

**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**

Summary Report

On 26 June 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop hosted a Culture Sector gathering to discuss the development of A Culture Strategy for Scotland at Glasgow Women's Library in Bridgeton. This report summarises the key themes raised and discussed by all those present at the event. A full report with more detailed discussion is also available.

Participants were asked to discuss a series of questions and the main discussion points are summarised below.

Key points on suggested principles and scope of the Strategy

- **The three principles underpinning the Culture Strategy, Access, Equity and Excellence** that were set out in the Programme for Government were felt by most to be a reasonable starting point. However, some participants were more critical of them as they felt they would not be meaningful for everyone, could be at risk of being conflated with each other or were "top down" concepts. "Excellence" was a source of some discussion for many participants: they felt that whilst it was important to strive for excellence, the concept could suggest distinctions (eg between professionals and amateurs), and was subjective or elitist. Whilst some were content, others said that they would like these principles changed or removed.
- **On the scope or definition of the strategy** there was general agreement that it should be broad, representing all aspects of culture from the more traditional and established, to the grass roots, informal and emerging, including the important role of popular culture. It should be informed by and relevant to everyone ("bottom up"), and should include and reflect the dynamic and changing nature of culture.
- There was a request to be clear about who the strategy is for, who will own it, what it will do, and why it is needed now.

In the main discussion, the following themes were raised and discussed by the participants:

- **Support for Artists / Valuing Arts/ Cultural workforce:** Participants felt strongly that artists and culture generally could be better valued. Those working

in culture sectors face challenges in accessing jobs, are not always treated or paid fairly, and have difficulty sustaining a career. New ways of better supporting their employment and careers are needed, perhaps through innovative taxation or new welfare benefits.

- **Focus on education:** The importance of education as a way of improving the status of culture and the opportunities for the sector was raised throughout the event. It was broadly felt that art, music and drama tend to be less academically important in schools compared with other subjects, and this has an impact on the subject and career choices that young people are making. It was suggested that there is scope to improve the standing of arts and cultural subjects in the Curriculum for Excellence. Indigenous languages such as Gaelic and Scots are important aspects of Scotland's culture and it is important that educational initiatives and resources are provided in Gaelic for use in Gaelic medium schools.
- **Young people** were identified as missing a chance to explore their creative sides with implications for their personal and career development. Some felt that there is a need for a shift in values about young people having the time and space to develop their creativity and it would be useful to re-emphasise the many benefits this can bring to a person's career, personal development and their health and well being throughout their life.
- **Leadership:** The need for a strong vision and leadership was emphasised both for the sector and in Government. It was felt that the First Minister and other Scottish Ministers could push a stronger message on culture in all policy areas. The culture sector also needs a stronger collective voice.
- **Investment in culture:** The main points made included that funding should ensure the sustainability of organisations and buildings and better 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 progress on outcomes). Venture capitalism was suggested as a possible funding option that could be developed.
- **Cultural Participation and Access:** Participants highlighted that there are still inequalities in participation/ access and elitism. There is scope to improve this by removing barriers to engagement and participation (with open, inclusive venues, and affordable events); and to widen access to include those who currently are not engaged, whilst respecting that other versions of culture and cultural participation exist (beyond the mainstream) and have value.
- **Cross Policy Working and national outcomes:** Participants felt that culture could play a more important role at the centre of government and should be integrated into other policies and strategies; Government could be better "joined up" to facilitate this. There needs to be better collaboration with partners across other policy sectors particularly health, education, finance, the third sector and community empowerment to sustain funding and achieve joint outcomes.

- **Evidence and impact:** A number of participants said that there is a need for 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. However, some felt that the outcomes model was problematic for this sector: a new paradigm and approach is needed that de-emphasises “demonstrating impact”.
- **Human rights:** The strategy should affirm that culture is a human right of the individual and of communities.
- **Communities:** It is important to maintain an emphasis on the “community” aspect (as culture brings people together); activity should be community based and reflect local communities’ interests.
- **Geographic decentralisation:** Participants stressed that focus and activity should go beyond Scotland’s central belt.
- **Scotland’s place in the world:** Scotland should be internationally recognised for our arts, cultures and languages. Culture could be a stronger part of Scotland’s brand/identity. We should use our soft power more both at home and abroad and we should communicate more confidently to ourselves and externally about our cultural successes.