland, which has enabled it to reopen its open fund for individuals, and provision of an uplift for the bodies that care for our national collections and for our national performing companies.

Media reporting and wider speculation have fuelled fears that the plans to provide an additional £100 million for the sector may not come to fruition. However, I want to put on the record here, so that it is absolutely clear, that the Scottish Government has the utmost confidence in the culture sector and is committed to providing significantly more funding for the sector on a cumulative basis.

I believe that we have turned a corner in public funding for culture, and our aim is that the culture budget in 2025-26 will substantially increase as a second step towards fulfilling our overall funding

commitment of an additional £100 million annually. As a Government, we recognise that it is absolutely fundamental that we have stable and supportive financial arrangements in place, and we remain committed to supporting the sector to fulfil its enormous potential.

The trajectory for the new Creative Scotland multiyear funding programme is positive, with the potential for many more cultural organisations to benefit. I am engaged in discussions with Creative Scotland about how best to navigate the operational challenges that are presented by the timing of the United Kingdom Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget statement on 30 October. Only once we have the necessary practical assurance around the Scottish Government budget for 2025-26 will we be able to set our commitments for the culture portfolio.

We will publish our budget on 4 December; it will then be subject to the normal parliamentary processes for approval. I have written, to that effect, to the chair of Creative Scotland this morning and have copied that to the committee. I understand that Creative Scotland is likely to delay announcing the outcome of the multiyear funding process until there is confirmation of the 2025-26 budgetary position. The Scottish Government will work closely with Creative Scotland in supporting the sector through that process.

It is clear, now more than ever, that we must ensure that every pound of public funding for culture is wisely invested for maximum impact in the sector, and that the support that is available from across the public, private and third sectors is enhanced where possible. In that way, together, we can strengthen culture and create the conditions for culture to thrive, which is one of the central ambitions that are set out in "A Culture Strategy for Scotland".

As I said before, I want to ensure that the sector can sustain, develop and ultimately thrive and innovate, but it will take time, investment and dedication to achieve that. It will also require prioritisation of activity.

In the recent programme for government, the Scottish Government set out the key strategic actions that it believes will best sustain the sector in the future. That work will include a review of existing support for the sector to inform future funding models, as well as exploring other ways in which the Scottish Government can work with partners to grow the overall funding pot for culture, diversify funding streams and support the sector in ways that go beyond funding, to include, for example organisational and business support. That work will help the sector to navigate current and future challenges and to make the most of opportunities for collaborative working.

The wider review will include a full review of Creative Scotland as the main distributor of funding for the culture and creative sector in Scotland. As you know, Creative Scotland was established in 2010 as the lead body for the arts, screen and creative industries. It is important that its remit and functions are reviewed, to ensure that it is continuing to meet the needs of the culture sector in a much-altered delivery landscape. The Scottish Government is committed to continuous improvement across all our public bodies, and to maximising the impact of public sector support for the culture sector. The review is a key component of that work.

I am delighted by the number of local festivals—as well as our nationally high-profile festivals of international renown—that have expressed an interest in getting involved in the planned festivals partnership. My officials are reaching out to a number of those festivals, and to other individuals and organisations that have an interest in festivals more broadly, to shape the membership agreement of the partnership in the first instance. The partnership will support collaborative working and active learning across festivals where possible and will ensure that the full potential of all our festivals is realised locally, nationally and internationally.

The Scottish Government remains committed to improving Scotland's public services as an investment in Scotland's future health and wellbeing, equality and prosperity, by strengthening future support for the culture sector.

As well as the review of Creative Scotland, we are continuing our public sector reform work with Historic Environment Scotland in order to maximise income growth, and we are working with our national collections bodies to explore alternative ways of working.

We will continue to work with partners to ensure that all available public, private and third sector investment is used to deliver the maximum benefit for communities and organisations across Scotland. I look forward to working with committee members and colleagues across the chamber to realise that ambition and, which is perhaps most important, I hope that you will support our plan to increase culture funding through the parliamentary process in due course.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much, cabinet secretary, and thank you for that detailed opening statement.

Since Covid, the culture sector has experienced a particularly hard time, as has been evidenced in our previous sessions. I think that "perfect storm" was the phrase that was used a couple of years ago. What we are hearing from people is that there is a lack of confidence, with in-year budget

changes, the closure of the open fund and so on all impacting on that. What are your priorities in the budget to increase confidence in the sector?

**Angus Robertson:** The most important thing that can boost people's confidence is delivery of the commitments that have been made. The commitment that has been made is to an uplift in culture funding, which will be cumulative and will top £100 million of annual increase by 2028-29. This is the first year of that increase, and more than £15 million of the additional £100 million has been disbursed already. As you would expect in the run-up to a budget, I am very involved in discussions internally with Scottish Government colleagues, but I also had discussions last week with Creative Scotland at senior management level to discuss how we can ensure that we are able to deliver the maximum amount of money that we can, as part of that uplift towards the £100 million.

That is no abstract thing, and it is not just a matter of confidence either, although confidence is really important. I acknowledge that. Would people wish it to happen more quickly? Absolutely. I, too, wish it to be as quick as possible, but a very important opportunity that is coming soon, and which I think will profoundly improve much of the culture and arts sector in Scotland, is the delivery of multiyear funding. I appreciate that everybody on the committee will know what that is, but not everybody who watches your deliberations might. It will change the way in which cultural organisations are funded. At present, they have clarity for only one financial year, but in the future they will have clarity for a number of years, which will mean that they can get on with their core task, which is cultural and artistic in nature, rather than financial and bureaucratic.

Creative Scotland has been working very hard behind the scenes as part of a significant change programme to deliver that multiyear funding, which has been supported by the Scottish Government. It was a proposal of my party and is now being delivered. In fact, I think that I am right in saying that Scotland is going to be the first part of the United Kingdom to introduce multiyear funding to our culture and creative sector.

It is a really big change programme, and it will be beneficial. At present, there are just over 100 regularly funded organisations being funded by Creative Scotland. In the last round, it had more than 250 cultural organisations applying for multiyear funding; I would like the maximum number of artistic organisations to receive that funding; if the figure is anything close to that, it will be more than double the number of Scottish cultural organisations that receive multiyear funding.

As committee members will appreciate, there is a huge prize to be delivered if we can secure the increase in funding. However, it is dependent on our having the resources, which is why we are waiting for the UK Government budget. I will try to be as persuasive as I can with Scottish Government colleagues through the budget process, but I also think that members will have heard the First Minister's answer to a question last week from Foysol Choudhury about support for culture. I know that the First Minister is very seized not only of the opportunity arising from, but the responsibility for, funding the culture sector.

If we can get all the planets in alignment, as I believe we can, we will see a transformation of funding. By that I mean not just the headline number for culture, but how we are doing it. I think that what we do will be profoundly positive for the arts and culture sector. I appreciate, though, that when there has been so much concern about funding and so much existential challenge to a lot of venues and organisations, people will believe it when they see it. They are right to have that feeling, but they can have some confidence, given that we have already begun the uplift in culture funding this year.

09:15

**The Convener:** We know that regularly funded organisations have a special place in culture funding in Scotland.

One of the other concerns that has been raised frequently is from organisations that have not met the criteria. With the review of Creative Scotland coming up, are the criteria for awarding grants being looked at? Will that be transparent to those who have the ambition to achieve multiyear funding?

