OFFICIAL REPORT
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Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 27 April 2023

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CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
13th Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)
*Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con)
*Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Foysol Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab) (Committee Substitute)
Brenna Hobson (National Theatre of Scotland)
Alistair Mackie (Royal Scottish National Orchestra)
Professor Andrew Miles (University of Manchester)
Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)
Alex Reedijk (Scottish Opera)
Gavin Reid (Scottish Chamber Orchestra)
Steven Roth (Scottish Ballet)
Professor David Stevenson (Queen Margaret University)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 27 April 2023

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

Interests

The Deputy Convener (Donald Cameron): Good morning and welcome to the 13th meeting of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee in 2023. We have received apologies from the convener, Clare Adamson MSP, so I will be chairing today's meeting.

The committee has a new member: Neil Bibby MSP has replaced Sarah Boyack MSP. I thank Sarah for her many and varied contributions to the committee's work over the past few years. We greatly look forward to working with Neil Bibby. Neil gives his apologies for not attending this morning's meeting, however. His substitute is Foysol Choudhury MSP. Foysol—I invite you to make any declaration of interests that you might have in relation to the committee.

Foysol Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I do not have any interests to declare.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you very much. We are also joined by Audrey Nicoll MSP, who is substituting for Clare Adamson. Audrey, I also invite you to make any declaration of relevant interests.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I have nothing to declare, convener.

The Deputy Convener: I thank you both very much. Welcome to the committee.

Culture in Communities

09:01

The Deputy Convener: Our first agenda item is to take evidence on our culture in communities inquiry, which is focused on taking a place-based approach to culture. We have two evidence sessions this morning. In the first evidence session, we are joined by Professor David Stevenson, who is dean of the school of arts, social sciences and management, and professor of arts management and cultural policy, at Queen Margaret University. We are also joined virtually by Professor Andrew Miles, who is a professor of sociology at the University of Manchester. I warmly welcome you both to the committee and thank you for coming to give evidence.

I will begin by asking you both general questions, just so that we can hear some opening remarks on what you see as being the main challenges to cultural participation in communities across Scotland, and your views on what good cultural policy looks like. I will start with Professor Stevenson.

Professor David Stevenson (Queen Margaret University): Thank you for that, convener.

For me, the main challenges come from the perception that cultural participation is difficult, as opposed to being something that occurs naturally and is an expression of ourselves as human beings. However, cultural participation is the way in which we define ourselves both as part of a community and in terms of our differences from other communities—communities that we might share common interests with, but from which there are differences. That means that the various groups and communities need equity of access to resources—time, money or space—in order to be able to pursue the cultural participation that they find meaningful.

Part of the challenge for good cultural policy is that good place-based cultural policy should be responsive to different groups, communities, people and places, so it is vital that it represents the differences that people express in that way. We all experience culture and we all want to participate in and express our cultures. However, there are differences. When we are faced with limited resources and there are discussions about how and on what we spend money and use the spaces that we make available, there are choices to be made. Part of the difficulty can be that we fall into thinking that there is a one-size-fits-all model and that we can invite people into a universal shared culture. Cultural participation is something that we all share, but meaningful cultural

participation can look very different for different groups and communities of people.

Professor Andrew Miles (University of Manchester): I echo the sentiments that David has just expressed. One of the problems that we have is in understanding how people participate culturally in their communities. The working definition of culture draws heavily on official traditional forms and assumptions about what is valuable in respect of how people participate culturally. First, we have to understand better what it means to participate culturally in those place-based circumstances.

Understanding of "community" is probably not as well founded and rich as it could be. We have to understand the trajectory of communities, including the historical influences and the resource dynamics to which David referred. "Whose culture?" is always the way that I approach the idea of cultural policy; I ask who is making policy and identify what matters to whom. We have to start with what people themselves want to participate in.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you for those answers. I will ask about barriers to organising and participating in culture. We have had several responses to our inquiry on that topic. Many respondents noted things including lack of public transport, lack of options—in particular, in rural areas—and lack of accessibility.

Professor Miles, you gave evidence to the United Kingdom Parliament in 2018 in which you talked about location as an important factor in participation levels. You made the point that the libraries with the highest numbers of users are often those that have good connectivity with public transport. What are your observations about that? We heard evidence from local authorities last week on that and on how we might address concerns about cultural policy.

Professor Miles: The problem of connectedness is an obvious one when we are dealing with rural communities, but it also affects peri-urban communities such as the one on the edge of Aberdeen that we did a lot of work with, in a place called Peterculter. The perception there at the time was that, even though it was only 7 miles from the centre of Aberdeen, it was caught in a policy vacuum when it came to the fundamental infrastructure that requires to be resourced in order for people to take part in established forms of culture—getting into the city centre, for example—and in networking their own cultural activities locally. With the community, we developed a cultural action plan that the community council put into operation. The council had five key actions that it made progress on while we were there, but when we did the scoping work for that cultural plan, in which we involved citizen researchers, we found that the second most important issue for the local community was the bus timetable. The basic economic, social and infrastructural issues—it is not rocket science—are what we need to address first when it comes to resourcing communities to pursue their cultural participation.

Professor Stevenson: There are three things that I want to say in response to the question. The first is about how we perceive barriers. I always suggest that a barrier exists only if it is a barrier to the direction of travel in which you want to go. Often, when surveys are done about why people have not taken part in certain activities, cost is mentioned, for example, but the barrier that tends not necessarily to be overlooked, but is always difficult, is lack of interest or lack of relevance.

That leads to the question whether it is right to challenge people's perceptions of what is valuable. I always refer to research that I did, in which I spoke to people about barriers. I was struck by the extent to which some of the people whom I talked to were aware of the barriers. They were concerned about the barriers that people might face in going to the local museum or theatre, for example, but one particular individual told me that they had never taken their children to a commercial cinema. They could not afford to go to the cinema: they could not buy tickets for their family. They said that no one was interested in the barriers that they faced in trying to express their cultural life and values.

The danger that we can fall into is that people who face certain types of barriers are limited in the types of culture that we are willing to help them to reach. We help them to overcome barriers as long as they are barriers to the type of culture that we feel is valuable for them to take part in. For people who, for example, cannot afford to go to the latest concert or to get tickets for Eurovision—even if they manage to get through the telephone queue—there is no help to overcome that economic barrier. There is a value judgment implicit in how we talk about barriers.

Secondly, I echo the point that Andrew Miles just made on the extent to which barriers extend across our lives. Often, culture is seen as an instrument or tool that can help other policy areas. In 2008, there was a Scottish Government document published called "Culture Delivers". That document was about persuading people that culture can deliver for every area of government: it can, for example, deliver for education and the economy. My challenge to all the other areas is to say that people taking part in their cultural life is an expression of a healthy society—a society in which people are healthy, have disposable income and can access public transport. It is a marker of

our success in the other areas in which government takes place.

Rather than saying, “culture delivers”, my challenge is always to ask, “How can all those other areas deliver for culture?” If people’s health is not right, they will not go to the theatre. A person who cannot access dental care will not sit and enjoy the potentially transformative effect of musicals. In that sense, on barriers, we need to watch that what we do does not become overly transactional and focused on certain types of activities.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you. I will bring in committee colleagues.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Good morning. There have been fascinating contributions so far.

I want to explore consideration of enabling people to access genres, types or expressions of culture that they are enthusiastic and passionate about, have been exposed to and with which they have engaged and had a positive experience. Could we do better, do more or be more creative in balancing that with exposure to new areas of culture that people might become passionate about but do not know about yet? For example, I like Scottish folk music only because a few years ago someone bought me a ticket for a Celtic Connections concert, as a present. In all likelihood, I would not have known that I like Scottish folk music without that exposure.

Exposure is an important consideration. I am not saying that there is a hierarchy or that if only people knew about a certain type of music or dance, they might enjoy it. They might, however. How do we create such opportunities? I know that festival organisations consider that, but is there more that we could be aware of and participate in?

Professor Stevenson: I am happy to go first on that one.

This is a common argument that comes up. There is a particular perception or position at the moment that omnivorous consumption of a broad variety of culture is, in and of itself, good because it helps us to understand other people and other types. Intuitively, rather than based on any evidence, I absolutely agree that understanding different cultures is important—understanding what you do not like is also important—because it helps a person to understand who they are, who their people are, whom they can collaborate with and where the overlaps are.

The difficulty—once again—is that we tend to challenge those who have the least amount of influence in society to diversify their cultural interests the most. There is a descending individualism whereby, if you have less money and are more requiring of free tickets and of opportunity, you have no control in terms of options in which you can take part. You might well be interested in going to a musical; it might be the thing that you want to do and you might never have been before, but you cannot get help to do that.

We absolutely want to embed a sense of curiosity in people. For me, the biggest challenge or risk that we face is that most of the evidence points towards the importance of our early years and early years education in making people curious about different forms of culture. Sadly, our notion of cultural participation tends to focus on adult or transactional interactions with specific organisations; the conversation about culture in education is seen as being separate and is not seen as being about cultural participation but is seen as a question about cultural education. Fundamentally, most of the evidence that I have read points to the extent to which we need to start when people are young, if we want them to be curious about diverse forms of culture.

That points towards ideas such as the cultural rucksack, which has been trialled in Fife. We should ensure that there are no young people who cannot explore the full spectrum. That is in order to find out what they value, but it is also to find out what they do not value. I am a professor of arts management and cultural policy. There are lots of arts that I do not want to go to, but I had the chance to make a choice and decide what is for me. There is not a problem so long as I am able to explore the things that I feel are important for me.

09:15

Professor Miles: I disagree slightly about how we could generate different interests. I will start with the fact that a lot of so-called everyday practices, which we would not include in the normal range of activities that are defined as “culture”, are often creative, rich and textured. We probably do not understand just how much expertise there is in communities in respect of activities that more broadly encompass creative practices, from visual creativity to other creative practices—making and so on.

How far do we want people to go in moving into different cultural spheres, and why? I am not sure. We should be supporting what people already do. I understand that there is a need to make relevant the kind of culture that is funded by the Government. In order to do that, provision in the early years is crucial, as is the transition from the early years to primary school then to high school. In England, quite a lot of cultural activity is woven into the curriculum. I am a governor of a special school where a variety of cultural activities and references are brought into the curriculum, but

those are then streamlined out at the secondary-school level.

