

Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

*Via email*

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Dear Cabinet Secretary

On behalf of the Culture Partners Group, we write to raise the urgency of the challenges facing the culture sector in Scotland. The group comprises 7 national organisations, with other organisations attending as observers, representing the breath of culture and arts across Scotland, which meet monthly to share knowledge and insight around the culture landscape in Scotland.

The culture sector has, like many other sectors, been facing challenging times in recent years. While the sector appreciates the budget challenges facing the Scottish Government and the constraints resulting from this, we feel there is a lack of vision and leadership in supporting the sector to respond to the challenges and a lack of ambition to explore potential opportunities for culture at a national level. This letter echoes and builds on the [#InvestInCulture](#) campaign, which calls on Scottish Government to confirm a coherent timeline to achieve the promised increased investment in the creative sector of £100 million annually by 2028/29, including the incremental increase of £25 million next year.

### **Investment and funding**

The commitment to increase investment in culture by £100 million annually by 2028-29 was welcome, however, two awards of £6.6 million to Creative Scotland are, in fact, not new money and there is an overall lack of clarity and certainty around the proposed increase. The uncertainty over funding, particularly regarding Creative Scotland's funding, also results in an erosion of confidence in the sector. There is a clear message that the Scottish Government does not understand the sector's value and decisions made to remove funding, then to reverse this decision, indicate that there is no understanding of impact, nor of the signal that is sent by removal of significant tranches of funding from the national agency.

At a local level, budgets for culture have consistently reduced over the last decade<sup>1</sup> and net revenue expenditure on culture has fallen by as much as 33% in real terms. As a non-statutory service, local cultural provision is in a precarious position as local authority budgets are facing enormous pressures and local authorities are faced with difficult decisions on budgets and choices that they may not wish

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<sup>1</sup> Review of Culture and Leisure Services in Scotland. EKOS. 2024

to make. This is further exacerbated by the aging infrastructure and need to upgrade and future proof assets, with a need for capital investment, across the country.

Similar to other cultural organisations, culture trusts and local authorities are faced with year-to-year budgeting, which prevents the implementation of any long-term planning or confidence for the future. Without multi-year funding settlements, it is impossible to plan for sustainable recovery and growth.

Finally, the latest challenges in the financial landscape are the increase in National Living Wage, which, while welcomed, creates an affordability challenge for many organisations. Coupled with the recent increase in National Insurance for employers, which was unexpected and unbudgeted, the sector is moving ever closer to the cliff edge in the next financial year.

### **Leadership and strategic direction**

The lack of leadership and strategic direction at both a political and Scottish Government level is further amplified by the decision earlier in the year to remove the Culture Minister post, resulting in a loss of a dedicated political champion. Furthermore, the Culture Convenors meetings, bringing together local authority Culture Convenors with the Minister twice a year have stalled, with no recent meetings taking place, nor any meetings scheduled.

The Culture Strategy provides strategic ambition for the sector, and the publication of a Culture Strategy Action Plan Refresh earlier this year was again a hopeful signal. However, it is unclear how the ambitions can be achieved within the level of resource provided to the sector. There is no sense of ownership of the strategy nor the action plan, and no clarity if there is any link between the strategy and budgetary decision. There were working groups established to oversee the implementation of the Culture Strategy Action Plan, but again these have not met for many months and have no guidance, leadership or work plan. There was a Culture Value Summit event that took place in May, but notes were only distributed from this in October, losing the opportunity to capitalise on any momentum or urgency from the discussions and no tangible actions resulting from this event.

We call on the Cabinet Secretary and Scottish Government to include immediate funding for the culture sector within the forthcoming Scottish Budget, specifically detailing the distribution of the £100 million of additional new money for the sector. We also request that the Cabinet Secretary and senior Government officials meet with the Culture Partners Group as a matter of urgency, to understand the immediate and pressing challenges in more detail and to collectively discuss a constructive way forward for the sector.

On behalf of the Culture Partners Group, I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.



Kirsty Cumming  
CEO, Community Leisure UK  
Chair of the Culture Partners Group

Culture Partners Group Scotland

**Appendix: Members of the Culture Partners Group**

Children's and Youth Arts Advocacy

Community Leisure UK

Creative Lives

Culture Counts

Scottish Council on Archives

Scottish Book Trust

Scottish Libraries Information Council