**Angus Robertson:** The process of change from the current funding model for regularly funded organisations to the new model of funding on a multiannual basis involves many more cultural organisations than are currently funded. From memory, I think that there are currently 115 or so regularly funded organisations. As Creative Scotland has already confirmed to the committee, it is dealing with applications for funding from more than 250 cultural organisations.

If we are able to provide the funding and Creative Scotland is able to disburse it, having gone through a process to ensure that due diligence is carried out, many more organisations will receive funding. Will everybody who wants to be funded be successful? I cannot speak for Creative Scotland or the process, but I imagine that, as with most funding rounds, not everybody will get everything that they want. However, that is not the end of the story.

On your point, convener, this is about different funding streams. As the committee will be aware, there is the likes of the open fund, from which a lot of individuals or smaller projects seek funding support. That is one of the funding streams that will continue, but there are other ways in which funds are disbursed through Creative Scotland. That will no doubt be looked at as part of the review.

Committee members will understand that such a significant change programme will lead to a recalibration of funding as it is disbursed through Creative Scotland. Instead of that happening annually, a significant part of it will be decided and will run for a number of years. That all needs to be looked at and considered. Is the best way in which it should work the way that it has worked until now, irrespective of the fact that there will be a major change to a multiyear programme?

There is an additional dimension to all this. I am not sure that I have all the answers, but I am certain that members of the committee might share my observation. As the Government sees it, the cultural sector in Scotland includes our national galleries and museums, the National Library of Scotland and our national performing companies. It includes work that is funded through Creative Scotland and a number of other areas of cultural and artistic life that are not part of that approach. I have always had a question in my mind about whether there are gaps in that approach.

It is apparent to me that there is a clear gap in one of those areas and it relates to festivals. As we all know, festivals are profoundly important, whether it is a small festival in rural Scotland or one of the biggest festivals that we have in Edinburgh, Glasgow and elsewhere. We need to make sure that we have the right infrastructure in place so that they are properly funded and supported, and that the Government and its agencies are as supportive as they can be. That is why having a review of what Creative Scotland does and how it does it, while at the same time thinking about the different ways in which Government supports culture and the arts, will ensure that we take a view right across culture and the arts to make sure that we are supporting them as well as we can, and that we have the right institutions in place so that they are properly supported.

We should not lose sight of the fact that it is not just about organisations and venues. It is also about workers who work in the culture and arts sector, many of whom are freelance and many of whom have been living a very precarious existence.

I have said this to the Scottish Trades Union Congress, individual unions and the culture fair

work task force: we have to make sure that we are as supportive as we possibly can be for everybody who is working in the sector.

On the multiyear funding process, if our organisations and venues are more sustainably funded, they will be in a much better place to ensure that they are employing people—many of them freelancers—as part of their projects and their work programmes. I am trying to take an approach that ensures that we are looking at the culture and arts sector and everybody who works in it as a whole—venues, organisations and the workers in the sector.

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

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Good morning, cabinet secretary; it is good to see you. Given the concerns that we have heard from the sector over the past few weeks, when we have been taking evidence through the pre-budget process, and the opening comments that you have just made, it is clear that there is a need to ensure that the sector remains constant and that it also has the confidence that comes from having long-term clarity.

The need for financial stability has been raised by every organisation that we have heard from. Today, you have given some clarity about how you see the potential for that, but there is an “if” in relation to that potential, and that is before organisations have to deal with their staffing costs, the costs of producing work and even the cost of working towards net zero, all of which they must include in their equations about how they fund themselves. It is difficult for those organisations to predict where they will be in the future, and they need the Government, Creative Scotland and others to give them confidence in that regard.

Everyone tells us that they are doing more with less, but the cultural package that we provide is still strong and buoyant in the communities that we represent. Nationally, we have an organisational structure, but it is extremely fragile, and we do not know what will happen in the future.

How do you square that circle to ensure that those individuals and organisations can thrive and survive, which we all want them to do? They are doing all that they can within their own organisations, boards and management structures to do that, but it is extremely difficult for them to see what the future holds without having that stability. I note that, as I commented earlier, you said that it is an “if” situation.

**Angus Robertson:** I would not expect to say this to you often in debate, Mr Stewart, but I agree with absolutely everything that you have said. Your characterisation of where the sector is and where it feels it is, the nature of the challenge and



also the prize, if I can call it that, of getting this right is correct.

Would I wish progress to be quicker? Absolutely. I have seen much of the evidence that has been given to the committee. The perfect storm that has existed for the culture and arts sector here—and, incidentally, elsewhere in the United Kingdom and in other countries too—has been profound. The impact of inflation, among other things, has been asymmetrical. The impact of inflation on the arts and culture budget has been much higher than it has been elsewhere—we can read about that in the newspapers this morning, with people restoring cultural venues and theatres finding that the costs of doing so have been going up.

The nature of the challenge has been profound for the sector. The word “if” is at the heart of your question, and I really hope that we have the answer to the problem. The good news is that this significant change for a significant part of the sector—venues and organisations—revolves around multiyear funding, which is to be introduced next year. As we emerge from this time of extreme distress in the sector, we have a commitment by the Government, which I have reiterated and repeated and which I am 100 per cent committed to trying to deliver.

If we deliver that funding at the scale and at the speed that I would wish it to be at, and if we deliver multiyear funding, I think that we will be a significant way forward. When venues and organisations know that they have funding for a number of years ahead, they will be able to get on with what they want to get on with, which is being creative, rather than worrying about the bottom line. Of course, we need to take account of the bottom line, which is why we have a process for things. Predictability is the point: multiyear funding would allow organisations to know where they will be, not just for this year or at the end of the financial year, but for a number of years ahead. The good news on the applications for funding that are being made to Creative Scotland is that the creative sector has been putting in bids that are not just about keeping heads above water. To use Mr Stewart’s own words, it is about remaining constant, having long-term clarity and delivering what they want in creative terms—I believe that they can do that.

I will signal, because we have not yet touched on it, that we have been talking entirely about revenue. I am clear that, to manage to deliver on the commitments of the Government and on the trajectory, there are quite a lot of “ifs” as part of that, and in a Parliament of minorities we are all involved.

I will make the case as part of the budget process for the Government to commit the

funding, but the budget will need to be passed and, without it, the resource will not be there to deliver. I do not want to create further concern, because every year, everything is subject to the parliamentary budget process. Everyone understands that, but it is pretty important. We will need to get the budget through with an added allocation, but there is an asterisk there. I am very keen not to lose sight of capital funding. There are projects that I would wish to support, but we do not have the capital funding allocation to allow us to do so at present.

**Alexander Stewart:** You have also talked about the review of Creative Scotland. It is very important that we have clarity as to where the organisation is going and what is going to happen with it. You touched on the number of applications that are made to the organisation, for which it is not able to provide support. In its own way, Creative Scotland is not fulfilling its obligations to the sector, because it cannot: it has to decide how it rations the money and its resources. Is it time for there to be a change in the creative sector? The review may have implications for Creative Scotland. Is there anything within that that you want to explain to us? Some people have said that the review could be the demise of Creative Scotland.

