



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

**Thursday 16 September 2021**

**Session 6**



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**CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE  
4<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2021, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

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

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

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

\*Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)

\*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

\*Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Matt Baker (Stove Network)

Fiona Campbell (Traditional Music & Song Association of Scotland)

Clara Cullen (Music Venue Trust)

Mike Jones (The Stand Comedy Club)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

James Johnston

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



## Scottish Parliament

### Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

*Thursday 16 September 2021*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]*

#### Pre-budget Scrutiny 2022-23: Culture Sector

**The Convener (Clare Adamson):** Good morning. I warmly welcome everyone to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. We have received apologies from Mark Ruskell, who has other committee engagements this morning.

Our only agenda item today is pre-budget scrutiny of culture sector funding, as part of our pre-budget scrutiny work. The committee is currently looking at the continuing impact of Covid-19 on the culture sector and the sector's long-term future.

We have with us our second panel on the topic. We welcome Matt Baker, orchestrator, the Stove Network; Fiona Campbell, convener, the Traditional Music & Song Association of Scotland; Clara Cullen, a venue support manager at the Music Venue Trust; and Mike Jones, managing director, The Stand comedy club.

We will move straight to questions. I remind members that if they want to direct a question to a particular witness, I will ask that witness to answer first.

The Stove Network and the TMSA have talked about the importance of culture to wellbeing in our society, and the Government has indicated that it wants to move to a wellbeing society. I would like to hear first about the cultural social prescribing model mentioned in the Stove Network's submission, and then about how the concept of a wellbeing society affects all your organisations. I will go first to Mr Baker and Ms Cullen, and will then bring in the other two witnesses for an industry view

**Matt Baker (Stove Network):** I think that I had some feedback there—no, it is all right.

I should say at the start that although I sit on the national partnership for culture, I am in no sense representing it today; I am purely representing myself and the Stove Network.

You ask about wellbeing, convener. As we have seen in crises before—perhaps, in our own culture, most notably during world war two—

culture has played a role in filling in for essential services during the pandemic, as those services were lost during lockdown. We have had numerous reports from social services and so on of the incredible role that cultural practitioners have played in filling in for essential services. I am here today to propose a significant shift in the way that we regard culture and that we should support it as a fundamental means of making a fairer and more equal country, and one that is built on climate justice as well as wellbeing.

Social prescribing is an important model, with general practitioners and other health professionals referring people to cultural organisations and cultural practitioners as part of a wellbeing approach. However, I think that we need to be looking at this much more widely when I say that we should change the way that we think about culture. Predominantly, we think about culture from a top-down point of view—we think of culture as something that people go to engage with rather than something that people are involved in making. During the pandemic, it has been shown that an essential part of people's wellbeing is taking part in culture as a way of being part of initiatives in their communities.

In Scotland we have an incredible tradition of ceilidhs and storytelling, which are things that have traditionally bound our communities together. When we think about culture in future, we need to be thinking of other ways in which cultural practitioners can be part of enabling and supporting such activities within our communities. That is what will lead to increased wellbeing, an increased stake in communities and increased fairness and equality, working from a grass-roots position. We are proposing a way of looking differently at culture and saying, "Let's invest significantly in that grass-roots approach."

The Scottish Government's culture collective programme is a Covid proposal that involves 26 projects around the country working on a regional basis. It is based on the idea of putting out-of-work freelance practitioners to work in communities. More than 250 jobs are being created around the country for people working at grass-roots level. There is also the creative communities project. If we can continue that kind of momentum, we can build a new and world-leading way of thinking about culture and make a split between that and the culture of excellence that we then take people to see. We should think about culture in the same way as we think about sport, where we invest in participation in sport and in elite sport.

**Fiona Campbell (Traditional Music & Song Association of Scotland):** Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence. I want to preface everything that I say today by saying that although I appreciate what Parliament and the Government

have been doing in this time of uncertainty, we are looking to see how we can improve as we go through this and come out of it at the other end. Sometimes I have been rather negative in my thoughts, but it is all to do with improvement and constructive criticism.

I agree with a lot of what Matt Baker said, such as the grass-roots idea. I would go one step further and say very clearly that we are supporting what people want to do. The voluntary sector side of arts and culture is a very large base of people and we must understand that a lot of those people are not necessarily working in a context in which they are told what to do; they are organising, animating and bringing opportunities for artists into the community—and vice versa. The role of the grassroots and, crucially, of the volunteer organiser needs to be supported and recognised.

In my evidence paper, I note, from anecdotal information and the general context, my concern that some people will have fallen out of that pool of volunteers for various reasons. For example, they may not have been well or they may have burn-out from having done a lot of extra work—more than they would normally do—in organising an event or something. A lot of them have been trying to make connections with people on a personal basis. I am aware of singing groups where people have been visiting in gardens, singing outside or just trying to make sure that the social aspect of culture is not lost. That is one of the key elements of wellbeing. We have been talking about isolation and resilience, and people who have some cultural activities that they can maintain, whether individually or in a group, or maybe online, have generally been having a better experience than people who were isolated in the first place.

I think that a lot of the structural problems and the issues that we are looking at today—they are covered in the committee's evidence papers—were there already, but they have been exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. The fragility of the systems has been tested and in many cases found wanting. If we can improve on that in general, I think that it will make us more resilient if anything like this happens again.

That highlights the shift that Matt Baker talked about—I would term it as having real support for and understanding of the role of cultural activity in our everyday lives. There are people who still have the view that we do not need the arts, culture or craft. They use the word “amateur” in a judgmental way rather than meaning “for the love of it”—that is where the word comes from. They say that such activity seems a luxury and is not really important, whereas I think that there has been a lot more evidence during the pandemic that cultural activity has become a very crucial way of people coping. That was there already, but it

has become clearer that it is one of the ways that people keep going.

