A Report Summarising Key Themes from a Culture Sector Gathering at Glasgow Women's Library, with the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs at Glasgow Women's Library, Bridgeton, on Monday 26 June 2017

Full Report

Introduction

1.   This paper presents the themes and discussion points that were aired at a Culture Sector Gathering on 26th June with a broad audience from across the cultural sectors. The aim of this event was to launch a programme of engagement on the development of a Culture Strategy for Scotland and to draw in initial insights and expertise. The event was hosted by the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop at Glasgow Women's Library in Bridgeton.

Background

2.   Following a speech[1] by the Cabinet Secretary to inspire ideas and launch the discussion, participants were divided into 10 groups each with a host facilitator, and asked to discuss a set of questions.   Each facilitator summarised feedback from their table discussion and presented it back to the plenary. Scottish Government officials at each table took notes. These notes together with the plenary feedback have been reviewed and a summary of key points for each question is provided.

3.   Groups were asked to discuss suggested core principles for the strategy, and the scope of the strategy. Then they were asked to consider the current state of culture now, how they would like things to change and what do to enable change to happen. The key themes of the discussion throughout the afternoon are summarised below.

Key points of discussion

a) **Who is the strategy for?**

4.   There was a general call for greater clarity on who the strategy is aimed at and who will own it. Some queries raised included:

- Why do we need a strategy now?
- What influence will a strategy have on cultural activity that is not state funded?
- Is it for the country or the state?
- Is it an arts strategy or a culture strategy?
- Is there is a tension between community and global perspectives?

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[1] https://news.gov.scot/speeches-and-briefings/culture-strategy-for-scotland

b) What should the Culture Strategy do?

5.   Each table was asked to identify one thing that the culture strategy could do to make an impact. There was a range of views on what the purpose of the strategy should be: at one table participants questioned the need for a national strategy at all, and at another table participants suggested a success measure of developing a strategy would be that one was not needed in the future.

6.   Specific points on what the Strategy could do to make an impact included:

- Culture should be valued and sustained and not treated as an optional add on;
- The Strategy could provide a high level affirmation of culture as a human right or simply be a high level policy statement underpinned by sector strategies;
- The Strategy should establish Scotland as a cultural haven;
- The sector should be supported to promote and evidence culture's impacts in different areas, demonstrating the currency of the sector, and facilitating connectivity with stakeholders outside the culture sectors;
- The Strategy must provide a vision for the whole country, be ambitious and engaging, and provide a framework of priorities;
- The Strategy should focus on how the resources that are available can be used to make a difference (rather than why the investment is required in the first place);
- The way that The Strategy is delivered is as important as the end product; The process must be open, bottom up, involving all, and respecting existing cultures. It must also include those who will challenge the status quo;
- Art, music and drama should feature more strongly in the school curriculum;
- Taxation breaks should be considered as a way of supporting the cultural/ artistic workforce;
- Cultural policy needs to less risk averse; getting it wrong is key to enabling innovation;
- The Culture Strategy should not be used to seek conformity but rather culture should reflect our communities and must be self-determined;
- The Strategy should adopt a rights based approach not a deficit approach.
- We should ensure that The Strategy is aligned with other national strategies and plans such as the the third National Gaelic Language Plan.

The Principles (Access, Equity and Excellence)

7.   Discussions firstly focussed on the order, meaning and possible interpretations of three principles that were set out as a starting point for discussion in the Programme for Government.

8.   As a starting point, the following definitions were offered.

- **ACCESS**: everyone can engage with and participate in culture in myriad ways, both as professional and member of the public, regardless of age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, geography or socio-economic background; all those who develop, make, produce and present culture can access the opportunities and facilities they need. All parts of Scotland can enjoy a range of choices when it comes to how to live their cultural lives.
- **EQUITY**: everyone across Scotland is able to benefit from the prosperity that culture can bring (personal, social and economic); culture supports inclusive, sustainable growth of Scotland's economy and greater socio economic equality; all cultures, heritage and languages are equally valued; all those involved in culture from all backgrounds can be supported.
- **EXCELLENCE**: Scotland is a country that values and supports excellence and recognises that excellence is subjective and its meaning varies depending on the context; the conditions exist to support excellence across the sector/s and as members of society, to enable them to have confidence, to realise their full potential and to be innovative and imaginative; Scotland places culture at the heart of society; Scotland's culture is valued, diverse and is of all of us, for all of us; Scotland is a place of excellence.

Discussion points on the principles

9.   Many felt that the "access" and "equity" were appropriate, reasonable and useful principles as a basis, and it was noted that the commitment to these principles is very strong in Scotland. Taken together they were felt to be appropriate.

10.   However, some felt they lacked energy and excitement, were "tired, overused concepts", and were "government language" so would not be meaningful to everyone. For some the concepts were "paternalistic" and reflected a "top-down" or "deficit" approach, rather than connecting into real life.

