

CREATIVE SCOTLAND REPORT- NOVEMBER 2009

PUBLIC MEETING, PERTH

On the 5th of October organisations and practitioners from the cultural sector heard further details on the progress being made toward Creative Scotland at the second public meeting in a series of four. As our members know, the SAU does not oppose the principle of reform or the establishment of a new agency. However we have at length laid out our reservations on this and the previous administration's plans, specifically their inability to assure Scotland's visual and applied artists that they will receive more and not less support in the future.

Richard Holloway spoke of the long gestation of Creative Scotland as a good thing, allowing the sector to "grieve for the old paradigm" and adjust to the new. The SAU is aware of no such paradigm shift, just anxiety and inertia that have crept into the sector during an artificially protracted process that ballooned due to the inadequacies of the Scottish Government's Creative Scotland Bill. The establishment of Creative Scotland 2009 Ltd showed that work could continue with or without a bill. That company's chair, Ewan Brown, stated in his speech and for the first time in public that Creative Scotland will have a "new and broader remit", something successive Ministers for Culture have always denied.

PERSPECTIVES FORUM

On the same day, the new Creative Scotland Perspectives online forum opened with a provocative essay from Prof. Hans Abbing, stating that it is in the sector's best interests to restrict the number of professional artists and phase out state support of creative practitioners. This essay and the ones to follow are written by third parties not involved in the establishment of Creative Scotland and are intended as stimuli for discussion. While we acknowledge that the views of Prof. Abbing are not those of Creative Scotland, his framing of the issue is both confused and deeply negative.

The means by which an artist (of any discipline) makes a living is of fundamental importance when discussing how to encourage and sustain their profession. The premise that the only form of State intervention is a national executive's commitment of money forms the spine of this essay. On the contrary, there are clearly numerous and subtle forms of intervention at many levels of government. We believe that the current priority for artists and their representatives is to engage directly with politicians and public servants (in the Scottish Government, the Development Agencies and the Local Authorities), to secure and promote the role of the practitioner within all Scottish cultural structures. This engagement should focus on artists articulating their needs for a stronger position from which to pursue their art practices and be involved in formulation of training, support, protection from exploitation and

appropriate remuneration for their work.

Unfortunately the Perspectives forum appears to be promoting academic peer debate and discussion to a predetermined agenda with no guarantee of influence. The forum is being moderated by Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen employees, a considerable number of whom will be made redundant by the advent of Creative Scotland (see below). No representative of the Scottish Government or Creative Scotland 2009 Ltd is participating in an open manner. And we read that after a mere two weeks of discussion on support of the creative practitioner from a tiny sample of just twenty-five contributors, a report was prepared for Creative Scotland. All this could be seen as a cynical attempt to distract creative practitioners from the real parliamentary, legislative and inter-organisational processes shaping Creative Scotland and to pay lip-service to sector consultation.

EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING & CULTURE COMMITTEE

On the 12th of October the Scottish Parliamentary ELLC Committee delivered their report on the Public Services Reform Bill at Stage 1 of consideration. The Committee broadly endorsed part 3 of the bill, bringing Creative Scotland into being, citing further delay as damaging to the sector. However the committee noted the SAU's written and oral evidence and agreed with us that the Scottish Government's contention that the word "artist" cannot be used in the wording of the legislation is invalid. To quote the relevant portion:

Definitions

63. The issue of the lack of definitions of terms such as 'art', 'culture' and 'creativity', which caused concern during the consideration of the previous bill, remained a concern for some. The Scottish Government holds the view, as it did during consideration of the previous bill, that such definitions would not be helpful due to their likely restrictive nature.

64. The Scottish Artists Union remarked—

"[...] it has been said that the principal reason why the word "artist" has not been used is that using that word would result in an obligation to define it. However, as we have already heard, the Government is satisfied that it does not need to define words such as "art", "culture" or "creativity". That is welcome; we believe that, too. Equally, we believe that the word "artist" does not need to be defined but that it needs to be used in the Bill if artists are to be at the heart of what Creative Scotland will do—the minister has taken great pains of late to say that they will be there. If artists are to be at the heart of what Creative Scotland does, their absence from the Bill seems a little bit strange."

