

## Beyond COVID-19: one year on A Playwrights' Gathering

**Friday 23 July 2021**

**Live Captioners:** Karen Pritchard and Eluned Charnley  
**Speakers:** Various

**Note: This document is not a verbatim transcript**

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: Welcome everyone, lots of faces I know and lots I don't, I am on the board of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, I am a dramaturg and performance maker myself. Welcoming Louise Stephens first, the new Creative Director for Playwrights' Studio, Scotland.

LOUISE STEPHENS: Hello.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: Louise and I will have an informal chat so you can get a sense of who Louise is, for those who don't know her. We are excited to do this and it's an honour to welcome Louise to this role.

We have had some great chats over the last few weeks and chats about playwriting and pandemics and everything in between. What is clear to me, Louise comes with loads of energy and expertise and ideas, but is open to conversation, which is exciting for me - not coming in with a fixed point, but wanting to listen, hear, and talk to us. Listening to the sector and Scotland and the Playwrights' Studio is a process, and one that we are all part of.

So, in the spirit of Louise getting to know you all and vice versa, I will hand over to her, to give us an introduction to how she came to be here - she worked in Scotland in the past, some may know. Louise tell us - this is your life!

LOUISE STEPHENS: [Laughter] To reflect on some of the things you are saying, thinking of this as a process, it goes through life cycles, depending on who is the Creative Director and what is needed for playwrights at that moment. But thinking about the Playwrights' Studio which I have been involved with - I will start with that.

I did a course in 2005/6 in dramaturgy, and as part of that I had a placement with Playwrights' Studio. This was the first time I had encountered it and realised it was a wonderful space that just supported playwrights in various ways, through advocacy and through practical support and financial support. I did that course, a placement at Playwrights' Studio, then Literary Assistant and then Literary Officer at the Traverse Theatre and, in a move initiated by Playwrights' Studio, they asked if I would like to do a PhD and do research for them, so I did that for a few years. Then I moved on and worked at the Royal Court for six years, two years as Literary Assistant, then Assistant Literary Manager, then the Deputy Literary Manager and then the dramaturg at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin - I'm still in Ireland right now but looking forward to coming back to Glasgow.

The common thread through that work is supporting playwrights in some way, or theatre makers, in making work and learning about organisational structure and

different types of support. I got to encounter so many different forms of work, so a thrilling thing to come back to Scotland after what is that 10 years away or something? To have seen work from all over the world. We are lucky to see work from all over on our doorstep, but that is what I have been up to.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: One of the things that stuck with me from our first conversation, was the need - or your enthusiasm - to treat artists with respect, that they are the experts and know their craft. I love that you begin from this position - they know stuff and can handle difficult conversations.

LOUISE STEPHENS: A lot of that work I have done has started from a relationship where you encounter someone's work for the first time without encountering them for the first time. I always start from, in reading a play, you should see the intention of the playwright and assuming that this could be the play that could reinvent the form. So starting from a place of imagining beyond what you have already experienced.

What we talked about Lewis, was the thing of, that the conversations that you have around work. Sometimes, the best thing for that conversation to progress is not to assume that every note you will give will be met with push back or defensiveness. That is death to a creative conversation. So I start by assuming that the playwright is in control of what they are doing and knows what they are doing and it is my job to meet that idea in its conception wherever it exists above their head. I don't know if that makes sense.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: Makes lots of sense to me. At this juncture, at the end of this wee chat, we are going to take some questions, but the way we will do it, if you could send me private messages, I will filter through to see if there are themes or topics coming up. So send a question as a private message in the chat, and I will filter through and see the common themes coming up.

This may be a tricky question, and I'm not sure if I prepared you. I am interested to ask you - having had that opportunity to work in all those different places with writers in all parts of the world, are there any peculiarities or specificities to the Scottish playwriting scene, that you have observed in the past, or recently?

LOUISE STEPHENS: In the way the community works, I think there is a great solidarity between playwrights here, that is comparatively unusual. I think this may be due to a number of factors, including Scotland's history of very strong touring work - that is a longer conversation in a way - but the great leadership that playwrights showed in the 90s, through striking for their own worth and setting up their own mechanisms, to have their work recognised.

So in terms of the form that works takes, I see commonality between Scotland and Ireland, in terms of oral traditions, but wouldn't want to go too far down that road of observations, because you can be trapped in that. What I tend to see influencing work the most, is what other work is being produced in the scene. You can see the ripple effect of a particular production going on that inspires people to try out a new form or a new storytelling mode, that is provoked by what they have seen on stage. But I'm looking forward to re-immersing myself in Scottish theatre and seeing where it is right now, when we can go again.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: Indeed, the new productions that bring new mutations into the

sphere, you see those ripples and it's so important to bring fresh ideas and voices into the mix. I agree with what you say about the sense of community.

There was a coffee morning hosted by Olly Emmanuel before this and there was a sense of unison between Scottish playwrights, the stronger the sector there is, the more of us getting work on, the stronger the Scottish playwright voice is. This year and a half has been a difficult time for the theatre sector as a whole and playwrights, and the future looks complicated, we have to be honest, it looks uncertain for all of us.

