

culturecounts

The campaign to highlight the value of culture in Scotland

Commission on Parliamentary Reform Written evidence submitted by Culture Counts

Introduction

Culture Counts is a group of over 40 umbrella associations and organisations from across the arts, screen, heritage and creative industries in Scotland. The group formed in 2011 to advocate for the value and importance of culture to life in Scotland. More information can be found at www.culturecounts.scot.

The Culture Counts principles are:

- Cultural expression is an individual right and supports a better understanding of our own and others' identities.
- Culture is fundamental to our quality of life.
- Culture is a powerful force for renewal, regeneration and sustainability. Culture can bring economic benefits to individuals, communities and the nation.
- Culture makes important contributions to improving the learning, health, wellbeing, confidence and quality of life for individuals and for our communities.
- Culture is crucial in the development of a skilled and imaginative population.
- Culture encourages understanding, value and enjoyment of our environment.
- Culture raises the profile of Scotland at home and abroad, connecting Scotland to the world.

Submission

Culture Counts welcomes the opportunity to submit this written evidence to the Commission on Parliamentary Reform and we have responded below to the three themes outlined in the call.

Engagement

Culture Counts has been pleased to engage directly with a number of MSPs and with the Parliament through the Cross Party Group on Culture. We have appreciated the ease of engaging through these channels.

“Culture however is underrepresented in the Parliamentary structure, having no standalone presence at Committee level and having only passing mention as an indicator in the National Performance Framework, but not as one of our sixteen desired national outcomes.” At the start of this Parliamentary Session, we were very concerned to see that Culture was removed entirely from the new Committee structure and it took some time to reinstate the presence of this vital sector.

We have not found it easy to engage actively with the work of Committees across broader policy areas, in terms of discussing programmes of work and responding to Committee business. While we have submitted written evidence, we have not found a channel to follow-up this engagement and participate more fully.

Distinct Identity

It is not always publicly clear how responsibilities towards Culture are divided between Holyrood, Westminster and Local Authorities. Given the diversity and breadth of the cultural sector, there are a number of public agencies, civil service departments, politicians and parliamentary structures involved, which sometimes crossover. For example, while Culture is generally a devolved issue, Broadcasting is reserved and there is therefore a crossover in activity in the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee at Holyrood and the Culture, Media and Sport Committee in Westminster. These complexities are not always clear in Parliamentary information or in the media.

Checks and Balances

We appreciate that the role of the Committees is to hold Ministers to account but it is not always clear how this works in practice and what the structures and checks are. We are unsure how public agencies as well as relevant organisations and individuals are invited to participate in Committee proceedings and how Committee business is shaped to ensure it encompasses the rights and views of the people of Scotland.