

Submission to the Cultural Commission

October 2004

We are invited by the Cultural Commission to envisage Scotland in 25 years' time when our aspirations for our cultural life have come into being. This invitation takes us straight to the personal as well as the professional in our response as well as releasing our imagination to our dreams and to where often we dare not travel as the reality of working in the arts in Scotland can create grief for what might be if only....

It is one of the artist's functions to hold onto our dreams, our stories and our truth, to weave our humanity into shape upon which we can all reflect and see the reality of our evolution and our humanity as we travel the path of life. I take the opportunity to consider how my life personally would be different in 2030 should the changes and direction I offer as a professional were to be in place.

The personal future story...

I am 75 years old, maybe still working and making a contribution to the cultural life in Scotland. My partner and I enjoy participating in many ways. We enjoy a sense of well being, as the link between participating in the arts and well-being has long since been established. We participate in intergenerational projects and intercultural events through a number of art forms facilitated by arts workers who are politically and pedagogically aware and who are paid well and supported by management processes which invest in them. They have opportunities for continuous professional development and work in reflective practice. Arts workers work with communities because they believe participation is fundamental to all other activity, health, economic, political and for people who need specifically designed frameworks for achievement. They are not trying to patch up the consequences of an education system which has failed to engage a child, a mental health system which sees participation in the arts as therapy and therefore owned by practitioners not participants, through an economic system which sees participation in the arts as a way of getting those in the margins to enter the bottom of the economic ladder. We live in an environment that is built for human beings not to serve mercantile aspirations and we know we can express our identity and culture as and how we wish. Our family is involved with the arts and humanities. My daughter who is a gifted young person has been able to return to Scotland to pursue her career in the Humanities [she speaks 7 languages]. She has had to leave Scotland and go to the United States of America where she has been awarded a number of fellowships to develop her research and work. Currently there are no such opportunities for highly gifted young people in Scotland. Her emigration is Scotland's loss both culturally

and diplomatically. My grandchildren are educated in schools not only in the arts and humanities but also through the arts – every lesson, no matter what subject is taught as artistically as possible. Children are nourished by their built and creative environment by teachers who are educated themselves within holistic pedagogy not just to deliver the government’s curriculum. The children play and discover through play and develop their social skills and societal aspirations through play, they are not processed through modularised pieces of learning that stunt and oppress creative intelligence. The children learn how to resolve through their awakened creative intelligence instead of resorting to violence or head in the sand or addictive lifestyles, as they have no other way of dealing with conflict and pain. When the children express a desire to engage with the arts as a career, they are not warned away for fear of unemployment or being maligned as ‘arty farty’. In 2030, the arts and culture are leading Scotland internationally in the areas of research and human rights and there is a deep breath of freedom of expression of culture and identity that is the life force for future generations.

Such aspirations lie in the assumption that there have been attitudinal and structural changes to how the arts are woven into our identity and culture far more than monetary changes. When teachers themselves have unawakened creative intelligence how on earth can they nourish this in children? All too often the response has been to add another structure and layer from above. This is the last thing that needs to happen. The core to a creative Scotland lies in an education system that has teachers who themselves have intellectually invested in pedagogic implications of what they are doing. It is a country with universities and colleges that develop life-long learning in students through reflective practice and critical analysis. Citizens express their own culture through having explored their identity and have clear expressive paths. The sense of self that each citizen has denies the infestation of dominant media imagery and addictive lifestyles.

Such dreams are for families and communities.

The second part of this submission is from the reflections of an arts professional in Scotland. The challenge set by the Commission is to be brief.

In reading the Cultural Policy Statement and outline that the Cultural Commission offers as background to the submissions, it appears relevant to focus on the fact that to view people as ‘consumers’ of culture in itself denies the very core of what is trying to be achieved in terms of ‘cultural rights’. Culture is an integral core part of humanity and we cannot be ‘consumers’ of humanity. To reduce culture to simply a materialist analysis automatically denies the very ‘rights’ which the Commission seeks to develop. A similar consideration can be brought to the notion of ‘giving access’. Such terminology

automatically assumes the ownership of something being extended, therefore denying the human right of participation and reducing it to a power relationship based on the generosity or patronisation of those who have ownership of whatever is being extended. If a citizen is not participating in a given activity, then there needs to be an analysis of the activity, not targeted action towards the citizen to change and conform to fit in with current policy. If participation and expression is not taking place then the first question is surely why?

These observations are based on the hope that by 2030, arts organisations have developed organisational and management processes which are not in contradiction to the very heart of participation and cultural development. For example, arts managers have developed beyond using 'off the shelf tool-kit' approaches to management and are working in reflective practice which supports and nourishes the arts work and workers in the organisation. If for example, they are an arts organisation which is involved with participatory practice, they begin to reflect on the implications of management processes which are in contradiction to this. It is understood that the arts workers are the front line of the organisation and everything they do reflects the management of it.

The arts worker is seen as a crucial resource for a number of agencies as it is recognised that they have ways of developing creative resolutions in situations which are stuck by linear thinking. Arts workers are a vital research resource as they work in participatory processes that deliver accurate findings to inform policy and engage communities with the democratic process. The link between cultural development and the democratic process is not just acknowledged but understood as implicit. Arts workers have in built time for reflective and developmental education for themselves and they also have employment and career opportunities in which they learn to apply their skills and knowledge to ever widening contexts. Ticky box evaluations have long since been abandoned and considered reflection and the participatory process informs future developments, alongside debates within contemporary research.

Arts organisations are arts and learning led. They are not administratively led.

The National organisations are diplomats for these values and their work reflects the humanity in our cultural life. Their work explores and expresses our contemporary human condition for us to learn and delight – whilst minding our Past. But the work is not stuck in 19th Century aesthetics and the management has engaged with the processes which are discussed earlier in this submission, and does not reflect those 19th Century principles. Internationally Scotland is leading in the expression of our humanity and at the Edinburgh International Festival we are seen as the home to which all other arts

organisations in the world come to refresh themselves in such thinking and learning. The role of our universities and colleges in developing this work is implicit to this vision. For by 2030, they will be interwoven with the arts in the nourishing of such thinking and application and our research work in this area is what the visiting artists from the world over come to participate in and learn from.

The invitation to submit to the Cultural Commission is an opportunity to dream, yes. It is also the opportunity to really examine the existing resources and consider how we can refocus our energies and thinking to shatter the structures and barriers to our achieving in areas which, in some cases already exist in embryonic form.

Stephanie Knight

Director

Royal Bank of Scotland Centre for Community Arts Research & Practice

School of Drama & Creative Industries

Queen Margaret University College

Elm Row

Edinburgh

Scotland EH4 7AH

+ 44 [0] 131 317 3979

sknight@qmuc.ac.uk