I suppose in some ways, if you put a positive spin on it, the past year has forced us to challenge what theatre is and why we do it. And ask the question, what does success look like? So, interested to throw that to you Louise - a whole big tangled mess of issues I am throwing your way - but interested in your reflections about what the last year and a half has caused you to think about where playwright sits?

LOUISE STEPHENS: Could you restate that again? Sorry.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: Absolutely. I am interested in your reflections over this challenging time and how has it caused you to re-evaluate what playwrights do and why?

LOUISE STEPHENS: It would be remiss not to say, it has brought up for a lot of people, or underlined for a lot of people, the differences between the parts of our industry that are freelance and some that are company or building based. Restated challenges to try and find the ways for those two parts of the industry to talk productively to each other. I am sure people here have a lot of opinions and encounters that speak to that - it is a complex situation and I won't attempt to go too far into it right now - but I think and hope and anticipate that Playwrights' Studio can be part of solving some of that gap that is there between freelancers and companies and how each side appreciates each other.

I was aware at the start of the pandemic, how, none of this will be news to anyone here, but how unstable the work can be, for freelancers. I am not going to be able to say anything revolutionary, but this has been the thing that has been underlined for me, over the last year and a half. The importance of playwrights is obviously never something I have questioned, but I was asked in the interview for this job, what is the unique thing, what do playwrights do, what is the point - they put it better than that. I said, and this is true, playwrights are mechanisms for delivering radical empathy and I don't think there is much else we could do more for audiences right now. I hope that answers your question.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: I love that notion of delivering a mechanism for radical empathy, it feels vital and urgent. Something else I found moving and inspiring, I was reflecting what is playwriting and live theatre? We are all live streaming and views are in the millions, but you talked of the potency of a smaller audience and the power of that. Do you remember?

LOUISE STEPHENS: This came from a reflection of doing work with a TV company. They talked about the scale of their audiences, of 10 million, and looking at my time in an influential theatre, that could only ever fit in 7000 if they had sold out their upstairs space. But recognising in that moment, that the way that TV people were talking about that - they could only ever move their audience a small amount, because of the

particular project, a series - but with theatre, I am so aware you can absolutely move someone a huge distance because of the directness of the experience and also because sometimes, there is less limited or less limitations of the form of theatre, which can be more radical, than for those mass media experiences. So, what better tool for re-engaging with the problems of the last year and a half? I keep saying that, but more than that!

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: You were seguing into this, not only the pandemic we are dealing with, but also in a matrix of intersecting movements, like Black Lives Matter and the climate crisis. It seems like lots of conversations need to happen, and in a way this is connected to your radical empathy point, where does playwriting fit into that and how does the way we make and share plays also come into that discourse?

LOUISE STEPHENS: I think we talked about responsibility before. About the responsibility of artists to talk about certain things. Also, I guess the problem that comes with that word makes it sound like a chore. Playwrights pick up on currents underneath dominant discourse - they're often ahead of the curve of burning issues in society not yet being talked about. I've seen that time and again where playwrights predicted the thing about to happen and brought it to public consciousness in a way not always possible in other media.

Naturally playwrights are already interested in inhabiting marginalised experiences because what you're asking people to do when you select a particular moment, character, or person, is exercise empathy in inhabiting a different experience. It doesn't specifically speak to climate other than we're working in a system intricately linked to many questions about the future, about how humanity will persist in a crisis. I don't know if that's specific enough.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: That's the thing, we need to think so broadly, there is no one route or answer. That's what I enjoy about the way you will approach the creative directorship is as a process - there's not one goal, there's processes and mechanisms we can try and design and implement which maybe serve to address some of these.

Do you want to talk more about that? I love the notion you want to approach Playwrights' Studio as a process and creative process.

LOUISE STEPHENS: I suppose a thing I've been thinking about is how, or should, we use artistic process as a sort of model or guide to how Playwrights' Studio works? I suppose I mean that in specifics by saying in an artistic process there is a lot of communication when it works well. I've started out speaking to playwrights and will continue that of course.

Also thinking about the different phases Playwrights' Studio has gone through. The main thing now for me is working out what is needed right now in all the different places Playwrights' Studio works in. Around what is needed in terms of development of resources and in terms of advocacy, in terms of how Playwrights' Studio speaks to government and funders and other larger parts of the mechanism we work in. Does that help?

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: I think so. I'll take some questions. Lots of people have been bringing up digital performance, a hot topic at the moment. People are interested to hear your thoughts on the position of that - feels like it's something not going away,

we're here now on a digital platform. It has done huge things for access and opens doors, but there is hunger for live performance. What are your thoughts about hybrid performance moving forwards?

LOUISE STEPHENS: There's one part, the tools, it's great to be able to have a conversation with anyone using Zoom. Then there is the form itself. I think there's work being done at present around for example how to safeguard playwright's rights and exploitation digitally of work.

There are also heaps of possibility in use of tools like this as performance platforms. I guess we're back to balancing that with making sure that's not at the expense of, for example, the liveness of live performance and the use of space that obviously is unique to theatre.

So yes. I think there's still lots of work to be done to make sure digital work is not at expense of form and doesn't lead to exploitation of writers and other creatives. It's an exciting point.