David Stevenson talked about understanding where barriers are. It is still the case, fundamentally, that cultural participation in the UK, including Scotland, is segmented principally by social class and age. We have to understand what is going on with those kinds of demarcations in order to address how we might develop the cultural practices that people want to do and other options in which they might want to get involved.

Another point to make is that, if you are looking for practical ways of encouraging people to engage with different types of culture, and if that is thought to be a valuable thing to do, you need to put culture, or interventions, in the places that people normally inhabit—the places of their everyday engagement. People have done that: arts organisers have put work in shopping centres and so on.

One thing that I have observed is that multiform outdoor arts engage right across communities. I used to live in Kendal, where there is a big outdoor arts festival. People whom one would not normally see at such things would engage with a wide range of arts forms, from comedy to high-wire acts. It was evident that there was curiosity. People from less privileged residential areas of the town stood on the outside of the festival for the first day and gradually moved towards the centre. In so doing, they were interacting with other people and discussing what was going on. There is, in those kinds of opportunities, potential for increasing social interaction and discussion of what is going on in people's own broadly formal cultural spaces.

There are particular art forms to consider. I have recently been working on comics—comic art graphics—and graphic novels. That is why I brought up the point about demarcations between particular social groups. Among young people, comics are a big deal. Manga—which is a principally Japanese form of comics—has begun to have a global impact in youth culture across to the west. Comics are multiform art objects that integrate visual art and text. The accessibility of such forms can introduce people to other forms of culture and other cultural references.

There are, therefore, broad, structural issues that need to be addressed. The point about early years education is fundamental but, in the meantime, we could look at particular states and locations for cultural practices that bring whole communities together, and at forms such as the comics that I have just mentioned.

The Deputy Convener: Professor Stevenson wants to add something.

Professor Stevenson: I want to make a brief point on what was said about spaces. I want to stress that there is a sense that we start from the assumption that people are cultural and are doing something. I have done research on evaluated projects. One that sticks out was not in Scotland but was in a city in England. It was a project about getting people from various ethnic diasporas to take part in dance and music. The perception was that the project had failed; it failed to get people to come to an event, in that not as many people as were wanted had come along. I spoke to people whom it had been hoped would take part, and they said that they did not go because they play music and dance in the places that they were already going to—for example, they were singing and playing instruments in places of faith.

We have a sense of what a cultural space is. Of course, we need specialist spaces—they are vital. We need specialist theatres, film studios and music studios, but there is always a risk that we do not properly understand what our cultural infrastructure is. It includes school halls and—as Professor Miles suggested—parks, bandstands and skate parks; places where people gather together and listen to music. They are all cultural spaces. If we want to talk about a cultural ecology—if that is something that we find attractive—we cannot merely pay lip service to it.

Recently, we heard frustrations being expressed due to the difficulties that were being faced by Edinburgh's Filmhouse. People made strong arguments for why such spaces should be protected. The difficulty is that, across our communities, small community halls and school spaces are closing down. Such places are as important to the cultural ecology as the Filmhouse is, but there is a sense that we do not feel anguish about those closures.

The danger is that when we consider what works, we are not also looking at what works but we are ignoring—the places that are shutting. A better idea is to give people just a little—to allow them a little time and a little resource to do things within existing spaces. Also, we need to understand that any space can be a cultural space. That will not always require significant investment, but it does require that we value the things that people are already doing.

Foysol Choudhury: Good morning.

I will ask a question on what you have just said, but I also have another question. Are we using the spaces that we have in schools? You have mentioned the Filmhouse's difficulties and that you always find it difficult to attract people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Are they adequately informed? Do they know where they can perform or participate?

Professor Stevenson: The challenge is twofold. First, there can be small bureaucratic difficulties with access to certain types of spaces. Schools are useful spaces, as are community campuses but—to go back to barriers—there are microchallenges. I am involved in evaluation of on-going Culture Collective projects. We have heard that, in some places, there is difficulty in, for example, finding out who has the keys for a place.

We often make things more complex than they need to be. Part of the difficulty is that, if things are short term and the project is transactional, the microbarriers become massively important. I use the word "infrastructure" very widely. By it, I also mean local people who understand how to access a hall, know whom you can speak to and know how you can get a piece of equipment. We can then start to use the resources that exist.

My second point is that we often require an up-front justification for why the transformation needs to happen—people have to turn their cultural participation into a problem to be overcome—rather than asking what people want to do in a space. I go back to an evaluation that I once did, at which I spoke to a group of women who wanted access to a museum space. What they really wanted was a warm space in which to get together to crochet and knit. That was it. They really struggled, however, because the organisation with which they worked wanted them to construct their request as a complex social problem that they needed to overcome, that needed to be transformed and that needed to be integrated. They said, "No. What we need is just access to a space. There's a group of us and we have an interest."

We can make the situation appear to be more difficult than it is. It is about saying that people have a right to take part and do not necessarily need to justify what they ask for by making it a problem. That is a roundabout way of saying that I do not think that we are making enough use of public spaces that can be cultural spaces.

Foysol Choudhury: Do you believe that there has been a drop in cultural participation from individuals from typical low-income backgrounds or deprived communities?

Professor Stevenson: That is a difficult question. Again, it comes back to a point that we have made about the measure that we use to make judgments about levels of cultural participation. We have the Scottish household survey, which is a blunt instrument. I can flippantly point out the difficulties with it. For example, going to a gallery to look at a piece of art is considered to be cultural participation, but buying a piece of art, taking it home and putting it on your wall is not considered to be cultural participation. That is because it is difficult to categorise such things. We can see from the Scottish household survey that there is little by way of statistically significant shift in the patterns, but I can confidently say that if people have less disposable income and less time because they have to do more work in order to generate more disposable income, the time that they have in which to read or to listen to music diminishes.

It comes back to what we are talking about. People listen to the radio at work and listen to music in the car. It is a difficult question, and I have probably answered it poorly. To get to the heart of your question, I say yes—certain people have less time, less money and fewer resources to explore the things that they find meaningful. I imagine that Andy Miles will be able to nuance that for me.

Professor Miles: I can offer some new data. At the beginning of this year, I commissioned a YouGov survey on the broader definition of "culture" that I used in my previous work, which was a big Arts and Humanities Research Council project that took an approach to culture that started with people's practices and what they valued. In the new survey that I have just started working on in the past month, we asked people about 19 different participation types. We asked who practised them regularly and how much their participation in those various areas had changed from before the pandemic to after the pandemic. It is quite a big survey of 6,000 people, so it is statistically representative. It covers Scotland in much smaller numbers, of course, because it comprises all the UK nations and regions.

Broadly speaking, we are seeing a strong majority whose cultural participation rates and types did not change after the pandemic from what they had done before it; about 60 percent of people indicated that their practices had not changed. Where there was change and people had increased their participation, that was strongly related to economic resources. Those who did more stuff were better-off, more privileged and higher educated. There was therefore more stability among groups that were less privileged and lower resourced.

09:30

There were only three participation types for which participation increased over the pandemic: the arts, including painting, playing a musical instrument or writing; playing video games—no surprise there; and, interestingly, gardening. That was the case across the UK. There was a small variation in the rates in Scotland; for example, there were more doing the arts in Scotland than in the rest of the UK.

Another interesting thing came up when we asked people, rather than using the definitions of culture that I mentioned—the 19 types of cultural participation, ranging from the high arts to socialising or going to the pub—to tell us in an open-field question what they had been doing since the pandemic that was new and had been sustained over the period since the official release from lockdown. The response is very interesting in that it shows across the board that there were new participation types, which are very classed and very related to age, as I mentioned before.

In a way, there is change, but it follows the same routes and patterns as we saw before. There is much more crafting: many more people have taken on craft activities since the start of the pandemic. You can see, however, that the crafting activities that take place in white working-class communities are different from those that take place in working-class ethnic minority communities.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Those were interesting points about how the world might be changing a little after Covid. Are there trends in terms of availability of time; is time becoming harder or easier to find? There is growing interest in the concept of a four-day week, which is being implemented in a minority of situations. What are your thoughts on that? In particular, how does that play out in relation to time not just to participate, but to organise the voluntary effort that is needed to, for example, run a third-sector group? How does that vary in communities that might be time rich or time poor? Reflections on that would be useful.

Professor Miles: It is very clearly the case that better-resourced people have more time. That plays into time for organising, as well. In the survey that I just mentioned, we saw declining rates of voluntary participation before and after the pandemic. Since the pandemic, people are spending less time volunteering.

We would need data on time use in order to be clear about what is going on. The bigger emphasis that I have seen in the data so far is on economic resources. The only people who are increasing their participation outside the home—for example, in going to theatres or the cinema, going out and playing sport or attending events—are people who are economically capital-rich. That is combined with time. People whose employment status is less certain, or who have to mix and match work, are less able to control their time. People who are better off have more regular working arrangements and can invest their spare time during holidays and so on. Time is a big issue, but I cannot give you precise data on that at the moment.

Professor Stevenson: There are two points to make. Time is vital; I often go back to the notion of opportunity cost. Often, in thinking about audience development work or about reaching out to people, the organisations that I work with—through no fault of their own, because we all do this—imagine that people are sitting doing nothing and that the reason why they are not coming is that they are waiting to be persuaded or motivated to do so.

I always encourage organisations to ask, "What does the person have to stop doing in order to find the time to come to our place?" It might be that they have to stop doing paid work, or they might have caring responsibilities. It might be that they are already doing something that they find valuable, so we have to make an argument for why they should take a risk. To go back to the point that Ben Macpherson made, that opportunity cost—the balance of risk as time reduces—means that the likelihood of people thinking that they are doing something that might not be valuable to them starts to increase.

There is also the question of travel. The time that is required is not just the time that is spent at the event, if that event is not within one's home. There is also the time spent travelling to a place, which means that the time investment that is required varies relatively significantly across the board.

I absolutely want to come back to the point about volunteering and, in particular, about the impact that that has on the governance of organisations—voluntary organisations and major organisations. There is a significant challenge regarding diversity on the boards that run such organisations. I understand from evidence that I have seen that there has been progress on gender diversity, but diversity on arts organisation boards is not changing as much as it could when it comes to age, ethnic background and class. That is about time, because such involvement is voluntary; people have to give their time and must have time available to them. There is also a question about confidence and what social norms and skills people need in order to be on those boards.