**Angus Robertson:** First, I tried to draw a picture of a changed, improved landscape for the culture and arts sector in Scotland, which, by its very nature, will and must have an arms-length funding body that is able to deliver. Previously in the committee I have paid tribute to what Creative Scotland did during Covid and I will do so again. We have a responsibility for ensuring that taxpayers’ resources are well managed. During Covid, Creative Scotland dispersed millions of pounds of absolutely essential support to keep the creative sector from going under and it did it well. It deserves our respect for that.

It is also true to say, however, that the organisation has not been reviewed since its establishment and it is going through a massive change programme. Once we have delivered on that and once Creative Scotland has concluded the process, with the Government having allocated the funds and, I hope, with colleagues having approved the funding allocation in the Parliament, I think that there is a question to be asked about how the organisation works and how the rest of the cultural landscape fits in. I made a point about considering whether everything is being thought about in a holistic way.

I am sure that you do not wish me to prejudge any review, and it would be wrong for me to do so, because this needs to be looked at. There will not be a Government review in the sense that I am not going to sit at the head of this and drive a review;

others will look very closely at how things operate, and we need to have a look at international best practice.

09:30

I underline the point that Creative Scotland is introducing a process as the first in the United Kingdom to do so, which I think is a really good thing. I know that it is a good thing because people elsewhere in the UK are very interested in it. For example, when I met Lisa Nandy, my opposite number in the UK Government, she was very interested to learn about where this process is because we are doing it first—Creative Scotland is doing it first. I am very keen to support it in concluding the process and for us to then think about how everything is fitting together and working. However, I do not want to prejudice that.

**Alexander Stewart:** I appreciate that. We all want to see the sector thrive and survive. As I say, it has been extremely resilient, having been supported by organisations, including the Scottish Government, to keep it in that place. However, if we do not get this right—unless the resources, the equation and the challenges change—it will mean the decline of the sector over the months and years ahead. If we do not change, it will not thrive.

**Angus Robertson:** Again, I could not agree more; that is absolutely right. We have been advised about the scale of financial support that is required for change. I think that it was Culture Counts that estimated that it would be around an additional £100 million annually. That is the point that I made in Government and that is what has been agreed in Government and has been avowed, repeatedly, by the previous First Minister, by John Swinney and by me before the committee.

That is what we are aiming to deliver. The fact that colleagues from other political parties are reiterating the scale of the challenge and the necessity of applying the additional finance and changing the way in which finance is delivered, and delivering it sustainably, fills me with hope that we are all in agreement about what is required. I will do what I need to do in Government to make sure that we are able to deliver the increasing funding on a year-on-year basis. It will then be up to all of us as MSPs in our own parties to be persuasive about why it is important to pass a budget that does just that. I appeal to Mr Stewart and to all colleagues, especially those in other political parties, to be as supportive as they can be.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** There is a great deal in the picture that you are painting that the committee and the sector would welcome—increased resource, long-term certainty and a review of the remit and operations of Creative

Scotland. I think that that is welcome. I hope that I am right in hearing from you that you understand that it will take time for the sector to rebuild trust, given the turbulence and the stop-start nature of funding, particularly very recently. It will take time and the delivery of those commitments for that trust and confidence to build, if the Government does commit to that.

There has been some discussion in our evidence taking about the short-term, immediate step—in the coming financial year—towards that £100 million commitment. One witness said to us, if the figure for the coming financial year

“is £20 million, it will not touch the sides”.—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 19 September 2024; c 12.]

I appreciate that you will not be in a position to give us a figure right now, but do you hear and recognise the evidence that has been given to the committee that clearly indicates that it will have to be significantly more than that, just to be taken seriously?

**Angus Robertson:** Again, I could not agree more. As I observed in a previous answer, the scale of the funding step change that is necessary for the culture sector to thrive has been worked through and has been estimated as an additional £100 million. The Government agrees. That is why we are working towards—

**Patrick Harvie:** That is by 2028; I am asking about the coming year.

**Angus Robertson:** Indeed. The point that Mr Harvie makes—I welcome him to the committee, incidentally—is about how we can do that as quickly as possible, which is the key challenge. I think that we all appreciate that there are significant challenges right across public administration and there is a demand right across the public services for them to be funded as well as can be. The Government has a difficult job in trying to balance all of that but, in seeking to persuade colleagues, I will be making the case that we deliver on the commitments that we have made.

In her budget speech on 19 December 2023, the then Deputy First Minister, who has remained the finance secretary, Shona Robison—I printed this out because I wanted to be reminded of it—confirmed the increase of £15.8 million for this financial year, of which, as I have confirmed a number of times, more than £15 million has already been disbursed, and she went on to say:

“Our aim is to increase arts and culture investment in 2025-26 by at least a further £25 million.”—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2023; c 15.]

That is the next step change. Clearly, a significant part of that will need to go towards the multiyear

funding requirements of Creative Scotland. However, by its very nature, it is multiyear funding, and if we can continue to increase it year by year, which is the Government's intention, that is how we will be able to fund the change.

Mr Harvie might wish to intervene and say that the point is that there is more than multiyear funding and we have more organisations than will be funded by that route. There are our national performing companies, our national museums and galleries, the festivals, the youth music initiative, Sistema Scotland and so on. There will continue to be a hope and an expectation of moving from sustain to thrive, so where are the additional resources? That is why I, together with my officials and with advice from others, am trying to make sure that we get that balance right as we increase the funding going forward. Will we get that balance right? I hope so, because it is really important that we do. I have said this before, convener, but the work that you do as a committee really helps to inform the consideration that we in Government give to those relative priorities.

I will highlight one challenge in particular, because mention has been made of how we can work with a funding body on these things going forward. One of the challenges that we have objectively had in the past year is that we have been working to different budgetary timetables. If we look at the challenge that we had around the open fund, that involved Creative Scotland operating to a Creative Scotland budgetary timeline, and the same goes for multiyear funding. We have a governmental and a parliamentary timescale in which we consider budgets, and they are not in sync. If we are asking our publicly funded bodies to do a job on our behalf and we also have to, with due diligence, make sure that taxpayers' money is disbursed responsibly, we have to make sure that we are in sync as much as we can be. I hope that that is an area where a review can advise us on how we can best do that.

If I was a creative out there who was trying to get on with being creative and keep my head above water in difficult times, I would be saying, "Please can you just get those kinds of administrative questions sorted?" I understand that, and that is one of the areas where I think that we can do better. I hope that we can do better, and I think that a review might help to give us some of the answers about how we do that.

**Patrick Harvie:** Thank you for that extensive answer. If there is time later, I may ask a follow-up question on that subject.

Further to the last point that you made, I note that there is also a need for alignment with the timescales that are relevant to individuals and organisations, including small organisations and freelancers. If the disbursement of funding leaves

them facing a crunch moment in relation to how their finances work, they can end up not getting the benefit from it.

I want to talk about the relationship with the review, because there is a huge opportunity from the review but there is a danger of a chicken-and-egg or cart-before-horse situation—I am not sure which metaphor is right here—with regard to the relationship between funding and the review of Creative Scotland's remit and operations.