A lot of performance has engaged with this medium excitingly. I hope it also generates paths to different types of work. We've talked about where playwrights can be and perhaps this increased faculty with this sort of tool can expand that and take playwrights to new places geographically, artistically, etc.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: I love that question of where playwrights can be, let's keep asking that. It also offers potentially more carbon friendly way for Scottish playwrights to offer work internationally. There is a question about how we build dramaturgy and culture with anti-oppressive ethics built in, for example how we make sure we have dramaturgical processes and panel discussions where a range of voices are heard.

LOUISE STEPHENS: I have done that in the past and it always resulted in better conversations. Sometimes when diversity and equality are talked about, they're not necessarily talked about as enriching, but sometimes it can slip into a language that implies that it is a 'have to do' instead of a recognition that the structures that existed in the past prevented us from expressing as communities and countries or whatever you want, the fullness of our collective experience. So thinking about the point of the agency we all have in different spaces, that's one way to express it. For example not to take part, or use your power to make sure correct space is made for all different experiences.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: It ties to your point about communication and a good creative space having open communication, full of empathy. Louise such a pleasure to talk to you. Every conversation I've had with Louise leaves me feeling stimulated, listened to and challenged, really exciting qualities to have at the head of the organisation at this time.

LOUISE STEPHENS: Thank you and thank you for welcoming me.

EMMA MCKEE: Thank you so much Lewis and Louise. Hopefully we can come back to some of the questions in the Q&A section. We'll now move onto some presentations which we hope will give you more information about what we've been up to as organisations. I'd like to introduce Linda Duncan McLaughlin and John McCann.

# Playwrights' Studio Scotland

LINDA DUNCAN McLAUGHLIN: That was great, I agree I feel inspired and looking forward to working with Playwrights' Studio as we move forward. I'm Linda Duncan McLaughlin, Co-Chair (with my colleague John McCann) of the Scottish Society of Playwrights (SSP). We're a membership organisation representing playwrights working professionally in Scotland and we have a current membership of 150 - can I get a yay!!

SSP is affiliated to the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), and our role is basically to advocate for playwrights' interests, particularly with theatres and production companies in Scotland, and to make sure that our voice is heard as part of decision-making in the Scottish theatre sector.

We are co-signatories to the Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB) commissioning agreements which operate across the UK, and we have been instrumental in drawing up the joint Scottish Society of Playwrights/Federation of Scottish Theatre (FST) commissioning contract laying out the rights, terms and conditions that govern commissioning by FST member companies in Scotland.

We advise playwrights on all aspects of playwriting in Scotland, but a lot of the queries we receive are about how the contract should run, and issues that arise from that. John, do you want to say a wee bit more about that?

JOHN McCANN: Thanks Linda. Hi, I'm John McCann, Co-Chair with Linda of the SSP. Contracts have always been an important part of the work we do, it would take up the chunk of our time in the year, addressing concerns on our desk, concerns from you. For obvious reasons this has become particularly vital over the past eighteen months, and we've been doing a lot of work lately on digital contracts and helping to adapt and, in a lot of cases, designing from scratch agreements about digital theatre offerings during the time that it's not been possible for live theatre work to be presented.

It's an increasingly important part of the theatre sector, and it's something that we're keen to keep abreast of, so if you have experience of digital work, good or bad, particularly if a theatre wants to present a piece of your work both physically and digitally in this kind of hybrid way we've talked about, we'd be happy to hear about it and offer advice if you need it. We're currently renegotiating our commissioning contract. There is a historic clause talking about how elements can be used for publicity, which in current circumstances is out of date and we're keen to address that moving forward.

Last year we produced a set of Digital Theatre Guidelines which can be found on our website [scottishsocietyofplaywrights.co.uk](http://scottishsocietyofplaywrights.co.uk), along with information on the SSP/FST Commissioning Agreement itself.

The SSP has also been involved in a load of workshops and committees over the past while which have been monitoring developments in the sector throughout the pandemic. For example we've been part of the STUC Cultural Affiliates Group, which meets on a fortnightly basis with representatives from the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland, and we're partners on that group along with WGGB, Equity, Artists Union, National Union of Journalists, and we found that group particularly helpful. We're also contributing to ongoing discussions about how to steer the sector as we emerge from current restrictions.

LINDA DUNCAN McLAUGHLIN: We're basically here to represent your interests, and that

# Playwrights' Studio Scotland

means we're keen to hear about your issues and concerns. We're happy to advise people whether or not they are members of SSP, so if you need advice about any aspect of the industry, please just get in touch with us on [scottishsocietyofplaywrights@gmail.com](mailto:scottishsocietyofplaywrights@gmail.com). And look at joining.

We're always keen to welcome new professionally working playwrights in Scotland. If you're not yet in that position, keep us in mind for when you get your first commission. I'll hand back to Emma now. Thank you for listening.

EMMA McKEE: Thank you so much John and Linda.

Next I'll introduce Jules Horne, a playwright speaking on behalf of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain.

