

Investing, Advocating, Promoting... strategically

Andrew Dixon, Chief Executive of Creative Scotland, interviewed by Daniel Jewesbury¹

DJ: I suppose the most obvious question is, how is Creative Scotland different from the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen, its predecessor organisations?

AD: Well, in a number of ways. Firstly, we've taken on the combined responsibilities for TV, the arts and creative industries, also the responsibility for stimulating cultural export; secondly, we are very committed to not just being a funding body. We are a funding body, or *investment* agency as we call it, but we are much more of a promotional body and much more of an advocate for the cultural sector that can give something money. We are not about just monitoring what happens to that money, we are about getting behind the cultural organisation, getting behind the artist and trying to shine the spotlight on him and to package things together in a way that tells a story of what's happening in the cultural sector in Scotland.

I use the analogy, we're not just a cash machine in Edinburgh that dishes out grants but we will dish out a lot of grants but, whilst we are a supporting organisation, the support doesn't stop, we have to move on and find how we can help promote them. It kind of manifests itself in a couple of examples already.

One is our artist residencies programme. I mean, when I arrived, everywhere I went in Scotland I found an artist in residence. You go to the Isle of Skye and there is a visual artist, writer, musician in residence, doing fantastic work, hidden away, nobody else would know that this is happening because their work is not shared more widely and they would be working in isolation from other artists in residency in Stirling and so on. So I came back from visiting the artists in residence that we had, at the time we had 57, and we put extra resources.

For the first year we are trying to get 200 artist residencies or awards that we can pull together in a single programme called Creative Futures, which has maybe forty or fifty partners that are running those residencies. The difference is that they will all be branded together as Creative Scotland Residence Programme. There will be 200 artists, we will bring them together through social networks; we will bring them together physically... there is a want to... and we will promote and advocate the work that is going on so that the work is not hidden. For those that want to be... away and hidden, that's fine but many people responded very positively to the idea that they are part of a bigger community.

Another example is that there is the festivals guide that we produced. It's a similar story of going round in Scotland, and everywhere I went there's another festival and nobody had an overview, nobody had a picture of what was happening 52 weeks a year in Scotland. We've just gone into a very simple partnership with *The List*² who came to us, actually, with an idea of a different sort of festivals guide for Edinburgh, but we said it would be great if you'd do one for the whole of Scotland. They produced this guide to festivals, 280 of them, across Scotland and it's now linked on our website that you can search all what, ifs and where. So it puts individual festivals that might have been hidden away, like Pittenweem or smaller festivals into a bigger context of festivals in general...

DJ: So it's a question of creating a national strategy for cultural activity then?

AD: Yes it is.. well,...I hesitate to use the word *selling*. To a certain extent it is about presenting

the total picture back to Scotland and back to visitors. I mean we're not a tourism agency but with that festivals guide, if we can produce the content of it with *The List*, then tourism agencies as well as others can onwards promote it. But let's take the visual arts. It's actually terrific: in Glasgow International or in Edinburgh in festival time because you've got a guide to know what is happening that month and there is the kind of evidence that shows that people literally follow that and you know, they move, they take their information and move from one thing to the other, but for the rest of the year, the chances of someone finding a gallery as a visitor are pretty slim actually. So, yes, how do

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we as a national organisation help things locally. Now, in some ways that should be an Edinburgh job to promote galleries in Edinburgh but we can take the overview for Scotland and work to find new mechanisms of promoting visual arts, promoting public art, promoting whatever it is, film, film locations... We've got to try and tell a story because it's not been told in the past quite as positively as it should be so we're underplaying our strengths, that is the feeling. So that is the second bit of difference.

The third difference is really the kind of creative industries and the economic side. You know, we still will invest in straight cultural, individual artist's projects on artists' terms. It's absolutely pivotal for what we do. In fact, we will put more money into that. But we've got a remit, if not of money – not of new money – to support

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the creative industries and to co-ordinate that and to encourage the likes of Learning and Skills Agencies, Enterprise Agencies, to put their money behind creative industries, whether that'd be the games industry, design, fashion, potentially festivals and to piece together the economic story about the cultural sector.

Sometimes economics and business language doesn't go down well with artists but actually if it's the way that we will get more investment, more resources into the cultural sector then it's a really important role for us to play. So things like getting engaged for the first time in digital media, okay – the Arts Council has funded and Scottish Screen has funded individual projects but actually putting pilot projects together in this partnership we've had with Channel 4 and Scottish Enterprise that enable some kind of bigger scale developments happening like Central Station, the likes of ISO apps, (the developers behind Central Station, but who have also worked for BBC iPlayer, Glasgow School of Art etc.) development of ripped photo

art, 4IP, and trying to mainstream that as actually a valid part of what we do. So moving into some of those new territories.

DJ: Is there a danger then that the definition of creativity becomes, it becomes very difficult to pin down, it becomes very broad and sometimes almost comes to almost include everything?

AD: Creativity does often include a wide range of things. Would we fund a food festival? Yes, possibly, if it had a creative... cultural element to it. Would we fund a restaurant? No! There are kind of borders and boundaries to everything we / you do, but looking in the visual arts. Visual arts for years has been breaking down barriers. It has driven a wedge between art form barriers of the past and there is far more collaboration going on across visual arts and other media.

