

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 15 May 2024
9th Meeting, 2024 (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 20 September 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government, and 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 new written submissions from the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland, the Petitioner, and the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [The Committee received two written submissions prior to its last consideration of the petition.](#)
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, 27 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

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

Clerks to the Committee
May 2024

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 20 September 2024

The Convener: That brings us on to the petition that we very nearly started earlier but stopped midstride. PE2030, lodged by Denise Hooper, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the funding it provides to the Scotland + Venice project and ensure that Scottish artists can contribute to the Venice biennale in 2024.

The petitioner notes that Scotland has participated as its own entity in the Venice biennale since 2003, with people attending the festival specifically to see the Scottish contributions.

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development has responded to the petition, saying that the decision to pause involvement in the biennale in 2024 is to allow for an important period of reflection and review. The review was expected to begin during the summer just past and was to include a process of sectoral engagement to explore new approaches to the project for the longer term.

The petitioner has also provided a submission highlighting recent comments by the First Minister about the value of culture, and is urging a greater focus on the benefits of Scottish culture and arts being promoted on such a prestigious international stage.

I am tempted to ask what the important period of reflection and review was about. I presume that it was on wider considerations than just this one contributory event. Do colleagues have any suggestions? We could certainly write to the Scottish Government asking for an update on its work to its international culture strategy.

The Government submission refers to the decision

“to pause ... involvement”

to allow

“for an important period of reflection and review.”

I would be interested to know what that means. What was important about it and how long is it reflecting, and what is it reflecting on that is important?

We might also write to Creative Scotland to seek information on the review of the Scotland + Venice project. I would also be interested to know what the outcomes of our past participation have been. I do not think that that is terribly clear. What have we seen? Maybe Creative Scotland can tell us how that compares with our participation in other events. It may well be that that is what the Scottish Government is reflecting on. If we heard from all of them, that would be helpful.

Does anybody else want to comment?

Maurice Golden: In addition to that, it would be useful to ask Creative Scotland to include what monitoring metrics it uses to analyse success or otherwise.

CPPP/S6/24/9/7

Foyso! Choudhury: We should ask for a timeline as well.

The Convener: I thought that you were going to suggest that we go on a fact-finding visit to Venice, Mr Choudhury.

Foyso! Choudhury: I was about to ask when we are going there. [Laughter.]

The Convener: Okay. We will write to all those organisations, if members agree.

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I thank Denise Hooper for the petition. We will be investigating the issue further.

Annexe C: Written submissions

Scottish Government submission of 11 October 2023

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

I write in response to your correspondence of 21 September 2023 regarding Scotland + Venice and which also sought an update on the development of an International Culture Strategy.

Scotland + Venice

As the principal funding organisation for the Scotland + Venice project, Creative Scotland are commissioning a review of Scotland's participation in the Venice Biennale, on behalf of the Scotland + Venice partners: British Council; National Galleries of Scotland; Architecture & Design Scotland; V&A Dundee; Scottish Government; and Creative Scotland themselves.

Creative Scotland published an invitation to tender on 20 September, seeking professional services to undertake the review. The review is anticipated to run from November 2023 through to May 2024 and will comprise a mixture of desk research, interviews with key stakeholders, and targeted sectoral engagement sessions.

The scope of the review is anticipated to cover the relevance and impact of the project; the commissioning and delivery model; the partnership and governance model; ethics and sustainability; and finance and budgets.

The work will be overseen by a steering group made up of representatives of the Scotland + Venice partner organisations and other invited stakeholders with interests in Scotland + Venice. The outputs of the review will be shared publicly.

The review will provide key research findings and present and evaluate options for change, underpinned by a clear resourcing/financial strategy. The outputs of the review will be presented to the Scotland + Venice partnership Board for consideration. Recommendations from the review are intended to inform plans from 2026 onwards.

In March 2023 the Scotland + Venice partners announced their decision to pause the project and to carry out this review. As the committee are aware, there are no plans to participate in the 2024 Biennale. Plans to participate in 2025 are under review.

International Culture Strategy

In the Programme for Government published on 5 September this year the Scottish Government's commitment to publish an International Culture Strategy was restated. We are currently aiming to publish the strategy by March 2024.

