

Notes of Playwrights' Gathering: Beyond COVID-19

12 June 2020

1. Introductions

Linda Duncan McLaughlin: Good morning everybody and welcome to the first ever online Playwrights' Gathering!

For those who don't know me, I'm Linda Duncan McLaughlin, Co-Chair of the Scottish Society of Playwrights (SSP). We have been saying hello in the chat box so feel free to do that.

It's wonderful to see so many people here: we're all aware that we're going through a time of uncertainty and change right now, and it's a great indication of how strong our playwriting community is and how committed we are to working together to ensure an equally strong future. It's really important that we make our voices heard as part of the planning process for how the arts in Scotland moves forward, and we're hoping that today will be just the start of the conversations we need to have, both among ourselves and with the planning bodies.

John McCann, my Co-Chair, will be speaking later about SSP's role in that, but for now I'm going to hand over to Fiona Sturgeon Shea, Creative Director of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, who's going to be chairing the proceedings today.

Fiona Sturgeon Shea: Hello! Thank you again for your willingness to be involved in this Gathering. We really appreciate your time and know how valuable this is.

My name is Fiona Sturgeon Shea. I'm Creative Director and Chief Executive of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and I'm going to be chairing today. As best I can! My colleagues Amy McKenzie and Hayley Sinclair are acting as hosts and doing any technical support. And you will hear from my other colleague Emma McKee later in the meeting too.

I'll quickly run through some of the ground rules, although I'm sure by now that everyone has lots of experience of Zoom. The cameras are off for a better experience for everyone using Gallery view and the mics are muted for everyone's benefit so we don't pick up background noise etc. This will also help Katy Smillie and Shaurna Dickson, the BSL interpreters, and Louisa McDaid, the captioner.

We'll be taking questions and comments only after the presentations. If you want to speak in person, raise your virtual hand in Participants in the menu bar at the bottom of your screen – or in the chat function. If anything does occur to you while people are speaking, do use the chat to note that down and we'll try and pick up as many of those as we can, after all the speakers have finished. If you start these with Q, then we'll know that they're questions for us and not more general comments.

Some of the speakers will mention people or organisations or campaigns that you'll want to remember. There will be a transcript available of the Gathering so you don't need to worry too much about taking copious notes or missing anything essential. There are things that happened overnight that we will include in the follow-up to the meeting.

So, as you know, one of the immediate things we want to do is compile a submission

to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs (CTEEA) Committee at the Scottish Parliament. And we want this to really reflect your experiences as playwrights in Scotland and your views about the future – and we need this to be as wide ranging and diverse as possible.

To help us prep for that, we've invited speakers with different perspectives and experience to inform and inspire us towards that goal. For anyone who has attended one of the SSP/Playwrights' Studio Gatherings in person, we would usually gather your views as part of the meeting. However, because of time and Zoom, we will be doing that later through a short survey. We will email this to you and anyone who couldn't make it today.

If we have time, we will try and have a quick Zoom poll to just get a sense of what you would prioritise from six asks that have already gone to Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture and her colleagues at the Scottish Government, from the advocacy body, Culture Counts. (Annie George will explain a little bit more about their role.)

2. Presentations

Annie George: As you may know, the Federation of Scottish Theatre (FST) is a membership body which advocates for the theatre and dance sector. Since lockdown, FST have been collecting and representing members' experiences, engaging with Scottish Government, alongside Culture Counts, who provide guidance to decision makers in the Government on behalf of the whole cultural sector – arts, screen, heritage and creative industries – as well as UK partners.

The FST Board of Directors has been meeting weekly - somewhat more frequently than I anticipated when I joined it in September. They are a group of highly committed, dynamic and creative leaders, to which I add my experience as an independent writer and theatre maker.

We know people have been feeling out of the loop and isolated, as though discussions are happening and decisions being taken without them.

As I'm in the room, I wanted to give you the lowdown about our activities during this time. We have heard about anxiety about safety; hard times; threatened livelihoods and grief. But also love; community; support; ingenuity and creativity. And importantly, appetite for change; more collaboration and honesty than we've probably ever seen.