The singing group I referred to is the Forget Me Notes, which is run by a couple of professionals, but there are amateurs and volunteers around them. They made a link with a singing group in Plymouth through online Zoom sessions. One of the people in Plymouth fed back that they had a history of depression and, although they live with a partner, they would have found it more difficult to get through the pandemic and the lockdowns if they had not had those twice-weekly singing sessions. They found it very helpful to be able to keep singing because they are a singer. To me, that shows the importance of wellbeing. We must recognise the fundamental role of culture in everyday lives as well as when it is a special item or a special event. I endorse a lot of what Matt Baker said.

**Clara Cullen (Music Venue Trust):** Thank you so much for having me.

I reiterate and agree with what Fiona Campbell said. A lot of the issues that Covid-19 has revealed were already there prior to the crisis but they have been amplified because of the crisis, whether they relate to the relationships between venues, as tenants, with their landlords or access to creative funding. Prior to the crisis, the grass-roots music venue sector did not really have access to cultural funding and venues were not part of Creative Scotland's regularly funded organisations. During the crisis, grass-roots music venues had their own fund, the grass-roots music venue stabilisation fund. That was the first time that our sector had access to that type of support. The Scottish Government's recognition of the role of grass-roots music venues as inherently part of the cultural fabric of Scotland was a big breakthrough and a huge step forward.

As we move out of the immediate crisis phase and look at how we move towards stabilisation and—hopefully—recovery, before we can address issues of wellbeing, it will be very important to stabilise the sector. In order to do that, we will need a focus within the cultural remit on things such as structure and the sector's model of organisational ownership and improving things such as ventilation. If we focus on and address the longer-term issues, eventually, there will be more security in the sector. I hope that having more security in the sector will mean that we can continue to focus on wellbeing and mental health, and on the people who work in the sector. However, that will be difficult to do without stabilising the sector first.

**Mike Jones (The Stand Comedy Club):** I guess that, at its best, the arts and cultural sector is all about making connections and giving people, whether they are audience members or

participants in a workshop, that sense of connectedness, community, place and belonging.

In a comedy context, there is nothing better than being a room full of people where everybody is having a great time. One of the peculiarities of comedy as a live art form is that the audience is a key participant in the event. If an audience is not engaged, the show can die, but a fully engaged audience helps to lift the whole experience—the performers thrive on that and it becomes a virtuous circle. As somebody who puts on events, if I am stood at the back of the room seeing 150 to 200 people all having a good time, I definitely get a sense of “Job done.”

09:45

During lockdown, we missed that real live experience, but we tried to recreate that sense of community through a livestreamed show beamed directly from the Edinburgh club on a Saturday night. It was very different, of course. Comedians playing to a camera is a very different thing, and some were better at it than others. However, we tried to create other elements of that sense of being part of the experience. Using live chat and social media, we had virtual heckling, with people commenting on what they had just seen and directly feeding into the show. That really developed a sense of community. When we first tried to do it, we had no idea whether people would tune in, but we had hundreds of thousands of people over a total of, I think, 24 broadcasts over a 14-month period, and a lot of those people were repeat viewers.

The shows were free to watch, but we encouraged people to donate if they had had a good time and, boy, did they donate. We had a total of 200,000 individual donations, which was a key part of our ability to survive financially and showed us that we had a very strong brand and a whole bunch of people out there who felt that connectedness with us as an event producer. We are now trying to capitalise on that as we start to rebuild and get people back in for what is, at the end of the day, the proper live experience. However, we were pleased to have tried to develop that sense of community and connectedness throughout lockdown.

**The Convener:** I watched quite a few individual performers who had a virtual tip jar when they were working during Covid, which was quite interesting.

I will move on to questions from committee members.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** That was a really good discussion about wellbeing, but I want to pick up the issue of employment. The importance of keeping people in employment in

the live music and cultural sectors came across very strongly in some of the written evidence that you have submitted. The Music Venue Trust talks about how one in 11 jobs are in the creative industries, which might surprise a lot of people.

Last week, the Musicians Union gave evidence that about a third of musicians were thinking of leaving the sector. In the context of this year and now, our job is looking at what the budget should look like. What short-term measures do you think will help to keep people employed in the sector, but also make it resilient, as we are not quite through the pandemic yet? Could I start off with Clara Cullen from the Music Venue Trust, because that issue came out in your evidence. I will move then to Matt Baker from the Stove Network, because you were talking about the importance of retaining culture staff, and the others can come in afterwards. Over to you first, Clara Cullen: what can we ask for directly now that would keep the sector going and keep people in jobs?

**Clara Cullen:** As Sarah Boyack correctly noted, in our sector staff are probably doing five jobs at once within the infrastructure of venues. You might be running the venue, promoting, booking and managing the bar. Often one person is doing a number of jobs and being supported by their team members. At the moment, we are not sure of the full impact of the Covid-19 crisis on staffing. I think we will see that in the coming months as the dust settles and we can get a better assessment of the full impact on staffing.

Grass-roots music venues act as hubs for training and development throughout the creative industry. You might join a music venue as bar staff and then start doing a little bit of lighting or work as a sound technician before moving into that kind of field. How can we get funding or recognition of those spaces being training and development hubs into the wider perception of what a grass-roots music venue does? It is not just a space for putting on music. Predominantly that is the core of the activity, but these are local community spaces where people can get their first taste of the live entertainment industry. Often through the grass-roots music venue as a central hub, they learn things and advance through their career and sometimes go on to be very big touring musicians or working in the industry in big arenas. As Mike Jones was saying, the grass-roots level acts as the entry point, or the beginning of development, and it can be the opening door to a really amazing and wider creative field.