Why does that matter? It matters because, when you are on a board and are trying to imagine somebody else's cultural values, there is always a sense of trying to persuade them or to move them forward, as opposed to saying, "What would I value?" or, "What should be there?" One of the best routes that we have is through ensuring that our boards are diverse and that the people on them are representative so that what is commissioned and who is employed are diverse.

This might be a bit of an easy metaphor. The point of this is that diversity of programming results in diverse people and audiences. I point to

the Edinburgh Playhouse. A significantly diverse audience goes to the Playhouse, which is a commercial venue. I argue that that is partly because of the diversity of its programming. That is driven by a commercial imperative, but having diverse people on arts boards means that there can be diverse activities and a sense of what could be done. Time is vital, but the governance question is often overlooked. Also, who has the time to set up a new organisation?

Mark Ruskell: Related to that, I will ask about trends in availability of physical assets, whether that be the Filmhouse, a village hall, a playing field or an open space for an expansive art exhibition. What is the level of availability of such resources? Is there a tangible decline? Are particular resources in more decline than others? Are opportunities opening up for communities to get access to new forms of resources?

Professor Stevenson: I do not want to give a robust answer without saying that we do not have a good data set for all the assets and spaces. That is, in part, because we do not necessarily fully appreciate what they all are. I can say—in particular, in relation to evaluation work that I have been doing recently on the Culture Collective's programme—that we are seeing a decline in access to spaces and resources through which people express themselves culturally. Anecdotally, that is more significant in rural areas and smaller places, in terms of the effect of one space—one community hall—that had supported a multitude of cultural activities closing down.

We are also facing challenges at the other end—the specialist end. The challenge is not to fall into the trap of this being an either/or situation, whereby either we can have world-class theatres in certain locations or we can have community spaces. It is about saying that we know that often the journey is from community spaces to television, for example. That is the route that people take. We know that young people's experiences—often through youth theatre, going to local cub scout activities or to local amateur pantomimes—are important.

Many public spaces, however, are facing challenges in their finances, which means that they are looking to commercialise their space and are being told to charge for use of space in order to cover their overheads—their costs. We are passing those difficulties further and further down the chain and making it harder and harder for people to access spaces. Yes—there is a challenge.

Also, some forms of cultural practice fundamentally require access to specialist equipment. For example, mosaic work and stained-glass work need access to equipment that no individual can afford on their own. That leads to questions about our ability to sustain a creative economy. Again, there are facilities, but it is complex and difficult for an individual to navigate access to those spaces.

I would say, anecdotally, that our spaces are becoming more difficult to access and are less available.

Professor Miles: We have some data on assets. During the understanding everyday participation project that I mentioned, we collected our own data on assets because official sources were so inaccurate and did not encompass the wider definition of culture that we use. We found that there is more participation, of the broad cultural type that I am talking about, in rural and peri-urban communities than in urban communities and city centre residential areas. People are getting involved in a lot more. What is supporting that—as David pointed out earlier, and which we have evidence of—is the availability of all kinds of infrastructure that would not be termed as cultural. They are not theatres; they are village halls or other community assets, such as buildings that are borrowed for practising by choirs, for pipe music or whatever it might be. Those are fundamentally important resources that we need to retain and recognise for their importance. With regard to the quantity of those types of cultural assets, I am referring to places in which we worked, such as Lewis and South Uist.

In Peterculter, there was a very important dimension to bringing the community into cultural activity in the role of a village hall. Like a lot of communities, Peterculter is a complex community with a village identity, even though it is an urban community. People buy into that imagined identity as a village through being able to access resources such as the village hall, which is a neutral space, unlike, for example, the working men's club or the country club on the edge of the village that was set up by one of the oil companies. That type of resource, to which people of all types can go and have a sense of ownership, without excluding any particular groups, is really important. It was both symbolically and practically important in Peterculter.

I do not know what has happened since the pandemic, but, as we left, there was a struggle going on about how to raise funds for the hall. The locals, as they called themselves, who were in the majority on the committee, wanted to maintain the profile and the trajectory of the hall as a space that was open as much as possible to mother-and-toddler groups, knitting groups, the Christmas panto and so on. Another group, which was more associated with incomers, was looking to raise funds in ways that did not sit comfortably with the local group. Therefore, there were tensions about resourcing. The incomer group said, "We have to

keep this going, but we will need to put the hall out to these kinds of activities." There was a cultural tension around that.

It is about understanding where the resources are but also about how they are managed and the, almost natural, social tensions that go on in an unequal society. Those things have to be understood and managed. Little pots of funding for such places are absolutely crucial.

Professor Stevenson: I want to stress again the point that I mentioned earlier about the term "infrastructure". I want to nuance it because it is very easy to think about it in terms of physical assets. The point that Professor Miles is making is that infrastructure is also the networks that exist in those places and the extent to which those networks have the time, resources and connections to access the assets and the resources that are there.

09:45

The touring network that works to support touring across Scotland is vital. I did work with the touring network. It is an ageing network of, essentially, voluntary producers who do the work of connecting: opening up the halls, making sure that someone has somewhere to stay and ferrying people in cars where there are no buses. However, it faces a challenge in that a lot of those people are saying, "I am too old", or, "It is time for someone else to pick this up", and moving on. If there are no young people with the time, because they are too busy trying to find work or their work is very short term, we lose that network, which is part of the infrastructure. The Culture Collective has been so powerful because part of the Culture Collective is about recognising the need for strong networks locally.

Later, you will hear from some of the nationals. National companies are incredible, but their ability to go into a community requires there to be networks for them to link into. Otherwise, they will end up just connecting to the same people. That infrastructure—that local network—needs to be sustained. It will not necessarily have outputs constantly, but its presence—the sense of people being there, having the time and being able to contribute—is part of our infrastructure, along with those small spaces and small bits of equipment, and it actually maximises the investment that we put into our nationals. Otherwise, the nationals do not have a local infrastructure to build on when they go out touring.

Mark Ruskell: Would you make a distinction between a democratisation of culture and a cultural democracy? Does what you describe—the work that you have done with the Culture Collective and the studies that you have done in Culter—really focus more on what a cultural democracy looks like locally rather than just on widening participation and access more generally?

Professor Stevenson: It is easy to make it binary. The danger is that it often pits one against another to say, "It's one or the other". Even if you want to democratise culture in the sense of democratising those high arts organisations, the best way to do that is through having a strong cultural democracy whereby there is a localised, grounded network that can be connected into. Yes, our concern is often too much about how we can get people to interact with certain types of organisations. That is a value judgment for society, Government and local government to make. However, pragmatically, if you want to do that, one route is to make sure that there are rich and robust local cultural democracies taking place that have access to assets, time and infrastructure.

Ben Macpherson: It strikes me that, if we were on the health committee and asking the same questions about sport, there would be such a crossover. Do you have any further comment on the time constraints due to the demands of the cost of living, particularly around key necessities such as housing, and the pressure that that puts on the volunteer network? Opportunity for participation is a concern across the whole wellbeing consideration, whether that is access to culture or sport or having the time to undertake exercise or cook. It is all connected, is it not?

Professor Stevenson: Yes. Professor Miles, do you want to go first?

Professor Miles: It is connected. I will give you an example. We did work on Lewis on community land management as a form of cultural participation. The whole idea of buying the land and then developing it is a cultural process. It also involves cultural activities when you engage people in the process. We looked particularly at young people's participation on community land management boards. We have the classic construction of its being mostly retirees and mostly men who run those organisations. Of course, we are dependent on them, because they are the only people who have the time, but at the same time, what you fold into that is a particular way of running an organisation and a particular set of assumptions and values about who should participate and who it is valuable to include.

We worked with younger people who had gone on to those management boards, and we asked them what the barriers were and what the needs were. Fundamentally, it is about supporting people at different parts of their life course in order to enable them to engage with and productively alter the culture of those organisations in ways that

bring more people in and reflect the importance of local cultural values.

It is about diversity but also about the practical measures that you need to take, such as supporting people who have childcare responsibilities to participate in board meetings in the evening or working with employers to give employees time off at particular times when they need to engage with community land trust business. Those practical issues were very much to the fore in that case.

I will go back to the previous point. One of the issues about vibrant, local so-called cultural democracies—recognising what people value in local communities in the present, and have done historically, through their broader sense of engagement with and belonging to a place—is that they are a way of getting people into managing their own affairs. I do not mean that in an individualistic, neoliberal way but much more in a collective way, by getting people involved in the business of local politics and valuing and underpinning the development of a local community in a civic way. Culture in the civic sense is a really important connection between local cultural activity in the broadest sense and civic participation. It is about getting involved in decisions that affect you, your family and your neighbours. That is what I mean by cultural democracy; there is a broader connection with democracy with a big D. That is where I see the importance of building up local infrastructures that can connect with the national organisations that take care of the important formal types of cultural participation. I am not saying that the local ones are not important, but you need to connect both ends of the process of cultural participation.

Professor Stevenson: I fully agree. Sport is a good example. In sport, people find less tension between the everyday and the elite. We have a sense of how, as Professor Miles says, those things connect. We do not question the fact that, if we want to have elite Scottish football players, rugby players and curlers, we need young people to have a bash at it. They will not all go on to be great sportspeople, but there is a sense that different things are needed. One is not more valuable than the other; they are fundamentally interconnected.

If we stood here and asked, “Should we have football or sports pitches across all our communities?”, everybody would say, “Yes, that is fine. Let us not build houses on them. Let us not take the pitches down”. However, we agonise over local music venues; we question them, and local music venues close down. Music is as popular as sport, yet we seem to struggle to get the sense that, if we want the elite end, we also need to allow the local end to happen. They need different things, however. The challenge for arts and culture, which sport does not have, is that we are trying to service both with the same policy interventions; whereas, in sport, it is recognised that elite-level sport requires different interventions from those that support local-level movement and sport activity.

The Deputy Convener: The clock is ticking down a bit, and members still have questions to ask. If we could have slightly shorter answers, that would be great.

Audrey Nicoll: Good morning to the witnesses. I will focus my questions on the role of corporate social responsibility. It may tie in a little bit with what you outlined, Professor Stevenson.

