

## **Response to Glasgow Life's draft Glasgow Culture Plan**

### **1. Introduction**

We recognise and appreciate the detailed work that has happened thus far in preparing the draft Glasgow Culture Plan. As the UK's only dedicated playwright development organisation, based in Glasgow city centre and supported by Glasgow City Council for the last 16 years, we are pleased to provide further information that might be helpful in the next stages of the Plan.

#### **1.1 About us**

Playwrights' Studio, Scotland is the nation's only arts organisation exclusively dedicated to the long-term support, development and promotion of Scotland's playwrights. We work actively and creatively with playwrights, connecting them with audiences and organisations, for the ultimate enrichment and enjoyment of the people of Scotland and beyond.

We **aim** to:

1. Strengthen and provide vital support and resources for Scotland's playwrights.
2. Actively promote Scotland's playwrights, their plays and the craft of playwriting.
3. Stimulate, lead and facilitate critical thinking about playwriting through discussion, debate and advocacy.
4. Increase the efficiency and sustainability of Playwrights' Studio for the benefit of Scotland's playwrights and the people of Scotland.

#### **1.2 Scotland: a place for playwrights**

Our **vision** is one where Scotland is the foremost centre of playwriting in the world. It is a place where playwrights thrive and excel and where they are valued as central and essential to a strong and healthy culture.

Scotland's playwrights lead the way in the creation of ideas, of new forms and visions, and in the quality, originality and vibrancy of their plays.

Scotland's playwrights respect and welcome the participation of audiences, whose lives and stories they reflect back to us – live - encouraging engagement in the present and involvement in active debate.

The work of Scotland's playwrights enriches, entertains, and moves us beyond ourselves. Playwrights help us to imagine the future.

Scotland's playwrights are a distinctive, diverse and highly skilled group of artists who receive sustained support throughout their careers and whose work is commissioned and performed widely at home and abroad.

Scotland is a place for playwrights. It is a place where passion, trust and confidence in playwriting - and its power and potential to shape national cultural identity and transform the lives of its people - is appreciated and embraced. Other countries and their playwrights look to Scotland with aspiration, as somewhere to exchange ideas, to learn and to collaborate.

## **2. Comments on the Glasgow Culture Plan**

### **2.1 Prologue - Glasgow culture context - How far have we come? / Contemporary Glasgow**

Whilst we understand that this is a summary of culture in contemporary Glasgow, there is currently a missed opportunity to highlight the particular strength of theatre in Glasgow and, from our perspective, playwriting. The achievements of Scotland's playwrights at home and internationally have been major contributors to Scotland as a thriving cultural nation and to Glasgow's prime place within this.

Glasgow's playwrights punch well above their weight in their contribution to the cultural life of the City, their work in community education settings and their influence on the learning of future generations. They are highly-skilled, influential artists whose work is produced all over the world, translated into many different languages and regularly published. New writing is flourishing, shining a light on Glasgow as an international hub for playwriting.

However, our research\* indicates that ongoing support for these important artists has never been more vital:

- The average playwright in Scotland earns between £1000 and £4999 per year from playwriting.
- Because theatres are facing their own financial pressures, it is becoming more difficult to develop the craft of writing for larger stages, with female playwrights in particular being overlooked.
- Playwrights from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and working class writers face extremely difficult challenges in developing their careers.

\*(Scottish Society of Playwrights/Playwrights' Studio, Scotland biennial survey for 2018/19)

This is a particular issue for Glasgow as approximately 55% of Scotland's playwrights are resident in the City. Of all local authority areas in Scotland, Glasgow has the highest net migration of playwrights (12%).

### **2.2 Principles - What do we stand for and by? Our Values**

We were particularly drawn to the value, *to learn from the experience of all the City's people; past, present and future*. It feels important, in these times of rapid political, economic, social and technological change that stability, experience and infrastructure is maintained to ensure that other values, such as being *creative, playful and provocative*, are able to flourish.

In the pursuit of innovation, the achievements of individual artists, organisations and projects could be under-appreciated or under-recognised. The value around being *authentic* and *distinctive* will also be difficult to model or guide behaviour without a strong underpinning of thorough research and full acknowledgement of who is working in the City, the conditions under which they operate and the models that exist to support, promote, produce, present and pay them.

## **3. Final Chapter / What long-term change do we want to see? / Vision and Long-term Outcomes**

We have been funded by Glasgow city Council for 16 years now and have proudly contributed to creative, social and economic outcomes for the City. We will continue to do this, whilst serving the communities of Glasgow who participate enthusiastically in our public programmes. We have responded to two of the most relevant outcomes in the Plan, in terms of how we might help to achieve them.

### *Everyone is able to access cultural and creative careers*

Playwrights' Studio was founded in 2004 following an intensive campaign by playwrights who identified a gap in provision for an independent resource to support the development of new plays and to promote their work. This was recognised by Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Arts Council as an important strategic issue for culture in Glasgow and throughout Scotland.

Our work remains just as relevant and necessary today - if not more so. Satisfaction with Playwrights' Studio is at an all-time high, with 84 - 90% of playwrights in 2019 stating that we were doing 'quite' or 'very' well in achieving our aims.

All of our Programmes and Services are in enormous demand and are routinely over-subscribed. This year's Mentoring Programme, for instance, demand outweighed availability of places by over 10x. Increasingly, playwriting is an option for study, self-development, fun or relaxation by large numbers of Glasgow residents. Attendances are extremely healthy at our public events and participation in practical playwriting workshops is at maximum capacity.

Impact on individuals from long-term artistic development can be transformative. We provide somewhere for people to explore their creativity and, if they choose to, professionalise it.

### *Glasgow is globally recognised as a leading creative and cultural world city*

Snapshots of Glasgow playwrights' achievements from just this week include: our first Associate Playwright and former Scots Makar, **Liz Lochhead**, whose adaptation of *Tartuffe* is currently being produced in Australia; **Kieran Hurley** whose play *Mouthpiece* is in Edinburgh prior to a world tour in summer and autumn this year; and, **Frances Poet** whose play *Adam* is also currently being produced in Australia.

We welcome the acknowledgement within the Plan that continued success will not happen by accident. It will involve a combination of policy, stewardship, resources and, above all, the hard work and creativity of artists. As a development organisation, we believe that long-term investment in artists is the only way that this outcome can be achieved.

**4. Our Story / What will it take to achieve this change? / Responding to Challenges**

We apologise for ending this submission on the subject of money. However, as many cultural organisations in Glasgow await the outcome of applications to the Glasgow City Council Communities fund, we would make a plea that this Plan is sufficiently resourced and that all of the organisations and bodies responsible for supporting culture in the city work together to ensure its best success.

Fiona Sturgeon Shea  
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