11.   Some noted that there is potential conceptual overlap between "access" and "equity"; and queried what is meant by "equity": one table felt it has financial implications, whilst others asked if it is different from the "equality". "Equity" should be for both the audience as well as the artists. "Access" sounded "cold" to participants from one table, and "meaningless" to those from another. For one table "access" should include "participation". Other tables' participants noted that education and confidence are key to "access".

12.   Several tables found the term, "excellence" challenging. Whilst some felt that it was important to strive for excellence, the term could be seen as elitist and subjective: excellence cannot be measured; and it imposes a distinction between professional and amateur. Others challenged the term further describing it as "jargonistic", "clichéd" and that it fails to reflect the need for risk (i.e. that not everything can be successful). Alternatives for "excellence" that were suggested included "aspirational", "ambitious", "edgy" or "having a positive impact".

13.　　The terms were also felt to be quite audience focussed (rather than production focussed) and could imply a distinction between producers and recipients of culture.

14.　　There were a number of contributions that argued the principles needed to be revised.　Some argued that the principles are already intrinsic to the work of practitioners and it is more important to state a vision than principles.　Those from one table pointed out that it is important not to get too hung up terms, and not to have a check list that all activity must conform to.

15.　　Other suggestions included the possible inclusion or addition of the following concepts:

> celebration; ambition; achievement, diversity; risk; benefit; learning; sustainability; participation; imagination; learning; creativity; interchange between invention, continuity and sustainability; substitution of 'inclusion/engagement' for 'access'; framing the strategy around removing barriers; ensuring the principles were active and not passive in nature; career pathways.

The Scope

16.　　Participants were asked to discuss the scope of the strategy, what is meant by "culture" and what sort of definition would be useful?

17.　　There was general recognition that some form of definition would be helpful but that any attempt at definition should be inclusive and broad.　Key points made included:

- Any definition should represent all aspects of culture, should draw on a broad range of views and treat all aspects equally and include sport, media, broadcasting, languages and traditional arts and music. It should have greater recognition of new methods of cultural consumption in TV and broadcasting including social media and online activity; and reflect the diversity and plurality of the sector.　It should include "publicly funded", more popular cultural forms, and everyday activities;
- A broad definition is already captured by UNESCO but some felt this was too broad;
- Many participants acknowledged that there is a tension in trying to define the scope of the strategy:　should the definition be limited to what SG and funding partners support or should it be broader, bolder, more aspirational?　They recognised that we need to define it to be practical, but defining culture could limit opportunities;
- We should allow people to define for themselves; and a broad, flexible, enabling definition is useful. It should include and be relevant to everyone; and underline the legitimacy of many cultures;

- Any definition also needs to be dynamic and changing, reflecting that culture is live and ever-evolving;
- The definition should aim to normalise universal access to culture in all forms including everyday activities;
- Some felt it was important to distinguish "culture" from "creativity";
- It should also be realistic that there are also negative aspects of Scottish "culture" (alcoholism, racism, parochialism, political division).

Where are we now?

18.   Participants were asked to reflect on the current state of culture in Scotland and to consider the good things and the challenges:

19.   On the positive side, the following points were made:

- Culture prospers in Scotland and there is a lot going, on with many successful cultural events (sometimes evolving organically rather than by design);
- For the size of the country we generate high quantity of work and activity and our people and collections are great assets;
- There is a wealth of talent and potential in Scotland;
- There are high levels of public participation and engagement (coupled with a strong desire amongst the public to participate);
- As a small country, we have a strong sense of pride in our culture and heritage, including new ideas, contemporary cultures and   traditional arts and music, and historic environment;
- Gaelic is recognised as an official language of Scotland, and there is a range of Scottish Government initiatives in place to support the provision of Gaelic medium education throughout Scotland.
- As a nation we are resilient and tenacious and we are in a good position to build on what we have already;
- Socially and politically we are at a pivotal moment in our history given recent events such as the Independence Referendum and Brexit. Culture and art practice helps us to reflect and make sense of these things;
- Culture and arts are relatively well supported in Scotland;
- Most culture is not supported by public funding.

20.   The challenges that were identified included:

- There are resource / funding limitations: there is still short term funding and emphasis on pilot projects. The funding model needs to facilitate risk taking and innovation;
- There is a lack of jobs/ opportunities to have a career;
- Inequalities still characterise cultural engagement. Being cultural is not an option for everyone. There are still access issues and there is still elitism around art;

- Culture is not seen as academically important. The Curriculum for Excellence could be stronger on culture;
- Many young people today don't seem to have the same opportunities to explore and experiment with arts and culture compared with previous generations (in part due to tightening up of benefits access and a change in values);
- The SG outcomes focus is challenging as it can be difficult for cultural organisations to demonstrate impact, and they struggle to fit into this framework;
- The sector feels that it is not always managing to demonstrate its value as convincingly as it would like to.

8. What do we want the future of culture in Scotland to be like and how can we support getting there?

21.   Having considered what is working and what the challenges are, participants were then asked to consider what we should be trying to achieve in future and to come up with constructive suggestions on what to do to make changes happen.