My constituency of Aberdeen South and North Kincardine is up in the north-east. I was interested to hear Professor Miles’s contribution about the Peterculter project, which is in my constituency. Historically, the north-east has benefited from a buoyant energy sector, and we know that that sector—and, I am sure, others—has been very supportive of arts and culture. It has supported everything from a local knitting club to, for example, the BP portrait award. It is right across the span. With regard to place, access to space and the democratisation of culture, I am interested in your comments about the role of corporate social responsibility and the provision, whether that is of funding or a venue, to support culture in communities.

Professor Miles: I am not sure that I have much to say about corporate social responsibility, other than the obvious: as corporations benefit, directly or indirectly, from the public purse, it is important that there is a reverse contribution. Politicians are the only powerful actors who can tie such organisations down, but I do not have any specific knowledge of how that might happen.

Professor Stevenson: I have only one concern. I agree that money is available, but the difficulty is that it becomes selective and the money might vanish. Therefore, we should not rely on it. There is the notion of there being a percentage for the arts or a percentage for culture to ensure that that money is an expectation not a gift, so that if you are in a community, you are of that community. However, it is for the communities to decide how that money is spent. Again, it is about ensuring that there is community wealth and that the decisions about how that wealth is spent sit in the hands of the communities.

Audrey Nicoll: I have a quick follow-up question. Without straying from the focus of the session, which is around place and space, it is important that communities and organisations are confident of funding sustainability. I am interested

in your comments on models of funding that can provide that reassurance.

Professor Stevenson: We have a very fractured funding landscape, which means that there are complexities. People spend a huge amount of time trying to get money from centralised organisations, such as Creative Scotland, or local authorities, which put in similar funding. In Germany, for example, there is a much clearer understanding of how different elements of the funding landscape support different things. We have a big challenge in determining who covers the overheads, whether they are the overheads of a major theatre space or those of keeping the heating on in a village hall. There is an awful lot of game playing and hard work in grappling to put together bits of funding from different components, with multiple agencies engaged in that.

We could take a much bolder overview by asking, "What is national funding looking to support? Is that there to provide the infrastructure? Is the local authority there to provide the activity?". That would mean individual organisations not having to spend time navigating a very complex landscape in order to piece together bits of funding to support the infrastructure. In Scotland, we do not value the overhead costs enough, by which I mean the time for running those organisations and the spaces. Everything is funded through project funding. The biggest challenge that we face is a persistent and pernicious obsession with short-term project funding.

Professor Miles: I cannot disagree with that. I have greater knowledge of the funding of the English system, and the model that seems to work best is the national portfolio organisation model, where you have three years of guaranteed funding at a particular level, and then those organisations can come back and repeat the application for a further three years. That consistency is really important.

I support the idea of a division of labour when it comes to the funding of on-costs—the overheads—which are the invisible costs. Professor Stevenson mentioned—I do not know whether he was being serious—a percentage for the arts. The arts are not funded very well. When you think about the amount of money that is spent across Government, you see that arts funding is a tiny amount. The Arts Council England budget might look huge on one level, but it is tiny in relation to other aspects of Government. We need more money in the arts, and we need more money to support local cultural development. Again, in England, with the withdrawal of state funding to local authorities, it has been extremely difficult for organisations to make good.

10:00

In Culter, all we could do was support the volunteers to make funding applications to various bodies. We managed to help them to get several thousand pounds—from the Co-op, for example—to support the regeneration of the youth club there. The community council really valued our input and support. I do not agree that everything should be voluntary and reduced to the efforts of a few individuals. We need structural funding into communities to make capital out of the incredible talent that exists, but it needs to be supported consistently and structurally.

The Deputy Convener: Our final question is from Alasdair Allan.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): If you will permit me, deputy convener, I will get on to my familiar hobby horse with my question.

We do not always talk about books and literature in the context of culture. In the past, I have asked officials from cultural organisations in Scotland about promoting literature, and I have stumped them, although I am sure that I will not stump you. Perhaps one of the most liberating things that an individual or a community can discover, if we are talking about place-based culture, is that their community has produced writers and literature, whether that be James Hogg in the Borders, Irvine Welsh in Leith or George Mackay Brown in Orkney. In the past, we have assumed that schools will deal with that, but, of course, they have not. There is an interest in what literature and books your community has produced, but, as a country, are we meeting that interest and that demand in communities?

Professor Stevenson: Books are important, but, for me, it is about story telling. Fundamentally, what people want to know is that they have told their stories—their ancestors have told their stories, and they will tell their stories. Books are vital, but, as Professor Miles mentioned, graphic novels are vital, as are the stories that people hear about their generation and their identity. Music is also vital—music is poetry. All those components use words to allow us to express the human condition. Do I think that we are focusing on this space? The challenge is that it becomes very difficult for certain people from certain backgrounds to be able to publish.

I almost hate to bring this into the discussion, but it goes back to what we have been talking about regarding entrepreneurialism and the notion of a ramp. That is the notion that there are lots of ideas, the ramp goes up and you scale up. In art and culture, that becomes very difficult to do. People tell stories in school, or they may have an artist-in-residence who inspires them, but moving from that on to knowing how to get access to a

publisher or how to do a certain activity can become challenging. We need to share the stories of the past, but we need to ensure that people are telling stories now and writing their own stories.

It comes back to education, but it is about having, for example, artists and writers in schools. The work that is being done in Wales on having artists in every school is exceptional. The country has genuinely made a commitment and is looking to do that. Wales is almost up to having a resident artist in every single school. That is a bold commitment, where it has been said that that is an entitlement for everyone.

Professor Miles: Reading is a ubiquitous activity, as is shown in the survey data that I have been generating. One of the interesting things about all forms of cultural participation, as we define it, is that they are profoundly social. That includes talking about reading and writing. The advent of the book club and the development of such interaction has been quite important.

There is one thing that I wanted to mention earlier when I was talking about finding out about what goes on in culture. A lot of culture happens in the home, and, because it happens behind closed doors, it is quite difficult to get involved with that activity. I get the sense that a lot of people were doing more writing during the pandemic. That is one of the things that was encompassed when I said that people were doing the arts. It was one of the few activities that increased after the pandemic compared with before.

Books are very important, and the work that we did on libraries shows just how important libraries are to people when they can access them on their own terms and within their everyday schedules. If they have a library that is more or less on their doorstep and is connected to shops, we found trajectories whereby people pick up their kids, do the shopping and go to the library. It is about fitting places where books are held into people's everyday lives.

To go back to the issue of what a book is: young people read books, but they are particularly interested in the visual form alongside the written word in comics and graphic novels. As I said before, that is a developing cultural phenomenon. We need to understand more about the way in which people interact with writing online through blogs and making comments on websites. Even posting on Twitter is a form of writing, whether we like much of what is on it or not. It still requires the construction of a couple of sentences to advance a point or argument. We need to better understand all those different contexts in which writing takes place.

I am not sure whether I can say much about identity of place from my research. The one place where it was very evident was in Gaelic identity and culture and in Gaelic-medium education on the islands, where young people, in particular, were brought into connection with their historical cultures through literary representations and storytelling. When you have a hook like that, which is strong on identity in the first place, you can fold in different types of cultural activity, including reading and writing.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you very much. That is an important point to finish on.

Thank you both very much for attending and for such a stimulating evidence session. We will now suspend the meeting briefly to allow for a change of witnesses.

10:06

Meeting suspended.

10:10

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: Good morning, everyone. We now move on to a round-table discussion with the national performing companies. We are joined by Steven Roth, executive director of Scottish Ballet; Brenna Hobson, executive director of the National Theatre of Scotland; Alex Reedijk, general director of Scottish Opera; Gavin Reid, chief executive of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra; and Alistair Mackie, chief executive of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. I warmly welcome you all.

Given the round-table format, we want there to be a free-flowing discussion, if possible. There are three broad themes, which we will cover in turn, if we can, although I appreciate that I have just said that we want it to be a free-flowing discussion, so we might just see how it goes. Please indicate to me or the clerks if you want to come in on a particular question or theme. We have a hard stop of 11.30, when the committee must close its business due to the fact that other parliamentary business will take place thereafter.

Our first theme is that of national and local layers of government and how they work together. Last week, we heard evidence from local authorities. How do your organisations seek to complement the work of other bodies, such as local authorities or other national agencies, in providing communities with opportunities to attend and participate in cultural activities? As I am looking at Brenna, perhaps she can start.

Brenna Hobson (National Theatre of Scotland): Sure. To start off, the cultural economy is very much interlinked, so we cannot exist without the venues that local authorities provide.

None of us is resident in our own venues, which enables us to be truly national. In addition, we are seeing the pressures on local authorities, in particular, in the amount of cultural provision that they are able to engage with. That is a difficulty. If any one aspect of the cultural landscape is affected, we all are, and that is key here.

The Deputy Convener: I will go around the panel.

Steven Roth (Scottish Ballet): The key thing for us is that we are interlinked with all the dance networks, where they exist, in local authorities. As Brenna said, the venues are crucial to what we do and how we interact with them and the work that they do. They are struggling. In Aberdeen, during the pandemic, His Majesty's Theatre almost faced closure at one point. Those are key venues that rely on their local authorities, and we are there to support them with content, because we are the major producing organisations. We produce the content that goes out to those venues.

We also have a close relationship with the local authority schools. We currently work with about 26 schools in eight local authorities. We used to be funded in each local authority area where we performed—Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh and so on—to do outreach programmes with organisations in their areas. Over the past seven, eight or nine years, that funding has eroded to zero, but we are still trying to do as much as we can in that space. We are often approached by the local authorities to complement work or to bring our programmes to their areas, but, essentially, they do not have any funding to give us to do that. We do it where we can, but, as is the case for all my colleagues, our budgets are ever more stretched, and we try to make them go as far we can.

We are out there everywhere. We are about to go to Orkney and Stornoway. Where we can, we do that, usually through fundraising specifically for that purpose.

Alistair Mackie (Royal Scottish National Orchestra): I am sorry to be repetitive, but there was a time when local authorities were a crucial part of the funding of the RSNO, and that has decreased enormously. The City of Edinburgh Council withdrew its funding in my second week in the job, in 2019. More and more, we are expected to provide financial support to local councils. That support often comes from trust and foundation income, which we use to get out and about.

10:15

As a national company, we are very determined to be in every local authority in Scotland. We are committed to that, but the funding for that now comes from trusts and foundations. There is increasing pressure on trust and foundation income because, with standstill funding and cuts from Arts Council England, we all go to the same trusts and foundations to ask for more and more. The heavy lifting is shifting away from local councils towards trusts and foundations, and that is very difficult to sustain.