How we can retain staff is a longer-term question. When you do the maths, someone working in a grass-roots music venue is often working for a lot less pay than they would get in other sectors because they are doing so many different jobs and wearing so many different hats

at once. There is something philosophical about recognising the worth of those spaces, the people who work in them, and the people who dedicate their lives to them, because it is not, at least at the grass-roots level, usually in pursuit of money. It is love and it is because of the varying kinds of opportunities you get when you step into a grass-roots music venue. How we empower and enrich those people will be a mixture of practical steps, and then it is about the wider perception and the philosophical question of how we shine a light and get recognition of the sector from a wider perspective.

**The Convener:** I am also keen to think about how we can push for resources or where we should target them. In the evidence from the Stove Network, Matt Baker, you talk about the work of the culture collective and the Sistema model. What are the top priorities of investment in retaining people in employment as well as keeping the sector going over the next year or two as we come through the pandemic?

**Matt Baker:** I really like Clara Cullen's idea of training and development hubs; they are partly at the root of it. On retaining the cultural workforce, I hope you will forgive me for just a little example from where we are with that training and development hub idea. The Stove has pioneered an idea of creative placemaking. We are a community development trust, the only one in the United Kingdom that is run by artists, and we have grown to be a social enterprise with a turnover of £500,000 a year, employing 10 local people in creative partnership projects in communities, crucially supporting the growth of the cultural and creative sector. We are best known for initiating a community buyout of Dumfries high street, which people might have heard of, which is the Midsteeple Quarter project.

I think what Clara Cullen was talking about is the same kind of idea at a different scale of approach, by investing in projects at a community-embedded level. I am advocating for national investment in community-embedded art programmes that would provide a stable and fair work income for the cultural workforce and would support the freelance economy. If regional and city programmes were co-ordinated, it could also support teams of associated skills in production, event delivery, art administration, marketing and so on. Along with the Sistema model of artists in residence in schools, that is basically equipping our cultural workforce and retaining it by putting it to work in community settings along with the infrastructure of local organisations like grass-roots music venues like ourselves, comedy clubs, or wherever, because we have the innovation in the arts sector.

As entrepreneurs, we know how to make things happen and that innovation and creativity are fundamental to us getting out of the Covid situation. Training and skills would be essential for people seeking to start out in the sector. It has been a fundamental part of how we have worked at breaking down the sense that only entitled people can join the cultural sector or who can afford to volunteer, rather than bringing in people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are experiencing inequality, and bringing those opportunities into the cultural workforce. We have been doing that, as Clara Cullen has been describing, through on-the-job work experience, by providing opportunities for career progression for people at all levels in the cultural and creative sector, and by being a doorway through which others can enter the sector directly from that community base, thus maximising diversity and inclusion in the growth of the sector.

If you took that significant investment approach to a community-embedded art programme, you would not be talking about directing money at the large theatres and so on; you would be talking about doing it from the bottom up. The large theatres would come in when you add on top of that community-embedded programme an active research and development programme looking at the work as it is going on, mapping how it is using other bits of infrastructure or resource that we already have in the cultural sector, and seeing which bits of those will be useful within a new model of a grass-roots culture creation, which is the foundation of our growth and progression as a country.

**Mike Jones:** We are at a very difficult phase at the moment with the impending end of the job retention scheme, which has been key to our ability to retain some staff throughout this period. Once that ends, we will again be exposed to the harsh realities of the commercial situation. We have only just reopened our venues in Scotland. Our marketing strapline was previously "live comedy every night" but at the moment we are doing an average of three nights a week in each of our venues in Scotland and England and we have actively reduced our capacity. Our physical capacity and numbers of people in the room is at about 66 per cent, so the fact we are doing fewer events for fewer people clearly means that there is less money coming through the box office and from food and bar sales.

I am in a very strange position at the moment. As we potentially fall off the end of the JRS cliff, I am having to agree and negotiate with people reduced-hours contracts that reflect the level of work we have available for people to do at a point where we are trying to grow the business. However, because we will not be back at pre-Covid levels for at least a year, my ability to offer

hours of work to people across the organisation, including office staff and venue staff, entirely depends on our levels of activity, which in turn depend on the number of people who want to come and see events at our venues.

The positive news is that almost everything we are putting on at the moment is selling out, so there is clearly a demand there, which we are looking to meet, but I am engaged in some quite difficult conversations, whether with admin staff or box office staff or marketing staff, saying, "We are not doing 20 shows a week across the organisation; we are doing maybe half of that, so people's working patterns will have to reflect that." It is quite difficult to maintain morale and focus during that kind of process, because we clearly want all our staff to be engaged as we grow the business, but if we are limiting their input consciously, it is quite a difficult equation to square.

10:00

**The Convener:** We can see you now, Ms Campbell, but we cannot hear you, unfortunately. I am looking to our sound engineer. Is Ms Campbell there? I do not think she can hear us in the room. Perhaps somebody could try to get her onboarded by phone again, if that is possible. I will go back to Ms Boyack.

**Sarah Boyack:** It is very helpful to get the evidence and comments there, because I was looking for comments about the short term. Mike Jones made a comment about the importance of the JRS, given that we are not yet out of Covid, and Matt Baker's idea about linking into communities, ticked all the boxes for me, because it is about employment retention, it links into wellbeing and communities, and it is potentially about the next generation coming through and retaining the skill set, so we are very keen to see that issue resolved. There is keeping people in employment and venues open. Is there anything else in terms of structural support you think we need to look at? I do not know if any of the witnesses want to come back in again, having heard the others' comments. Matt Baker or Clara Cullen, is there anything else you want to come in with before we move on to the next question?