Let me give you one example of the potential negative consequences that some people may be worried about. Creative Scotland has had some criticism for some of what it has done. An area that is pretty well regarded, as far as I can tell, is Screen Scotland, which is doing pretty well. My view is that the games sector would benefit from a similar high-profile approach, with a similarly high-profile unit within Creative Scotland to look at the games sector, which has sometimes fallen between the creative and enterprise parts of Government.

I know that the Government is serious about the games sector's potential and has talked about developing a games strategy. However, if the review of Creative Scotland said that, among other things, it should have a more high-profile and well-resourced games unit, is there a risk that the rest of the culture sector would say, "Hang on, we thought that extra £100 million was all for us?" Is there a danger that, in looking at the remit, we end up not seeing all that additional committed money going to what we currently cover in the creative sector but the movement of pots of money within Government?

That is two questions in one: one is about the games sector and the potential for Creative Scotland to do some really good stuff, which I would like to see happen; the other is about the impact on the existing funding streams and the people who benefit from those, if Creative Scotland were to take on something new within that funding of £100 million?

**Angus Robertson:** Again, total agreement has broken out at this meeting. I totally agree with Mr Harvie's observations. I agree first that the review is an opportunity. I genuinely view it as an opportunity to help us to better understand what Creative Scotland does well and what we need to do differently, to ensure that we are not missing out on the different parts of the creative sector. Mr Harvie lights on an important question. We have a screen sector that is responsible for the support and development of what is produced for television and for the big screen at the cinema, but not for a screen—small or large—in the games sector.

It would not be right for me to put words in your mouth, but you or any other committee member might ask whether what the games sector does—very effectively, incidentally—is not also part of the continuum of what happens for television and for the film sector, whether the skills are not transferable and whether aspects of the games sector are not the same as they are for film and television. Take the example of soundtracks. Is there a difference between the music that might be produced for the games sector and the music that might be produced for a television programme or a film? The answer is no.

Therefore, will a review look at that area? Yes, absolutely, because—I explain in case anybody who is watching the proceedings does not know this—support for film and television is within Screen Scotland, which is part of Creative Scotland, and support for the games sector is not. Support for the games sector is part of the Scottish Enterprise network. That is a historical decision—I was not around at the time—and I am sure that there was good logic for it—

**Patrick Harvie:** Not really.

**Angus Robertson:** However, is that something that we should now look at? I am not drawing limits on how a review can consider the creative landscape.

The second point—it cannot be a subsidiary point, because it is that important—is that the funding must follow the responsibility. Therefore, if there are any decisions about including or removing something from the culture portfolio, the funding will follow. Mr Harvie might point out that that is exactly what happened recently with regard to events, which had been part of my portfolio responsibility. That responsibility included delivering the likes of the cycling world championships. That is now back in the economic portfolio, and the money that is assigned to it has gone with the responsibility. I do not want to get too far ahead of myself.

Mr Harvie was modest in describing screen as doing “pretty well”; it is doing unbelievably well. The industry is now worth £635 million—give or take some millions—gross value added per year. By independent estimation, by 2030, it will be worth more than £1 billion to Scotland, and that is not including the games sector. It is therefore one of the great stories that we have in our creative and cultural firmament. Should the Government and our agencies do everything that we can to help it to survive and thrive? Absolutely. Should a review look at that? Yes, it should.

09:45

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Good morning, cabinet secretary. You have been

agreeing with the premise of many of the questions from committee members. Would you agree that the culture sector in Scotland is in crisis?

**Angus Robertson:** I agree that the culture sector is emerging from crisis. By any objective criteria it is doing so, given the challenges for a number of organisations and venues. Obviously, not every organisation has been going through a crisis. However, the pressures have been such that there has been a collective one, from which we are in the process of emerging. I spend a lot of my time, as do my officials, ensuring that we support organisations and venues that have been confronting existential challenges, because we want them to survive. As we are able to find, allocate and disburse increased funding, we will move from the sustaining phase—which some people have described as “crisis”, and I acknowledge that for many it has been so—and emerge from it. I think that that is where we are now.

**Neil Bibby:** We have heard significant evidence from the sector that it still faces a huge crisis. Museums Galleries Scotland told the committee:

“We have reached a point at which so many organisations are in crisis that they are struggling to do the really good work that we know can be done.”—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 12 September 2024; c 10.]

Culture Counts has warned that

“the crisis facing Scotland’s culture sector is an immediate one”,

and Creative Scotland has said that it is working with

“a number of organisations that are in crisis and on cliff edges.”—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 19 September 2024; c 37.]

Recently, the First Minister received a letter from prominent figures in Scotland’s music scene, including Paolo Nutini, Biffy Clyro and 170 others, who raised concerns about an impending “cultural catastrophe” unless the Scottish Government provides immediate and reliable support to the sector.

Why are we in the situation of facing a crisis in the culture sector and an impending cultural catastrophe? How will the Scottish Government act to stop such a catastrophe and avoid such a crisis?

**Angus Robertson:** I know that Mr Bibby has already been listening very closely to the past 40-plus minutes of evidence, in which I have been outlining our commitment to increase funding for the cultural sector extremely significantly; to go through a change to the way in which funding is allocated, in line with the wishes of the sector that it be done on a multi-annual basis; to embrace the

opportunity to look across the creative and cultural landscape, to ensure that we have its administration in the best possible order; and to deliver on that change as quickly as possible.

Here is a challenge for us all. We cannot just wish the means—we have to vote for it. We will soon have a budget, in which I hope I will be able to secure the agreement of my colleagues in Government that we will provide an allocation for culture that is heading in the direction that everyone would want. We would all wish it to be delivered in one year, no doubt. I will try to be as persuasive as I can, but, realistically, because of the scale of increase that is required and that we have committed to, it will take a number of years to do so. Regardless of that, we will have to vote for it. If we do not pass a budget, sitting and pointing out that things have been extremely challenging and that, for many, it has been a crisis, but then not supporting the means and not voting for it, will be a real problem.

**Neil Bibby:** We have discussed the need for confidence and certainty in the sector, but what we are seeing is chaos and a mess. I have been listening closely to what you have been saying. You have said that you want to reassure the sector and to provide a stable environment. You are also saying things such as, “If we can secure an increase in funding,” and, “I will try to persuade colleagues.”

For months, the Scottish Government has been giving clear commitments and promises to increase the budget by at least £25 million in 2025-26. Cabinet secretary, you have said that, the First Minister has said it and so has the Deputy First Minister. Yet, half an hour before the committee met this morning, you wrote to Creative Scotland, saying that you cannot tell it what the funding position will be next year. That is chaotic.

**Angus Robertson:** Let me be absolutely clear about the budgetary process, for anybody watching who is not aware of this. Scotland’s budget is dependent on budgetary decisions that are made by the UK Government. We do not have clarity from the UK Government about our budgetary situation, and we do not have multi-annual funding for the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government—Mr Bibby knows this to be so.

**Neil Bibby:** Yes.

**Angus Robertson:** In circumstances of previous incoming Governments, the length of time that it took for a UK budget to be in place and for there to be clarity is as follows. In 1979, a change of Government led to a budget in one month and nine days. In 1997, Gordon Brown delivered an incoming budget after two months and one day. In 2010, George Osborne delivered

a UK budget in one month and 16 days. Rachel Reeves, the incoming UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, will deliver her budget three months and 26 days after the election.