We know there is very little financial resilience in our sector, for individuals or organisations. Social distancing in our buildings is going to be difficult for staff and audiences, with long lead times, to ensure their safety on re-opening. Touring will be extremely challenging. Risks of re-closure because of spikes in infection, are very high. Insurance will be problematic, but there aren't any answers yet.

The 'road map' doesn't even mention theatres. Phase 4 guidance states that 'physical distancing may still be in place'. No-one can predict how long it will take to get to Phase 4. People are looking hard at whether they can offer Christmas shows, whether audiences will be able, or willing, to come back. Indeed, what is the viability of opening?

Very little theatre production is expected to take place in buildings, until at least Feb/Mar. Cancelled and postponed programmes may not simply shift forward by a season or a year. Redundancies are being announced and it's likely that there will be more. Restarting larger productions will require greater consideration. Different kinds of work will become more important in the new context, with digital work increasing and improving; sharing practice, and experience in platforms, which allow people to be paid for that work.

The FST are holding some online meetups for non-members like freelance technical and production staff, who don't have other places (like Playwrights' Studio), aiming to engage the wider sector to share the broadest range of ideas.

With a clear mandate from members, FST are working on a new industry strategy. Despite present uncertainty, we are committed to exploring how to make things better, especially in areas that were sorely neglected before, but essential for our future, the environment and equalities, with the deep roots of structural racism so urgently exposed by both pandemic and protest.

With UK and Scottish Government colleagues we are working on re-opening guidance, initially for rehearsal and production; but we know that, just because you are allowed to open doesn't mean you can.

We are thinking about how to properly support people who are vulnerable, or have caring responsibilities, and if opening to smaller audiences is financially viable.

We are working with local and national media, sharing case studies that show why theatre matters. Preserving some capacity for when we can come back, and how, as well as responding and adapting during the earlier phases.

Professional theatre and dance will continue in the future, even if we don't fully know yet how, or when. And yet, there's still comfort to be drawn in knowing, that even in these challenging times, when you strip everything back, what remains are our stories.

We are the storytellers, and we will adapt and keep telling our stories, however we may. Whether in flipflops or pyjamas or not!

Bill Armstrong: I am Bill Armstrong, from the Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB).

The WGGB represents professional, emerging and aspiring writers across a range of craft areas: videogames, television, film, theatre, books, comedy, poetry and animation. We negotiate better pay and working conditions with key UK industry bodies and lobby and campaign on behalf of writers on a wide variety of issues.

I chaired the union's television committee, negotiated with the BBC, ITV and PACT and developed the *Free Is NOT an Option* campaign before taking over the Scottish chair.

Thanks to Zoom and this crisis, we now have a very active committee across the country, and you will hear from Jules Horne in a moment. It's critical that WGGB Scotland works closely with the SSP, Playwrights' Studio and the Federation of Scottish Theatre to get writers' voices heard and to influence decision makers at a

time of existential crisis for our theatres.

The WGGB guidelines for playwrights during COVID-19 will provide us all with a useful tool in that work. They are on the union website at www.writersguild.org.uk and there is a great deal more detail to these guidelines and recommendations than I have time to mention here but the main points are:

- No writer should be asked to return upfront fees
- Productions of new plays should be postponed rather than cancelled
- Theatres should pay acceptance fees promptly, even if the production is delayed
- Writers should not waive payment for the right to stream previously recorded shows
- Fees for work commissioned for digital platforms should be pro-rata with existing WGGB agreements

Even if the theatres you work for were not involved in the development of these guidelines, drawing attention to them can often be far more effective than you would imagine.

Many, if not most, employers will recognise them as a fair and reasonable framework that will enable the richness of our theatre to survive this crisis intact. We found that a similar thing happened with the *Free is NOT an Option* campaign.

Even when theatres re-open, budgets will be tighter than ever. Without strong, collective action writers' fees will be reduced and the work they are expected to do for free, will increase. The diversity of voices on the cultural landscape will be reduced and society fragmented when we most need to pull together and feel a part of something greater than ourselves.

The COVID-19 and *Free is NOT an Option* guidelines provide sound principles and detailed recommendations, which can help us articulate our collective campaign to get writers voices heard in the critical months and years to come.