Even in craft, if you look at the work of the Dovecot and innovative work that they do with craft and arts. Visual arts has been at the forefront of breaking through the art form silos. We are getting rid of all the art form silos here, which I suppose is the next big difference. There will be no art form budgets and we will have generic budgets that are more strategic, much more planned and on a larger scale and able to punch the weight.

DJ: But with criteria in terms of assessing quality of application, assessing the effectiveness of funding – the criteria still needs to respond to the art forms.

AD: Why?

DJ: So ... there is a uniform set of criteria that will be used?

AD: We'll try and get a common set of criteria. We're still working on that actually but there will be a much *simpler*, common set of criteria that is around quality of production, track record, delivery, in some instances it is leverage of other resources... commitment to accessing audiences or reaching audiences... it is not rocket science, it's always been there. But we will have our craft-specific criteria or theatre-specific criteria.

DJ: I suppose some organisations have... audience, box office and they can measure their participation in certain ways. For other organisations it is quite different in how organisations reach their audience. So there have to be different ways of evaluating...

AD: There are different criteria for different programmes but we'll have common criteria across the art forms that is what I'm saying. I mean film is slightly different. With film... we will still have a discrete film programme. For various reasons we've got criteria – especially Lottery-specific – we have to fulfill. That will have a set of specific criteria. Everything else: festivals and events, quality of production, talent, access to education, quality of development – all those will be across art form, anything will be put forward.

DJ: I would like to ask about the arms-length principle and where that sits within Creative Scotland as an organisation that has the power to commission the work directly? Is there a danger in using those powers that Creative Scotland almost becomes a rival to the organisations that it funds?

AD: No. I mean, primarily artists and creative practitioners are at the heart of our thinking. We might strategically commission a service to be delivered or a... some geographic delivery in the cultural sector but we wouldn't say... we want this piece of art for Dumfries and Galloway as a Gateway sculpture. We are not directly commissioning individual works or individual

productions. What we *will* do is take a more strategic look at the sort of whole cultural ecology. So we've had a programme called Flexible Funding, funding a lot of galleries and a lot of theatre companies, an awful lot of theatre companies. Flexible Funding, by its very nature was very competitive, 139 organisations bid and there ended up being 60 grants for 2-year programmes of work and everything being supported is really high quality because it was the kind of cream of the crop and fantastic proposals.

The trouble is we haven't decided how much of one thing we wanted and how much of another thing we wanted so we could have ended up funding 60 theatre companies just because they were the best applications. We could actually, technically, fund 60 theatre companies in Glasgow just because they were the best applications. We're going to get rid of that programme, it takes... We are very committed to what we are supporting but we are going to get rid of it in two years time.

But gradually, what we are going to be doing is take a strategic look at different sectors. So we will take a look at visual arts and say, actually... there's the national galleries, there's our Foundation Organisations that we fund, The Fruitmarket Gallery, various centres, what are the gaps on the map? What are the organisations, not just on the geographical map but the visual arts maps? [DJ: Map of provision?] Do we need an organisation that is actually delivering on curatorial training or international export of the visual arts or supporting artist careers as well as putting things on the walls in galleries? We would define four or five franchises that we'd then advertise and invite proposals to come forward. Instead of then supporting maybe individual organisations we'd hope we'd might get collaborations.

So we might get CCA in Glasgow plus the International Festival and someone else coming forward to deliver a package of work or a programme of work. As we define those strategic commissions, we would have an eye to the geography of Scotland because there is fantastic work – that we're very proud of because they are our strengths – in Glasgow and Edinburgh but there are huge tracts in Scotland where there isn't quite the opportunity or there isn't the production base that there needs to be. So, you get the drift? We describe it in our corporate planning in terms of theatre but you can describe anything really.

DJ: *So it's going to be very much a question of identifying those gaps in provision and commission organisations to deliver in those areas? [AD: Yes]. In terms of the identification of those gaps, that is then the strategic role of CS?*

There will however be the things that we want to achieve, that is about the kind of creative identity of culture in Scotland.

AD: Yes. We would do that *with* the sector. We would do these reviews with the theatre sector, the music sector and the visual arts sector, including national companies, things like RSAMD if you talk about music, college of arts if you're talking about Visual Arts. So there will be a much broader conversation about where the gaps are. Let me show you this: This was a theatre show that I went to see at the Fringe, Plan B (the Highland-based dance and theatre performance company). Basically, instead of the programme having the CVs of the actors they had this *organigram*, they have the artwork, they have footballers, art and



something... what this is, is basically four people's careers. This is actually our job. This is CS's role: to get people onto the career track of working in the visual arts or theatre or film in Scotland. To find the talent, the hopes, the places where you really add value if you get them an exhibition at the Print Studio in Glasgow and you're a printmaker. They've got a thing on at the moment, four one-week exhibitions of members' and student printmaking. They have *added* something to the CV of those artists and present an opportunity to present their work in a way that they couldn't have in the past. They are an important platform or station in this thing.