JULES HORNE: Hello I'm Jules speaking on behalf of Bill Armstrong. Lovely to see Louise and everyone. I wanted to mention the Writers' Guild of Great Britain is here and affiliated to STUC, and I'm a member of both [unclear] unions and SSP. A statement from Bill. And the new co-chairs are Suzy Enoch, Grant MacGregor and Nicola Jo Cully, who many of you will know.

Over the past year, Bill has been campaigning tremendously hard for Scottish members on the STUC and on the ScotGov CTEEA committee consultation on the arts. That's the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee. The Writers' Guild committee have worked closely together and his strategic experience has been invaluable and practical.

Here is Bill's statement:

As we work towards whatever the new normal will be, two things are clear. One is all too depressingly familiar and something most writers will have noticed. The other is more encouraging and something not many will be aware of. And there is a clear lesson to be taken from both.

As Covid has ripped through all areas of the creative industries, writers have increasingly come under familiar pressure to do more for less money, usually under the guise of, "it is a crisis and we all have to pull together to get through". Broadcasters, production companies and producers have repeatedly used this line to undermine terms and conditions of employment, good practice guidelines and accepted norms.

Not a week goes by without writers alerting WGGB to persistent and insidious erosion of agreements. Our colleagues in the Scottish Society of Playwrights have noticed employers using the cover of Covid to undermine and rewrite long-standing agreements with Scottish playwrights.

The financial pressures driving this will only increase with time. The worst effects will be felt most by the weakest and least able to resist it. Writers, few in number, working independently and remotely, are amongst the most vulnerable workers in the creative industries. What we do is too often badly misunderstood, under-appreciated and poorly rewarded.

It has always been a good idea for writers to join together with other writers, to communicate, to understand they are not alone, that they face the same problems as

other writers, to find solutions together, and to fight for better terms and conditions of employment together. In the years to come, joining together with other writers will be more critical than ever.

There are three main organisations that represent and fight for Scottish writers interests, WGGB Scotland, the Scottish Society of Playwrights and the Scottish Society of Authors. There are good reasons for three separate organisations, as writers in different craft areas face very different problems and institutions with whom they have to negotiate.

But there are also pressing reasons for all three organisations to consult and co-operate with one another. Writers, especially Scottish writers, cross the boundaries of different craft areas on a regular basis. The three organisations face many similar problems, negotiate with the same government funding bodies and deal with the same government bodies. Working together enables us to share ideas, find common ground and solutions, and press the case for writers with greater leverage and effectiveness.

And this brings me to the good news part of the story.

Over the course of the pandemic, the Scottish Trade Union Council has held a regular fortnightly meeting of the creative industries unions - unions representing writers, artists, actors, musicians, technicians and journalists - who meet as a group with the Scottish government, Creative Scotland and recently with Screen Scotland. As the pandemic has progressed, the scope and range of these meetings has increased. Trust, co-operation and understanding between the unions has grown.

The Scottish government increasingly acknowledges the value of consultation with the unions. The influence and leverage of the creative industries group as a whole, and of each individual union as a part of that whole, has significantly increased. The voice this gives to relatively small organisations like WGGB Scotland and the SSP - relative to the likes of BECTU - is invaluable.

The SSP recently told us of problems they were having with an employer who was attempting to unilaterally alter the terms of an agreement (this happened to me and others). The mere mention that the SSP were regularly meeting with the Scottish government as part of the creative industries unions group, with the implication the issue might be raised within that forum, was enough to bring the rogue employer back in line.

The clear lesson to be drawn is that as individual writers and separate organisations - we are all too vulnerable and likely to see the terms and conditions of our working lives deteriorate. Joining and actively supporting one of the writers' organisations, encouraging and helping your organisation to work with the other writers' organisations, and with the other creative industries unions, will get our voices heard where they need to be heard, increase our ability to defend our livelihoods, and make us all stronger.

JULES HORNE: I'd like to add a personal note to Bill's statement. I've been on the committee this year and it's been eye-opening. Working together, you see patterns, and gather evidence, which becomes leverage. And that's crucial for the writers' organisations' negotiations, which are increasingly high level.

It's also vital for isolated writers. I wouldn't suspect a unilaterally changed theatre



contract. I'd assume it was normal best practice. I wouldn't have gained confidence to ask for payment when asked to work for free on a local strategic project. I wouldn't be talking to the local leisure trust about artist payments. So being an active union member has made a difference in lots of ways. I'd strongly encourage you to get involved if you can.

EMMA McKEE: Thank you Jules. Next I'd like to introduce Andy Robertson, Communications Manager at Culture Counts.

ANDY ROBERTSON: Hello. Let me just share my screen.

## FULL CULTURE COUNTS PRESENTATION

### **SLIDE 1**

So hello everyone and thank you for welcoming me to this Playwrights' Gathering. My name is Andy Robertson, I'm Communications Manager for a project called Culture Counts.

### **SLIDE 2**

I'm going to talk about 3 things today;

- What culture counts does
- Some of our achievements in the advocacy work we have done with our members
- And lastly to put forward this idea "What does a country that values culture look like?" This is the inspiration for our Communications Strategy.

### **SLIDE 3**

Culture Counts collaborates with the culture sector to promote the public benefit of the arts, heritage and creative industries to decision makers. However this means we have to be a pivot between decision makers and the sector itself.