My point—this is really important—is that I would wish to have been able to give clarity to the creative sector a lot earlier than we have been able to do, but we are entirely dependent on clarity from the UK Government about what our budgetary situation is likely to be. I do not think that any responsible member of the Scottish Parliament would suggest that we could unilaterally make budgetary decisions without any idea of what our budgetary situation is going to be. Would I wish us to have had earlier clarity? Absolutely. Could the UK Government have given us that? It has not.

We will have a budget as quickly as we possibly can following the UK’s budget. In the meantime, I am making every case that I can in Government to ensure that the funding is in place. Mr Bibby, you cannot, on the one hand, say that we should make promises about funding when we have absolutely zero clarity from the UK Labour Government more than three months after the general election.

**Neil Bibby:** How many months ago was it when you gave those commitments for an extra £25 million?

**Angus Robertson:** We gave that commitment last year, in the budget speech.

**Neil Bibby:** Last year—almost 12 months ago.

**Angus Robertson:** Yes—for this incoming year.

**Neil Bibby:** Did you have clarity then, when you made that commitment? When you made that promise, you somehow had clarity then, but you do not have it now.

**Angus Robertson:** Last year, we not only made a commitment to a £100 million increase; we confirmed that we would be increasing the amount by £15 million, and there was an intention—which I have read out to the committee, so I do not think that I need to do so a second time—with an aim to do that by the scale of £25 million this year. That is the scale of the agreement that I am trying to secure from ministerial colleagues. However, we have to do that on the basis of knowing what the actual budgetary situation is like. Otherwise, I would be before the committee being traduced by colleagues for making up numbers that are undeliverable.

We have made a commitment to increase cultural funding by £100 million. We committed to doing that by more than £15 million this year, and we have done so. We have confirmed the aim for the forthcoming year for that to be in the order of

£25 million. That is exactly what I am intent on persuading my colleagues to deliver. Subverting the budget process by not doing that on the basis of what we actually know the financial situation to be is not a credible description of the budgetary process within which we have to operate in a parliamentary democracy.

**Neil Bibby:** Forgive me, but I thought that you had already persuaded your Government colleagues about an additional £25 million over the coming—

**Angus Robertson:** I have.

**Neil Bibby:** So you have persuaded them.

**Angus Robertson:** I have persuaded my colleagues of the order of the increase in funding that is required; I have persuaded colleagues of the allocation for this current financial year; and I made the case last year, too, as confirmed in the speech by my finance secretary colleague—I will read it out again for colleagues who might not have heard it. She said:

“Our aim is to increase arts and culture investment in 2025-26 by at least a further £25 million.”—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2023; c 15.]

My job is to make sure that we do more than “aim” for something. Every fair-minded person knows that, when you have made a commitment to a significant increase and when you have said that you hope to be able to do it as quickly as possible, to say that you aim to do it is a noble and worthy thing. However, there is a difference between that and making a financial allocation in a budgetary process.

That is what I want to ensure that we have as part of the budget for next year. In due course, I will argue for the further steps in the increase to £100 million, but there is no way round the normal budgetary process. As we know, Scottish Government budgets are presented to the Scottish Parliament after UK Government budgets, because our financial situation is subordinate in devolution. It is one of the great shortcomings of being beholden to another place to make what we hope are good decisions.

I hope that the UK Government budget provides the means for us to be able to deliver—I really do—and I call on the UK Government not to continue with the austerity agenda that it has inherited, but unfortunately it looks set to do so. However, for clarity, I point out that, in contrast to the rest of the United Kingdom, we are increasing culture spending in Scotland. Spending is going up under this Government in Scotland; it is going down right now under the new and current UK Government; and it is going down right now in Wales under a Labour Government there. Here in Scotland, culture funding is going up.

Would I wish it to go up more quickly? Absolutely. Am I trying to do everything that I possibly can to make sure that we reach the commitment of an additional £100 million by 2028-29? Absolutely. We have started to do that; it is happening; funding is going up; and multiyear funding is coming. However, the resources need to be found, and they need to be voted through in Parliament. That will require all of us to vote for them. All of us have—I assume—suggested thus far that they are supportive of having the additional means, but if we wish to have those additional means, we will have to vote for them.

**Neil Bibby:** Obviously, the Government has made promises. You said earlier that the sector will believe this when it sees it, and I will believe it when I see it, too.

**Angus Robertson:** I am sorry, but as an additional point, I think that it is helpful for viewers to be aware that the current Scottish Government is operating in a minority parliamentary situation. To get a budget through, it will require a majority of MSPs to vote for it. That is why this is not just a question of commitments by the Government. I have given the Government’s commitments; I have underscored those commitments; and I reiterate them. What I wish to communicate to colleagues is that, if we are agreed that the scale of the challenge is such as it is, and if we are agreed that we require to deliver additional resources of the scale that the Government has committed to wanting to deliver, we need to vote for that.

**Neil Bibby:** I am sorry, cabinet secretary, but I do not think that you have underscored the Government’s commitments today. In your letter to Creative Scotland half an hour before this committee meeting, you have provided huge uncertainty about the budget position this year, having given clear commitments to provide £25 million extra next year. That is not what the Government is doing today. You have not underscored commitments this morning; instead, you have provided huge uncertainty to the sector, because it now has no idea what funding it will get next year.

**Angus Robertson:** I totally refute—

**Neil Bibby:** Can you tell us how much money will be in the budget?

**Angus Robertson:** I totally refute—

**Neil Bibby:** You are asking us to vote for a budget, and you cannot even tell us how much money will be in it.

**The Convener:** We are not going to reach an agreement here—obviously—and it is not helpful if we get opinions thrown in with answers at this point. I will move on and bring in Mr Adam.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Good morning, cabinet secretary. Unlike Mr Bibby, when I see challenges, I try to think of ways of solving them. Perhaps that in itself is telling, as we move forward with this. Thank you for explaining to those who are having difficulty with it how the budget process works, cabinet secretary, but I think that there is something else that is telling, and Mr Bibby may well have accidentally stumbled on to a solution to the problem.

There is talk about uncertainty on the budget, and that is because of the way in which the devolution settlement works—that has always been the case. I have been here long enough and have been in enough committees across different portfolios to know that the same argument is made in relation to other portfolios as well. Mr Bibby has stumbled upon the idea that, if we had multiyear budgets from the UK Government, that might be a solution and might help with moving away from the uncertainty, difficulties and challenges in many of the sectors that the Government supports.

10:00

**Angus Robertson:** The Scottish Government's position is that we wish to have multiyear budget settlements in the UK. At present, we are trying to disburse Government funds on a multiyear basis but with a lack of clarity from the UK Labour Government, which is taking three times longer than its predecessors did to give any clarity whatsoever on the budget.

Having multiyear clarity would be a good thing, and that would allow us to allocate the funds. However, we should not be blown off course from understanding how things actually are. I am an optimist about the trajectory of recovery for the culture sector. Why? It is because we have acknowledged the scale of the challenge, and I think that there is agreement that the scale of the challenge is financially what the Government has committed to. I have committed to that a number of times in giving evidence to the committee, before now and again today. That is the aim of what we want to commit to as soon as we can. If we do that, I am confident that the funding of culture will be in a better place.