22.   The following points were made and these have been grouped by theme:

Focus on education: formal and informal

23.   The importance of education as the basis of a thriving arts and culture sector both formally and informally was a core theme that was raised throughout the event.

24.   Suggestions to bolster the educational arena included:

- Investment in, and embedding creativity within an expanded Curriculum for Excellence and in teacher training;
- Recognition that arts/ culture are on a par with STEM subjects;
- Support for creative teaching methods training for teachers;
- Recognition and support of the role of parents/carers in nurturing creativity in early years;
- More opportunities for young people to engage in creative pursuits.
- Ensuring that cultural initiatives and resources that are introduced in schools are provided in Gaelic and Scots.

Leadership

25.   Participants said that:

- There is a need for a strong vision and leadership both in government and across the culture sectors;
- The FM and other Scottish Ministers could push a stronger message on culture in all policy areas;

- A Scottish Government statement that it values and is committed to culture could be very powerful;
- Champions within and outwith Government should promote art and culture both formally and informally.

Support for Artists / Valuing Artists and all those working in the sector

26.   Participants made the following points:

- There should be higher value on / trust in creative artists and on the role and place of culture in society (recognising intrinsic value too);
- There is a need to tackle the issue of artists working for free. There should be specific rights for artists to earn a living and have a career. There is a need to promote and achieve fair pay for creative producers/ artists;
- Use the taxation system to support creative endeavour and benefits system to allow experimental early career activity;
- Explore the introduction of universal basic income;
- The culture sector needs a stronger collective voice and could benefit from a Trade Union for the sector.

Investment in culture

27.   Participants noted that:

- Funding should ensure the sustainability of organisations and buildings (through long term funding); and to facilitate risk taking that is needed for innovation;
- There should be equity between large and small organisations in accessing funding;
- There is a need to reduce bureaucracy around funding applications (including requirements to demonstrate outcomes).
- Better frameworks for support are needed (especially to help sustain lower level community support) and better support for business;
- Robust partnerships and collaboration across sectors is also needed;
- There should be less emphasis on capital projects;
- There should be equity of opportunity in funding schemes between small and large organisations;
- We should consider how can we help sustain culture which is not funded and not seen;
- Could venture capitalism be a possible model?

Cultural Participation and Access

28.	Participants pointed out the need to:
- Remove barriers to engagement and participation (with open, inclusive venues, and affordable events); and widen access to include those who currently are not engaged, whilst respecting that their own cultures exist and have value;
- Reduce / simplify bureaucracy around funding applications.

Cross Policy Working and national outcomes

29.	Participants emphasised that:

- Culture should be at the centre of government and should be integrated into other policies and strategies. Government could be better "joined up" to facilitate this. One suggestion was that all Government departments should have a culture budget.
- There needs to be better collaboration with partners across other sectors eg. health; finance; third sector; community empowerment to sustain funding and achieve joint outcomes.
- There should be a national outcome for culture in the SG National Performance Framework. Culture should be more prominent across the NPF.
- There is a need a more robust evidence base to demonstrate and better articulate the impact of culture on outcomes across other policy areas and sectors and to promote culture as an enabler.
- Others suggested that the NPF outcomes model was problematic for this sector, and that a new paradigm around measurement and impact was needed.

Communities

30.	Participants felt that:

- The Strategy should affirm that culture is a human right of the individual and of communities;
- It is important to maintain an emphasis on the "community" aspect (as culture brings people together). Activity should be community based using existing arts workers who are embedded in their local communities. Across all sub-sectors, the strategy should reflect local communities' interests. Communities should feed into the strategy and its development;
- Geographic decentralisation is needed: focus and activity should go beyond Scotland's central belt;
- Young people should have more time and space to explore their cultural and creative side.

Scotland's place in the world

31.   Participants said that:

- Scotland should be internationally recognised for our arts, culture, languages and historic environment; culture could be a stronger part of Scotland's brand/identity; and we should use our soft power more both at home and abroad.
- We should communicate more confidently to ourselves and externally about our cultural successes;
- Political leaders should validate culture more strongly and promote investment in it.
- There should be more honest and open critique.

Conclusion

32.   This report has summarised the main points of discussion that were raised at a Culture Sector Gathering on 26th June with the Cabinet Secretary. The three principles of Access, Equity and Excellence were discussed, as well as what the scope of the Strategy should be.

33.   A number of key themes emerged in the main discussion, covering a wide range of issues including: cultural value and support for the workforce, the role of education and Curriculum for Excellence, young people, leadership, investment, cultural participation and access, cross government working, evidencing impact, human rights, communities, geographic considerations and Scotland's place in the world.

34.   The Cabinet Secretary and her officials in the Scottish Government are now exploring and developing these themes in further Culture Conversations that are being held with members of the public and other groups across Scotland. The findings from all aspects of the consultation and engagement work, will then feed into the development of the Culture Strategy.