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So I am kind of using this as an almost conceptual way of describing our role. We need to find ways of supporting them get onto this track, of identifying the platforms and then say: you've got that really great platform over there at the Fruitmarket, what else could it do? What more could that organisation do to meet our objectives which are investing in talent, investing in the cultural economy, investing in quality production, investing in access?

DJ: *So is it about giving organisations new targets within their existing funds? Is it about redefining their targets?*

AD: It is about *inviting* them... we're going through a review of our Foundation Organisations at the moment. We're pretty happy about what's there and we've talked about building our strong foundations which was a very good message to put across when we were bidding for our money from the government and we've *meant* it because they are strong foundations. Once you've got foundations, you want to ask: what else can you build on top of them? Could you make them even stronger? Are there things that they could do that are outside their buildings? Fruitmarket Gallery has done some great education projects with *Air Iomlaid (On Exchange)*, a visual arts project linking school children in Skye and Edinburgh. They had internships and trainee curators. Could they kind of do more in terms of trainee curators? At the moment they are operating with a grant and they do their x number of exhibitions a year and education programme. Actually, if you gave them a bit more resources, what else could they do?

We are not doing directioning and saying we want to give you targets. We are entering into a

series of conversations which say 'What more could you do in delivering our objectives in Scotland?' And some of that could be artistically, some of that might be geographically, filling some of those gaps. There isn't a strong enough small scale visual arts touring network. Could we find one of the visual arts organisations to take that role on?

DJ: *There is a certain way in which you want to take on decisions-making in which you bring the different art forms, different sectors in helping you make decisions where the blockages may be in... in the career paths and how this could be developed?*

AD: What I kind of understand is that there aren't these... stations, these places... if you look at printmaking, that is fine. There are – if you look at Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Dundee – fantastic facilities. The sculpture workshops are great in Glasgow and Edinburgh. If you look at certain other forms, there are limitations as to the resource base or the places where people can go and take their work on to a next stage. So it is about us having that conversation with the sector about where there are gaps. Also about where there are strengths, I use theatre for an example. We have a real strength in children's theatre in Scotland and you want to build on that strength. Likewise there is a strength in GI as a festival but it is only scratching the surface of what it can really do if it were given more resources to make things happen.

DJ: *I want to talk a bit more about these various approaches to resourcing. You said at the start that Creative Scotland is much more than a funding body and that that is what differentiates it from its predecessor organisations. The literature talks about grants, loans and then, there is also in some of the documents, talk about corporate investments, venture capital and so on unlocking commercial investment. I imagine that when loans are talked about these are non-commercial loans, the recuperation of an investment at declining terms of profit. But is there, I am wondering, if there is a distinction that is clear, a definition about that kind of loan and commercial investment?*

AD: I think it is fair to say that at the moment we are not even at first base in terms of those new forms of finance in terms of loans. We do... effectively you're doing loans when you're investing in films, you just don't expect to get much of it back. There is a recoupment clause in the contract, so with the Last King of Scotland we got a cheque back of \$60,000 but we are interested in... Are there ways in which different types of finance can be made to help artists to deliver what they want to achieve? To kind of capitalise things? There are bits of really interesting work in the US, and I never like to use the US as an example for the arts because funding-wise it's terrible, but it actually has done some really interesting things with artists, artists-space and loans, money, housing and studios. I think there are kinds of loans that we can learn from them. So we want to explore that territory.

It is easy for us to invest in an agency like WASPS and that has been true for a certain kind of investment, where the British Arts Council, quite visionary, put £3million on the table for five arts projects in five places. It was terribly flexible as to how the money was spent. Ultimately, it was about an asset base for WASPS that enables them to operate very sustainably as an organisation to offer cheaper and better quality accommodation for artists and creative people. Can you actually do that for individuals, for individual artists? Could you create an artist mortgage? Could you create some way of supporting people that isn't just about a grant? We're starting to explore that territory.

DJ: *There are a couple of things in terms of how Creative Scotland is acting. Is it acting to administrate funds that are borrowed commercially? Is it...*

AD: Not at the moment. Our income is primarily at the moment Scottish Government, Lottery and some trusts and foundations. It is not inconceivable in the future that we might *stimulate* private investment into creative industries, into sort of the more commercial end I suppose more likely in the creative industries. But the only areas we have *really* got into, this is actually quite an interesting example, is Own Art.

I was chairman of the board of Own Art when it was set up. Own Art is just a very clever scheme but all it does is pay the interest on the purchase of an artwork by a member of the public. It uses relatively little money and the benefit goes to the commercial gallery in terms of its sale, in terms of the artist [who] gets the money upfront, and the member of the public gets the benefit because they're buying a work and spreading the cost over 10 or 12 months.

Now, you can take that principle and use it on other things. In England they have already used it to allow the public to buy musical instruments. Take the same principle and use it to buy artist equipment, and if an artist is having to hire equipment on a regular basis, why can't we do a loan on the buy and a repayment plan. Then we are able to recycle the money but essentially we do some deal with the bank where the bank manager does the process for us. So we want to explore that territory.