### **SLIDE 4**

So what we also do is - we demystify the operations of Government and Parliament; allowing more people from the arts, heritage and creative industries to influence policies that impact on them.

### **SLIDE 5**

Our Networks is how we got most of this work done. We work with different groups to advance different advocacy projects.

Core Members: these are the major umbrella organisations across Scotland's arts, screen, heritage and creative industries and they pay a fee to join Culture Counts.

Our Subscribers: can be anyone working or volunteering in the culture sector which is free, and they receive our monthly Journal which keeps everyone up-to-date on the policy landscape that impacts the sector.

Subgroups are often created in response to new and sometimes unexpected policy challenges - like Covid.

And lastly our Cross-Party Group at Scottish Parliament, which we're in the process of renewing for the new term. This gets us and the sector in the room with MSPs twice a year.

## SLIDE 6

Here are some collective achievements from these networks over the past 12 months - the biggest one is the Scottish Parliament Election in 2021. We crowdsourced a manifesto through online events. The process was open to anyone working or volunteering in culture and produced a large bank of issues and ideas and which gave us eight clear asks for political parties. So this helped us make the case in the media and in meetings with the major political parties to work to get these asks included in their manifestos. Which was successful on a number of counts. And it's informing our future work now, at the beginning of this new parliamentary term, and we prioritise our work in three places, Place, Brexit, and Diversity in the sector.

In response to COVID-19, we launched a quick footed survey in March 2020, which had almost 400 responses within a couple of weeks. That supported our calls for sector investment at a crucial time - NPF4 is an example of some really nitty gritty policy stuff, which included submitting evidence to the ongoing work in Scotland's planning policy and planning framework called NPF4.

It is three different projects we have been working on recently.

So, what does a country that values culture look like?

This is a provocation we took from a conversation with academics at QMU. Its central to our digital comms strategy, so everything we post on social media, everything that goes on our website is looking for answers to that question.

Listening to Louise, I wonder if this changes the advocacy conversation, instead of us shouting about how good we are, it changes the conversation - we have ambition for the arts and future generations, and we believe in broad mindedness - and this demands creativity and patience. And change takes time, so here are some examples of how I try and answer that question through our communication strategy.

[Useful Facts](#) is a microsite - an index of stats, drawn from research papers about the value of culture, may be useful for applications for funding and advocacy work.

Our social media channels promote stories about the value of culture, and also provide opportunities for those working or volunteering in the sector to engage in policy making

## SLIDE 10

The [Culture Counts Journal](#) brings you up-to-date with the policy-making landscape across the arts, screen, heritage and creative industries.

Information on all of those things are available at our website [culturecounts.scot](http://culturecounts.scot) - there is information about the other projects on there too. If you have any questions my email

is andy@culturecounts.scot.

Thank you for listening.

EMMA McKEE: Thank you so much Andy. Next, welcoming Vanessa Boyd, Interdisciplinary Performance Officer at Creative Scotland.

VANESSA BOYD: Hi Everybody, I'll also share my screen. Hopefully you can all see that ok.

## FULL CREATIVE SCOTLAND PRESENTATION

Hello and welcome. Lovely to have so many people together in this digital space today. My name is Vanessa Boyd and I'm Interdisciplinary Performance Officer at Creative Scotland. It's lovely to see so many faces here today. For those of you who aren't so familiar with Creative Scotland I'm going to give a brief introduction to who we are and what we do, an overview of how we have responded to the Covid Pandemic and supporting Scotland's creative sectors, and a funding update for the next year or so.

There is a lot more detail that I could go into than I will have time for in this presentation, but I will leave my email with you all so that you can get in touch after this session should you have any questions or would like to follow up on anything specific.

In a typical year we have a budget of £90 million, but we've distributed an additional £70 million in the last months. We have a large organisation of 120 individuals, split into three areas, Screen Scotland; Creative Industries, and Arts and Engagement,. This latter directorate is where I sit along with a range of other art forms and we work in collaboration with colleagues across legal, finance, EDI, etc.

### **Slide 4: Our Funding**

This list of funding routes is by no means exhaustive but probably the funds that you have most likely heard of or would be relevant for you to apply to as playwrights or if you work within the performing arts sector.

We recently supported a range of outdoor and non-conventional performance to reflect impact and changes of COVID-19 on access to venues etc. [There is a brilliant selection of work going out this summer and autumn which I'll share in the chat](#). Our regularly funded organisations are RFO, a portfolio of 121 organisations that have received 3 years of regular funding. Because of the pandemic, they received an additional year of funding. We also have a range of targeted funds from different art form teams and external partners, which you can find out about on our website.

A hot topic today is the impact of Covid. I don't need to go on about how challenging it's been for the sector as a whole. There have been challenges, cancellation of work, temporary closure of venues, and social distancing and not being able to be together. There are also some really great initiatives and new ways of working around digital platforms to talk to people around the world and increase access and accessibility.

This slide is a snapshot of what we've been working on since March 2020. A large proportion of time is adapting existing funds and distributing emergency funding.