Relationships with local councils are crucial to the successful integration of culture in communities. Across Scotland, we have relationships with everyone in order to get into schools and community centres, and it is crucial to maintain those relationships.

Alex Reedijk (Scottish Opera): Good morning. Rather than echoing my colleagues' necessarily gloomy perspectives, I want to say that one of the interesting characteristics of both Scottish Opera and the world that we inhabit at the moment is that we have had well over 30 years' worth of what we would call opera highlights or smaller-scale touring. We draw on a gene pool of about 110 smaller communities across Scotland, and we try to visit about 35 every year. It is just four singers and a piano, but that intervention in those communities resonates and is powerful because, on the whole, those halls are full, irrespective of whether they have 100 seats or 300 seats, and that is brilliant.

What is interesting is the sense of integration that there has been, pre-Covid, during Covid and post-Covid—this relates to a point that was made earlier—with regard to the local authorities' responsibility to maintain and sustain the halls and the number of those halls that are, in fact, sustained by volunteer groups. We saw a huge loss of motivation and energy for all the obvious reasons during Covid, but, coming out of Covid, many of those volunteers and voluntary organisations came back together.

In Scotland, at an infrastructure level, we are blessed to have a number of amazing community halls that are sustained by communities, which are a great delight and pleasure to visit. However, I echo colleagues' comments that the challenge remains that, on the whole, local authority funding has, in effect, stepped away from the work that we do at all levels, although there are little green shoots and glimmers of hope where, on a project-by-project basis, we can occasionally secure some support. It really matters to us—as it does to all of us here—that we are very present across the nation.

Gavin Reid (Scottish Chamber Orchestra): I echo all the comments on the reduction and loss of crucial local authority funding—in our case, it was Glasgow City Council that we lost funding from, not long ago. We have retained the annual funding from the City of Edinburgh Council. You will have noticed the information in the pack about

our longer-term community residency in Craigmillar, which, for us, is a model for how it could work in other places, if that level of funding was available.

Similar to Scottish Opera, my organisation has toured—except in a couple of recent years—around the Highlands and Islands and the Borders for about 42 years, and has given more than 20 concerts in some larger venues that we do not get to regularly, such as Stirling castle. We also went to Yell in the north of Shetland, and we gave a concert in its village community hall to 50 of the most appreciative and wonderful audience members I can recall. That is very important to us. We have just launched a similar summer season. When planning and delivering concerts in local authorities across the country, there is no end to the rich and aspirational conversations, but we fund it from our core funding and resources. As you can imagine, with 50 people in Yell, box-office return is welcome but limited.

The Deputy Convener: Mark Ruskell wants to come in on this topic.

Mark Ruskell: I was particularly struck by the work that all the national companies are doing with schools around Scotland. I talked to a teacher who was involved in a Scottish Opera production with her school about how transformative that was for the entire school. That was a big undertaking, and it developed the self-esteem of the young people. I want to ask you about the resource implications of doing that, particularly on the school side, because it is quite a big commitment for a school.

We have also seen changes in the way that music tuition is provided for across councils. Is there resource available for schools to interact with in order to make your work in schools effective? What are your reflections, from the council resource side of things, on the music resources and general resources that are needed in schools to make your work effective?

Alex Reedijk: That is a really good question. I should say that, on the whole, Scottish Opera finds itself across about 100 primary schools around Scotland. A couple of things characterise those visits. Interestingly, one of those things is less to do with money and more to do with individual champions in the school. Where there is a particular headteacher, music teacher or other teacher, they are often the broker, facilitator or link between our overtures and the outcomes in the classroom. That is partly—this is not a criticism of anybody—because every school, teacher and headteacher has hundreds of pressures every day, and a good thing like this takes a bit of energy to get some cut.

We charge a small amount, but our price point does not go anywhere near covering our costs. It is simply a recognition of the exchange of services that we offer and the responses from the kids. In my travels over 17 years, I cannot tell you how many people I have met who have said, “I loved it when the Scottish Opera came when I was at school. My kids loved it, and now my grandkids love it.” There is something about the sustainability of the delivery of musical performances. About 100 kids get involved in each of our performances. That track record is tremendous.

The other side of it is that Scottish Opera has what we call our Young Company, or Connect, which started 12 or 13 years ago. Typically, we had about 100 young people involved, drawn from around Scotland, to try to amplify all that was particular to our art form, and to encourage people to be singers, musicians or administrators. We formed a small orchestra as a part of that, but, with the diminution of music training, we have had to disband it because no young people were coming through to participate in it. I am sure that my orchestral colleagues will agree that the diminution of music teaching in schools has had a direct impact on the flow of young people into our sector.

Alistair Mackie: I would like to talk to one thing in particular that we are very committed to: using digital resources to get high-quality music tuition into every classroom. There is no substitute for live musicians, live music and music teachers, but there are not enough music teachers, particularly in primary schools. Giving normal primary school teachers the skills, resources and training to teach their classes is an incredibly effective way in which we, as national companies, can influence classroom teaching. We have had tremendous success with a number of projects. “Gaspard the Fox”, an animated film with teacher resources, reached more than 100,000 Scottish schoolchildren.

Two weeks ago, we signed a memorandum of understanding with a company called Charanga, which has been going for 25 years. Charanga is a very evolved digital platform that supports music education, primarily in English schools. It is in 12,500 English schools and reaches more than 1 million primary school children. It has just made an agreement with the Welsh Government to support all schools in Wales with music education, from instrumental tuition to classroom teaching. Charanga is now in more than 30 per cent of Scottish schools, and we hope to work with it to grow that percentage. It opens so many doors. It builds lesson plans for teachers and gives them the resources to deliver those plans. It gives the kids experience of playing their instruments with quite sophisticated backing tracks. It does not have much orchestral music, and the RSNO will provide—in Scotland, England and beyond—resources to populate Charanga’s platform.

There are many challenges for us around funding, but digital gives us an immense opportunity to stimulate an interest. At the moment, our model is to stimulate that interest through digital, but we then want to get live musicians there. In the past couple of months, particularly in March, we have noticed, as we have gone into a number of halls around Scotland, that in every hall we have been oversubscribed with schools wanting to come to experience music live. Therefore, digital is not the end point; it is the start point. It is an amazing facility. If we could put even limited resources into integrating digital education across the national companies, that would have a huge impact across Scotland.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): We have discussed a reduction in local authority support, if you like, but, according to the Scottish Parliament information centre, there has been a 20 per cent reduction in real-terms funding from the Scottish Government over the past 10 years. What sort of impact is that having on the sector? What coping mechanisms, or otherwise, are you utilising to try to continue to make an impact and improve culture-based policy in that context?

Steven Roth: I am happy to answer that. As a group of national companies, we are agile, out there and entrepreneurial. You have heard examples of the entrepreneurialism within the companies. I can speak for Scottish Ballet in that way. With the standstill funding that we have had for 10 years or so, we have had to make it an imperative to raise money in other ways, and, usually, it comes from trusts and foundations or from sponsorship. What that creates—a little bit—is a stop-start mechanism. You can raise money—sometimes, significant funds—for a specific project and it will give you a pilot or a start-up, and then that funding may drop away.

I will give you a good example of that. Someone mentioned corporate risk for social responsibility. Our safe to be me programme runs in 26 primary schools in Scotland. It is a live programme—there is also a hybrid version, similar to what Alistair Mackie described, but we prefer it if we can spend a week in a school with a whole year—with an outcome at the end in the form of a performance. That was funded by Aberdeen Standard Investments for the first two years, but the funding was stopped suddenly at the end of last year—full stop. Therefore, the funding no longer exists for us to continue to develop that programme or to continue it. We are looking for funding to substitute the funding from Aberdeen Standard Investments, and I think that we will eventually find it, but the situation means that we cannot rely on it for the long term.

Long-term impact is incredibly important from the perspective of engaging with young people through their life cycle so that they become the audience of the future. The dance health programme, within which the safe to be me programme sits, is about the whole life cycle. We do programmes for young people and programmes for older people with dementia and Parkinson’s, and so on. All of those are funded by Scottish Ballet, through trusts and foundations or corporate sponsorship. Obviously, it becomes harder and harder to do that, because we are in a competitive space with each other and are looking for as much as everyone else who is looking for money for services, be they social or creative. As I said, we are agile and entrepreneurial, and if we are told no, we will try to find another way to do it, and we will keep doing it and expanding, as far as we can. However, there is nothing like the security that you have with the solid government funding that is at least linked to inflation. With that, you know that you can keep up with costs. That is particularly pertinent for touring organisations, whose on-the-road costs are phenomenal, particularly for fuel, and who build sets, for instance. Alex Reedijk will tell you about that. Yes, it is a constraint, but we try to fill the gap in any way that we can.

Brenna Hobson: I agree: we are all out there hustling for extra money. I also want to highlight the fact that we are also incredibly efficient, so we will be co-producing with other organisations in Scotland and, frequently, England and the rest of the UK. That means that the contribution that each organisation makes will be smaller and the work can go for longer.

10:30

We have all taken a very strong look at all our overheads. We are coming towards the end of the efficiency that we can bring to bear, and it is with great reluctance that I say that it is starting to have an impact on the amount that we can put out. That is a concern for all of us.

Alistair Mackie: We are entrepreneurial. We are all very inventive in finding ways to make less go further, but the honest truth is that, when we compare the rates of inflation, we can see that our musicians are now paid probably 30 per cent less than they were 12 years ago. As a percentage of turnover, 12 years ago, Government support for the RSNO made up about 70 per cent of our funds; now it is 40 per cent. It is not that we are not being entrepreneurial; it is that we are at a limit and just cannot keep doing it.

We are looking at commercial income. We are looking at film and television recording. We had Disney here last week, and we will have Universal Pictures here next week. We can win the contracts because of the quality of both the orchestra and the facility. We have that quality of facility and

orchestra because of the support that we get from the Scottish Government, so it is absolutely crucial to earn more income. I would love to sit here and tell you how creative we all are in getting over the funding challenges, but I absolutely think that we are coming to an end point where there will be a real impact.