Yesterday I had a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture and unions and representatives of the Scottish Government and a truly alarming report was given of the redundancies sweeping the Scottish theatres - that the scale of this was not appreciated by the Scottish Government. It was said we had 3-4 weeks to come up with a comprehensive rescue package. Otherwise there will be no theatres when the venues are allowed to open. Saving the buildings is not enough as you will end up with a corpse with all the blood drained. The WGGB has a template we will issue this afternoon to be sent to MPs and MSPs. For a follow up, you can get this after this meeting.

Jules Horne: There will be a transcript of this, as this is a bit bullet point-y. I am Jules, a fiction writer in the Scottish Borders.

I wanted to say a bit about campaigning at local level. Wherever you are in the country, you can make a real difference. In the South of Scotland, we have a new enterprise agency, South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE). Just launched. Strategic economic decisions are being made, while arts representatives are furloughed.

That's senior managers at Live Borders and the Scottish Borders Council, with a strategic remit for the creative sector. Our best senior advocates are furloughed, and can't attend SoSE meetings. If the arts miss key strategic meetings in a rural area, that can have repercussions for years. Like five year EU grant plans devoted to farming and tourism. Your sector representation might be all there is.

What you can do:

- Send a submission to the CTEEA Committee. Mine is anonymous for search reasons. You can choose to do that.
- Copy this to your MSPs, MPs and local economic development team.
- Tell them you've sent it to the Committee. They'll have to read it.
- Put the 5 key points at the top. 5 bullets, and what action you want. They'll really appreciate this.
- Include economic impact stats. "The creative sector is worth xx billion to Scotland and is the fastest-growing industry sector." The creative sector is worth more to the Borders economy than forestry and fishing combined are good ones. Culture Counts has that kind of information. Economic impact means 'the triple bottom line'.
- Social, Environmental, Economic. Holistic impact. The creative sector already hits all those. Use those words: Sustainable livelihoods, IP creation, innovation.
- Introduce your creative sector business. Bring it to life with photos so they can see you.
- Include economic stats.
- Follow up.
- Persist.
- If you don't get a reply, email someone higher up. That worked for me.
- It's amazing how adding 'in the SSP or WGGB union' makes a difference.
- Become actively involved with the WGGB or SSP. There is no better way to get your voice heard.

That's it. Get in touch if you'd like some kind of template to speed things up.

Peter Arnott: Whisper it. You see that New Normal everyone keeps talking about being just round the corner? This might be it. It might already be here. The Titanic may already have hit the iceberg. I have to face the fact that my current commission - which I feel very lucky to have, by the way - might be for a cast of eight to ten actors who will NEVER perform the play in front of a full, live audience. They might have to tell the story on a studio set for the cameras, sitting and standing at least six feet apart from one another.

Now I can do that. I might even get quite excited, artistically, by the prospect of something like that. But who the hell is going to pay for it? How much will they pay for a socially distanced evening in a one fifth full theatre where they get their temperature checked before they go in. £80. £120? Seriously?

As an individual, like everyone else, I have no way of knowing anything. But as a small cog in the collective 'business' of Scottish theatre, I know this much: that if our sector needs collective, strategic support to get through this, then we are going to have to earn it by being strategic and collective ourselves. The pandemic and the economic crisis which is going to follow it mean that the time has come to ask to whom the public space of our theatres actually belongs.

The time has come to look again at the model of 1947, where public funding was extended to the boards of already existing charitable trusts to administer those spaces on the public's behalf. I'm sure that all of us here and everyone involved with those institutions wants live performance to be part of a sustained societal effort to revive the educational, retail, tourism, health and leisure sectors of our economy and culture ... but do we really think we do that simply by restoring the status quo ante viro? Do we really think that keeping things exactly as they were is a sufficient offer to make the political case for ourselves as a public good?