If UK Governments want to make the devolution settlement work better, we require things to happen on a multiyear basis, or, *de minimis*, we require a budget to be produced quicker than the incoming UK Labour Government is doing—that would be of huge assistance. Taking three times as long as all predecessors does not contribute to improving the budget process.

**George Adam:** In the past, some people—not you—have almost talked down the culture sector. However, traditionally, the sector has dealt with

challenging political and financial times, and it has always been very resilient. In fact, you and I will remember the dim and dark 1980s, when the culture sector was Scotland—it was our political voice, because this place did not exist. Surely, the culture sector is not in the place that some people say. It has always been a resilient sector that has been able to come forward with new ways of working and new ideas to push forward Scotland in the world.

**Angus Robertson:** I totally agree. It has to be our understanding as a Government and as a Parliament, and among the political parties in the Parliament, that, if the scale of the challenge is as it has been and we are agreed that we want people to succeed right across the creative sector, we have to deliver the means for them to be able to do so. I am confident that we are emerging from the crisis that large parts of the culture sector have been operating under in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. However, unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, where culture budgets are being cut by the Labour Government for England and by the Labour Government in Wales, in Scotland, funding is going up.

I know that some observers find it difficult to acknowledge that funding is actually going up in Scotland, but it is, and I am glad that it is—I want it to go up by more, and that is exactly what we aim to do.

**George Adam:** I have one final question, which is on the review of Creative Scotland. Various creative organisations have given evidence during the budget process. You mentioned that Creative Scotland has not changed since its inception. I might have a wee bit of skin in this game, because I asked Iain Munro what the point is of him and of Creative Scotland. I might have been a wee bit brutal with him, but that was basically because I was not getting answers. I then got a history lesson on why a national arts council was created after the war.

Given what Mr Harvie said about the games industry and given that Screen Scotland, as an offshoot of Creative Scotland, has been an absolute screaming success, if we are looking at changing or reviewing Creative Scotland, there are surely different ways of working and Creative Scotland maybe needs to start thinking about coming into the 21st century and moving forward.

**Angus Robertson:** The purpose of the review is for us all to consider how the creative and cultural landscape operates in Scotland and the role that an independent arm's-length funding body plays. I do not think that any serious players in the cultural community question the need for an arm's-length funding body that chimes with the sector's needs, interests, concerns and expectations in 2024. I know that Creative

Scotland has done lots of really good work. I particularly acknowledge its dispersal of funds during Covid.

It is fair to say that we are making major changes through the introduction of multiyear funding and the significant increase in culture funding. Not only is funding going up in Scotland this year, but I think that I am right in saying that we are the only Government in the UK that has committed to increase culture spending on that scale. There has been no confirmation by the UK Government about any increase in culture funding in the years ahead. We must think about how we manage the increased funding so that our national institutions, our national performing companies, our festivals and other culture bodies have the appropriate administration and support for the 2020s, because Creative Scotland was set up in 2010.

I do not want to prejudge the outcome of the review or to set limits on any recommendations that might be made. The committee will no doubt hear many suggestions, and I am sure that that will play a part in the process.

We all need to acknowledge that we have—and we have had previously, in different guises—a national arm's-length arts funding body. Committee members have asked questions about the scope of Creative Scotland's responsibility and whether other things should be considered to be within that scope. We need to get those issues right at the same time as getting funding in place. We are beginning to head in that direction, and it is the right time to think about those things in parallel.

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** Good morning, cabinet secretary. We have spoken a lot about Creative Scotland and the review. Given the controversies this year, the review is timely and will, I hope, lead to better working relationships between the publicly funded body and the Scottish Government. However, it is right to say that the decisions that Creative Scotland can take depend on the budget that the Scottish Government provides.

Creative Scotland's chief executive, Iain Munro, has stated that lack of clarity about the budget was part of the reason why it decided to close its open fund. Cabinet secretary, I have in front of me a freedom of information document, dated 27 August, that requested any correspondence between you and Creative Scotland regarding the announcement of the closure of the open fund. The response that I received stated that there had been no discussions between you and Creative Scotland regarding that significant announcement. We are talking about £6.6 million, so surely there would have been correspondence between the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland. Why

did such discussions not take place? If they did, can you clarify what discussions took place?

**Angus Robertson:** First, as I am sure Ms Gallacher is aware, not everything that the Government does is done by the cabinet secretary or in correspondence; a lot of the work takes place between officials. The main challenge with the open fund was the issue of timescales and due diligence in relation to the disbursement of public funds.

As I have said, a review of Creative Scotland will be very useful for everybody in trying to ensure that there is maximum alignment between the budget processes of the Government and the Parliament and the budget processes of Creative Scotland and the culture sector. If any of that is out of alignment, we run the risk of people who have responsibility in one area being unable to do what they want to do because they are waiting on others to do due diligence, or for the Government or the Parliament to agree, or for the funds to be disbursed. Having the least discontinuity on those three levels is absolutely key.

Creative Scotland knew the scale of the funding that we intended, because funding does not just go out at the start of the year, it goes out at different stages of the year; I am sure committee members know that. Creative Scotland knew the scale of the funding that we had committed to disburse, because we made a commitment to an allocation of £15.8 million in last year's budget and that is exactly what we did. The funding is in place and the open fund is open.

I would observe that Creative Scotland has had significantly more applications for funding to the open fund, which speaks to the characterisation of a number of members of the committee who have said that the scale of the demand for financial support in the sector is significant. I acknowledge that and there is no doubt that the size of the fund will be looked at in future years. The other area for the review to look at is whether, once multiyear funding has come in, it has an impact on the different funding streams, whether that is the open fund or others for Creative Scotland.

To go back to Ms Gallacher's initial question about the way in which the Government operates, I do not do everything personally. It is officials who work on a day-to-day basis between the culture directorate and Creative Scotland and there are constant discussions about funding issues. I met representatives of Creative Scotland last week to talk about its plans for multiyear funding and our challenges around the budgetary timescale. We agreed that we want to make sure that multiyear funding can progress, that the Government can secure the funding and give Creative Scotland the certainty to be able to launch multiyear funding, and that we make sure, as part of a review, that



we have the best possible alignment around our different budget processes. I am sure that the committee gets that some organisations' budgets run from January to December, and others have different financial years.

There are a number of areas around budget, apart from the quantum of the funding that we want to have allocated. It is about the different budgetary challenges that we have as organisations, whether as a funding body, as a Government or as a Parliament. I do not think that anybody is seriously suggesting that there is a shortcut around the budget process for the Government and the Parliament. I do not think I have heard anybody say that we should do that. At the same time, we have to be cognisant that other organisations operate at different timescales.

How do we make sure that we do that in a way that is not detrimental to people in the creative and cultural communities? I am very seized of that.

**Meghan Gallacher:** I understand where the cabinet secretary is coming from with respect to multiyear funding. Of course, it is not just Creative Scotland that is looking for a new way for the Scottish Government to allocate funding to those organisations. Historic Environment Scotland is another one that would like to see a progression to multiyear funding. What conversations has the Scottish Government had with Historic Environment Scotland? I am very concerned about where its budgetary situation is in terms of the prioritisation of historic sites and whether there will be a significant reduction in the important work that it can carry out.

