

Cultural rights and the remit of the Cultural Commission

Consultation response to the Cultural Commission
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The Equality Network is a national network of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) organisations and individuals in Scotland working for LGBT equality. We are funded by the Scottish Executive Equality Unit to help the voices of LGBT people to be heard in national policy-making in Scotland. We welcome the opportunity to comment briefly on the Cultural Commission's current consultation.

Our response is based on discussion with people involved in some of the LGBT cultural organisations in Scotland: **Glasgay!**, **OurStory Scotland**, and **Remember When**. We are very grateful to those organisations for their input to this response. For more expert LGBT community input to the Cultural Commission's work, we encourage the Commission to contact these and other LGBT cultural organisations in Scotland directly – please see the annex to this response for more details.

Cultural rights

There is a popular idea that some segments of the LGBT communities (in particular, gay men) have historically been significantly involved in some strands of cultural activity, such as theatre. This assumption misses a key fact: that in the past any such involvement has never been on the LGBT communities' own terms. Consideration of how few gay actors and performers, even today, are publicly 'out' shows how marginalised the true identities of LGBT people have been.

Cultural activity portraying or involving LGBT people has in the past been mainly or entirely on the terms of the non-LGBT majority population, rather than portraying our own identities openly and

honestly as we experience them. Projects such as Glasgay! and OurStory Scotland (see annex) are now changing this by portraying LGBT people on our own terms, and are enabling LGBT people to become involved in cultural activity, again on our own terms as 'out' LGBT people.

Similar barriers to cultural representation and inclusion have been experienced by other marginalised communities, and this is unacceptable in a Scotland which aspires to be a country of inclusion and equality. We suggest that there should be a cultural right of **representation**, along the lines of "Every community in Scotland should have the opportunity to be represented in the arts on their own terms".

In addition, the right of **opportunity**, suggested on the Commission's website, does not as currently formulated capture the right to be able to realise one's creative potential on one's own terms. An opportunity for an LGBT person (or someone from any other community) to take part in cultural activity in a way that does not allow them to express their identity is not enough. We suggest that the right be reworded as "Everyone living in Scotland should have an equal opportunity to realise their full creative potential and identity."

We have suggested 'Everyone living in Scotland' rather than 'Every citizen of Scotland' because the latter is not well-defined or inclusive: does it include other EU citizens living in Scotland, for example, or asylum seekers?

Cultural responsibilities

The cultural responsibilities suggested on the Commission's website include that citizens (again we would prefer 'all people in Scotland') should take responsibility for 'tolerance'. Tolerance is simply not enough. LGBT people do not want to be 'tolerated'; neither do other communities. We all share the responsibility in Scotland of creating a society of mutual **respect**, and we strongly suggest that **respect** is the key responsibility that ought to be promoted, in place of 'tolerance'. An expansion of this keyword might be "Diverse cultures in Scotland will treat each other with mutual respect".

Cultural entitlements

In line with our suggestions for cultural rights above, we suggest the following entitlements.

“Members of diverse communities in Scotland should have the opportunity to see their own community represented and to learn about it”.

Support for this entitlement would include support for specific community cultural events organised from within communities, such as Glasgay! Equally important are projects which record, in people’s own words and images, the lives and histories of people within communities, such as the OurStory Scotland, Remember When, and Lesbian Archive and Information Centre projects (see annex). What is needed in particular here is ways of making those records accessible to people across Scotland – for example, museums could support website-based online cataloguing, and where possible, online access to the recorded material. A good example here is the British Sound Archive in London.

“Members of diverse communities should have the opportunity to participate in cultural activity in a way that affirms their identity and community culture.”

One way to support this entitlement is to encourage projects such as the collaboration this year between OurStory Scotland and the 7:84 Theatre Company. This brings together volunteers from a marginalised community with theatre professionals, and is a cost-effective way of developing cultural skills and experiences within a community (please see the submission to your consultation from OurStory Scotland for more details).

The Commission’s remit

Institutional infrastructure

Funding for the arts in Scotland seems at present to be lagging behind recent increases in England. LGBT people have made a considerable contribution in the past to cultural activity, but as noted above, not as ourselves on our own terms. Funding for LGBT community cultural

activity, as such, has been very limited, and this is replicated for other marginalised communities. **This historical discrimination against support for cultural activity within communities that face social prejudice needs to be addressed by a funding strategy as part of Scotland's key aim of creating a diverse country that is welcoming to all.**

Consideration of repeat funding should take into account the prior success record of the applicant organisation, including its success in supporting the identified cultural rights and entitlements. It is important that funding is available across Scotland, including outwith the cities and large towns, but also within the cities for projects based in urban communities – the LGBT communities for example have a particular and specific urban presence.

As we have noted above, support for joint work between professionals and community volunteers is a very good way of opening up diverse cultural activity to participants and to others.

Services and access to them

As noted above, **we recommend prioritising improvements to the public availability of cultural and historical material from Scotland's diverse communities.** Museums and archives, both at national and at local level, need to reflect the diversity of our communities, and also need to improve access to material. The City of Edinburgh Council's support for the Remember When project (see annex) is a good example here – it is in the process of developing a permanent archive of oral history interviews, documents and other material recording the histories of Edinburgh's LGBT communities, which will be included as part of the city's social history collections. Web-based online catalogues, and online archives of material, are potentially key tools here.

Maximising creative potential

As referred to above, the joint OurStory Scotland / 7:84 project, bringing together professionals with community volunteers, is an example of an effective way of building the creative potential of marginalised community members.

Annex

The Equality Network is currently aware of five LGBT organisations with a specific focus on cultural activity operating within Scotland.

Glasgay! runs a major programme of LGBT cultural events in Glasgow each November (the largest LGBT arts festival in the UK). See: www.glasgay.co.uk Email contact: info@glasgay.co.uk

OurStory Scotland is a Glasgow-based organisation which collects, archives, and presents the life stories and experiences of the LGBT communities in Scotland. See: www.ourstoryscotland.org.uk
Email contact: ian.archive@ntlworld.com

Remember When is an oral and community history project to document the lives and achievements of Edinburgh's LGBT people, past and present. See: www.rememberwhen.org.uk
Email contact: rw@rememberwhen.org.uk

Lesbian Archive and Information Centre is a Glasgow-based centre containing Britain's largest and most significant collection of materials about lesbian lives, history, activism and achievements. Contact: via Glasgow Women's Library, 109 Trongate, Glasgow, G1 5HD

Diverse Artists is a Glasgow-based group which exists to address LGBT issues through the advancement of education and the arts. Contact: via Glasgow LGBT Centre, 11 Dixon St, Glasgow, G1 4AL