Alongside this we have also been continuing work into refreshing our strategy and funding framework.

The Open Fund is what probably most of you have applied to or are interested in. The Open Fund: Sustaining Creative Development is the fund that you would apply to if you were looking to undertake research, development or project development. It's open to all art forms/activity. You can apply as an individual or as an organisation, and it is open all year round with no deadlines. We have been working on changes to the Open Fund. On 10th August we will launch a refreshed version. Guidance will be published next week. This work has been carried out in response to feedback from applicants.

It will retain its core purpose (to support creative activity from individual artists, producers and other creative professionals in Scotland), as well as the assessment criteria which will broadly be the same, and it will continue to be open all year. And an online portal allowing applicants to edit and save applications and check eligibility before submitting.

There will be a proportionate application process, with questions and responses based on the proposed activity and level of funding being sought. If you're looking for a smaller request or something simpler then we'll ask you to put in less information. There will also be a more straightforward approach to accepting applications in video and audio for those with access needs. We'll have a published list of specific priorities to increase transparency in the panel decision making process.

As mentioned earlier, in 2019/20 we examined existing research and consulted with hundreds of applicants and stakeholders, seeking people's experiences and suggestions about future funding. We consulted hundreds of applicants to better understand their experience.

We also looked at a historical overview of Creative Scotland's funding decisions and commissioned research which looked at the approach of other funders around the world. This work, and in combination with our response to the context we are operating in and still dealing with, we have created a refreshed strategic framework to guide our work in 2021/22 and beyond.

To summarise, we will prioritise:

- Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion
- Sustainable Development - so really taking into account the ongoing impact of the climate crisis
- Fair Work
- International

[You can find more detail in our annual plans, see chat box for a link.](#) Alongside that there has been thinking and consultation around changes to broader funding approach. The main differences are:

- A broader base of organisations receiving funding regularly
- Strengthening relationships and taking a partnership approach to developing arts and creativity
- Improved decision-making processes linked to priorities
- Support for individual artists - the open fund for individuals

- Simpler and more transparent processes

I'll share this presentation as well so you have links to the Annual Plan and refreshed priorities.

So, to summarise our direction over the coming months and into 2022/23:

August 21: Open Fund for Individuals will move to an online application process

October 21: Further details of transition year 2022/23 and future funding approaches  
And how we regularly fund organisations.

April 22: Full details of new funding framework

22/23: Transition year to new funding framework

Thank you for listening. My contact address is [vanessa.Boyd@creativescotland.com](mailto:vanessa.Boyd@creativescotland.com) if you have general enquiries contact the enquiries team. Thank you very much everybody.

EMMA McKEE: Thank you Vanessa. We're due a short comfort break. See you at 12.05.  
Thank you.

## **BREAK until 12.05**

EMMA McKEE: Hello and welcome back. I will give you a short update on what Playwrights' Studio has been up to.

As you know, we are the nation's only arts organisation exclusively dedicated to the long-term support, development and promotion of Scotland's playwrights. As well as the team, we have four playwright board members: Rona Munro, Lynda Radley, Davey Anderson and Clare Duffy as well as three Associate Playwrights Adera Onashile, Stef Smith and Lesley Wilson. They have been a tremendous support to the team over the last sixteen months.

I wanted to give you a very quick update on what the team have been doing since the first online Playwrights' Gathering. As you know, staff have been working remotely since 17th March 2020. Following the announcement from the Scottish Government last week, this will remain our way of working for the next couple of months at least.

The organisation has not instigated any face-to face activity since March last year, so the majority of our work is now happening online (largely thanks to my colleagues Hayley and Amy). The main reason for this is to ensure the health and safety of staff and artists particularly with the Delta variant becoming so prevalent. For example, the script development workshops for our mentored playwrights happened online earlier this week.

Whilst balancing out our wish, like the rest of the sector, to be back working in-person, as an organisation, we are keenly aware of the power differential in rehearsal rooms and the pressure this could create for artists contracted by us to feel that they have to be in the room. So we will be continuing to work in this way for the moment.

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We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of those artists who have gone on this digital journey with us, and we will definitely continue to take advantage of this technology as we move forward. But we understand that this way of working is not for everyone. Therefore, over the coming weeks and months, staff and board will be exploring how the organisation might be able to move back to in-person activity. Within Scottish Government guidelines, of course. This will include The Space, The Tom McGrath Writers' Room, and the Plays Library. So please bear with us and we'll keep you updated as things become clearer.

The Playwriting Programme for 2021/22 will be launched this month. We anticipate there will be some changes as to how these programmes will be delivered as we enter this new world.

Our wider advocacy work includes being part of discussions with the wider sector, the Federation of Scottish Theatre, Creative Scotland, and the Scottish Government.

To keep you all informed, in August 2020, like many other independent cultural organisations in Glasgow, we were informed that our core funding from Glasgow City Council had been cut after 16 years. Our Creative Director contacted these organisations and we have been working as a collective to engage with representatives from the council and Glasgow Life.

This advocacy work is continuing and will continue for us both publicly and behind the scenes.

All of the team, particularly my colleagues Amy and Hayley, continue working very hard behind the scenes keeping their eyes peeled for any opportunities that may be of benefit to playwrights and promoting these as soon as possible through our e-news and social media channels.