Gavin Reid: I will come in only to add a postscript to that. Nobody in our sector is short of ambition or of a passionate desire to reach more people, to do ever more creative work, to work with more and more interesting artists, and, as we all do to some extent or another, to co-curate with communities and partners around the country. The Scottish Chamber Orchestra's musicians are all freelance. They are paid by the session. They are not on a retainer or contract. Every budget is built from the bottom up. To some extent or another, we are all now at a point where entrepreneurialism, ambition and creativity are at a max, but, certainly in our case, we are innovating slightly at the margins.

We would love to have a much more well-developed digital output to complement the live output, but there is no resource to develop that idea, and there is no real income-generating model that matches the significant new expense. We will all have examples of that to offer, the point being that matching ambition and resource is always the balancing act. It is just getting much harder.

Maurice Golden: Your submission notes the collaboration that you are involved in. Do you feel that collaboration could be strengthened under a place-based approach to culture within communities in order to collectively respond to unmet demand across those communities?

Gavin Reid: There are some long-standing examples of collaboration here. The RSNO, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the SCO—now with Perth concert hall—have collaborated on a community-based series of public concerts and an increasing range of schools-based work. That partnership goes back over 25 years. The RSNO and the SCO have presented a joint series of concerts and outreach activities in Aberdeen for many years. We will all be able to point to those collaboration-specific projects.

At the moment, there is a collaboration of thinking among this group in particular, which has intensified in recent years. That goes from the top to the bottom of the organisation. We have found depths of support, resource and creative thinking among our group, and I do not mean just at this level but throughout the organisations, which are producing much richer opportunities for output not only in terms of business efficiency and use of resources but in how we are serving the whole country.

Alistair Mackie: Maybe I can share some good news from the pandemic. We used to meet once a quarter, but, throughout the pandemic, the five of us met every week and began to talk much more about how we can collaborate. Each national company has incredible skills, and we are trying not to overlap, so we are looking at where we map out our geographical reach and trying to be sure that we are not competing with each other but are complementing each other in the regions. I think that we have made enormous steps forward in that regard in the post-pandemic period, largely as a result of more communication between us during the pandemic.

Alex Reedijk: I just want to colour the discussion a little by saying that it is also true that there are many areas of collaboration—with a small "c"—that, perhaps, might not evidence themselves in the public domain. For example, Scottish Opera has a large producing company and we have a constant throughput of young technicians, costume makers and marketeers who come to us from, say, the conservatoire, go through our organisation and go on to populate roles across the rest of the cultural sector.

Oddly, we see ourselves slightly as a training organisation—the same is true of the organisations that my colleagues represent. We do not mind the churn, if you like, of young people because we know that we are doing our bit to populate the sector. There is also cross-pollination between ourselves and the film and TV sector. What is fascinating is that, for many years, the seesaw was tipped around a wee bit, depending on which sector was slightly busier than the other. Now, however, we have lost a lot of our freelance folk to the film and TV sector because, happily for Scotland, that sector is thriving. Less happily for us, though, a lot of really clever people have gone over to that world because, in the short term, the money is very fine indeed.

It has also been interesting that musicians, for example, all ebb and flow between the organisations that rely on them, according to the needs of each of our projects. They, in turn, provide training, inspiration and mentoring for others. Between the five of us, we have really strong connections with the conservatoire in Glasgow, and all its skills come in and out of our organisations. On the whole, the door is very widely open to all that.

The other thing that sits slightly outside the five of us is our partnerships with, for example, the likes of the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow. That is an example of where we have worked together to suit either the scale of the work or the venues or the strengths of the project.

The Deputy Convener: I invite Foysol Choudhury to ask a question.

Foysol Choudhury: Thank you, convener. Good morning. How much involvement do the national performing companies have with third-sector organisations? As you probably know, the third-sector organisations work with different ethnic-minority organisations as well, bringing in ideas from different countries. What is your involvement in that, and how do you guys work with third-sector organisations?

Alex Reedijk: A particular example that we are very proud of is that, in the summer of 2022, we presented our production of "Candide" in our car park. We were still edging out of Covid and we wanted to present our work outdoors in order to encourage audiences to come along. We spent quite a lot of time thinking about how we could present "Candide", which has about 15 different scenes and locations in it and huge chorus requirements. We built on a community chorus based in Paisley for a production that we had done in a tent a few summers ago, and we enhanced that by way of a very strong partnership with the Maryhill integration network. In the end, we found ourselves with a chorus of about 80 volunteers, drawn from our more obvious Paisley musical lovers and an extraordinary collection of human beings through the Maryhill integration network.

As a result of that, we have forged some really strong partnerships that have resulted in those singers joining our own Scottish Opera community choir, and we are beginning to alter the DNA of our audiences. That is just by way of an example.

Brenna Hobson: Working with third-sector organisations and other cultural partners is incredibly important to all of us. For example, prior to and all the way through the pandemic, the National Theatre of Scotland worked with Luminate, Glasgow Life, the Eden Court theatre and All The Queen's Men in Australia on a project called "The Coming Back Out Ball", which was aimed at older LGBTQ+ Scots who, potentially, find themselves being discriminated against a second time round as they age or, potentially, go into care homes. That was a way of community building that we started pre-pandemic but were able to successfully build on during the pandemic, online. We ultimately had to step away from that project, because we cannot be everywhere all the time, but things are still happening in Glasgow and Inverness as a result of that.

We also work extensively with arts organisations internationally. We worked with a brilliant arts organisation in Calcutta on a project associated with the 26th UN climate change conference of the parties—COP26—where people experienced each other's lives via the metaphor of putting on a digital pair of shoes belonging to someone who might live 1,000 or 10,000 miles away from them. Those sorts of partnerships are incredibly important to us all.

Alistair Mackie: I will mention two partnerships that the RSNO is involved with, the first of which is with Sistema Scotland, which is an amazing organisation. Our musicians have been in the five big noise centres around Scotland, and we invited the musicians from those centres back on to the stage and gave them a platform. On five occasions this year—there will be more next year—the first piece in our concert will be performed by the RSNO, infused with young musicians from Sistema. The young musicians' families and supporters come along to the concert, and it is a completely joyous occasion. One thing that made me very happy was that, in a recent performance of two Brahms symphonies, unconventionally, there was applause after every movement of every symphony. That said to me that there were people in the audience that night who do not normally come to the RSNO. I was thrilled that they applauded every movement. That has been a wonderful relationship.

The second partnership that I will mention—one of the great highlights of my four years in Scotland—is the partnership with a group called Musicians in Exile, which is made up of refugees in Scotland. That was arranged through the Scottish Refugee Council and a group called the Glasgow Barons, which is based in Govan. These people come to our country with incredible musical skills, but they do not have instruments or an outlet to express themselves. If we want refugees to integrate into our communities, we have to make them welcome with their music in their ways. If they have a chance to express themselves and to feel a bit more human again, their chances of successfully integrating into our country go up.

We are looking at more partnerships there. Again, I would particularly like to give credit to the people in Govan—the Glasgow Barons and the people who run Musicians in Exile—for the amazing work that they are doing. The RSNO has been honoured to collaborate with them.

Gavin Reid: I echo everything that Alistair said about working with Sistema Scotland. That has been a great joy for the SCO as well, and we have a couple of projects lined up for later this year in two of their centres.

Through our work in Craigmillar, we have collaborated with the Craigmillar and Niddrie community festival, which was, as I am sure you know, an extremely important festival that ran for about 25 to 30 years and was in abeyance for a while. We worked with partners there to reinstate that festival and are working towards the next iteration of that for this summer. Prior to our work in Craigmillar, we worked across the community in

Wester Hailes on a long-term basis and worked regularly on a number of collaborative projects with Whale Arts.

One project that I am particularly proud of at the SCO is the work that we do with child and adolescent mental health services. We know that CAMHS is extraordinarily overstretched and that it is very difficult to be taken on and looked after by it. We have run a number of on-going projects with CAMHS over the last few years, one of which is called New Vibe, which is for teenagers with moderate to severe mental health issues. Not only is the feedback from the professionals at CAMHS incredibly positive, and not only can they show the tangible benefits of the project, but they have systematically come back for more projects over the last few years. That tells me that it is a service that is badly needed.

The Deputy Convener: I will move on to our second theme, which is what we describe as unmet cultural need.

How do national performing companies identify where in Scotland to take performances and to deliver community-based projects and what form of project should be delivered? A crucial part of that question is the extent to which co-production with local communities happens and how cultural need is identified.

10:45

Steven Roth: There are various layers to that question. First, we are the national performing arts companies. We represent Scotland and the arts in Scotland at the very highest level, both nationally and internationally. Therefore, we present large-scale works in major theatres. You can pick out those cities in Scotland where there are major theatres: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Aberdeen and so on. Perth and other places have concert halls. We have a responsibility and we are funded to be the pre-eminent national performing arts organisations.

Below that level, we do a whole lot of other things, which we just talked about, around collaborations with the third sector. How do we determine where we go? As the national performing arts companies for the Scottish Ballet, we go where there is a stage big enough to mount a large production. For other things, where we have collaborations and partnerships, we will always take direction from the community with regard to what is on offer from Scottish Ballet.

I will give an example. We have a large range of health programmes for MS, dementia, the Safe to Be Me programme and Parkinson's. We could be delivering those across every single community in Scotland, because every community wants them. There is a huge need. We have a partnership with Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland. They look to us to go to areas where there is an acute need. For instance, the highest per capita rate of MS sufferers in the United Kingdom is in Orkney. We have partnered with the National Health Service and the MS Society in Orkney to run a pilot programme of Elevate, which is our MS for dance programme. We are also running the programme in other places. That was not Scottish Ballet going to Orkney and saying, "Let us do that programme there." It was about us working in partnership with the NHS, the Scottish Government, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Alliance. They will identify areas of need, and we will try to fulfil that need where we can and start that collaboration.

Brenna Hobson: We are all incredibly networked. For instance, we are doing a production later this year called "Thrown", about backhold wrestling. We are working with North East Arts Touring to talk about where that production is potentially right. We are going to two of their many venues. One of the advantages that the National Theatre of Scotland has is that, unlike some of our colleagues, we can relatively easily make work for tiny village halls or 4,000-seat theatres.