Earlier this year we undertook a survey to seek stakeholder views and input which will inform the shape of the strategy. We received over 60 responses from a wide range of organisations and individuals across the Scottish culture sector and more

widely. Scottish Government analysts are currently considering the responses received and compiling an analytical report on findings that will be published in the coming months. Alongside the report we will publish responses received, where responders have given us permission to do so.

We will ensure that any of these outputs, as well as the final published strategy, are shared with the Committee if they wish.

Directorate for Culture and Major Events

Creative Scotland submission of 19 October 2023

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

In March 2023, it was announced that the Board of Creative Scotland and the Scotland + Venice partners were pausing on the Scotland + Venice project in 2024 to allow for a period of reflection and review.

While this was a difficult decision given the project's significant achievements, in the current financial and planning environment, it felt necessary to review the current model and consider the project's position within the wider scope of international opportunities available to Scotland's art and architecture communities.

The Review of the Scotland + Venice Project

Creative Scotland published the invitation to tender for the review of Scotland + Venice on 20 September 2023.

Creative Scotland are commissioning the review, on behalf of the Scotland + Venice partners and will determine the future viability of the project and the effectiveness of the current approach. It will also address the resourcing and capacity challenges that Scotland + Venice has faced in previous years and in context of the climate crisis, will consider how Scotland + Venice can achieve Net Zero.

It is anticipated that the review will cover the relevance and impact of the project, the current commissioning and delivery model, the partnership and governance model, the ethics, sustainability, finances, and budgets.

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.

Work is expected to run from November 2023 to April 2024, comprising of desk research, interviews with key stakeholders and targeted sector engagement. This work will be overseen by a steering group, made up of representatives of the partner organisations and key invited stakeholders. Once complete, the review will be shared with a range of stakeholders and be made available to the public on Creative Scotland's website.

More information on the review can be found on our website:

[Creative Scotland | Invitation to tender for a review of the Scotland + Venice project](#)

Outcomes of Scotland's past participation at the Venice Biennale

The previous evaluation of Scotland + Venice was undertaken in 2017/18 and covers the years 2009 to 2017.

The brief for this evaluation sought to:

Identify the importance, reach and relevance of the project, to Scotland and its visual arts sector

Evaluate the delivery models and determine the strengths and weaknesses

Establish whether the project is regarded as an international priority by and for the sector

Explore whether there are alternative models for delivering the project and whether these would achieve equivalent/better outcomes

Determine whether there are opportunities beyond the project for Creative Scotland and partners to strategically develop the international profile of the visual arts sector in Scotland.

Methodology included a review of policy documents/reports, interviews with key partners, participants and the wider sector, a focus groups with partner media teams and those working in the visual arts sector and benchmarking of the participation of other countries which were Wales and New Zealand.

The evaluation revealed a consistently positive picture of Scotland + Venice. It presented key findings that included a strong belief from stakeholders that the project should continue to be a priority for partners to invest in, that participation in the project has strengthened artists profile and connections both in Scotland and internationally, that the project is important in raising the profile of Scottish contemporary arts and that the project represented good use of public money.

The recommendations from the evaluation were used when planning the approach to Scotland + Venice 2019 and long-term ambitions for the project were set, including building stronger links between the presentations at the Venice Art and Architecture Biennales.

The full evaluation is available on our website:

[Creative Scotland | Evaluation of Scotland + Venice \(2009-2017\)](#)

Metrics for success

The metrics for success link to the project's objectives for Scotland + Venice. These are:

International opportunity

To make a critically relevant contribution to international discourse about art and architecture and to generate international opportunities for Scotland's creative sector.

Excellence and ambition

To make a strong, globally relevant, and distinctive contribution to La Biennale which, in turn, nurtures and promotes the best of Scottish art, architecture, and design.

Global position and recognition

To strengthen Scotland's reputation as an ambitious, innovative, connected centre for the arts and architecture, internationally open to new ideas and partnerships.

Public Engagement

To strengthen public interest in and engagement with contemporary art and architecture from Scotland.

The Creative Workforce

To centre and support the creative and professional development of a diverse range of artists, architects, curators and producers.