There have already been instances of new thinking; that artists should be individually supported at different stages of their careers by an expanded system of residencies and bursaries; that regional hubs become the default funding and managerial base for arts activities in different geographical areas; that a properly funded touring network with an annual festival to select and fund tours of existing projects be founded in order to lead an expansion and extension of performance and participation with a specific focus on locales of social deprivation and geographical (and social) isolation; that an integrated arts strategy work in tandem with the health service, the education service, services for people with physical or learning disabilities, social services for the elderly and other special needs groups. There is no shortage of ideas, but I don't think we can really deliver ANY good ideas while clinging to the burnt-out shell of our currently bankrupt institutions. If we die in the ditch to defend the management structures through which and often despite of which we have been TRYING to do good, then I respectfully suggest we're dying in the wrong ditch.

Let's be honest. Twelve weeks ago the system was already broken. Half of the cultural spend in Scotland was through untouchable national companies while the other half was more or less a free for all application form competition.

This was already inefficient and corrupting and has been cruelly exposed by the pandemic and its aftermath as absurd. I don't think theatre as such lacks for future potential...if we think about our sector as public, shared space. But, as we know,

individual theatres and theatre companies are in a whole heap of trouble.

The response to troubled times has to be sector wide and strategic. Sitting back and waiting for audiences and governments and the buyers of Lottery tickets to bail us out with no questions asked, as if we were bankers or something, is strategically inept and morally repugnant. I am not advocating a cull of our institutions, but I do think the times demand that those institutions get smart and get organised.

If we are to make a New Deal for theatre in Scotland it has to be as a shared public service geared towards specific, and necessarily political ends.

And if that means ending the hypocrisy of unaccountable and chaotic 'arms-length' funding, then that might be no bad thing. We are either part of the solution, part of an integrated new vision of community, reinventing what the Arts Councils did in 1947, refreshing the return to life...or we are part of the problem...and we can put our heads between our legs and kiss our ass goodbye. Nobody will miss us.

Emma McKee: Hello everyone. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Emma McKee and I am the General Manager at Playwrights' Studio, Scotland.

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: myself, Fiona, Hayley Sinclair and Amy McKenzie, we have four playwright board members: Rona Munro, Lynda Radley, Davey Anderson and Clare Duffy as well as two of our Associate Playwrights Stef Smith and Lesley Wilson joining the conversation today.

I wanted to give you a very quick update on what the team have been doing since the lockdown began in March. We've been working very closely with our board and have produced an emergency plan and budget as obviously we have lost earnings and income as a result of this and have increased costs due to cancellations. They have been very supportive of the team during this time.

In April, we launched our Bursaries and Projects programme as well as online sessions to specifically support playwrights during the COVID-19 crisis.

We are still running our core Playwriting Programme (Mentoring, New Playwrights Awards, Professional Programme and Script Reading Services). The team are currently working on how we can move the existing programme onto Zoom (other online platforms are available).

In late summer, the Playwriting Programme for 2020/21 will be launched, and we are looking at how this might inspire some imaginative thinking about the possibilities for theatre once we emerge from this crisis. So rather than waiting, we want to support playwrights to get ahead of the game and help them provide creative solutions to the theatres and companies as they return to commissioning and producing work. Part of this will be working with the playwrights on our board but the team also want to have a more 'creative' Gathering with you to talk about some of this. So, we'll be in touch about that soon.

Our wider advocacy work includes being part of discussions with the Federation of

Scottish Theatre and Creative Scotland and staff have been feeding into research with them, Literature Alliance Scotland, the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and our other main funder, Glasgow City Council.

As you may know, we're running a Q&A session with Creative Scotland this afternoon which, unfortunately, is now sold out. We want more playwrights to apply to the new Open Fund so we could discuss the possibility of organising another session if there's the demand for it. All of the team, particularly my colleagues Amy and Hayley, are 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.

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.

John McCann: Hello, I am John McCann and Linda Duncan McLaughlin and I are both Co-Chairs. The Scottish Society of Playwrights is a membership organisation representing the interests of professional playwrights in Scotland. We are affiliated with the Scottish Trades Union Congress. We have a current membership of over 140 playwrights, all at varying stages of their careers.

The SSP has been representing the interests of playwrights in Scotland for nearly fifty years. Our core tasks include:

- Negotiating the FST/SSP Commissioning Contract and facilitating its operation.
- Meeting with organisations and companies to foster best practice.
- Answering member queries concerning other theatre contracts and industry practices, most often for members who don't have an agent.