Another example this year is that Aberdeen Performing Arts has a real aspiration to produce more work. Often, it does not have the funds to do that, so we are co-producing with them our production of "Dracula" with a significant director, Sally Cookson, who does not often work in Scotland. The skills that she will bring into the community here will be incredibly valuable. Our partnership with Aberdeen absolutely came from them saying, "This is an aspiration we have. Can you help us?" That work is being relocated to Aberdeen. It has a playwright who writes frequently in Doric and will have Doric elements. As Steven said, it is about having conversations with organisations about what they need, as opposed to our imposing things on them.

Another thing to mention is that our deeper schools' work, where we co-produce works, comes from our relationships from touring into schools. We can start with a relatively light touch. We take the production in, and that is useful. People's first experience with theatre is often when it comes to their school. Something like our production of "Like Flying", which looks at young people and confidence and mental health, grew out of some of those relationships that developed when we were visiting and were then able to have bigger conversations with teachers and particularly head teachers.

Alistair Mackie: I will make just one point. We go out looking for partnerships in the communities; of course we do. Sometimes, it is just a case of

phoning up every school or health trust in the area to try to find things. I would love to see things coming the other way. I hope the idea of social prescription is growing in Scotland, but NHS England, back in 2018, employed 1,000 link workers. Healthcare professionals, through those link workers, came to arts organisations to ask whether there was something they could do. We can go to a health board, and say, “Perhaps we could do this for you,” but if someone were to come the other way and say, “Actually, could you help us with this?”, I would really welcome more of that so that the partnership building is more even, coming from both sides. We can guess what might be helpful and, in some ways, we can research what might be helpful but, really, we need healthcare professionals to come back to us and tell us how we can serve them and make ourselves available as a resource to healthcare.

NHS England is not a charity, I guess—maybe it is; I do not know its structures—but it is doing that for good business reasons: what it is investing in admissions and prescription of drugs goes down. It is cost effective. I believe that it is now increasing the number of link workers from 1,000 to something like 4,500. It has been incredibly effective. We are beginning that in Scotland, and I would like it to go further.

Gavin Reid: An interesting partnership has grown out of two different aspects of our work. For about 10 years, musicians from the SCO have worked with NHS Lothian on a project that we call ReConnect, which is small scale, working in hospitals and day care centres with adults who have a diagnosis of dementia. Lots of organisations are now working in this field. It is clearly very valuable work. There is plenty of important research that shows the extraordinary benefits of music to people who are suffering from that condition. We have been involved in a lot of evaluative work there, too.

Entirely separate from that, the SCO has, for many years, given a Viennese concert in the Usher hall on new year’s day. We tend to work in partnership with an organisation from the charity sector and use the concert as a fundraising opportunity. For many years, it was Marie Curie. It is now Alzheimer Scotland. The two elements have come together, and Alzheimer Scotland is now working with us on a close and regular basis, looking for other opportunities through its networks around the country for us to deliver workshops.

To come back to the first bit of our conversation, the ambition is unbounded. We are limited entirely by resources to be able to deliver it.

Alasdair Allan: I am interested in the point that Alistair Mackie made about co-operation between the NHS and the world of culture, and the benefits that that can have for each of them. This is a theme that the committee has gone to again and again. You feel that the initiative is one way. Does any kind of clearing house, if you like, exist to promote that kind of contact, or is it an ad hoc exercise that you all have to invent over and over again?

Alistair Mackie: I will be interested to hear what my colleagues say but, from an RSNO perspective, we have probably initiated all the partnerships that we have, largely, or they have come about through personal relationships and experiences that members of our RSNO community have had. Certainly, in my four years, no one has phoned me up, and said, “Could you bring the RSNO to do this?” It has all been stimulated largely from personal relationships from our side.

The Deputy Convener: Are there any wider comments on that point?

Alex Reedijk: I will offer slightly more hope. Well over a decade ago, Scottish Opera started a small breathing project around cystic fibrosis, just to see whether singing and breathing could help to improve the quality of life for the very small number of individuals in Scotland for whom cystic fibrosis has a big impact on their lives. Fast forward to the ending of Covid, and we wondered how much of that work could be repurposed to help sufferers with long Covid, so we rolled out a digital programme based on our learning from the cystic fibrosis process. A few months ago, we were approached by NHS Scotland to bid for money to help to roll out that programme further, and it has been rolled out a good deal further. When you look at the map of the UK, you will see that a goodly number of folk—over 2,500—have interacted with that programme, many of whom are south of the border. We were very happy to be invited to bid, and very happy to be able to say, “Look, we have only so much time. Nevertheless, we’ll do our best,” and the bid was accepted.

Alistair’s point about much of the evidence being anecdotal or casual is a fair point, but there is room for a bit more joining up, particularly between health and the arts.

The Deputy Convener: On the subject of defining cultural need, I think that I am right in saying that the five NPCs are planning a collective mapping exercise to help understand what is being delivered in social impact cultural activity and the communities that are being reached. Do any of the witnesses want to speak to that or tell us what those plans are? Obviously, data is important.

Alex Reedijk: The short answer, convener, is that it is work in progress.

The Deputy Convener: We can revisit that.

Alex Reedijk: Yes please.

The Deputy Convener: Okay. Thank you.

The last theme that we will explore is place-based cultural policy. How do the NPCs deliver that approach? To what extent can the value that it provides to communities be measured? What challenges are faced in delivering a place-based approach?

Gavin Reid: I mentioned the example that is, perhaps, richest for this conversation, which is the work that we are doing in Craigmillar. We have around eight separate on-going projects there, running across five years. It is important that, before the work started, we spent a couple of years getting to know people, developing relationships and developing ideas. The work is very much co-curated, and I am happy to say that I think that they would report that there is a feeling of integration and collaboration rather than of an arts organisation that comes along and gives.

We are looking to invest in a formal evaluation of that project, but we also want to look at where else those ideas can travel. In a country like Scotland, you immediately add an awful lot of expense by travelling regularly. We have musicians going to Craigmillar every week for a whole term at a time. They are developing long-term, deep engagement in communities. There are sharings and performances. The orchestra will go there en masse in October, in the first week of the next main concert season. The orchestra will be in Castlebrae high school. To do that at a distance obviously adds a significant extra cost that is difficult to fund. However, as part of our annual summer touring around the Highlands and Islands, we are also developing residencies within those weeks of concert giving. We were in Inverness-shire—in Inverness, Drumnadrochit and Elgin—for a week last year, working on a whole range of community-based things. It is important that we aim to do that. Finding the resource and an efficient way of delivering is the key thing, and we are all learning the value of co-curation.

Alex Reedijk: One of the characteristics of a place-based approach is the need for consistency, for taking a long-term approach and for quality relationships. Sometimes, the outside observer could feel that we are not necessarily doing a great deal or that the projects that we speak about are quite specialist. That is because they are specialist, and they require deep dives and a great investment of time by both the companies and the local communities.

We were thinking about celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Walter Scott. Other witnesses may not know that there are something like 98 operas based on the novels of Walter Scott. There are rich pickings. Coming out of Covid, we wanted to find a way to help address issues of anxiety, isolation and lack of empowerment that are reportedly experienced by a disproportionate number of women as a result of lockdown. We did that through a series of arts-led workshops in the Borders based on the plot and central themes of Scott's novel "The Bride of Lammermoor" and the opera "Lucia di Lammermoor". A group of women in the Scottish Borders were invited to develop their skills across an array of visual and literary mediums. To cut a long story short, we developed a series of interesting visual and musical outcomes that appeared in our theatre in Glasgow. They will also be exhibited in Galashiels. It was an interesting deep dive and there was a lot of person-intensive work, but it was fascinating and, hopefully, there are helpful outcomes for the individuals involved.

11:00

Alasdair Allan: Clearly, you are all doing very creditable work on two fronts: the first is to ensure that harder-to-reach groups are being reached and that people are overcoming their threshold anxiety, if they have it, to come to events; and the second is to try to get around the country. How do you combine the two things to make sure that, when you visit different parts of the country, you are not just meeting similar people? What are you doing to make sure that, when you get to different parts of the country, you are reaching as widely into that community as you can?

Steven Roth: We always send our engagement team out ahead of the company whenever we are performing. We always have our engagement team on the road with us everywhere, which will include when we go up to the islands very shortly. The team will go in to schools and community organisations. If we are running dance health programmes, whether those be on Parkinson's, dementia or whatever, those teams will be there as well. Everything that we do in the region—in the local authority—is linked to the performance. The themes from the performance, whether it be "Swan Lake", "The Nutcracker" or whatever, will play through those engagement programmes. Our engagement team is going up to Orkney and then on to Lewis one week ahead of the company going there. We will bring those communities together to help us to build the venue, because there are no venues on those islands where we can perform. We are taking everything with us, including new green hydrogen electricity generators.

Alasdair Allan: I should say that my constituency does have electricity.

Steven Roth: There is not enough high-powered electricity to do a show. Usually, we take

two or three generators with us. In this case, they are green hydrogen generators.

We will build the venues and give those communities exactly the same experience that they would have if they were sitting in the Theatre Royal in Glasgow or the Festival Theatre in Edinburgh—exactly the same experience. That comes at a huge cost, but it is important. It is important that, where possible, Alex Reedijk sends four singers and a pianist to a village hall. It is also important that, where possible, we take full-scale works to places that do not have large-scale venues.

Looking at that in a holistic way, we do not just perform and go; we go there and try to enrich those communities and bring those people to us. It is important to do it there, on the ground, in those places. It would be cheaper for us to fly 700 people from Lewis or Orkney to the Theatre Royal in Glasgow or a theatre in Edinburgh and let them see the show and fly them back the next day than it is for us, as a company, to put everybody on the road, with all the trucks that we need and so on, and build the theatre. The importance of doing it in that place, however, is invaluable to those communities.

Alex Reedijk: I have a point about the place-based approach, particularly thinking about Covid and coming out of it. In the midst of Covid, we were struck by how many of our audience were saying to us, "We really miss going to live performances," and not just opera but the general principles of live performance, because of all the things that it does to enrich people's lives. I very much take the point about unmet demand and how we build an audience. Perhaps we are in danger of speaking into our own echo chamber. How can we test ourselves to think more widely than that?

