

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 2 April 2025
6th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2030: Review cultural funding arrangements to enable Scotland to contribute to the Venice Biennale in 2024

Introduction

Petitioner Denise Hooper

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the funding it provides to 'Scotland + Venice' and ensure that Scottish artists can contribute to the Venice Biennale in 2024.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2030>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 15 May 2024.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to Creative Scotland.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received two new written submissions from Creative Scotland, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial position on this petition on 29 June 2023.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 28 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. Members may wish to note that [Culture Radar, who were appointed to lead the review of the Scotland + Venice project, concluded the review in July 2024.](#)

Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
March 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2030: Review cultural funding arrangements to enable Scotland to contribute to the Venice Biennale in 2024

Petitioner

Denise Hooper

Date Lodged

8 June 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the funding it provides to 'Scotland + Venice' and ensure that Scottish artists can contribute to the Venice Biennale in 2024.

Previous action

I have written to my MSP, Marie McNair.

I have also canvassed previous contributors to ask if they will add their voice to a campaign.

Background information

Scotland has participated, as its own entity, in the Venice Biennale since 2003. This prestigious, international arts festival has been successful in showcasing Scottish art and architecture on the world stage. People go to see specifically what Scotland is doing. It is an event I have attended on a number of occasions, and I feel Scotland must be represented.

The decision to withdraw from the 2024 event is not a good decision for Scotland. It is a step backward not to be on that world stage, part of the festival and contributing to it in Scotland's own right.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2030 on 15 May 2024

The Convener: PE2030, which was lodged by Denise Hooper, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the cultural funding that it provides to the Scotland + Venice project and ensure that Scottish artists can contribute to the Venice biennale in 2024. When we previously considered the petition at our meeting on 20 September 2023, we agreed to write to the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland, largely because the material responses that we had received did not really explain anything at all, unless I am missing something.

I am pleased to say that we have now received responses from both the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland. They confirm that the Scotland + Venice project was paused in order for a review to be carried out of the relevance and impact of the project. The response from Creative Scotland notes:

“The review will present and evaluate options for change, underpinned by a clear financing strategy. It will support the future planning of Scotland’s participation at the Venice Biennale from 2026.”

I might suggest that Creative Scotland investigates some of its other funding at the same time, but that is a separate matter.

In response to the information provided by the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland, the petitioner has expressed concern that it may, therefore, be 2027 before Scotland is represented at the Venice biennale again. The petitioner highlights comments from the then First Minister Humza Yousaf that investment in Scotland’s arts and culture will be more than doubled over the next five years, which the petitioner believes should allow greater flexibility for Scotland’s participation.

The committee has also received two submissions from the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, updating us at various stages on progress on developing and publishing the international culture strategy. That strategy was published on 28 March 2024 and it was subsequently debated in the chamber.

In light of the explanation that we have received, such as it is, and the resolve and determination that there appears to be that there will not be any participation in 2024 nor in 2025, it would seem, do colleagues have any suggestions for action?

Foyso! Choudhury: Did we get an update on the Creative Scotland review?

The Convener: We did. That is the matter to which I just referred. It explained the basis of the pause that was implemented. The review that Creative Scotland is undertaking to look at the value of Scotland’s participation is due to conclude, but that was why it paused our participation. I think that there was a previous evaluation at an earlier date that did not lead to a pause in our participation, but it has this time. That was the explanation.

Foyso! Choudhury: I think that we should keep the petition open until the review is concluded. Maybe the convener will want to organise a committee visit to Venice as

well. [Laughter.] However, I feel that we should wait until Creative Scotland's review is concluded.

The Convener: Do you want me to formally record that as the recommendation, Mr Choudhury? Is a committee visit to Venice part of your consideration?

Foyso Choudhury: Yes—both things. [Laughter.]

The Convener: In the first instance, we might keep the petition open, as Mr Choudhury suggests, and ask Creative Scotland, if the review is concluding, for an update on its conclusions and the consequences for Scotland's future participation in 2025, 2026 and 2027. I think that that would be reasonable.