The SSP fully endorses both recent Writers' Guild of Great Britain documents which Bill mentioned earlier:

- *Free Is NOT An Option*
- *Playwrights and Theatres During the Closure: Guidelines for Best Practice.*

Recently the SSP has been:

- Working with organisations to assist them in the design of contracts, some of you may have been offered in the past two months for online content.
- Linking with Writers' Guild of Great Britain and Equity to identify legal representation for our membership.
- Holding online drop-in meetings to help members stay connected.
- Able to offer a rolling programme of small support grants to members.

Now I'm going to talk a little about where we thought we were before lockdown.

A key finding from the 2018/19 Playwrights' Studio/SSP Playwrights Survey noted the continued, steady and significant decrease in Scottish playwriting commissions. 2019 ended with the publication of *Putting Artists in the Picture: A Sustainable Arts Funding System for Scotland*, a report from the CTEEA Committee at Holyrood. The report recommended that there should be no circumstances in which individual artists should be competing against network organisations for funding from Creative Scotland.

The report also made recommendations for Creative Scotland to change the way it allocates funds by putting artists at the centre of its approach, including incorporating peer review into its application processes; creating a tiered application process to reduce the burden on applicants who are unlikely to progress to later stages of the process; and introducing funding programmes, such as bursaries and stipends, aimed at supporting artists and arts organisations at different stages of their development.

We were expecting Creative Scotland to announce details of their Future Funding Approach in early 2020. I was hoping Creative Scotland would have addressed these recommendations, but lockdown happened as this was due. This pandemic has exposed the fragile nature of the theatre ecology. I'd like to borrow an analogy from a colleague who said about the theatre sector, we are not all in the same boat. We never have been. It's always the same storm, but we're in very different boats, and now we realise many of us have always been in the water and when we ask for assistance, we're being told by people who are not in the boat to be entrepreneurial.

Which brings us to where we think we are now, and one of the chief reasons we are here today. The Scottish Parliament's CTEEA Committee wants to hear our concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on our life and work. The Committee also want to hear your direct experiences of how you feel the Scottish and UK Governments have responded. The organisations represented here today will respond in your name, but we would also urge you to respond as individual artists.

3. Discussion

Chatham House Rule applies from this point onwards.

Host: A question from the chat function: Who has accessible money for active social artists? There are issues with post COVID-19 sustainability funding and artists needing immediate funding for technology upgrades to reach audiences with low internet access. Who has accessible money for active social artists?

It was agreed that further research could be undertaken and someone would respond privately to the individual who asked the question.

Question: John mentioned contracts for digital work. Is there anything in the contract that is different for digital work for fee etc. or just the original version?

SSP: In terms of what Bill mentioned - and it's in the WGGB document - and in terms of the amount of time a particular organisation was asking for, it was basically time slicing from the structures we have in the existing SSP contract. There has been very little difference there. There were discussions around digital rights because it could be a free for all. This was an issue being discussed before lockdown and the current crisis brought it to a head.

In terms of digital rights, there were two strands. An organisation was looking to use the work on their own digital platforms but their broadcasting partner was looking to stream the work as well.

There was a lot of negotiation between them. Even this week, a writer was in contact with the SSP and some of the clauses added to the contract we were working on were a bit vague!

These clauses came from the broadcast side of things. They were using very technical and dense language which, in contract terms, the SSP wanted to be as clear as possible. We have sorted that out. In terms of the fees agreed for this particular project, it was £750.00 for a commission of no more than 10 minutes. Then there was a top up fee of £250.00 in lieu of royalties, and further fees from the partner depending on the platform the digital work would be shown on.

The SSP could make this information available to people and we must bear this in mind going forward. But we were keen, when talking with the broadcaster, that the SSP wasn't setting a precedent so playwrights' fees and rights aren't undermined when things ease.

It was a new landscape we were traversing because it was a different thing. It started from a theatre place. We had talks with the organisation this week and they clarified the contract conditions. A few of the writers here today have worked with them already on this. We are keeping a close eye on this to avoid problems further down the line.

Something that made us pause was the request for rights in perpetuity. We negotiated that writers had a clear start and end date. Some of the confusion around the rights came from the technically dense clauses on the broadcasting side of things and we have hopefully assuaged those.