**Angus Robertson:** On the general point about multiyear funding, there is a huge interest in the third sector as a whole in multiyear funding working. That is why, quite apart from the self-evident advantages that it would bring to the cultural sector, proving that moving from an annual funding model to a multiyear funding model is workable will be a huge prize for the third sector as a whole, and what is true in the arts sector is definitely true in the heritage sector and in the charitable sector.

10:15

The Government is definitely thinking about that. Historic Environment Scotland is in a very interesting place, because it has wanted greater freedom to determine its own budgetary circumstances, and I have agreed with that. At Historic Environment Scotland's last board meeting, it agreed on its plan in relation to that. That is hugely interesting, and no doubt the committee may take a view on whether it wants to better understand how that operates.

Historic Environment Scotland has been very successful in dealing with the challenges that have been alluded to in relation to what has happened on an environmental basis to a lot of our historic infrastructure and in the work that it is doing to maintain and protect that. Historic Environment Scotland, from a budgetary point of view, has been given the freedom to get more income through its own efforts, and I welcome that. I am very supportive of that.

Shona Riach, do you want to add anything on that point?

**Shona Riach (Scottish Government):** The new chief executive of Historic Environment Scotland, Katerina Brown, has just started in post. Following her arrival in the institution, the board signed off a new business model, which we have been discussing closely with it, and which, as the cabinet secretary says, will allow it to keep more of the revenue that it raises.

**Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** I have two questions on sustainability. Many people who are watching the meeting will ask themselves whether it is sheer hypocrisy to demand certainty and multiyear funding from the Scottish Government and, at the same time, say nothing about £160 million being taken out of the Scottish Government's budget with 90 minutes' notice. The two things cannot co-exist, and where they do, it is hypocritical, in my view.

On financial sustainability, it is true that, as Meghan Gallacher said and, I think, as the cabinet secretary mentioned, all sorts of third sector groups are very keen to have multiyear funding. How you can have that when you do not have certainty from Westminster is the big question, but is it the case that the culture sector is slightly different? The sector has told us in evidence how precarious it feels, and if you have an end point of £100 million-plus in 2028, you know that you will be spending £100 million more by then. Is the bridge to that not a more manageable process in the culture sector than it would be in a number of other sectors? The sector is uniquely precarious, but you have an end point in place that you and your colleagues can usefully use to consider whether indications could be given as to what funding there will be over the next three or four years.

**Angus Robertson:** Mr Brown is absolutely right to point out the challenges on income, particularly for a lot of freelancers. He is also absolutely right that it is important that maximum clarity about increasing funding is forthcoming. To be exact—I was looking through the figures earlier to underline the point about the direction of travel in answer to Mr Bibby—we have been absolutely clear that we are committed to increasing funding in Scotland by

an additional £100 million on an annual basis. If we compare and contrast the previous UK Government's funding levels with the funding levels that are being maintained by the incoming Government, we see a 6 per cent reduction in the culture budget for England. In Wales, there is a 6.5 per cent cut to the culture budget this year, while in Scotland it is going up.

I appreciate that people want certainty, but they should know that the direction of travel in Scotland is for culture spending to go up. That has not just been committed to; it is happening, unlike elsewhere in the UK, given that the Labour Party at the UK level and the Labour Party in Wales are cutting culture budgets.

I am proud to be culture secretary in Scotland, where we are increasing culture funding and heading in the direction of a transformational shift in funding culture and the arts in Scotland. Would I wish that to happen quicker? Absolutely. Am I seeking to do it as quickly as possible? Yes. When we get there, will we be in a significantly different and better place? Yes, we will. Could we do it any quicker? If we had a multiyear funding agreement from the UK Government, we could, but we do not.

In fact, the current UK Labour Government has no intention of putting such an agreement in place, and I have heard not a single one of the Labour parliamentarians in this place argue that we should have it. However, it is self-evident that if we want multiyear funding disbursement, it would be advantageous to have multiyear clarity from the UK Government in relation to devolved budgets, given the subordinate financial nature of the devolution settlement. I ask any colleague in any party to recognise that as a commonsense solution, as we move in the direction of Meghan Gallacher's suggestion about the Government having the widest possible multiyear funding approach—which I agree would be the best thing for everybody involved.

For those watching proceedings who might view this as a slightly technical question or a question about accounting, I ask that we just imagine for a second a really small organisation—a particularly small organisation—with not a lot of people to do the paperwork, the finance and the budgeting. When we think of the transformational difference between its having to do that work every single year and its having to do it for a number of years at one go and then getting on with the business at hand—which is to be as creatively focused as it wishes to be—we see that that has to be the prize for us all.

However, I say again that, for us to do that, we have to wish the means. One can be critical and just ask, "When is a commitment not a commitment?", even when one can see the money beginning to head in the right direction, but we

need to be careful that we are not only recognising the challenge but actually doing something about it. The Government is doing so, and the Parliament will have an opportunity to do so in the budgetary process. Then, if we are supportive of the budget, as we will have to be, we will hopefully secure the means—the means that have been committed to, of course—through that budgetary process. That is how finance works in a parliamentary democracy.

**Keith Brown:** I will leave the cabinet secretary with a suggestion that might strengthen his arm in his discussions with colleagues. There might be a particular case to be made for the culture sector, given its precariousness and the fact that the £100 million-plus has already been identified as an end point. However, I am not looking for a response on that.

It will be interesting to see whether, as I believe that he will, the cabinet secretary achieves £25 million-plus next year, and whether people in this Parliament who say that they want an increase—an increase, I should point out, compared with what is happening elsewhere—support it. My view and my prediction just now is that they will not.

My second question is on sustainability of morale, rather than finances. We have heard a lot of evidence—I would point, for example, to the *Official Report* of the committee's previous meeting—about morale in the sector not being good, partly for the reasons that we have heard such as the perfect storm that people have experienced and the other pressures that they are under. That view might be a wee bit at odds with the fact that, as the cabinet secretary has said, Scotland has been pretty unique in having an increasing budget in this area. However, I note that people felt that, at various levels, they did not have access to or feel included by the Scottish Government in the way that they would have wanted. I think that they are reeling somewhat from the effect of the decision not to have a culture minister, which puts additional pressure on you, cabinet secretary, given that you are having to take on that brief as well as the external affairs and Europe portfolio.

Nevertheless, the sector is looking for greater engagement, and I think that, in these constrained financial times, regular discussion, dialogue and engagement with the sector would, on the basis of some of the testimony that we have had from stakeholders, go a long way. Is it possible to do that? I know that it will be time consuming, but can you offer any support to the sector in that regard?

**Angus Robertson:** I absolutely can. On inclusion and engagement, I give the committee the assurance that that activity is constant and ongoing. Indeed, in my opening statement, I talked

about recent meetings with trade unions in the sector.

I give the example of festivals, which are just one important part of the cultural firmament. During the summer, leading members of our festivals sector expressed keenness for there to be a focused level of support from Government on what the sector does. Some people set the bar really low for what that support should be, suggesting that we should have a meeting. I said that the issue is much more important than simply having a meeting about it; it is about having a proper strategic partnership with the sector. I therefore announced the creation of a strategic partnership for Scotland's festivals.

This is not about having more meetings or working groups that are not focused and do not have an outcome. When I am asked a question in which it is suggested that there is not enough interaction, I can point to the example of our bringing in a framework and a partnership, as we did for the delivery of large events, such as the UCI cycling world championships, which were extremely successful.