DJ: *But that is not in the intention of replacing...*

AD: No, no that is as well as. There are other interesting sources of cultural financing that are starting to emerge. There is the whole area of *crowdsourcing*, kind of online choices about which projects to fund and online giving to seize the public appetite to put money into things. To a certain extent Central Station have done it with their small grants that they are doing online, not in raising the money but in allocating choices. That, again, is territory we will explore because if we just use our resources in straight grants we are not getting the most out of them. To tell a story of when I worked in Northern Arts. We funded a residency in Grizedale, in the forest there, and it was a craft agency and it was £20,000 per year. It was hugely popular, we would have 70 artists a year apply for it. It was a six months residency, fantastic, you got an exhibition, produce some work, left the work behind. There would be 59 artists that we totally hacked off because they didn't get in and there was one that got it. It was a great residency, it had good profile and looked good on the CV. We used the same £20,000 when the residency programme finished and put it into a public art agency in Cumbria, partnered up with some money from Sustrans³ and from the local authority. Within a year it had generated £1 million worth of artist commissions. Which was the best way to use the £20,000? The answer is there is no right answer but both have a kind of validity and if part of our role is to expand the cultural economy then we have to look at mechanisms to do that sort of leverage.

DJ: *I suppose there is one danger of if the agency itself becomes involved in quite a lot of that, of the agency becoming exposed to quite a lot of liability for interest to commercial banks, presumably at commercial rates.*

AD: Yes, I mean we would set up partnerships that would limit the risk to ourselves and limit the risks to our partners, but also: we could be prepared to take those risks. You don't really get creativity unless you take risks. So we've got to be prepared – not to gamble but to trust the cultural sector a bit more.

DJ: *Maybe then, slightly linked to this...*

AD: Can I tell you another angle, because sometimes it can give you a better sense of our thinking. There is an artist in Newcastle who came to us for a grant for £3,000 for a studio, he's 26. We gave him a grant for £3,000 for a studio and he came back and says 'Actually, I found a building. I can put 12 studios in here but I'd need £30,000. If I get £30,000 off you I could get £90,000 off the city?' We backed him. He was 26 years old, he had never owned a building in his life. He made great furniture, he was a great cabinet maker and he now is running something like 70 artist workspaces in Newcastle. He's got three buildings.

We've got to be able to spot the talent like

that, that is able to do that, and with social entrepreneurs. I met a guy from Glasgow on Monday, you know they've got the studio down by the railway arches and they are gradually taking a lease on some of those railway arches. Very little of public money has gone into it but he's just an entrepreneur... [pauses] ... social.

DJ: *You mentioned the recoupment through film, e.g., of loans...there is an argument that says that for some film funding, for non-commercial cultural films, sometimes that the model of funding for film funding for UK Film Councils, Northern Ireland Screen, Scottish Screen, that because it applied an industrial model to the whole area it was sometimes difficult for a cultural film to be made because it couldn't recoup that money, and so it was already ineligible. First of all, do you think this is an issue? But also, that there is no desire in part of Creative Scotland to move people who have been funded through grants into a kind of recoupable structure? In other words, there is not going to be any imperative on people to be trying to marketise something which isn't already?*

We are very committed to what we are supporting but we are going to get rid of [Flexible Funding] in two years time.

AD: There will always be a range. I mean there are very few films that seriously recoup money other than to their primary major investors. We are small-scale investors, with £300,000 in a £5million budget. So our share back could never be great, but it is right: if we do have a success and the British Film Council is having a huge success with *The King's Speech*, we get our share back in. We can then re-invest it, perhaps back into the same company.

We're quite interested in investing in companies and if they are successful, the equity is re-invested in them rather than us because we can't budget, you can't realistically budget to say we are supporting twelve films next year and we will get a £1million income off them. That would be unrealistic. What you *can* do is to set up a programme where Ecosse Films or Sigma Films (who've recently released *You Instead*, recently premiered at Glasgow Film Festival and in the

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US at SxSW, and who have just signed a new distribution deal with Icon Films) if they are successful part of the deal is that we continue to get the credits but that we re-invest the profits back into the next project. I think that is a great incentive.

DJ: *Is there not any pressure from Creative Scotland or perhaps from the Scottish Government to expand that model out to other areas in other words: the non-commercial forms, whoever it is, performance arts, the free cultural publishers. Is there no pressure to marketise them?*

AD: If you ask if there is any Government pressure on – no. The Government is interested in Creative Scotland playing a role in co-ordinating the development of the creative industries and helping Scotland's overall ambitions to be a sustainable and successful country. But there is no pressure that says we've got to apply all our resources into that commercial activity. In fact we're not! At our *heart* we are a charitable organisation that is about access, opportunity and taking cultural activity to the Scottish population and hopefully exporting a bit, reaching the people of Scotland. Our primary stakeholder is the Scottish population.

DJ: *I suppose the reason for some of the uncertainty around these areas is because of the breadth of the remit. It covers from the most commercially exploitable, as parts of the creative industries, as we're calling them, software development and so on, to...*

AD: I can maybe show you the building blocks budget. It can show you how *little* the creative industries is in the context of our own... You know, we're not... we've got a co-ordination role but we're not in a primary investment role. Architecture is classed within the creative industries but we'd not be leading on investing in architecture in a big way. Commercial publishing is part of it, we may engage with publishing as a cultural product but we are not going to be involved in commercial publishing. What we do have a role to do is to ensure that there are the mechanisms there to support people developing in those sectors and industries. We will often devolve our responsibilities.

