



Education and Culture Committee

Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future

Voluntary Arts Scotland

Written evidence in response to Theme 3, Broadcasting and Culture

Introduction

Voluntary Arts Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education and Culture Committee's call for written evidence. This submission is in response to Theme 3, Broadcasting and Culture, and the following issues in particular:

- The benefits that could derive to Scotland if its cultural and creative output were promoted more widely;
- How Scottish cultural bodies currently work together with their counterpart bodies in the rest of the UK, and whether this relationship may change.

Executive summary

Voluntary arts groups help shape our national identity, develop artistic talent, make a significant contribution to the economy, and are at the heart of communities across Scotland; promoting creative citizenship, community engagement and wellbeing. We believe culture has a major contribution to make to all aspects of life in Scotland, but that this potential has not yet been fully realised. An overarching statement of principles recognising the value of cultural engagement and the inclusion of cultural engagement in our national policy framework and its measurement would go some way to addressing this.

Voluntary Arts Scotland

Voluntary Arts Scotland is the national development agency for all voluntary, or amateur, arts groups in Scotland. There are over ten thousand voluntary, self-led

arts groups across Scotland including choirs to country dancing, and painting to pottery groups. Voluntary Arts Scotland (as part of the UK and Republic of Ireland wide charity, Voluntary Arts) supports the people that run these groups through training, networking events and thematic briefings on areas of regulation and policy. We advocate at local and national government levels for public policy that removes barriers to participation in creative, cultural activity and for greater recognition of the contribution made by voluntary arts groups to health and wellbeing, economic development, and artistic talent.

Voluntary Arts Scotland is a member of the Culture Counts Steering Group and we endorse the submission made by Culture Counts to the Education and Culture Committee Inquiry.

Valuing culture

At Voluntary Arts Scotland we recognise not just the importance of cultural output, but who makes it – the ‘creative citizens’ running voluntary arts groups and the impact it has on those individuals, and the community around them.

Access, enjoyment and participation in creative, cultural activity supports several of the current Scottish Government National Performance Framework Outcomes including reducing inequalities, ensuring healthier lives, promoting educational attainment, supporting resilient communities and enhancing individual wellbeing. Exercising our freedom of expression allows us to make sense of the world around us, to reconcile points of difference and to develop individual talent. The right to cultural participation is, like other rights, universal, indivisible and interdependent on other rights including the right to education.

The Scottish Household Survey (2011) results showed that over two million people in Scotland regularly engage in cultural activity. While this is positive, Voluntary Arts Scotland works to promote greater active participation in creative, cultural activity and the many benefits that brings, distinct from a more passive engagement with culture as an audience member or short term community arts intervention. Many people have told us that they became a member of a voluntary arts group after

signposting from formal education (often evening classes), retiring or preparing for a professional arts career, or after taking part in a community arts project.

There is currently little quantitative data about the impact of the voluntary arts sector across Scotland but we are supportive of on-going research by Glasgow University's Centre for Population Health into the links between arts participation and wellbeing (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council).

Equality of opportunity to access and engage with culture is a fundamental human right which has implications for how we plan and fund cultural activity in the future. It should be included in Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights. The principle of public funding for culture, both for its instrumental and intrinsic value, is vital. We believe that for culture to flourish and to contribute more to the wellbeing of Scotland, a future Scottish Government (whatever the outcome of the independence referendum) should draft a nationally agreed statement of principles which assert:

- i) the value of culture in society in all its manifestations;
- ii) a human rights framework which empowers local communities to access and engage with culture, raises the ability of local government to measure cultural engagement, and holds the state to account in the realisation of access to culture;
- iii) a commitment to embed culture across public policy areas.

Constitutional future

A nation defines itself by its culture. It is part of who we are. Voluntary Arts Scotland welcomed the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs remarks that *"culture and heritage are of us all and for us all"* (June 2013 keynote address) but would like to see more detail than is currently in the White Paper about how participation in creative, cultural activity will be promoted and protected in a future Scotland.

Voluntary Arts Scotland is non-political. We advocate for a public policy environment where barriers to participation are removed— such as access to transport in rural areas, affordable rehearsal and meeting venues, accessible venues, and public

funding that is inclusive to the voluntary arts sector. Voluntary Arts Scotland is committed to supporting and developing strong local cultural infrastructure. By local cultural infrastructure we mean facilities (spaces, buildings, equipment), resources (funding, training, support), and networks. This requires recognition of the value of creative, cultural activity at national and local government levels and leadership.

Voluntary Arts has a devolved organisational structure with departments in Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. We successfully work across several devolved nations and two sovereign countries. We do not therefore foresee the implications of any constitutional change following the Independence Referendum on 18 September impacting upon our organisational governing structure.

At our recent conference at Platform Arts in Glasgow, 'Culture, Creativity and You: Why Making Matters', we hosted an Independence Referendum debate, with representatives from Yes Scotland (Christopher Silver from National Collective) and Better Together (Patricia Ferguson MSP). We want the people of Scotland to make an informed decision about the future of their country, and that includes knowing how volunteering and arts participation will fair under a continued UK government or independent Scotland.