**Clara Cullen:** Coming out of the Covid crisis goes back to some of the structural issues that were amplified or exacerbated by the crisis. For us, it is the fact that 93 per cent of our venues are privately owned—private tenants with landlords—as opposed to community-owned. What Matt Baker said about his community scheme a few years ago was very interesting, because until we address the issue of long-term ownership, moving out of the crisis and creating resilience will be difficult. It is difficult for venue managers to

implement schemes, whether they are improving the infrastructure of venues or improving their green capabilities. That is quite difficult to do if we do not have long leases or security of tenure.

Through the Music Venue Trust's save our venues campaign, we saw a huge outpouring of love from the general community for their grassroots music venues. We had local communities raising millions of pounds to save their local music venues. That demonstrated that there is a desire in the local community to be more connected to their venues.

Moving forward, we could create resilience within the sector if we moved more towards a community ownership model or a community benefit society model, which is being done in some of the other nations. That is probably quite a concrete policy measure that could be explored to create longer-term resilience, so if this type of crisis were to happen again, venues would be in a better position to react because there would more long-term security within their ownership models.

**Sarah Boyack:** Matt Baker, you made a point about Dumfries and moving into the town centre. Could that model be applied elsewhere as we try to regenerate our town centres and link culture in?

**Matt Baker:** We are looking at our hollowed-out retail town centres. The role of the entertainment economy around town centres will be vital. We are all talking about how we make our town centres active and vibrant places that people want to be in, and where they gravitate to so that new businesses get footfall. The cultural sector is incredibly good at entrepreneurship innovation, through starting new businesses and growing new enterprises in town centres, and that is what is happening in Dumfries, as I can see out of my window right now.

Clara Cullen's point about the long-term nature of venues is very important and long-term funding gets talked about a lot. Because of the success that we have had, we are getting offers to partner projects, which means that there will be opportunities that we could bring into our region for our creative sector. We are literally stumped for capacity because we are spending so much time trying to raise funds to continue the core operation of the organisation; we are constantly hamstrung by having to seek short-term funding.

To have that security would make an enormous difference. The way I talk about this is that the security of some of those key organisations gives shelter for other organisations to grow up around them, so you create clusters. That is how the creative sector works, and we are working on a regional placemaking network in Dumfries and Galloway, where we are running projects in five of

our rural towns around us to build capacity for the kind of way that we are working.

At that sort of infrastructure level that you guys are looking at, and listening to Clara Cullen talking about community ownership, I think there must be enormous potential here to join up with the place-based investment programme because the community sector is being supported and you could see cultural venues as part of that community sector. That is not happening at the moment. We have to basically become a different person for each of the different strands of funding that we have to apply for and we are speaking different languages all the time.

There is also opportunity there in the market. We are seeing that particularly in the rural areas in the south of Scotland that I am familiar with. The community sector has become a vital market for the cultural sector. It is different to the cities, where you have a big critical mass of cultural businesses. It is more dispersed in a rural area and the community sector has become a vital market for creative businesses as a living. Coming back to the idea of community-embedded work for freelancers, if you provide that security of tenure for freelancers to work at the community level, it will feed the entire cultural infrastructure. They will also then be free to go on small tours with their bands, play in the comedy clubs, or build their own new work in the theatre sector. All of that is made possible by the security of key work in community settings.

**The Convener:** I am conscious of time and we have spent a lot of time on this subject area, but would Mr Jones or Ms Campbell like to add anything?

**Mike Jones:** I will briefly add two key points. We are fortunate to own our Edinburgh premises, but we rent the other venues. We have very benevolent landlords. In Newcastle, it is Newcastle City Council, which gave us a rent rebate last year. In Glasgow, until very recently, it was the Scottish Trades Union Congress, which gave us a 100 per cent rent-free period from the onset of the pandemic. Those leases will revert to quite chunky commercial leases, but we benefited from that short-term benevolence. In a similar vein, the rates relief that we received was invaluable as part of the overall funding package that we were able to access, but again, that already is tapering off in England and, from 1 April, rates will kick back in at 100 per cent in our case, which is clearly something that we need to be able to deal with from a financial point of view.

**The Convener:** I am not sure whether Ms Campbell is with us at the moment. I do not think she has managed to get back on to the call. I am sorry about that. We will move to questions from Dr Alasdair Allan.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** I am interested in what was being said in that discussion about the impact on artists, as employees and companies and businesses. I am also interested in individuals, given how many artists or people working in the sector are self-employed. I would like to hear from Matt Jones, or others, about the experience of self-employed people during lockdown.

**Clara Cullen:** I can only speak quite generally on this point, but the vast majority of people who work in the creative sector are freelancers. That has been the model for the past decade and this crisis has been particularly hard for people who are self-employed. The relationship between grass-roots music venues and the artists who play in them is important. Largely, the artists tend to be self-employed individuals, so protecting that layer of the creative industry is vital for us and the wider music ecosystem. Obviously, without artists feeling that they can have a stake in this industry, we cannot promote them or book them. Everyone is worse off if that layer feels forced to leave the industry—that is my quite general point on this issue.

**Matt Baker:** The points that I made were basically concerned with freelancers. When I am talking about creative businesses, fundamentally I am talking about freelancers. That is how the majority of the cultural sector works. When lockdown first happened, we had to switch emphasis very quickly. We worked between the wider community and the cultural sector, which we support. We are in the town centre and nobody really lives in the town centre in Dumfries, so our community vanished—the wider community—and we focused all our efforts on supporting the freelance economy. We found that the key things were, first, providing work. We had very little to start with. We started with small micro-commissions. People were in lockdown and did not know which way was up and did not know how to continue to be creative. Everyone was in an absolute mess, but we kept people going through that approach and were gradually able to draw in work and commissions for artists and freelance creatives through supporting communities funding.