Once again, the last but most important piece of information is that the team are always here and are available to chat or just listen. We can arrange phone calls, Zoom meetings or conversations by email. Whatever works best for you just now. So please do keep in touch! Thank you very much.

Finally, I would like to invite playwright Peter Arnott, to offer his reflections a year on from that first online gathering.

PETER ARNOTT: Hi. I'm a playwright here to represent no-one but myself. It was good to hear from the others about the effects of small-scale lobbying. They seem to have done well during the pandemic, and also from Andy about how Culture Counts institutionalises the collective lobbying we need, and from Vanessa, about the changes being a result of lobbying. I'd like to talk about a lobbying failure at the highest, most strategic levels.

Yesterday, Kate Forbes convened her panel on Scotland in ten years' time on recovery from Covid and what it will look like. She thinks it's a tight 10 years, and I agree.

Of the seven individuals named to the commission, only a computer games manufacturer approaches the creative industry. Is this a HUGE failure of lobbying? Where does this failure of lobbying come from? Why is there no vision but only immediate fixes to the curtains in the foxholes of our theatres and companies? Why is

it that open conversations about how to look at a long-term collective future for the performing arts in Scotland that flourished from May to August last year came to a more or less complete halt in September? The phones stopped ringing, people stopped answering emails. Why? Because the money arrived in September. This was on the basis of existing organisations and individuals too. BUT, this is not (or not just) a case of the salaried running around pointlessly while the freelance scabble for crumbs of information.

As Louise said when we talked about this yesterday, everyone working for a theatre company is constantly on fire. And it isn't a fire of inspiration. It is as if someone has doused them in petrol and tossed them an open zippo. In the last year, everyone in theatre jobs rushed from one cancelled re-opening to the next, between one short term plan to the next for their institution only, constantly, pointlessly exhausted. They had no time or space for a long-term collective plan or thinking, because individually and as institutions and companies, they were all, helplessly, on fire all the time.

Nota bene: politicians and senior civil servants, in my experience of this pandemic in particular, are EXACTLY the same. On fire all the time. They too are in dire need of fire extinguishers. They need, as Louise put it, someone to come along and give them short, easy answers that they can say yes to and stop thinking about (the ten-word answer as they call it in Washington DC).

These are the realities from which any consideration of the roles of PSS (and the SSP) have to start at this moment: there is no point in waiting for the high heid yins to come up with a plan. IT IS NOT GOING TO HAPPEN. It is our job as theatre workers who get paid to think and who work in every locality and every social context in the whole country to give THEM the ten-word answers. We are the ones who live in the world and most of us aren't on fire. Most of us can't get arrested.

Playwrights' Studio is one of the few genuinely effectively national bodies with the care of a WHOLE CULTURE as its remit. I think in ten years all the arts in Scotland can be organised on the same basis, on the same ethos. I think an eco-system of creative hubs, can put the Well Being and Place Based vocabulary politicians now share into actual employment and entertainment. For our audiences and ourselves. I think a single online hub for the Scottish performing arts is the place to start for creating and curating content, a gateway open to the world, to have a look at, as well as parts of Scotland which unlike Heineken we don't reach.

This should be connected to all the local creative hubs in cities and villages focussed on audiences, not on institutional self-preservation. We need to water the WHOLE garden, As a whole culture with solidarity. We need to lift our eyes from the immediate pandemic and look at the long term. For ideological reasons? Yes. But also because if we want to protect ourselves, we need to get our feet under the table at the meetings that matter. So we need to give them a very good reason to invite us. I think we're well placed to do that. Thank you very much.

EMMA McKEE: Thank you Peter. We now have around 15 minutes for questions, thoughts, comments. This part of the event will adhere to Chatham House Rules.

Maybe while we're waiting for people to absorb and reflect, Lewis were there any additional questions from your conversation with Louise we could address here?

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: There were a lot of people asking about how we do these things across the whole spectrum from making to programming to rehearsing. How do we have a process that feels fair but rigorous at every level?

EMMA MCKEE: Maybe I can invite the speakers to put cameras and microphones on if anyone wants to respond. Louise?

LOUISE STEPHENS: I want to check the question – what's the process of engaging as Peter is talking about with funders or government?

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: It's hard, I'm trying to weave a few strands. We talk about having lots of voices and being transparent and creating a mechanism for radical empathy. How do we do that at every stage? From an email exchange with aspiring playwright right through to conversations with government. What are the principles we can adhere to to ensure cohesive inclusive ethic through everything?

LOUISE STEPHENS: Something I noticed is about acknowledging processes are longitudinal. I really noticed and was thinking about it as we were talking, the discourse now can pick out one thing somebody has said and solidify that. I think artists are great at recognising processes take a long time and people change and shift as part of that. So part of any structural change has to be an acknowledgement that that will take a while, but also that conversations will be full of mistakes, misunderstandings, errors, and that is part of the process. I think also a point was made in the chat - how can we create positive change? Part of that is looking at what we are measuring, or not, as part of creative processes.

