

Cross- Party Group on Culture and Communities and AGM

18 September 2024, 6:00PM – 7:30PM in person at Scottish Parliament and online

MINUTES

MSPs Present:

Foyso Choudhury MSP, Sharon Dowey MSP

CPG Members and Guests:

Angela Adams-Gray, Anthony Schrag (QMU), Audrey Wilson, Brian Baglow, Charlotte di Corpo (Capital Theatres), David Francis (TRACS), Eithne Ni Chonghaile (MGS), Gavin Crichton, Jan-Bert van den Berg (Artlink), John Ennis (Journeys in Design), Laura Simpson (ESW), Laura Aldridge (Sculpture House), Lubna Kerr, Lori Anderson (Culture Counts), Max Alexander (Play Radical), Mhari Robinson, Nancy Riach (ACHWS), Neil Gilmour, Orchid Liu, Raisah Ahmed, Rakasree Basu, Trish O'Grady (QMU), Virginia Radcliffe (Licketyspit), John Cairns, Alishia Farnan, Ashley Smith-Hammond, Chantal Guevara, Diane Henderson, Eva McKenzie, Jayne Smith, Matt Baker (Stove), Ola Wojtkiewicz (Creative Edinburgh), Marie Christie (Event Scotland)

Agenda Item 1

Welcome and apologies.

Apologies

Clare Adamson MSP, Michael Marra MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP, Claire Baker MSP.

Agenda Item 2

Review and approve the minutes of the last meeting of 28 February 2024 – Moved by Foyso Choudhury MSP, seconded by Sharon Dowey MSP

Agenda Item 3

AGM Administration

- Election of Convenor – Foyso Choudhury MSP – moved by Sharon Dowey MSP seconded by Lori Anderson
- Election of Deputy Convenor – Claire Adamson MSP and Sharon Dowey MSP – moved by Foyso Choudhury MSP seconded by Sharon Dowey MSP and Lori Anderson
- Election of Secretariat – Culture Counts - moved by Foyso Choudhury MSP seconded by Sharon Dowey MSP

The past few weeks have seen our artists, performers, writers and producers deeply unsettled by threats to key funding. Whilst there is relief that these decisions have

been reversed the focus of the next Cross-Party Group will look at the impacts and vital work our artists do in our communities and what is at risk if this work is not valued, understood or supported. We will hear from four guest speakers, who will provide insights into their work in this area and what it means for our communities.

Agenda Item 4 – Presentation Virginia Radcliffe, Artistic Director/CEO of [Licketyspit](#)

- All have been impacted by the recent upheaval of funding.
- Virginia is Artistic Director/CEO of Licketyspit, a theatre company whose vision is that child-centred, inclusive theatre and drama-led play become an integral part of children's daily lives. Virginia is a theatre director and children's playwright who began to specialise in early years theatre in the mid-90s, after an extensive career as an actor. She founded Licketyspit in 2004.
- People become artists because they are compelled to.
- Many don't have much money or security of other industries.
- Positive effects on people's lives and also addresses trauma
- Secret of success – experience as a collaborator and theatre maker – best way to make meaningful theatre for children was to ask them.
- Set up a children and family network.
- Story play – all we need is each other. Inclusive and fair – promotes kindness, joy, hope and self-expression. Storyplay has emerged from the powerful synergy between actors and children as imaginary play experts.
- Radical as Lickety Leap – in a place of need improved confidence, language skills. Open doors to imaginary play world.
- Mission now is to open doors to imaginary playworlds to unlock the limitless possibilities in children. Equally beneficial for adults
- Works out of 7 community hubs in areas of high poverty across Glasgow
- What you say matters
- 1 in 4 children growing up in poverty. Children living in poverty in Scotland have led Licketyspit to a kind of holy grail in Storyplay that can truly bring about transformation through creativity.
- In such a challenging time – poverty makes thriving difficult.
- Arts and culture are as vital as physical exercise in health and well-being.
- Rejection of limited labelling in society.
- Artists can and should be at the vanguard of social prescribing.
- Virginia read out many quotes from participants of impacts and power of the work:
 - *“The response to LicketyLeap was extraordinary. Children who were considered elective mutes started talking.”*

Agenda Item 5 Presentation Laura Aldridge, [artist](#)

- Laura Aldridge is an artist who works in sculpture, ceramics and glass
- Laura is in her studio every day.
- She never wanted to be just an artist. In addition to her own practice, Laura works with Artlink, Edinburgh and has done for 17 years. This is the only job she has ever done where she is paid to work as an artist.

