

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

CALL FOR VIEWS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SCOTLAND'S CULTURE AND TOURISM SECTORS

SUBMISSION FROM REGIONAL SCREEN SCOTLAND

Cinema provision, and the ability to come together to share communal screen experiences, is a key factor in a community's wellbeing, confidence, and economic health.

At the point at which lockdown began, Regional Screen Scotland, with our partner Film Hub Scotland, was almost halfway through a major two year project to address gaps in cinema provision across Scotland, a project which we had been invited to develop by Screen Scotland, and to which they had contributed £500,000 in funding. The project was proving successful beyond our wildest imaginings: we had Expressions of Interest from 80 different groups and organisations across Scotland, from the smallest community centres wanting to run DVD screenings monthly, to plans to build or reopen fulltime cinemas. As we had hoped, a large number of projects were from Local Authority areas with poor existing provision, and high levels of multiple deprivation—such as the Lanarkshires, Ayrshires and Lothians.

Of course, all this activity, like all film screenings, is on hold for the duration. My plea, therefore, is that cinema, and cinema-related activities such as community screenings, are not simply lumped in with a catch-all 'leisure' category, and left to be, along with pubs and restaurants, the very last sector to be allowed to reopen.

Cinema is inclusive, egalitarian and popular—cinema going in the UK as a whole is still the most popular ticketed activity, with admissions in recent years being greater than *all* the admissions for music and sporting events put together. Cinema, at all levels, therefore, can become a highly effective tool in helping communities begin to come together, rebuild confidence and connections, and develop new ways of interacting socially. Compared with other forms of sport and leisure activities, cinema has a number of advantages: it does not face the social distancing issues that will, for some time, confront performers and sports players; it is affordable for those on low incomes (and that will be a much larger percentage of the population in the coming months); families can share experiences; friends can start to come together while still observing social distancing.

Scotland's local and community cinema sector is one of its great strengths, and one that, in normal circumstances, can be largely self-sustaining. But the greatest challenge for the sector is not the present lockdown—it is the uncertain environment into which we are all moving. Cinemas, whether private/commercial or voluntary/charitable, will need transitional help for many months to come.

Our programme, *A Cinema Near You*, has been funded as part of the Scottish Government's focus on developing the film industry in Scotland, which has led to additional annual funding and the establishment of Screen Scotland (not to be confused with RSS!). Key to our own activities has been extending the range of venues and locations which will be able to screen the new Scottish films that the Scottish Government initiative is intended to foster. In the new world we are moving towards, it will be critical that Scottish audiences can see, share and enjoy films which tell their stories, past and present, and for that we need to ensure that the momentum created by these recent interventions is not lost.

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