The point was partially there's a black box thing that happens in certain processes where there's an assumption that there could be, for example, an assumption that when money is given to an institution the care then is part of that package. That might not always be the experience of freelancers. Somebody made a point about demystifying. I think clarity of communication but also examination of what happens as part of processes at the moment is useful to improving everything. Hopefully that speaks to some points made there.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: I think so. There's a question in my head from the whole Gathering this morning, at times we focus so much on lobbying and justifying the arts, sometimes there is a danger of justifying ourselves out of existence. If I'm falling out of love with theatre, what brings me back in is seeing brilliant work, rather than information telling me how important the work is. If we get money to artists, they make work, and that's what makes people understand significance of culture.

LOUISE STEPHENS: Maybe it's something for Linda and John to reflect on?

LINDA DUNCAN McLAUGHLIN: I agree with Peter and Lewis - there is a difficult line to walk here, and Peter posted in the chat about how we get our feet under that table, but important to be thinking to be aware that we are creative artists and it's hard to put ourselves out there as lobbyists and leading the charge. We have to do that, without losing sight of what we are for. Louise said, what are playwrights for, and playwrights are creators of plays.

LEWIS HETHERINGTON: In some ways I think, my point, resonates with Peter's. The way we do the lobbying is giving us the money for me. The most significant



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conversations we have, with gatekeepers, is when I talk about my work - that is the lobbying I want us to do and resonates, with Peter, when he said we meet as artists, rather than mediators.

LINDA DUNCAN McLAUGHLIN: Yes, that does our talking for us. Funders see that and how valuable it is, but there is a catch 22. We need to get that creative discussion going, that will feed into a larger presentation within the community. How we do that, I don't have the answers to, I don't think any one of us can. But, as I said earlier before joining and starting our presentation, it is inspiring to hear these voices and rallying cries from everyone involved, and knowing that Culture Counts and Playwrights' Studio, are planks to build on, for want of a better word. Let's go out there and get a bit!

JOHN McCANN: Yes. Lobbying, yes, totally and I wish I really wish - it was wonderful to hear Lewis say, if you are feeling a bit fed up with theatre and whatever, that going to see a really great show energises you - I absolutely agree.

Coming from the north of Ireland, working for a theatre company there for a number of years, knowing it was difficult to get gatekeepers and funders to come and see work. I had a show on at the Fringe, and I had the Secretary of State say to my face, they couldn't see my face, that if she came, that would be favouring one play over the other.

But I am tired, so tired at the minute. The past 16 months, SSP, working with Linda has been fantastic, we have been able to get into rooms and have conversations with various cabinet secretaries about various issues. And seeing the surprise on their faces and their chins hit the floor, saying, see this emergency money, this is how we have seen it trickling down. We have seen the lack of transparency in that, and how freelancers are being left to fend for themselves. Yes, they have been commissioning 47 writers with the money you have given them, a great headline figure, but does a 250-word piece count as a commission? Has that saved them? I don't think so.

In terms of lobbying - we can get into the rooms and speak to the various figures. We are there, but the majority of time, I find that the time the SSP is spending is dealing with contracts and dealing with you guys and the problems you guys as writers, are facing. I could rattle off examples purely from the last 12 months alone, that would make your toes curl. How writers have been treated in rooms - people who have been involved in creative processes for a number of years, and haven't got a contract, until the company wants to kick someone off a project and bring someone else in, without paying a red cent...

Sorry getting angry - and this is ongoing, I have seen situations where numbers of you - this is you I am talking about - have been asked to do digital work and then when the theatre decides to do it in a physical state, instead of paying you for doing it physically, you can do it for the same money?

In terms of lobbying, the lobbying we really need to do is to our peers within the industry. To the FST to say - can you maybe keep an eye on how your members are managing the contracts? Because it is the wild west out there, and it seems to have gotten worse during this period. I have seen emails from organisations where they are saying they want the playwrights in Scotland to play their role, be more mindful about how they can play their role in Covid recovery. Now, am I being cynical? Is this a way of saying, can you do it for a little less than we are obliged to pay you, because you are obliged to help us, because we are in these straits as well? If anyone wants to ask me

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anything in particular, I can have a private chat with people and will continue to. There will be people here, that I will talk to this afternoon, because I am tearing my hair out, trying to get artists paid.

EMMA McKEE: Yes, going by what is going on in the chat, you have done an incredible amount of work over the last 16 months, incredible what you have achieved, and on behalf of everyone here, thank you so much. I understand where that frustration is coming from.

Unfortunately we have run out of time. There are questions in the chat, which we can pass on to the speakers. As always, we are scraping the surface. So if playwrights have thoughts about how we can facilitate further conversations to discuss these topics in more detail, let Playwrights' Studio know. Perhaps not in a public forum, but in smaller groups. Whatever feels appropriate.

We have come to the end of today's event. Thank you to the speakers, thank you also to the live captioners, Eluned and Karen and finally, thank you for attending. We look forward to seeing you at the next meeting, and feel free to turn on your camera and mic and say goodbye in person.

*(a chorus of goodbyes and thank-yous)*

EMMA McKEE: Lovely to see you all, thank you.

**END OF LIVE CAPTIONING**