That's one of the general things where we're different. We are not going to be trying to do everything from *here*. If we've got an agency we can devolve *money* to, to manage on our behalf, we will. If they are better placed to take decisions than we are, either because of a specialism or because of critical mass of what they are doing.

Let me just show you this – every block is £1 million – this is the budget as is going into our corporate plan so that everyone can see so that it is very transparent. So £18 million is Foundation Organisations, £8 millions is Flexibly Funded Organisations more or less, a little bit out of there, a little bit out of Lottery. We've got about £1.7 million of cross-cutting agencies, things like Federation of Scottish Theatre, VAGA (Visual Arts and Galleries Association) and different agencies, our overheads to run the organisation. £3 million of our Treasury funding that we have chosen to invest in Talent. That is the primary thing that we're investing in from our Treasury funding. There is no creative industries in there. Down here there is money that we've got for particular purposes from the Government. £10 million to use for a particular music initiative, £0.66 million for Cash Back for Communities, £2 million for Edinburgh Festival's Expo Fund and then £1.25 million Innovation Fund – so that is the Creative Industries, at £1.25 million it seems relatively small in the scheme of the budget. What we are developing up here, and this is still to be agreed and I can't give you the figures, we're developing a Lottery programme in bigger blocks. I can't give you the figure, but there will be a £3 million block for film, TV production. There will be a block for festivals and events, there will be some investment in the cultural economy work but that will be sustainability and environmental sustainability in the cultural sector.

Again, there is not a big chunk of money that says creative industries, loans. The vast majority of what we are doing is grant investment.

DJ: *We wanted to ask you something about what has been called 'single-purpose government', the idea of all government agencies face in the same direction and drive for the same purpose. [...] but, there can be productive tensions and that is surely where democratic space is. There might be useful social tensions where one department, one area, fights for what it believes to be important for its area.*

AD: I mean what I am setting out, you know, I've got my outcomes in front of me, it's in the plan, but: do we want to create a more successful country? Yes! With opportunities for people to engage in the arts? Yes. Do we want to achieve sustainable economic growth? Yes. These are all part of the Government's mission. There will however be the things that we want to achieve, that is about the kind of creative identity of culture in Scotland. Often actually arts and culture sets the agenda for Government to take up – I genuinely believe that the whole kind of climate change, environmental thing had... cultural organisations were there first. They were there doing stuff, Cape Farewell⁴, cultural projects, artists that were looking at this *years* ago. So it is quite important to use culture to create debate around issues. We're doing some really interesting work.

We've been doing some interesting work about inspiring communities in prison. It has been a mix of National Galleries, Scottish Opera, Glasgow Citizens Theatre – really quite intensive work in five prisons but really pushing the boundaries of the question that if people really did have that kind of opportunity to engage with something cultural and creative, would it have an impact on

their reoffending rates when they come out or their behaviour whilst they are in. That isn't in the book of our purpose for us to do that, yes, we want a safer country and all that, but that is us working with Motherwell College and a whole set of cultural organisations.

I think an organisation like Creative Scotland will always be looking at where those cultural strengths are because the cultural strengths... we don't have the cultural strengths in children's theatre because it was in the book of our priorities but we have those strengths there because we had the artists there who created really brilliant work for kids.

DJ: *...we can put the question this way: in the last three years something has come up quite dramatically since the start of the crash and the recession – not only is there a potential conflict between business and public interest but that there can be a conflict if Government policy tries to fold business interest and public interest into the same thing; if it's always presumed that we are all pursuing the same goal, then it's the public benefit that comes second.*

Yes, you can point to ways in which cultural actors in society are leading the way in all kinds of things, different areas of discussion and debates. But within society at the moment, within the UK at the moment we are all experiencing massive social cuts, public cuts and cuts that are to the detriment of the public benefit mainly because of the conflict between public interest and business interest. You've got both within your remit [...]

AD: Yes but I mean we are hardly a bank. We're not there to overtly shore financial purposes. We're there to serve a public and that is where our focus is. So I don't think that there is any chance of us being *diverted* by having an economic purpose in there. For me, you know, growing the cultural economy is about creating jobs, employment and opportunities for artists and it's about creating more work that reaches more people. If we start moving into territory that is about cultural export, taking artists to Venice, showcase Scotland at the festivals, eh... sorry, showcase Scotland at the Celtic Connections festival, then it's actually about creating more work and promoting the artists that we have got in Scotland. I don't see that as any conflict with that core role of delivering public benefit. The other big story for us is of course, we haven't had cuts. The Government in Scotland has chosen to prioritise investing in Creative Scotland and we're fortunate that we will see some Lottery income coming back after the Olympics and we are obviously planning a growth budget.