The other key element was the need to retain a network. The infrastructure vanished overnight. The creative sector functions through people talking to each other—that is how jobs and ideas get shared and projects get started, so those key development hubs for cultural organisations of all stripes that Clara Cullen was talking about were absolutely vital to maintaining that network of connectivity. We saw people who fell out of that very quickly drifted away from the cultural workforce. The idea of investing heavily in a community-embedded programme to bring work to freelancers is fundamental. If we do not do that,

we will lose many of the people with valuable skills that have been built up over years and that make us the country that we are.

10:15

**Mike Jones:** In our last pre-Covid year, we paid artists and performers £1 million across all our venues and during the Edinburgh fringe. Almost all of those people will be self-employed, so that is £1 million that is just not flowing through that part of the ecology. Another point is that, during the Edinburgh fringe, we expand our operations significantly and normally take on a bunch of technical and production staff, all of whom will be freelancers. I am not aware of the status of all of those people and what financial support they have been able to access as individuals, but again, a significant chunk of our annual budget just was not flowing to those people in 2020 or, indeed, at the recent much-reduced fringe.

**Dr Allan:** Do you think that that has had a deterring effect on new freelancers entering the industry? What can we do to try to overcome that? Do we need to rethink what we do to reassure young people who want to become freelancers in the arts that it is a thing that they can do? That might be a question for Matt Baker.

**Matt Baker:** That is not something that we are seeing. In our particular community, the arts have been active during the pandemic and people have been gravitating towards the sector. I have talked a lot about trying to make those opportunities at a community level to diversify our workforce. That is the big challenge: to convince that sector that arts and culture is a viable career. We focus strongly on always paying people and paying people at good rates, so that people have a sense that the arts is something that they can afford to be part of and want to be part of. There is a risk that, as visible cultural activity diminishes, people will drift away. However, I keep coming back to the idea that, if we are investing in community-embedded projects, the opposite will be true, because they are visible opportunities for people to take advantage of.

**Dr Allan:** I am interested in what you have said throughout the meeting about rebuilding from the bottom up and the importance of small venues and small cultural activities. I do not want anyone to take this as criticism of Scotland's large performing companies, but—given that we are talking about budgets here—does your position imply anything about the balance that will have to be struck in future between larger and smaller enterprises in the arts? Has Scotland got that balance right? Is there anything that you want to say about any of that?

**Matt Baker:** Yes. That is part of the root of the issue. I mentioned that the Arts Council of Great Britain grew out of the second world war situation. It had two distinct strands. One was about people making their own culture, participation and growing culture, and the other was about creating culture that people went to go and see. In the early 1950s, John Maynard Keynes took over as the minister responsible and he did away with the strand of making your own culture. We have lived with that vision of culture and the way that culture is funded from a public point of view ever since, focusing on making excellent culture and making it accessible for people. I think that we need to look at that differently, but just turning around to Creative Scotland and saying, "Deal with your budget differently," is not an answer. Creative Scotland has a tiny budget.

What I am suggesting is that we need to go back to that original vision of culture as having two strands: participating and making your own culture; and viewing top-notch culture. We need to look at ways that we can bring in money to feed that other strand, because what we are investing in culture at the moment will really just maintain that first model of culture as something that is to be consumed by the public rather than made by the public. We need to look at a way of funding that public creation of culture. That is where I think we need to be creating significant alliances with the health, education, regeneration and economic development sectors and not being afraid to say that culture has a part to play in all of that, as well as the way that we are making the transition around climate.

**The Convener:** I think that Ms Campbell is back and wants to come in. If any of the witnesses want to answer a question that has been directed to someone else, I ask that they could type R in the chat in BlueJeans. It is difficult to convene the meeting virtually, as you do not get the same sense that someone is desperate to answer a question online as you do when we are in the room together. I will bring in Ms Campbell.

**Fiona Campbell:** I will respond to the two previous questions. First, on the self-employed, there are a lot of freelancers in the traditional arts sector and we are very concerned about ensuring that they have the opportunity to make money during the pandemic. My digital capacity today shows you some of the problems that individuals can face, because they might not have the capacity or the resources to buy good-quality equipment, for example.

The idea of transitional support for organisations and artists is key. The end of the furlough scheme has been mentioned; the self-employed income support scheme is finishing, too. The next six months will be key to trying to keep people in the

workforce, whether that is through an organisation or whether they are self-employed.

That issue has come up in the traditional arts working group, which is a Creative Scotland advisory group. There is already evidence that young traditional artists in particular are looking at different careers, or are already moving into different careers, because the work is just not there. They have to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads and so on, and music is not paying its way at this time, for obvious reasons—we do not necessarily need to repeat them.

To support what Clara Cullen said about the stabilisation of venues and making them available, I am aware that a folk festival is having difficulty getting a venue for its usual festival in November. That is an issue about venues' ability to take on events and being organised by volunteers for example. Employing people, including artists, is one of the issues. However, it is not just about access to artists; it is also about access to venues and those who run the venues being confident of their ability to ventilate the venues properly and so on.

A lot of it comes back to what Matt Baker was saying about the difference in the funding structure. A lot of this relates to how well people have been core funded, or not core funded, and a better spread of core funding would be a good starting point, because some people do not need a lot.