65. When the Minister gave evidence to the Committee he commented on this point, stating that—

"[...] there is a focus on the creator. That can be defined in many ways. One of the difficulties of defining "the artist" in legal terms is that we might end up with a definition that includes only a man or woman with a

paintbrush, so we have to be slightly careful in the language that is used. However, I do not believe that we can have a cultural policy that does not have at its heart the artist and the creator—you cannot have a railway without trains.”

66. The Committee notes that the UK Department of Media, Culture and Sport defines 13 industries as making up the creative industries. The Committee also notes the differences of opinion in the sector in trying to define specific terms and is therefore of the view that attempting to provide definitions of terms such as ‘art’, ‘culture’ and ‘creativity’ in the Bill would be overly restrictive and possibly counter-productive.

67. The Committee notes the point raised by the Scottish Artists Union with regard to the absence of the word ‘artist’ from the Bill and believes that, as with other terms used in the Bill, the term could be used in the Bill, or in guidance, without need for a specific definition.

The report’s full text can be read at:

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/ellc/reports-09/edr09-psrb_stage1.htm

CREATIVE SCOTLAND BUSINESS MODEL

On the 23rd of October the Creative Scotland business model was released. It is useful to have a working document with which to engage and the SAU sees value in questioning historic assumptions and in endeavouring to ensure that practitioners working in those areas between disciplines that resist easy definition have an agency that can respond to their needs. Creative Scotland cite the importance of flexibility and partnership working throughout their published business model but risk bringing into being a "jack of all trades, master of none" organisation.

We learn that aside from a Chief Executive and Directors of Finance & Operations and Communication, Creative Scotland will have three Directors of Creative Development. This trio, as well as the various Portfolio Managers and Development Officers representing the "outward face" of Creative Scotland, will all share generic job descriptions within their tier of the organisation. No guaranteed funding allocations or attributable budgets are mentioned. The Directors will share responsibility for all the art forms, their individual roles remaining fluid. In the case of Managers, these will have no permanent staff and their job content will mix artistic specialism with roles in policy-making, geographical development, programme management, sponsorship and so on. Officers may have particular expertise but likewise will be expected to work in any art form or policy area on a project-by-project basis. As stated in the Public Services Reform Bill Creative Scotland will have thirty-five less staff than the existing bodies. And as the SAU has feared the Creative Industries are given premature and unwarranted emphasis, with one Creative Director, two Portfolio Managers and four Development Officers receiving creative industry assignments in this model, the only area of practice to get such treatment.

Colleagues in other unions will doubtless be representing the full-time employees of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen during the transfer to Creative Scotland. However it is clear that freelance staff with specialist knowledge, involved in art forms that many pursue as a career and for which all foster an abiding passion are the most likely to go, while those who stay will become something more akin to civil servants. Creative Scotland 2009 Ltd has long maintained that the task before it is merely to provide a skeleton that the eventual Creative Scotland executives and board will flesh out. Yet this business model names - with Ministerial approval - creative industries as an area of especial importance ahead of any given art form and assigns roles to its development. As such another valuable opportunity to assure our members that visual and applied arts will remain at the heart of Creative Scotland has been lost. Practitioners in other areas- film, theatre, music, literature and so on- will surely share in this disappointment.

The Scottish Artists Union will be seeking answers from Creative Scotland 2009 Ltd on the following questions:

1. The SAU knows from professional and personal experience that it is not encouraging generalism but rather providing an environment in which specialists can readily collaborate that offers the best means of support for artists. The fact that this business model does not resemble that of any existing organisation is emphasised as a recommendation for it. Why must Creative Scotland diverge from the best practice of its antecedents?
2. The SAU is dismayed by the emphasis upon Creative Industry, the very thing perennially forewarned by ours and other unions and hotly denied by government. Can an explanation be given for the assigning of roles to Creative Industry (rather than education, audience development, equalities or any of a host of other vital aspects of the new agency's work), despite the Creative Scotland 2009 Ltd narrative that such decisions were not theirs to make?
3. Of course we speak for visual and applied artists but our final question could be put forward on behalf of any and all art forms. Discounting the various core funded organisations, how is the budget for the professional development of individual creative practitioners retained within this generic, project-by-project model?