Pre Covid, we had a model of what we called a pop-up opera: a couple of singers, a narrator and a couple of instrumentalists. That sort of bumbled its way around, doing all sorts of wee things. We thought that, coming out of Covid, there was an opportunity to create live performances that could be presented outdoors in a way that would invite people to begin to return to the habit of seeing work. I am delighted that, in the summer of 2021, we managed to get to 46 communities around Scotland and played about 191 performances. The photographs of that are so wonderfully Scottish; in some of them, you have people sitting in their social circles on a sunny day, and, in others, you have the mist coming in over the hill. The important thing was that people sat through the weather, and they reiterated and reaffirmed their belief in and passion for live performance. There is something about intense dialogue with the communities, but there is also something about our duty of care to ensure that we do our very best to bring as much live performance around the country as we can.

Gavin Reid: I totally agree with what Alex Reedijk said. We share a strong feeling of responsibility to take our work as widely as possible. It would be too easy and completely wrong for us simply to go to the nice, well-appointed and largest venues with nice acoustics where we can predict what the ticket income will be and not go anywhere else. In the SCO, we take great care every year, particularly with the summer touring, to make sure that we are not simply going back to the same places that know us and like us and where we know that people will come. We take care to ensure that we are reaching new venues and new places every year. That is much harder and considerably more labour-intensive and expensive, and the box office returns are considerably less predictable, but it is the right thing to do.

Alistair Mackie: I do not have a point to make, but I go back to something that I said before. Last year, musicians were committed to getting out to all 32 local authorities in Scotland. The real success, though, is local partnerships. The last thing that I want to do is to go somewhere and tell people, "I know what you need: you need some Mahler." That is not relevant. We need to listen to what they want and try to match their need with our resource. We all do our level best to do that, but it often stands or falls on the local relationship—the local partnership—and on providing a resource that people think meets their need, wherever that is.

Audrey Nicoll: I have been listening with interest, particularly to the discussion on place-based policy. One thing that is coming into my head is the economic benefit that you bring to local areas when you are out in communities, cities and so on. I am thinking about, for example, the tie-in that some of your annual programme has with hospitality and tourism. What work has been done to look at the benefit that you bring to local economies? Forgive me if my next question has been covered already, given that a lot has been discussed. In addition to your engagement with partners and communities on performance, can you say a little about the mentoring that you do of local actors and performers through masterclass or mentoring opportunities?

Alex Reedijk: Briefly, on the first question, although I do not have the numbers at my command, I know from the conversations that we have with colleagues who run Eden Court theatre in Inverness that, when one of the national companies is there, the theatre and the city witness a tangible uptick not only in ticket sales but flowing through into accommodation, shopping

and food and beverage sales, particularly at weekends. That is partly because Inverness is at the centre of the Highlands, so the distance that is required to travel to Inverness is significant. I can dig out some stats on that if you like.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you for that. That would be helpful.

Gavin Reid: In our regular summer Scottish touring, we work regularly in partnership with VisitScotland. It helps to promote us and puts us in touch with various partners. Those conversations with other delivery partners are developing, and it is a priority for us at the moment, so it is interesting that you have raised it. One of the challenges of visiting new venues and new communities for a short period initially is, bluntly, making sure that people know that we are coming. We can have those conversations in advance with the likes of VisitScotland and its local delivery partners.

We will all have stories to tell about mentoring. The SCO has an annual project with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland wind players. We work with them on a project, mentor them and then perform at one of their main concerts in Glasgow. We also bring it to Edinburgh and, generally, wherever we can, take it to a third venue. We also run what we call the SCO academy, which is a training scheme for young musicians. In our new season, which we have just announced last week, in March or April 2024 we will have young string players playing alongside the orchestra on stage in the Usher hall and the City halls. I am sure that we can all tell you of regular mentoring that we do with young professionals in our sector.

Brenna Hobson: An interesting conversation that we have been having recently is not just about whether there is an impact when we go into some of the smaller venues, particularly. Recently, I was speaking to Heart of Hawick. It says that, when we are in its programme—I am pleased to say that we are this year—that has a general impact on its theatre programme across the year, because it raises the profile. That is one reason why we all try to get around to different parts of Scotland, and not just go back to the same places.

To pick up on your point about mentoring, we have a brilliant creation space in north Glasgow. We have four rehearsal rooms. It is well set up. One thing that we do carefully with our artistic development department is bring in both companies and individual artists from quite an early stage in their careers, when they might be five or 10 years off creating a work for us, and fund them to have mentorships and work on projects. Sometimes, what they need is just thinking time in a room. Rather than trying to do that when we are out on tour, bringing people to us and giving them that concentrated time is what has been working for us.

We all have a strong role in training freelancers. Quite often, it is difficult for freelancers to afford to work in things such as health and safety or anti-racism training, so we provide that as part of our induction process. Not only is the training paid for, they are paid to do the training. That is important.

Alistair Mackie: I would love us to do more work on the economic benefit of culture. The things that you mentioned—tourism, food and beverage—are very relevant. Of course, people come into venues. It stimulates communities.

We have talked a lot about our own work. Recently, Alex Reedijk invited me to the Scottish Opera’s production of “Il trittico”. It was incredible. I paid for a ticket to go back a second time. I can tell you that, the next day, I went into work feeling like a different person. What is the economic benefit of that experience? What is the economic benefit of culture that people take back into their working lives? That is much more difficult to define than direct economic benefit but, in many ways, I think that it is one of the most powerful economic cases that we can make. It is no accident that a country such as Germany, which has one of the strongest economies, has one of the strongest cultural scenes in the world. Culture and economy are fundamentally linked. Perhaps, in the cultural sector, we need to do better at defining and talking about it. We love to talk about we do. We are passionate about it. We are not economists. I think that, if we are going to win the case for funding of the arts in the public domain, we need to do slightly better at articulating the broader economic benefit.

The Deputy Convener: I do not know whether any MSP colleagues have questions before I close the meeting but, if I could ask a final question on that topic, it is this: how do you measure and evaluate the impact on communities of the work that you do locally? I accept that there is a rather simplistic way in which to do that by looking at box office returns and the size of audiences, but that is crude and there is a much wider benefit. We have just spoken about that. Is it even possible to measure impact? I will leave you that final question.

11:15

Alex Reedijk: The short answer is that it is a jolly hard thing to do. I take the point about the simplistic approach to the maths. One of my personal units of measure is being in the foyer at the end of a performance and trying to catch everyone’s eye and get a thumbs-up or thumbs-sideways response to the work. I know that that sounds a bit reductivist, but it is not meant to be. It

is just asking whether the group of people who have come together that evening have had an amazing time. If not, why not? Let us find out why, and let us do better.

Alistair Mackie's point about the overall health of a nation being reflected in and articulated through its cultural sector is important, and we are doing a bit of work through the University of Edinburgh to try to measure that. It is one of those questions that are ever so slightly beyond the media answers.

The Deputy Convener: On that topic, I am interested in hearing your views on whether there is a role for the performers in your companies—we have not really spoken about them today—in measuring impact.

Gavin Reid: A lot of it is hard to define. In an orchestra such as the SCO that is busy but not 100 per cent full time—there is about 38 weeks of work each year—there is space to do other things. We can measure our success by retention and by the artists who want to work with the orchestra. That is an important measure for all of us. One of the key things on that point is that, if I dare say so myself, all five companies are working at a high international level. The chain is strong, the artistic ambition is very high and the artists who come to work with us on a regular basis as conductors, soloists, actors and dancers are of a very high calibre. It is important to note that. It is not the whole answer, but it is part of the answer.

Steven Roth: We could spend an entire day talking about measuring public benefit and the impact on the community and its social benefit. We have talked a lot about art and the art form. Alistair Mackie just talked about what is, essentially, the feelgood factor of what we do. How do you measure the impact of that? How do you measure the economic benefit of what we do? When we were in Aberdeen for our Christmas week, it was during the Aberdeen food and wine festival. The festival attributed its success this year to Scottish Ballet being in His Majesty's Theatre with "The Snow Queen", because every restaurant and bar was jam-packed. We sold out our season.

There is that side to the equation, and there are all the other programmes that we have spoken of. We absolutely set out to measure and evaluate every programme in a scientific way, with empirical and anecdotal research. For our Safe to Be Me programme, we have partnered with the University of Strathclyde, which is with us in the schools, measuring the impact by speaking to the students and schools after the programme has ended. We have a partnership with Georgetown University Medical Center in the United States, which is evaluating our multiple sclerosis programme, because anything to do with health needs to have rigorous scientific research behind it. A PhD—a professor—at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland works with us almost full time, measuring and evaluating our work, and we work with the University of Florida on some of our health programmes. We evaluate in every way, and the universities publish the research. In essence, that is why we have established the national centre for dance health at Scottish Ballet to bring it all together, because there are so many threads to it. It is important to show that, in addition to going out and doing ballet because it feels good—we can all talk about that all day every day—ballet does good for the individual, their family and their community. There is a huge multiplier effect, and measuring that takes time and money, and you have to be in that for the long haul.

I come back to the first point that I made, about the stop-start mechanism, when you have to chase funding all the time. If you look at truly measuring something over the long term, you will see that you have to have enough funding to be able to do it for five or 10 years and to look at the impact over a long period, not just one year or one project.

Brenna Hobson: I echo what my colleagues have said about longevity and about needing the data. For me, the expertise, particularly of teachers, has been really interesting for us. I will read a short quote about our neighbourhood project from the headteacher of St Teresa's primary school:

> "It has been a privilege to share this experience with our young people and watch them transform into empowered young activists seeking justice for others in our world".

That is the impact that you can have. When you hear that from teachers, who are experts in the area, the impact of doing a project with young people is not be underestimated.

The Deputy Convener: Finally, Alistair, do you have anything to add to that?

Alistair Mackie: No. Evaluation is crucial to focus. We need to know what is effective, double up on what we know has impact and lose what does not.

I will pick up on one very quick point. We have talked a lot about what national companies do in Scotland. As we travel, we project Scotland's identity around the world as a vibrant cultural country that has a rich offering for people to come and visit or live. All of us can tell you about that. We are in the Musikverein Vienna a week on Monday and we are travelling around Europe. We all do that work, and it is fantastic. I am a proud Scot, and I am proud that our football team beat Spain 2-0 at Hampden Park. I was there, and I am proud of the work that the national companies do to send a message out to the wider world about

what a great place Scotland is. If you are talking about evaluation and impact, that is incredibly important.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you all very much for joining what has been a fascinating and stimulating discussion. On that note, I will close the meeting.

11:21

Meeting continued in private until 11:30.

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