When Creative Scotland did the fairly recent regular funded organisations application round, you had to apply for a minimum of £50,000 in each year. Not every organisation needs that amount, so you had to sort of inflate your budget to meet the application criteria. There are definitely areas that we could be improving on.

I will make a final point about entrance for new people. A lot of people get, as Clara Cullen said, their first taste in music venues, but there are also a lot of voluntary organisations, festivals and events where they can cut their teeth and get an idea of whether they would like to make a career out of it. That is where the issue about not having some of the events and festivals running in the usual capacity, where you need volunteers to be at the gate to look after the artists and so on, means that some of the usual pipelines are not currently operating in the same way—except for when they need some digital help; that is maybe where they come into their own.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Ms Campbell made a very interesting point about the need to spread core funding more widely. We have heard quite a lot of evidence that there is a desire for multiyear funding because it provides greater stability. However, as we know,

there is an annual funding system. Do the witnesses support multiyear funding? I will start with Mike Jones, please.

**Mike Jones:** I am speaking from the perspective of an organisation that, before Covid, did not receive any funding—the funding that we have received has been exceptional.

All organisations need to be able to plan their business and their financial model over a three to five-year period. Arts organisations that require funding absolutely require certainty of funding across a broader period rather than living hand to mouth. Obviously, the situation is even more extreme for project-funded organisations.

If regularly funded organisations are to continue to develop artistically and commercially—and there is an increasing imperative to develop ancillary income from things such as food and drink supplies—people need to know where the financial support is coming from, so that they can plan and develop over a proper business cycle. So, yes, multiyear funding would absolutely be a positive thing.

**The Convener:** I will bring in Mr Baker, and if Ms Campbell and Ms Cullen want to come in, or if there is anything that they want to add, they can put an R in the chat.

**Matt Baker:** There is no question that multiyear funding would be of benefit and that funding needs to be spread wider. The basic reason is that, if you are on an annual cycle, you do not get much chance to get on with the work because you are in a constant cycle of applying again and again.

However, that means that we as a country would have to make a fundamental commitment that we want to invest in the arts infrastructure and that that has a value. That comes back to the point about community, but I will not labour it.

I do not think that we can just look to Creative Scotland and say, "Spread that wider." As Clara Cullen and Fiona Campbell said, there are different scales of organisation. If we invest in those organisations, we invest in the ecosystem of support that surrounds them.

Creative Scotland's RFO structure is such that the vast majority of the money goes to the larger and great organisations that are effectively too big to fail. You have so little room to manoeuvre with that budget, because if you were to say, "Sorry, Lyceum, you are out", in order to spread the funding a bit wider, there would be howls of protest at a national level and a political storm created around it. The arts is incredibly good at making that kind of noise, as we saw with the previous funding round.

The situation requires us to look at innovative solutions. Maybe one solution is that idea of

having two funding streams, and you would know which stream you are in and that the money from the other stream is not necessarily coming from Creative Scotland's investment in the large organisations.

Sarah Boyack asked a question about a percentage on building contracts going to the arts. That could be an amazing commitment from the country. I am familiar with the system in Calgary in Canada, where every city department uses the per cent for art scheme, which creates centralised funds.

10:30

Those are the kinds of innovative solutions that we as a country need to look at if we are to commit to having a sustainable cultural infrastructure that creates the country that we want to see—if we believe in culture as an instrument for the changes that we want to see.

**The Convener:** I am afraid that we have lost Ms Campbell from the call again. Mr Cameron, do you want to come back in?

**Donald Cameron:** Thank you very much for those answers. Moving on to a linked issue, I want us to look beyond Covid, if we can. I accept that this will involve you looking into your crystal ball, but, in a year or so, when, I hope, we are out of the pandemic, how will the sector look? How should that be funded? I appreciate that you have touched on some of that in previous answers, but what would a post-Covid landscape look like, and how it should be funded? I ask Ms Cullen to respond first.

**Clara Cullen:** That is a difficult question to answer at the moment. Our members have 85 music venues in Scotland, which represents the vast majority of music venues. Some of those venues are actively in contact with us and have used our services to support access to funding from the grass-roots music venue stabilisation fund, which was the first-ever fund created in Scotland for grass-roots music venues.

Others have been in contact less, so getting a sense of the scope and scale of the crisis will probably take a little bit of time after this immediate crisis phase. We are recommending that an infrastructure audit is undertaken, so that we can see how Covid has impacted, whether there are music venues that have shifted to just doing bar, hospitality and food, or whether music-venue pubs have shifted in the short term to focusing on the pub side of the activity rather than on the music side. At the moment, that is a little bit difficult to tell.

Going forward, I hope that some of the structural questions about ownership, the role of

communities in their culture and how culture can impact other ideas—whether it be health, infrastructure or high-street regeneration—will present lots of exciting opportunities.

There is an opportunity because of Covid. We do not just have to go back to how things were prior to Covid, which, at least for the grass-roots music venue sector, was not to be funded at all in the RFO rounds.

The pandemic presents an opportunity to rethink the role of culture and how we deliver that, but unless we address some of the structural and systematic issues that were already prevalent pre-Covid, such as ownership and, as Mike Jones mentioned, business rates, it is very difficult to envision recovery when we are not yet at stabilisation, so that will be an issue.

**Mike Jones:** It is really difficult to see what the landscape will be like. The war is not over. There are a lot of things still to play out as we start to rebuild, but there is still the spectre of a winter lockdown hovering over all of this.

There is a real tension with the broadening of the definition of culture. That is clearly something that we benefited from, with an explicit commitment and recognition that comedy is a legitimate art form and that comedy clubs are worthy of arts funding. That was a major box ticked for our sector, but with the broadening of the definition, a big lifeboat was established and a large number of diverse and different cultural organisations, all with different business models, were invited to jump into it. Having broadened the definition and said, "Yes, you fall"—[*Inaudible*.]