We would encourage writers to get in touch as this goes forward with any problems.

Comment: At the beginning of lockdown I was involved with a project with two organisations, working with a group of writers. One of the organisations was looking for short monologues. They have a bit of online content.

There has been no payment from them including my fee. I was persuaded by the other organisation to take less than half of what I would normally take because it was online. At the time I felt I could not argue because it was presented as being online and not the same as face-to-face. I agree with that but it still requires a lot of preparation if you are the writer! I feel there is a lot of good will towards this project but no actual money for the writers. How do we avoid the situations where you feel you can't say no and it's been wonderful for the local writers but they are not properly remunerated?

WGGB: On the WGGB website, there are guidelines for writers during COVID-19 with detailed examples of pro-rata payments which may be helpful here. The problem of writers feeling they can't ask to be paid - that is a big problem and one of the WGGB guidelines, we tell people to ASK. Too often writers don't ask. If you don't ask to get paid, it won't happen.

Comment: I did ask but it was made clear it wasn't the same remuneration because it wasn't face-to-face and only online.

WGGB: if you don't ask you definitely won't and the more who do ask, the harder it is to say no.

Host: There is a question on the chat. How viable is outdoors theatre going to be as a partial replacement for indoor theatre?

Comment: I have thought about this question a lot because I have done a lot of site-specific work. I think getting away from buildings is obviously where we are heading or getting away from sitting in buildings. Despite the weather, I was mauled by midges on the Isle of Harris doing a show. I have performed in the rain and a variety of places. If we just embrace that and accept that the comfort and the nice wee glass of Merlot in the bar may not be the immediate future, it could be an exciting proposition. A lot are doing that work already. It's making sure they get the funding to continue the work and we can learn from each other how to do more of it and work more in these interesting and diverse areas. It's been done and happens in Scotland despite the midges and the weather.

Fiona Sturgeon Shea: Thank you so much for that contribution. Someone wants to ask a question about writing in BSL.

Question: I am a writer and I have written for a theatre company. I know there are problems with negotiation on getting paid and sorting out the writing in BSL. If you are writing in English and the performance is in BSL, how much input from the actors do I need? Can I do some of the acting and some of the directing? I don't know if they know BSL or whether it will be good enough. Should I be paid for translation work as well? If people are working from German into English, I am sure there are payments there. So I have to protect my rights and the work I am proposing to do.

Fiona Sturgeon Shea: Brilliant points! SSP, WGGB? Anything on that? I think that is a longer conversation but do you want to jump in?

WGGB: I can't give a detailed response but, if you put that in writing, I will forward it to the theatre company and general secretary and diversity group and hopefully get you an answer.

SSP: It's not something we have specific expertise on but, if you forward the question to us, we will do our best to find a workable answer.

Comment: I would like to make a couple of points. The political lobbying is very good and impressive and all the organisations represented today and the individuals lobbying - that is great and you are doing a great job!

We are the shape shifters and the innovators and the leading festival - in Edinburgh. We create the biggest arts festival in the world and we change spaces to make performance spaces. We need to come up with plans where we can show funders and the government how we can get people back into the buildings and create theatre in many different places. We have no problems doing this in the summer in Edinburgh, including in the pouring rain! We need to lead on the creative side.

Question: I love the idea of outdoor theatre and those aspects but what are we asking for in terms of restructuring? This could be an opportunity for the whole political system and how we work because it's not really working for a lot of us! I was excited about the idea of connecting today to see what ideas others have on what we want and what we could be pushing for. I feel we should be pushing but I feel it's a bit thin and stretched.

Fiona Sturgeon Shea: I don't think you are alone in that.

Question: I wonder of the 83, however many we are, I personally looked at the funding available for self-employed artists and none of it works for me! Is it working for any of us or a lot or a few?

Fiona Sturgeon Shea: This is fantastic stuff and we want to collect this because we have the limitations of this meeting. It's not just that we are going to put this submission together and send it to the Parliament and that is the end of the story. We need to know this to speak on behalf of playwrights and find other connections and ways to take this forward. It's brilliant. Thank you for your candour and honesty about this. It's not an easy time at all. I see you are getting lots of agreement in the chat box.