We have learned from our approach on events, and I am intending to follow that approach for the festivals sector. We are thinking about culture in the round and ensuring that we are not missing any part of the sector. That is why the conversations are significant and on-going.

I regularly say yes to meeting requests from people from across the sector, whether it is the Music Venue Trust, which has been raising issues such as ticketing and how to support music venues—some committee members will be aware of those issues. Organisations such as the Music Industries Association are in touch, asking to meet to discuss the music sector, touring and performing. I say yes to those meetings. It is really important that we have that dialogue, so that I am well advised, and colleagues in the civil service are well advised, about what we need to do.

We have an excellent level of engagement. I came into post at a time of Covid, but I was struck by the fact that we would have regular meetings that were well attended from across the sector and Scotland. If people are suggesting that they do not feel included, I encourage them to get in touch with me, because I want to hear from them directly about why they are not included, or about why they feel that they are not included, because it is important that everybody is included.

I am keen to hear good ideas wherever they come from. I feel that I am well advised. I look closely at the evidence that the committee receives from umbrella organisations, venues and other organisations. It is because we are getting good advice that we are committed to what we are

doing. We are delivering on increased funding—that is happening—and we hope to be able to strengthen that through the budgetary process. I am also keen to make sure that we are delivering change for the wider cultural and arts infrastructure.

**Keith Brown:** I have a comment. If you look at the evidence that the committee has taken, especially at our meeting two weeks ago, you will see that organisations feel that cross-portfolio work in Government is an issue. Mr Adam questioned them about that.

I do not think that the issue for organisations is necessarily about having working groups with particular aims; rather, it is about something that is much more amorphous, such as having a discussion, a chat or a meeting at events, and about feeling included. Those types of engagement have a value in their own right. Having heard their evidence, I am not certain that many organisations will take the initiative to contact you. It will have to be down to the Government to say that you are going to have a discussion.

It is just a question of feeling supported and engaged.

**Angus Robertson:** I would encourage anybody with whom Mr Brown's description chimes to get in touch, please. I spend a lot of time going to events with people from the culture and creative sector. I very much hope that people feel that I am approachable, that my officials are approachable and that we are very interested in what people have to say. If there is somebody who feels that that is not the case, please get in touch and we will do our level best to make sure that everybody's voice is heard.

10:30

The point about cross-portfolio working is a good one. I assure the committee that it happens and I can give an example of that. This week, I took part in a cross-portfolio meeting on rural Scotland and how the Government is delivering right across Scotland. Members of the committee and other members of the Parliament have made the case that culture exists right across Scotland, not just in our urban centres or in the biggest events that often take place in cities. Events take place the length and breadth of Scotland and we need to make sure that we are supportive of that.

Another dimension to multiyear funding is that, if we and Creative Scotland can deliver on all that, it will lead not only to an increase in the number of organisations that are supported, but to a bigger footprint of cultural organisations that are funded across Scotland, which would be a good thing.

**The Convener:** I thank Mr Brown for raising that issue, which is one that I was going to come on to.

In the Parliament at lunch time today, the Luminare choir will be performing on the theme of let's sing dementia. That is a perfect example of community working, culture in the community and the wellbeing economy.

The other point about direct funding is the opportunity for economic involvement for a lot of community-based cultural activities. The embedding of culture in the wellbeing economy and cross-portfolio working are themes that come back time and again. I would say that we do not have much visibility of that work at the moment, cabinet secretary. Can you assure us that it is being done? You will have difficult budget conversations with colleagues, but this is another area where you could encourage them to look at things such as social prescribing.

**Angus Robertson:** In my opening statement, I was pleased to underscore the value of culture in its own terms as well as recognising the role that it plays in wellbeing. We do not need to rehearse that in the Government or at this committee. The positive impact of culture is very well understood. We can already see excellent good practice in cultural organisations having a transformational impact on communities. Not that long ago, I spent some time with Scottish Ballet learning about what it can do through outreach and how it helps different people with their wellbeing. We need to acknowledge the level of ambition and the outreach that is happening in relation to wellbeing. We are not saying that culture having a role in wellbeing is something that should start; it is already happening, formally and informally. The question is how we maximise its potential. That is where progress is still to be made, but I know that, across Government, there is a recognition of the advantage that culture can and does give.

One thing that has been acknowledged, in particular, is the transformational role that the likes of Sistema have been able to play in a number of communities across Scotland. It was great to see Sistema performers here in the Parliament and great to see the growing level of public understanding of their talents and the transformational impacts on the communities that the musicians come from.

Could more be done? Absolutely, but we should acknowledge that a lot is happening already that others think is worth learning from, and we should not lose sight of that. Cultural decision makers in other parts of the world look to Scotland because much is happening here that is worth learning from given the excellent nature of the sector, notwithstanding the recent challenges that it has faced. Only this week, I spoke to a delegation of French cultural decision makers who were here

under the auspices of the French consul general in Scotland, and who were interested to learn about the culture sector and sustainability. They were being briefed by a number of cultural organisations about what they are doing in that field.

Not only is a lot of good work being done already, but others recognise that to be so and they want to learn from what is happening in Scotland.

**The Convener:** Thank you cabinet secretary. Mr Harvie has a final question.

**Patrick Harvie:** Thank you convener. Cabinet secretary, you mentioned meetings with the Music Venue Trust. My question is about the longer term rather than the coming financial year. One aspect of reviewing the creative landscape is about diversifying funding sources, so I think that there is some longer-term relevance to my question, and I hope that I can get a yes or no answer. When I raised the idea of a stadium levy, which the Music Venue Trust is arguing could help to fund many independent cultural venues, your answer was mostly focused on whether it is a devolved or reserved matter and whether it could happen in Scotland or would need to be UK-wide. Does the Scottish Government want to see a stadium levy happen, and does it want it to be used for that purpose?

**Angus Robertson:** I am very interested, in principle, in identifying any funding sources that might support music venues and organisations in addition to—not supplanting—public funding. I made mention of that in my opening statement. A lot more could be done in that area. We talk quite a lot about philanthropy as one income source, but there are others, including, potentially, ticketing.

The member's predecessor on this committee asked me about the issue with great focus, and I raised it with the previous UK culture secretary. As I have alluded to, some take the view that some elements of the issue are reserved. We need greater clarity around that, along with an understanding of the ability of the devolved Administrations to work with UK Government partners to look at the likes of a ticket levy, because it is viewed as a tax.

I am trying to give the shortest answer that I can—

**Patrick Harvie:** My point is that, wherever the decision-making power lies, would the Government like to see it happen?

**Angus Robertson:** I want to see more diverse income sources. That is not the yes or no answer that Mr Harvie would like on a ticket levy.

I have met representatives of the Music Venue Trust and I would like to meet them again. I said to the member's predecessor, and I say to him now,

if there are workable models that we can deliver, or which we can work with others to deliver, please talk to us about them. If there are workable models that provide venues or other organisations with sustainable additional funding, we should look at them. That is why I will not rule anything out. I will rule things in when I see workable and deliverable proposals.

**Patrick Harvie:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** Cabinet secretary, thank you for your attendance this morning. On that note, I close the meeting.

*Meeting closed at 10:38.*



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