DJ: *Yes. I suppose the thing is, artists are the vanguard of casualised labour. An artist does about 10 different jobs in order to do their one job. If anything, that situation is worse. The situation of the artist has become more and more precarious. I am not just talking about Scotland but generally. The evidence is there if you look at average earnings of artists, if you look at lifetime earnings of artists, career opportunities and so on and what artists actually make, what percentage of their income comes through practising their art. Is Creative Scotland then about improving that situation and addressing that situation?*

AD: Yes, we actually... I did a talk at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic College, saying, as long as the average visual artist's salary is still under £5k per year we cannot be criticised for investing directly in individuals and doing residencies and doing artists' showcases that give artists bottles to take to the party and a chance to develop things on their own terms, but ultimately the change to that earning capacity is not just about us giving grants it is about growing the economy as well, our festivals being more successful, the private sector commissioning art, it is about getting different partners to recognise the value of the cultural sector.

I did a lot of work in public art in the Northeast of England and it almost became a movement. There wasn't a building put up without a major commissions programme and I am not talking about three little stained windows in a front door. I am talking Paolozzi outside and some really significant programmes. That was just about creating an environment in which it was seen as commercially sensible to invest in artists when you're developing property. I don't think that happened to the same extent in Scotland but I think there are ways that you can stimulate that sort of thing to happen.

DJ: *Still, it always depends on there being sensible partners in the commercial sector. You are talking about it being common sense but at the same time in these kinds of regeneration developments there should be a consideration of the broader ecology in terms of arts and culture but until now...*

AD: I knew we got it in the Northeast when a fire station approached us for a commissioning programme for the new fire station and they wanted digital video art rather than anything structural. You know, you can create that sort of movement and sense of... and this work with the prisons is really interesting. The research has just gone and you can see if we... we *will* do some further developments with this and you can see, suddenly the penny drops that investing in artists' work in prisons has a cost benefit that is huge.

You know, it costs a £1,000 a week to keep a person in prison. If we were investing in cultural projects in prisons, we could reduce their bill. But that is a movement and so it's about creating that sense that art can change things.

DJ: *The Act gives you a duty to protect diversity, access and participation. Is there, arising out of that, a diversity of cultural and political expression? Is there a duty, as far as you see it, to protect that kind of breadth of expression?*

AD: I don't think that that is what that particular phrase of the Act means which was about population access. In fact, we have actually used a similar phraseology around our production base and getting the diversity of cultural production and cultural ideas because we don't just want 10 theatre companies doing the same show at the Tron. We want a variety and diversity of work, and the same in the visual arts. We've got to ensure that...

Visual arts is my background, I was heavily involved in the Year of Visual Arts in 1996 and lots of public art programmes and other stuff, and one of the things I've done over the years is to go to lots of art colleges and lots of degree shows. You go into a lot of art colleges and there is a homogeneity about them. It's almost the artists are kind of soaking up the genre of the key pieces. [...]

What is quite interesting, I went around the art colleges in Scotland and I didn't get that feel. You got a feel that there was that kind of diversity in there, particularly GSA and Duncan of Jordanstone and actually, Gray's as well, where there seemed more freedom of expression of student work, more difference, actually a broader cross section of programmes running. I think that is quite healthy. So I think we're helped in trying to achieve that by what is coming out of the education sector.

DJ: *There are threats to the future of arts and humanities in HE and in terms of the foundations of this knowledge economy, creative economy and so on, that is a very real threat in terms of even being there as viable sectors for you to be supporting in the future. You talk about promoting, advocating, encouraging and supporting access, so: is there a role for Creative Scotland in getting involved in promoting, advocating, supporting, and protecting the arts at that level, at HE level?*

AD: Yes. There is actually a conference in Glasgow on Monday on HE and Creative Industries and we are contributing to a report that has been produced about the role of the university sector in Scotland for supporting creative industries. Again, Scotland is in a slightly better role than in England, just as it is in culture so in HE and the value that has been attached to culture in the curriculum and the *pride* almost raised in places like GSA and the track record in places like Dundee. Yeah, we would want to lobby. As someone said to me the other day: what is Creative Scotland's position on the closure of libraries? Well, the position is that we don't want them to close. We're not going to stand there with placards saying 'Don't close the library', but literature is important to our...

DJ: *So, what's the language?*

AD: Likewise with colleges, we would not want there to be a wholesale closure of cultural programmes in colleges but we're not going to stand there with a placard but we are going to work strategically with universities and colleges to say how can we advocate the strengths of what you do? How can we tell a collective picture of

Scotland as a place to learn. I think it's a huge strength. If you add together GSA, RSAMD, Abertay, Aberdeen. That collective picture of *this* is a place to learn, the roles that festivals can play as platforms for new work, not just the Edinburgh festivals but 280 festivals across Scotland, there is a real strength there. So we would get behind that.

We would also get behind things like developing more incubator space, more artist workspace, which we do with WASPS but equally universities are very well placed to work in that territory and we want to do that collectively across Scotland.

I think there are kinds of loans that we can learn from. So we want to explore that territory. ... Could you create an artist mortgage? Could you create some way of supporting people that isn't just about a grant?

Protecting HE is pretty important but in the end of the day we're not going to be the agency that changes UK government policy. What we *can* do is to convince our colleagues in Scotland and Scottish Government that they have got a real success story on their hands when they have 20 people applying for every one place at GSA, this is not something that is going out of fashion.