- Her work derives from her deep-seated instinct for colour and texture - Image from a sensory workshop.
- Works with people with profound and multiple learning difficulties and they find ways to be creative together. This way of working is informative to her practice
- Communicates with light, sound, colour, play, feelings
- She is one of the founders and Lead Artists of Sculpture House - a long-term artist run project in Ferguslie Park, Paisley.
- Works with other artists and doesn't know many artists who work alone
- Wanted a better option than working with a private landlord, having to deal with a leaky roof. Renfrewshire Council provided a 20 yr lease £1 a year
- The house is set up like a house with kitchen, living room and dining space so it is welcoming and open and also has studio spaces within so it provides a circular benefit. It is like utopia
- Open and outward looking – community can come in and work with artists.
- Funding through Creative Scotland is unstable
- Important to have a bedrock and anchor link.
- Privilege to be an artist but difficult to keep going.
- Will be at Sculpture House for next 20 years.

Agenda Item 6 Max Alexander, [Play Radical](#)

- Max Alexander is an artist, play worker and thinker.
- Max's work centres play and connection with a particular focus on autistic, neurodivergent and disabled experiences.
- Play Radical aims to create space to celebrate and recognise the infinite ways we play, communicate and relate to each other as both children and adults.
- Play Radical is an organisation of 1 person.
- Max's own personal circumstances and that of who Max works with impacts and influences the work.
- Freelancer – seeking work, writing proposals for work, meeting people all falls on Max.
- Communicating the value is always a challenge as this type of work doesn't fit with the norms.
- Works with people who often don't have verbal language.
- Value lies in the ephemeral, playing, creating, and being.
- This work and art is rich and meaningful life
- Francois Matarasso said – "*Culture is intrinsic to human needs.*"
- Works with people with autism and this is a vast community who often don't have access to work like this. Also, up to 7 times more likely to die from, suicide
- There are huge barriers to this work.
- Radical Play has recently published Speculative Care Futures. The report is written from the perspective of imagined social care facility providing day services for adults described as having Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) and/or as Sensory Beings. The premise is that a small staff team at the centre have set to explore how they might change the culture of their service to better reflect who their service users are and how staff and service users could share space in more authentic, accessible and connected ways.

<https://playradical.com/portfolio-2/speculative-care-futures/>

- This was supported by Independent Arts Projects, funded by Creative Scotland through the Culture Collective and is used in teaching of students and supporting workers.
- What is special about the report is that only an artist could create this work.
- Needs time and space to do the work
- Also, immeasurable impact of work.
- Non – cohesive community

Agenda Item 7 Raisah Ahmed, screen [Writer/Director](#)

- Worked in film and tv industry for 13 years. From a working class Muslim immigrant family. Was a student activist
- Often people don't expect to see her in this sector. Don't see people like her represented. People in a room often don't expect her to be there. Never considered film and tv as something she could do. Never saw people like her telling stories. Felt that film and tv wasn't for people of colour
- Perceptions of communities can impact on what young people can and cannot do.
- Outside of Scotland people don't think POC exist in Scotland as not seeing it on screen representing Scotland.
- Can lead to imposter syndrome.
- Separation of CS and SS talent development agency. Having an agency focused on art form has been really beneficial
- Standstill funding has been challenging – has impacted who can access the sector and afford it. Detrimental to growth, cannot develop talent if they are falling away.
- Can't imagine other sectors operating in this way.
- We shouldn't have to say working in this sector is a privilege and should be a right for everyone to be an artist if that is what they want to be.
- Spending 75% of time wondering how you will make money next month.
- Art forms flourish when investment grows. And a flourishing sector brings people back – Douglas McKinnon Good Omens for example.
- Broadcasting work still predominantly commissioned in London.
- David Smith at Screen Scotland working on that with Ofcom