Any other comments or questions or reflections?

Comment: It's partly a response to the previous question. We have to think about this whole business in stages. The 'new normal' we are looking to will take about 2-3 years to get to. We have to think about that. We have to think about every stage - it's like being ill and moving from emergency to critical. Recovery comes for whatever the new normal ends up being. At every stage and this applies to every theatre making work outside of traditional spaces. We don't know how long it will last! Most of the industry is acting as if someone will turn on the tap again and everything will be fine by next spring - or even September, as I have seen suggested. If there is no vaccine and another wave, who knows?

We need to look at each stage in turn. It may be that outdoor theatre and theatre with small audiences and in pop up spaces, we need to stay alert to that. But we have to look at the structural damage done and the structural opportunities that exist because of that to radically change everything. I think we can do that but we have to want to do that. My concern is how much we really want to do that? Or do an ostrich imitation and hide? In each stage of recovery, we will have ostriches and also meerkats scanning the horizon! Which side do you want to be on?

Comment: Hello everyone! Great to have everyone together who can be here. I have been thinking about how radical we can be during this time. I was struck by what one of the playwrights brought into the conversation and it got me thinking about when writers aren't paid and the consequences for when those who hold the money are intersectionally discriminatory. We were facing that situation before COVID-19.

Normal didn't really work before COVID-19 and wasn't effective. So my question is around consequence and expectations.

Fiona Sturgeon Shea: Thank you for that. That needs fed in.

Question: My question was: are we thinking about ways to protect marginalised work that will be hit the hardest? I am in the position just now where one of the funders had to pull out at the start of Lockdown. It's trans theatre with a cast with people of colour and people with disabilities. I was able to get help but I ended up giving up my fee to be able to support that cast who were much harder hit than me because I am part-time salaried. I worry that, in the struggle for everyone to get work and get paid, it's those making marginalised work that will be hit really hard. To ensure we don't lose those voices.

Fiona Sturgeon Shea: Thank you for saying that. Great that so many are here today to hear that. When there have been comments about the bigger strategic campaigns missing the voices of artists and freelancers, we need to make sure those voices are amplified and heard in our own campaigns – we don't fall into the same trap.

Comment: This is a comment because it has been kind of answered by a previous speaker. I want to phrase the comment as a question to everyone as the big take away I am taking from this: we are talking about the fact no-one knows the way forward, that it's potentially very dire for us all and theatre. We have said encouraging and energetic things about the way we can move forward.

It almost feels like in this discussion we have come to a choice - do we in our campaigns and efforts try and keep Scottish theatre going? Do we support theatre as it HAS existed until now or take this as an opportunity to bring the walls down and move forward in a better way? And if we only have so much energy to give, where do we put it, whilst needing to earn a living and as moral beings in our culture? Do people think this is a question they feel they have heard and if it's a question we should be thinking about next?

Fiona Sturgeon Shea: Thank you so much. I think everyone will go away and think about that. I don't think we have time for the poll we hoped to do. Hayley and I will have a little think about the value of that. Is it valuable compared to the brilliant conversation in the meeting and the chat. We will try and find ways to address/use that chat which was totally fantastic, connecting you to each other.

And possibly feeding it into the submission. Nothing you have said in the chat will go to waste!

We will be in touch by the end of the day. Hayley and I will work on it now, about getting your views and the mechanism for this. If there is anything that would be useful to send out immediately. There will be a lot of information. This is only the start of the conversation and how we push the possibilities, how we can be part of the solution - is something we definitely want to continue and will.

Please keep in touch. We value your time and appreciate how difficult some of this will be. We know you have been through this with other organisations with applications for funding and we are not taking this for granted. We will make the best case to the committee and the Scottish Government. The thing we send you will be fairly simple and you can write as much/little as you like. We will share that with you. We will try and find ways so that you can hear from others.

We are over time and I will hand over to John McCann for the final farewell.

John McCann: Thank you. Lots to take away there. Thank you to the BSL/English interpreters Katy and Shaurna and Louisa the captioner. If you want more information about the SSP, visit our website at www.societyofscottishplaywrights.co.uk Get in touch with any specific questions

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