DJ: *Okay. I'll better let you get on...*

Andrew Dixon kindly offered to follow up on Daniel's conversation by taking some additional questions from Variant via email:

Flexible Funding

V: *You have said that although Creative Scotland is very committed to supporting the organisations it has funded in this way, Creative Scotland will get rid of Flexible Funding in two years time. As you say, this was a very competitive scheme with 139 organisations bidding against each other this year and less than half receiving funding for their programmes.*

From what you say we can only see a large scale plan for the future which fails to provide secure space for small organisations. Indeed, it would appear that you intend larger organisations to fill the 'gaps' that will be created by getting rid of swathes of activity currently conducted by Flexible Funded organisations. Moreover, in your description of the future there doesn't seem to be anything between big organisations and individuals except for your mention of 'franchises'. Could you please elaborate on your ideas in this respect?

AD: Our plans for strategic commissioning are not intended to 'get rid' of swathes of activity, but are instead about getting the right expertise to deliver work. The cultural ecology in Scotland is complex and we want to ensure that our investment is directed at the areas where it will make most impact. This could include, for example, smaller organisations collaborating on bigger projects, rather than investing in solely in bigger organisations.

Before we move to the commissioning model, there will be a rolling programme of reviews, with the sectors involved playing a key role, to inform our needs for different sectors. The process for commissioning will be introduced in stages with selected delivery partners replacing FXOs as each franchise becomes operational. This would start in 2011 with reviews of performing arts, visual arts and crafts. It will be followed in 2012 with reviews of film, digital media and festivals. In 2013 we will review literature agencies, publishing and equalities.

Each review will inform the shape and nature of the franchises to be offered through strategic commissioning. Our expectation is that many organisations will look for partners to bid for franchises, so collaboration will be stimulated,

as will innovation. Sustainability and resilience will be fundamental to the survival of creative organisations

Cuts

V: You said that “the big story for us is of course, we haven’t had cuts.” However, the consultant Ann Bonnar doesn’t tell the same story. As she points out, savings were made in the first place by abolishing the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen and forming Creative Scotland in their stead. She has said, “the overall cut to the culture budget is 10%, which is higher than the 6.9% John Swinney cited as the standard cut applied to non ring-fenced services. So it’s the next installments which will shape the story”.⁵ Bonnar also points out that the Scottish Local Authorities, which you are keen to work in partnership with, “are facing the same challenges as in England with large cuts to absorb and neither a statutory responsibility for the arts nor an agreement to support culture”.⁶ So the issue here seems to be complicated by compound cuts and stand still budgets in real terms, now and beyond the forthcoming election.

AD: For clarity, Creative Scotland’s 2011-2012 budget has been maintained at £35.5 million, the same figure as 2010-2011. By reducing our overheads and streamlining our services, we have saved resources and reinvested almost £1 m of savings back into the creative sector. Creative Scotland recognises the challenges local authorities face during the coming year, however, we have been in close discussions with a range of authorities that recognise the contribution that culture makes to the lives of their communities and are looking to maintain the value of their investment in culture and creativity. Our corporate plan, *Investing in our Creative Future*, includes a £1million programme to invest in the contribution that ‘places’ across the country make to a creative Scotland.

V: In arguing for the formation of Creative Scotland different Culture Ministers, Labour and Nationalist alike, assured the public that they were committed to the arms length principle. Going by what you say, these assurances have been misleading. The idea of the public service which you speak of seems virtually indistinguishable from developing the political notion of Scotland PLC under the auspices of Creative Scotland. So to what extent do you think your future budget is dependent on the organisation being a function of what, in contemporary civil service language, is called “single purpose government”?

AD: Creative Scotland is a non-departmental public body and as such is part of the wider delivery landscape of Scottish public services which includes local and regional government. Promotion of, and advocating for, Scotland’s talented creative sector benefits both the sector itself and contributes to the rich creative life of Scotland’s communities. This role is enshrined in the legislation that established Creative Scotland and it continues to operate within the arms’ length principle.

The Social Agenda

V: The 2006 Scottish government commissioned study, ‘Quality of Life and Well-Being; Measuring the Benefits of Culture and Sport’, shows how weak the evidence base is which underpins idealistic connections between the arts and the solving of social ills. However, the volume of research done in this area has not moderated the political appetite for making such claims.

You have talked about “doing some interesting work about inspiring communities in prison”. Some readers will be surprised to see you describing people who have been incarcerated as “communities” in quite such rose tinted terms. Of course the arts have long been offered to prisoners as one aspect of their generally humane treatment in accordance with human rights. What is new is an emphasis on the impact of the arts on reducing crime. But what if the arts have little or no impact on reducing re-offending rates? After all, the much stronger correlation is between crime and inequality. So are you perhaps guilty of overplaying instrumental benefits in line with contemporary neoliberal governments that normally play down the stronger correlation and play up what are in fact tokenistic policies?

AD: The *Inspiring Change* project, led by Motherwell College, has completed an early stage evaluation which is, as I said, interesting. Given the short lifespan of the project, the evaluation makes no claim to reducing re-offending, however,

it does cite impacts on inmates’ learning and on their relationships with their families. Ultimately, ex-offenders will be released into communities everywhere in Scotland – initiatives such as *Inspiring Change*, or the *Cashback for Communities* projects are about improving the lives of neighbourhoods and communities through the provision of cultural and creative activities.