**The Convener:** Oh dear. I am really sorry—oh, Mike is back.

**Mike Jones:** [*Inaudible*.]—able to help survive, how we enable those organisations to be fit for the future and able to thrive and develop from a very low point to fully deliver their core mission and what funders expect as the key outcomes.

Going back to what Matt Baker said, we have a situation in which we have said that a whole bunch of people merit our emergency funding. However, in future, without the emergency funding, we will be looking at the redistribution of finite funds. That is a huge challenge for funders.

**The Convener:** I will bring in Mr Baker, who, I hope, will be followed by Ms Campbell.

**Matt Baker:** Yes, I hope that Fiona Campbell can get in.

I can paint a picture of the future as I see it, but I can paint it only in my immediate area in the south of Scotland. I envisage a creative placemaking network across the south of Scotland—I am talking about Dumfries and Galloway and the

Scottish borders, which is part of the South of Scotland Enterprise area. Within that, there will be a number of key nodes—community organisations and cultural venues—that have a degree of core funding, with each supporting a cohort of creative freelancers around them so that you have that cluster.

By having that network, you have the opportunity to share capacity, experience, programming, physical kit and resources, and you can build, as we have been, a strategic partners framework around it from the community, health, education, economic regeneration and skills development sectors—we have been working with Skills Development Scotland a lot. That grows that larger mass of potential capacity and delivery, so that it supports your freelancers and gives them the capacity to build new work.

Through the profile, advocacy and collective bargaining that you have as a network, you have the opportunity to link to national and international project delivery, so that you can bring national theatre down to the south of Scotland to work effectively within communities and direct communities. You can do the same with international projects. If you join that up all the way around Scotland to create a network of linked, funded creative nodes, you would have an amazing vision of a sustainable creative future for Scotland.

**The Convener:** Can we bring in Ms Campbell?

**Fiona Campbell:** Sorry, but I am going to go on again about digital capacity. The issue for me is that the—*[Inaudible.]*

**The Convener:** Ms Campbell, I am very sorry, but we are getting feedback and—*[Inaudible.]*

**Fiona Campbell:** I am sorry about this. I am getting feedback now, but it should be fine.

**The Convener:** I think that we need to remove Ms Campbell from the call.

**Fiona Campbell:** What I have is the—

**The Convener:** Ms Campbell, we cannot hear you. Can you leave the call?

**Fiona Campbell:** Can you hear me now?

**The Convener:** No, we have echoes and things. I am really sorry about this, but if you remove yourself from the call I think that we will be able to proceed.

**Fiona Campbell:** Okay, thank you. Bye.

**The Convener:** I bring in Ms Minto.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** Mr Baker, I was excited to hear about your vision for Dumfries and Galloway, the Borders and the rest of Scotland. I would like to hear a bit more about

how you plan that to work and how we can progress to having that across Scotland. I am very sorry that Ms Campbell has just left, because I had a specific question about rural festivals and the impact of all the requirements and the lack of travelling, not only on the performers but on the communities, given that such festivals bring a lot of benefits, including for wellbeing.

I am also interested in the point that Ms Campbell made with regard to the minimum level of funding being set at £50,000. Coming from a rural community, I know that £10,000 goes much further there than it might in the centre of Edinburgh, for example, so any other panel member's thoughts on that would be useful.

**The Convener:** I will ask the clerks to write to the TMSA to request answers to the questions that it has not been possible to have answered, as it would be helpful to have those.

We will go to Mr Baker first.

**Matt Baker:** I am sorry, Jenni, but there were several questions in what you said, and I aware that we are short of time. Was there any issue in particular that you wanted me to address?

**Jenni Minto:** I was really pleased to hear that you envisage a network across Dumfries and Galloway, and I am interested to hear more about how you plan to expand the existing network from Dumfries to the likes of Kirkcudbright, Castle Douglas and other places.

**Matt Baker:** I mentioned the culture collective programme, which is a Scottish Government initiative of £6 million, with 26 projects across the country. Our project is one of those. We are supporting a community anchor organisation in five towns: Stranraer, Langholm, Sanquhar, Castle Douglas and one of the housing estates on the edge of Dumfries, in north-west Dumfries. We are supporting those groups to host two resident artists or creative practitioners for a year.

The community groups have identified a particular section of their community that they want to reach that has been particularly affected by Covid. For instance, in north-west Dumfries, there is a set of six blocks of flats that have a particular problem with turnover of tenancies. The practitioners are embedded in those communities for a year. Their work might include starting groups. In Castle Douglas, they are working towards completely rethinking the gala day there. Our experience has shown that, as a result of having that security of time, small social enterprises are being created and new groups are forming around a particular thing that people want to learn or do together. Environmental projects, community asset transfers and other projects are growing from such initiatives.

The amazing thing is that all those community organisations are now working together, collaborating on joint funding bids and beginning to think of themselves as a collective enterprise. In past years, we have been competing for funding, whereas now we are saying to one another, “Let’s all go for that together.” That is much better from the funders’ point of view, because it means that they are not put in the position of having to choose between, say, Stranraer and Castle Douglas. How are they supposed to know which would be better? That ought to be decided at local level. If we build such networks and give people the ability to talk and build trust, they will support the cohort of creatives around them. It seems to be working.

**Jenni Minto:** That is a really interesting comment. It might be one of the few silver linings to have come out of the pandemic that communities have found different ways to work together and different people have come out of communities with different ideas, which helps to expand cultural ideas.