Fergus Ewing: I would love to go to Venice, but I do not think that I would ask the taxpayer to fork out for that, for the avoidance of any doubt.

The Convener: I have been to Venice on a number of occasions, but that was under my own steam and not for the arts and culture festival.

In all seriousness, I read recently that the daily volume of visitors to Venice is now almost intolerable given the ability of the infrastructure to cope. I certainly know that, if you are staying in Venice, you really have to be up at 5 o'clock in the morning to have a wander around. Otherwise, you cannot move. The city is definitely under a lot of pressure. Nonetheless, it has a series of famous and celebrated arts festivals through the year, and Scotland's participation in those is to be valued.

Annexe C: Written submissions

Creative Scotland written submission, 14 June 2024

PE2030/H: Review cultural funding arrangements to enable Scotland to contribute to the Venice Biennale in 2024

Scotland+Venice is delivered through a strategic partnership of Creative Scotland, British Council Scotland, National Galleries Scotland (NGS), Architecture & Design Scotland (A&DS), V&A Dundee and the Scottish Government. Each organisation has a representative on the Scotland+Venice Partnership Board, which is chaired by Creative Scotland.

Established in 2003, [Scotland+Venice has presented 20 projects at the Biennales for Contemporary Art and Architecture](#).

In early 2023 the Scotland+Venice Partners agreed to pause the Scotland+Venice project in 2024 and 2025 to allow for a period of reflection and review. Information on the decision was issued to stakeholders and press at the time.

In the current financial, planning and policy environment it felt necessary to review the current model of delivery, and to consider the project's position within the wider scope of international opportunities available to Scotland's art and architecture communities.

A Review is underway and is looking at the effectiveness of the current approach and alternative models for the future. It is considering the changing landscape for international cultural events and the need to achieve a pathway to Net Zero. The Review is being carried out by Culture Radar who are consulting widely with the art and architecture sectors.

The Review is considering a range of options, including returning to presenting from 2026, the cessation of the Scotland + Venice project, occasional rather than regular participation and a range of venue models. The findings of the Review will be shared with stakeholders later this summer and will be made available to the public. The Partners will consider the findings and future options and communicate agreed next steps in due course.

Despite the pause in the Scotland+Venice project the Partner organisations have continued work to identify opportunities for artists, curators, and producers to engage with the Biennale in 2024. We have secured Scottish participation in the Professional Development Programme offered by the British Council Fellowship in Venice. The Scottish Contemporary Art Network (SCAN), Glasgow School of Art, and St Andrews University are partners in this programme. We have also offered opportunities to attend the Biennale through the Scotland+Venice Travel Grant awardees, with a focus on encouraging a diversity of engagement.

Creative Scotland written submission, 26 March 2025

PE2030/I: Review cultural funding arrangements to enable Scotland to contribute to the Venice Biennale in 2024

Scotland + Venice is a major international initiative showcasing Scotland's contemporary art and architecture at the Venice Biennale. It provides a global platform for Scottish artists, fosters international cultural exchange, and strengthens Scotland's presence within the visual arts and architecture sectors.

Scotland + Venice has been developed over twenty years as an official Venice Biennale collateral event and had established a reputation as one of the Biennial's most exciting events. Involvement in the Biennale was paused in 2023 to enable the Partners to determine the future viability of the project and the effectiveness of the current approach.

The Scotland + Venice Partners are Creative Scotland, British Council Scotland, the National Galleries of Scotland, V&A Dundee, Architecture and Design Scotland and the Scottish Government.

In 2024, the consultancy Culture Radar reviewed Scotland's participation in the Venice Biennale, including consultation with the visual arts sector. Creative Scotland, British Council Scotland and the National Galleries of Scotland lead on the Art Biennale, with the majority of the budget drawn from Creative Scotland's National Lottery funding. The aim of the 2024 review is to deliver research and conclusions that will enable the current Scotland + Venice Partners determine the future viability of the Scotland + Venice project, the effectiveness of its approach, and consider alternative options for the future.

The Scotland + Venice Partners will publish the 2024 Review in the coming weeks and set out our plans for the project in 2026.