Unesco

V: The Scottish Arts Council was not set up to be an instrumental force in the market in the way you describe Creative Scotland. The interventions the new organisation has made to promote what you’ve called “home grown culture” are already controversial. It seems important to remember that these interventions are sanctioned by the Unesco Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions which came into force in 2007. As Minister of Culture and Constitutional Affairs Mike Russell saw no difficulty in reconciling the anti-free market meaning of the Unesco treaty with his vision for Creative Scotland as an entrepreneurial organisation. Yet the interventions you make as an economic development agency concerned with our ‘cultural ecology’ are also distortions of the market. Given the complaints of small independent television producers about Creative Scotland’s patronage of STV at the indies’ expense⁸, for instance, how is Creative Scotland going to deal with the underlying business issues of cultural protectionism? How is Creative Scotland going to avoid becoming a bastion of publicly funded cultural nationalism?

AD: Creative Scotland has been thoroughly transparent in its aim to boost independent television production generated in Scotland and also that we would use a range of tools to build sustainable businesses. The good news is that this will offer excellent opportunities ahead for independent writers, directors and other talent to produce work that inspires audiences nationally and internationally.

Life in a Promotional Culture

V: Our experience of working in the cultural sector is rather at odds with the benign picture you painted in conversation. What we find is that the ‘economic agenda’ you talk about is inextricably bound up with a now widespread promotional attitude to culture. You’ve said that Creative Scotland is to operate “generic budgets that are more strategic, much more planned and on a larger scale and able to punch the weight.” We welcome pluralism and greater scope, but your language here also points to the new business ethos which we find threatening. In practice it is the same promotional ethos that we see overriding local democracy and accountability, for example when *Variant* was effectively censored by *Culture Sport Glasgow* for, among other things, allegedly showing *Glasgow* in a bad light. Or even more worryingly, when the *Aberdeen City Council* bowed to commercial lobbying and supported *Ian Wood’s* costly and, by the Council’s own findings, unpopular plans to build over *Union Street Gardens*. In that case it was *Peacock Arts* who found themselves at the centre of a storm created by different values in commerce and culture.⁹

There are many other examples which we could give of the problematic relationship between commerce and

culture, and no doubt you will be aware of the weight of cultural philosophy which argues that commercial exchange values are forever at odds with the very complex use values which underpin artistic quality and general cultural wellbeing. Yet, from its founding statements, it has been clear that *Creative Scotland’s* mission is to try and reconcile these contradictory movements. We are not going to resolve the arguments on these pages, but it should be no surprise to anyone that where you see public money “adding value” to culture in Scotland others may regard the dynamic very differently and see public money being diverted, in too many instances, to the cause of inflating exchange values and private profits, and ultimately extracting value through an ever increasing range of methods. From that perspective, the inflated public spending on such things as corporate logos, public relations and consultancy fees are all examples of an entrepreneurial culture inured to the plundering of the public sector. What are your thoughts on this situation?

AD: We have recently published *Investing in Our Creative Future*, Creative Scotland’s first plan, which sets out our ambition to see Scotland recognised as one of the world’s most creative nations and as a place of choice to live, learn and work as an artist. Our five objectives – investing in talent, quality production, audiences and access, place and the cultural economy – aim to increase the recognition, profile and influence of Scotland’s talented creative practitioners and to increase the audiences that value their work. We will use a range of strategic investment programmes to achieve this: these are now published, alongside our plan;

www.creativescotland.com/about/our-plans/corporate-plan

Notes

- 1 March 2nd 2011.
- 2 [Eds.] “The List, an entertainment and lifestyle guide for Glasgow and Edinburgh, is reducing its frequency. From 2nd March the magazine will move from a fortnightly frequency to monthly.” CISION, Media Updates - UK - 10th February 2011 <http://uk.cision.com/Resources/media-updates/Media-Updates--UK--10-February-2011/>
- 3 A primarily publicly funded charity, including: Big Lottery Fund, the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, local and central government (including the devolved governments in Wales and Scotland and government departments in Northern Ireland), Non-Departmental Public Bodies, and the European Union.
- 4 <http://www.capefarewell.com/art/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/art-and-climate-change.html>
- 5 <http://annebonnar.wordpress.com/2010/11/17/the-impact-of-scotlands-budget-for-culture-wont-be-felt-until-the-next-instalments/>
- 6 <http://annebonnar.wordpress.com/2010/12/21/how-statistics-about-arts-cuts-are-used-creatively-to-make-political-points/>
- 7 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/01/13110743/0>
- 8 <http://www.heraldsotland.com:80/news/home-news/tv-indies-slam-creative-scotland-s-stv-cash-1.1090123>
- 9 <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/save-the-new-contemporary-art-centre-in-union-terrace-gardens.html> http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/north_east/8682430.stm <http://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/Article.aspx/1752022>

Plan B Company, performer biographies, taken from the programme for *A Wee home from home*, 2010, reproduced in ‘Investing In Scotland’s Creative Future’, Creative Scotland Corporate Plan 2011–2014