**Matt Baker:** That is 100 per cent right. We have been allowed to think the unthinkable. We have a situation where councils have just been doing things rather than having to go through six different committees and prove outcomes before they decide, which works so well for the creative community. That is how we function—we try things to see what sticks to the wall and, if it works, we carry on doing it. That has become an accepted way of doing things in our society through Covid. We need to hold on to the idea of having a risk-positive culture in how we do things, and trusting and collaborating with people. That has come out of the pandemic, and we need to hold on to it.

10:45

**Jenni Minto:** I noticed that Ms Cullen nodded when I talked about £10,000 going further in a smaller environment. Would you like to give us your thoughts on that?

**Clara Cullen:** Absolutely. Often, by their very nature, funding requirements are restrictive. Particularly during Covid, our venues have sometimes found that they have not been able to apply for funds because they have not had the right business structure or have not reached the relevant threshold. As well as having the flexibility of recognising that comedy and grass-roots music venues are culture, there needs to be flexibility within general funding. During this year, particularly for a lot of our venues, it has been the first time that they have applied for any type of funding, and the value of learning that skill for the very first time cannot be underestimated.

Learning to speak the language of funding has been an entirely new experience for a lot of grass-

roots music venues. It would definitely be a positive thing to create more flexible and dynamic funding streams that do not discriminate against smaller venues. Our sector is incredibly resourceful; it can adapt very quickly, and it often does not need huge amounts of money to do that. We have seen it with the implementation of live streaming in grass-roots music venues. Small investments—microinvestments—can go a long way at the grass-roots level. That is what grass-roots culture is all about.

**The Convener:** I would like to ask a supplementary on the back of Ms Minto’s questions. I am excited to hear Mr Baker’s enthusiasm for the culture in place, especially as a long-term music charity that supports young people in my area is building its own bespoke studio and performance space.

That leads me to ask about younger people, because—this question might be more for Ms Cullen and Mr Jones—young people are often excluded by age because of licensing in premises. What opportunities are there for younger performers and younger audiences to take part in such live music opportunities?

**Mike Jones:** You are right that a lot of our work is focused on an adult audience. We offer shows for younger people and families, but probably not enough of them. We are reviewing that in our business planning.

Having said that we are not an organisation that normally requires funding, if we were to start to engage in more developmental work that involved engaging with schools or community groups to access young people, we would require a small amount of funding to support that work. At the moment, I would say that we are focusing on the commercial imperatives and the commercial situation that lies ahead of us as we start to regrow the business, but we have said that we do not necessarily want to go back to the default settings and do what we used to do pre-Covid. There is an opportunity to grow back better and to grow back differently, so pioneering such initiatives in a comedy context is definitely on our agenda.

**Clara Cullen:** Grass-roots music venues can play a role as development and training hubs for school leavers and people aged 16 and over. That is interesting, because it connects into a wider issue in our sector, which is that of succession. Many of the venue managers have been performing that role for 20 or 30 years and have a huge amount of knowledge, but what will happen after they leave? Who will they train up to take on that role and be the next generation in the ecosystem? If we do not have that, a venue might end up in the position of having to close because a

vital person in the organisation leaves, and we do not want that.

The idea of succession is incredibly important. I think that it can be done through grass-roots music venues diversifying their business and being recognised not only as places that put on music, but as central spokes in their community that open doors to people who want to experience what live music is like and act as training grounds, not just for artists in their careers, but in developing and building the knowledge of the people who work in such venues.

I am 27, and I started my career because I liked to hang out at my local record shop. I looked at what it was doing and that sparked an interest in live music and music in general. It is incredibly important that young people have that kind of access to music, that they think of such places as places where they can have a viable career and that they have respect for the culture.

**Matt Baker:** I thank the convener for asking that question, because the issue is an important one, which has been missing from the debate so far.

The question of young people generally is a vast one, particularly in rural situations, where a lot of chat turns to how we hold on to the young people and stop everybody disappearing to the cities. The smarter way to look at that is to think about the opportunities that we give young people before they reach the point at which they want to go away. We want to encourage people to move, to travel and to get new experiences, while giving them the idea that they have something to come back to.

With regard to places to play, the convener talked about pubs not being accessible to young people. The idea of the grass-roots venues that Clara Cullen spoke about is key there, along with the potential that exists through the community network. By investing in those places and giving them core funding and a cultural role, we make them a bit cooler for young people who want to associate with the cool of culture.

The town centre role is also important. Last night, I was involved in a conversation with some young people who talked about the fact that they do not feel welcome in the town centre. They feel that they are looked at as if they should not be there, whereas they gravitate to a place like ours, which they see as a place of safety, where they can be themselves. The cultural venues spread a bit of that influence of safety out into the public realm. We need to think really smartly about the way that culture is working for young people and to consider joining up some of the funding around that.

Networks are vital, too, in the sense that they provide a range of opportunities. In our situation, if

a young person who is a visual artist is in Castle Douglas and Castle Douglas is specialising in performance, that young person needs to be signposted to the right place in the network. Under the present funding models, there is a tendency for an arts organisation to hold on to its young people because it gets funding to support those young people, instead of signposting them to the right place by saying, "You should go and talk to those folk in Stranraer, because that'll be more suited to where you are." We need to create a culture of collaboration in order to join up those opportunities, give people a real sense of the range of what is available to them and make the best of the resources that we have, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

**The Convener:** Thank you. It appears that I pre-empted a further question from Ms Webber with my supplementary—I apologise for that.

I thank everyone for their attendance. It has been a very helpful session. I again apologise for the difficulties with onboarding Ms Campbell from the TMSA, but we will follow up with her in writing and invite her to comment on the questions that she was not able to answer today.

*Meeting closed at 10:55.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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