Asks from a screen perspective:

- Investment - In Screen Scotland (increase the budget which has been at a standstill since 2018), In talent, In ensuring every part of the industry is growing
- Lobbying - Of broadcasters - more commissions from Scotland based production companies working with Scottish/Scotland based talent - tighter restrictions on non-Scottish companies using regional funding to get commissions but not investing in Scottish talent.
- Authenticity - We need ALL voices to be represented - The representation of Scotland on screen is incredibly white.
- Financial Security - Creatives need to create - we can't do that if the industry is failing, work isn't coming in, we're leaving the industry because of lack of financial stability. It's the groups that aren't represented that leave first. Possibly we look at things like Universal basic income, the pilot of this done in Ireland might be a good thing to explore.
- The ability to fail - What is meant by that is the risk averse attitude of publicly funded broadcasters needs to stop. Because risk is the word often given to

underrepresented talent. Public funded broadcasters should be commissioning newer voices and not just relying on the tried and tested.

- Upskilling of our talent - Take advantage of global talent coming in and have Scottish talent shadow for a day, have set visits, use those coming in to do more than just provide jobs to crew and ensure that HOD's in Scotland are given a chance of working on those productions.

Agenda Item 8 Questions and discussion

- Are we doing enough for our home-grown talent
- Presentations were emotional
- Always a challenge to measure the value – Max said it is immeasurable
- Have to keep justifying ourselves and our economic value to decision makers. Culture is not an Industry
- There is a need to move the conversation on
- We have fallen into patterns where we need to or fall into speaking in terms of economics.
- Human value can be impossible to measure such as the happiness of communities. The conversations we have can end in toxic rhetoric due to a lack of ability to express ourselves. We would all benefit from reframing the language.
- Should be looking at prevention.
- We need spaces for artists to create art, yet arts is often the first thing to go.
- View in society can often be that arts are not to be taken seriously. Perception that it is not a serious way to spend life.
- Applications can be a full-time job. Can take 3 months to complete an application. Why is it so difficult. Can be a lack of trust. Creative Scotland asks questions that ask about things without answers.
- Artists are not social workers – put in a huge amount of work. What artists can do is transformational.
- Artist run, work for free, hours not spent on practise and other work.
- Current funding models force us to compete
- Compare amount of investment compared to other European countries we are well below the average spend. Finland had a required percentage of spend on artists.
- Licketyspit has a practice that people can take forward and adopt
- Not one way of doing art, idea or approach – need many different voices and ideas given space to make a difference. Holy grail does not exist.
- Cannot keep asking people to push at the same door.
- Economic models exist that are designed to keep people poor.
- Still having the same conversations.
- Often need to do activism before the work – can't be up to us to fix a problem we did not create.
- Screen Scotland has been open to listening.
- Government is looking at options and there is a planned review of Creative Scotland – need to keep pushing and determine how we prioritise
- Question –What will the world be like for our children in 10 years time?
- We need to reframe things and think about the long term and sector we want to see in the future

Apologies we did not get the chance to hear from everyone online but some of the comments included:

- We need to re-evaluate how we evaluate the arts!
- It's hard to examine art in an economical sense because it is by its nature a relatively intangible thing. how do you measure a feeling or an experience?"
- Art is reflective of society and we need to continue to make it inclusive, so that we can see ourselves represented in media. it becomes redundant when only people who have privilege can make it.
- art for arts sake
- We would never have had YBA of the 1980's if the current attitudes were as prevalent in the past.
- Recommended book by Justin O'Connor *Culture is not an industry*, Manchester University Press - <https://manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/9781526171269/>

Agenda Item 9 Any other business

None

Agenda Item 10

Date of Next Meeting – TBC