



CPG ON CULTURE: MINUTES

3 JUNE 2014, 5.30PM-8PM

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, COMMITTEE ROOM 1

SHOULD SCOTLAND BE AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY? THE IMPACT ON
THE ARTS, SCREEN AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Introduction

The following MSPs were noted to be in attendance:

- Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
- Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
- Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
- George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

Apologies received from:

- Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)
- Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con)
- Patricia Ferguson (Maryhill & Springburn) (Lab)

Group apologies received from:

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| • Norah Campbell | Head of Skills Academy, Scotland | Creative & Cultural Skills |
| • Julie Ellen | Artistic Director/CEO | The Beacon Arts Centre |
| • Gill Maxwell | Executive Director | Scottish Music Centre |
| • Suzi Simpson | Arts & Cultural Development Officer | Scottish Refugee Council |
| • Gordon Asher | | |

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

National Theatre of Scotland - 'Dear Scotland' performance

The Group watched a performance of two monologues selected from National Theatre of Scotland's 'Dear Scotland' series – Mary Queen of Scots and Sir Walter Scott.

Scottish Youth Theatre – 'Now's the Hour' performance

Attendees viewed an excerpt from the Scottish Youth Theatre's production, 'Now's the Hour', including a musical performance.

Discussion Point - Universal Credit

Janie Nicoll and Lynda Graham delivered a presentation to the Group on the predicted impact on artists of the roll out of Universal Credit. They noted that the new system would mean funders may also need to rethink the ways in which they administer awards.

The Group agreed to return to the topic of Universal Credit and benefit changes at a later date. You can listen to the full presentation online at www.cpgonculture.com.

Panel Discussion

The discussion was chaired by David Strachan, Managing Director, Tern TV, and featured:

- Ruth Wishart, columnist and broadcaster

- Fraser Speirs, musician
- Billy Kay, writer and broadcaster
- Jamie McGrigor MSP, musician

Ruth Wishart

- RW offered a comparison between Hungary and Scotland in the way their national art is curated by the respective national Galleries.
- She pointed to the absence of Scottish playwrights, philosophers etc. across the education curriculum, with only one university employing a Chair of Scottish.
- She stressed her belief that Scottish talent only achieves a level of visibility when they produce down south. Despite a wealth of talent available to showcase.
- RW noted that independence was required to allow us to promote, understand and appreciate our cultural and artistic practice. She hoped that through doing so we could '*consign the Scottish Cringe to the dustbin*'.

Fraser Speirs

- FS gave an overview of his background and stated that he had not felt at any time that he has been disadvantaged by being Scottish or from Glasgow. He pointed to Scots throughout the world who have made a name for themselves unimpeded.
- He highlighted the work of Robert Burns as an example of a Scottish artist revered across the world.
- He stressed that great achievements have been made under the union banner and advocated a little more devolution as the answer.
- FS asserted that being Scottish is neither an advantage nor a disadvantage.

Billy Kay

- BK stated that we cannot be fully ourselves unless we have been education on our own culture. He argues that we are being pulled in different directions with regards to being Scottish.
- He pointed to Kellman and Gray, who were lambasted for arguing that appointees should have knowledge of Scottish culture.
- He noted that although revered across the world, Burns was told not to write in Scots because no one would understand it.
- BK stated: '*Our real enemies are among us, born without imagination*'.
- He highlighted plans for the 'Bus Party' project, which would be touring the country in the run up to the Referendum, offering an oral history from Winnie Ewing to Sir Alec Douglas Hume.

Jamie McGrigor

- JM noted that he considers himself to be Scottish first, but also strongly British. He stated that Robert Burns did most of his work after the Act of the Union, when a climate of prosperity was created.
- He argued that the Scottish Enlightenment, experienced during Union, allowed Scotland to flourish in a new world.
- JM stated that artistic breakthroughs in Edinburgh and Glasgow are not enough, London market necessary. He added that arts grants in Scotland are very limited and through Independence we would be shutting ourselves off from other galleries.
- He pointed to Scotland's 'advanced arts infrastructure', mentioning about the Youth Arts Strategy, Time to Shine and the Creative Scotland 10 year plan, highlighting the diversity of the Scottish arts sector and its economic importance.
- JM cautioned against the use of art as propaganda, stressing can become infused which can lead to certain artists becoming favoured by Government.

Group Discussion

The discussion was then opened up to the Group. During which:

- Matthew Zajac (theatre producer) stated that he had worked a lot in Scandinavia and noted that arts spending is considerably higher. He argued that an Independent Scotland should appreciate art for its true value, reflected in prominence in education and government. He pointed to a fundamental lack of real education in arts in culture and a subsequent lack of respect.

- Janie Nicoll (SAU) stressed that it was the feeling of people working within arts education in England that they are under siege and fighting a losing battle. She noted that Creative Scotland did not offer a 'perfect' example. She argued that Scotland has been protected from many of the large arts cuts in England.
- Bill Sweeney (University of Glasgow) stated that Scottish classical music is thought of as a myth, and that we don't know about our own classic composers. He enquired as to whether our National Companies would have a distinct strategy for Scottish culture.
- Douglas Robert highlighted having encountered similar problems to BK in attempting to get Scots language TV documentaries commissioned. He added that Scottish artists have respect internationally and art holds no boundaries, they will not be shut off with Independence.
- RW stressed that Scotland needs to give and provide opportunities for people in Scotland so they don't have to go elsewhere. She stated: *'We neglect the new at our peril'*.
- BK highlighted that the Scottish Enlightenment has not taught at university level and pointed to Professors opting to join the nationalist movement in opposition. He noted that the *'Scottish Cringe'* has led to an undervaluation of Scots across education.
- Ann Packard enquired as to how the funding gap, from the loss of major trusts such as Sainsbury's etc. would be addressed following Independence. RW replied that she saw no reason why they won't see it as an opportunity to do things different and was not sure why becoming a national state would change this.
- BK criticised the promotion of Scottish artists through British embassies.
- Lorne Boswell stated his belief that austerity is the real threat for arts in Scotland and that no Westminster political party was seeking to challenging this.
- Neil Murray (NTS) noted that since the success of *the Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, people have warmed to new theatre and helped to build an audience who is used to this.

Any Other Business/Next Meeting

- It was suggested that the next meeting may feature a performance element from the music/film sector.