Ethical working

To maintain and develop a proactive and progressive approach to equalities, diversity, access, inclusion and environmental sustainability across the project.

Governance

To achieve best value for money within clear governance, management, and reporting structures

Comparison to other events

To our knowledge there are few if any comparable projects of this scale and scope currently being undertaken in Scotland. Where we have conducted comparative evaluations of Scotland + Venice in the context of other similar international initiatives the project has been found to be delivering strong outcomes and value for money.

Creative Scotland has plans to establish an International Strategy to guide its future work in this area. This will be informed by the Scottish Government's International Culture Strategy which is expected to be published in Spring 2024.

In the meantime, Creative Scotland sees opportunities to share, learn and connect with others as being key aspects to international work. We want artists, creative practitioners and cultural organisations to have opportunities to deepen their practice through international dialogue, exchange and collaboration - broadening knowledge, insight and innovation. Scotland's culture and creative sector need opportunities to maximise the potential of international markets, and we want high-quality work created in Scotland to be widely showcased and enjoyed. We believe Scotland is an important global centre for culture and creativity which is diverse, has strong traditional roots and an appetite for experimentation and innovation and our approach to international work is aligned with our other key priorities of EDI, Fair Work and Environmental Sustainability.

Petitioner submission of 17 October 2023

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

The Scottish Government's submission of 11 October 2023 stating that a formal review of funding will take place with likely outcome and recommendations being taken forward in 2026 is deeply concerning. It means that Scotland may not be represented at Venice Biennale at least until 2027. That is an outrage.

When Scotland needs to be put front and centre it is relegated and at considerable expense to the taxpayer. In my view, this is a perverse decision. It undermines confidence in public bodies. It is just wasteful and dare I say lacks any gumption.

In his address to the 2023 SNP conference, Humza Yousaf announced that investment in Scotland's arts and culture will be more than doubled over the next five years. He went on to say that "if politics is about choices, I choose to ensure that Scotland's arts and culture are supported to grow at home, and be seen across the world." This announcement should allow a greater flexibility for Scotland's participation at the Venice Biennale.

Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture submission of 18 December 2023

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

I am writing to update the committee on progress of the International Culture Strategy, to follow on from the information submitted on 12 October in response to petition PE2030.

A public consultation survey closed on 12 May and received a range of responses from both organisations and individuals. The aim of the consultation was to gather views on the culture and creative sector's needs, aspirations and motivations in terms of international activity, in order to shape the content of the strategy.

Today we have published an analytical report of the consultation responses [International Culture Strategy - Consultation Analysis Report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/international-culture-strategy-consultation-analysis-report/pages/introduction.aspx), which has been produced by Scottish Government analysts.

My officials are now using this analysis to support development of the strategy. This strategy will look to support the sector's international ambitions and ensure that barriers to achieving those ambitions are addressed.

I will be happy keep the committee apprised as the strategy develops.

ANGUS ROBERTSON MSP

**Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture
written submission of 5 April 2024**

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

I am writing to update the committee on progress of the International Culture Strategy, to follow on from the information submitted on 12 October in response to PE2030.

The Scottish Government committed to publish the International Culture Strategy in its 2023-24 Programme for Government. The new strategy was published on 28 March 2024 and is firmly focussed on the development of the culture and creative sector and how international activity can support that. It builds on existing activity, but explores additional opportunities and sets out a policy rationale for why Scottish Government considers international cultural activity to be important.

The International Culture Strategy has been informed by responses to a public consultation held in 2023. [The consultation analysis report](#), and the responses received, have been utilised in the development of the new strategy alongside input from a range of policy interests across the Scottish Government. Key public bodies and culture stakeholders reviewed a version of the draft at the end of February, their input was considered and included in the final draft.

A debate will take place on Tuesday 16 April to enable the Scottish Parliament to consider Scotland's International Culture Strategy and its vision and aims to support the culture and creative sector's international ambitions and potential. Please see a link to the International Culture Strategy here – [Ministerial foreword - Inspiring Connections: Scotland's International Culture Strategy \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

Yours sincerely

ANGUS ROBERTSON