



AHRC Creative Communities

Devolution Policy Provocation Paper

Health and Wellbeing



Introduction

This paper is part of a series of four Policy Provocation Papers produced by the [AHRC Creative Communities](#) programme.

It is informed by our [Policy Labs](#) – a series of creatively facilitated policy shops with governments, policy makers, cross-sector participants, communities and young people that took place across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Mayoral Authorities in England.

This paper presents policy solutions co-created with participants from our [Scotland Policy Lab](#) in Edinburgh.

Its solution suggestions focus on ways that the Scottish Government can use their devolved culture and health and wellbeing policy powers to unlock inclusive innovation, equalise opportunity for access to culture and research and enhance belonging through cross-sector delivery.

The following recommendations aim to help deliver the [Programme for Scottish Government](#) and present actionable propositions for Scottish Government and UK Government [in Scotland](#), Arms-Length Bodies and cross-sector stakeholders.



Policy Mission: Health and Wellbeing

Health and Wellbeing

Health Improvement | **Quality of Life** | **Physical Activity**

Healthcare Standards | **End of Life** | **Mental Health**

Illnesses and Long-Term Conditions | **Independent Living**

Prevention | **Health Workforce** | **Social Care**

Opportunities

Bringing People Together | **Empowerment** | **Self-Expression**

Delivering Public Health Messaging Collaboratively

Inclusive Innovation | **Inspiring Communities**

Patient Response | **Co-Creation Methods** | **Patient Involvement**

Value of Arts and Culture | **Supporting Mental Health**

Building Cross-Nation Perspectives | **Giving Voice to Lived Experience**

Challenges

Unequal Access to Resources | **Job Insecurity**

Creative Health Funding | **Arts Outcomes Becoming Social Outcomes**

"Value" of Culture | **Community Art v "Proper" Art** | **Outputs Focus**

Evidencing Work | **Access to Policy Makers** | **Extractive**

Exclusionary Languages | **Professional Silos** | **Tokenistic Co-Creation**

Quantitative-Only Evidence | **Lack of Lived Experience Data**

Not Acknowledging Community Benefits | **Sustainable Funding**

Communicating Value of Preventative Solutions

Policy Context: Health and Wellbeing

The Scottish Government's [Programme for Government 2024-25](#) includes a commitment to strengthening the performance of NHS Scotland, taking forward engagement and planning for the transformation that will be needed to “deliver our vision of a Scotland where people live longer, healthier and fulfilling lives”. The programme focusses on improving the health of the population through prevention and early intervention to create increased productivity and maximise access to services. Scottish Government has also [introduced a Bill](#) to establish a [National Care Service](#) that will transfer social care responsibility from local authorities to a new, national service. That service will aim to make an impact on life expectancy and quality of life through improving the quality of social work and social care services in Scotland.

The [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) (2023) is the shared vision of Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to improve mental health and wellbeing. Its outcomes focus on equipping communities to act as a source of support for people's mental health and wellbeing, championing the eradication of stigma and discrimination and providing a range of opportunities to connect with others. It commits to adopting a “mental health and wellbeing in all policies” approach to facilitate cross-policy actions that more effectively address the wide-ranging social, economic and environmental factors that impact people's mental health and wellbeing, including poverty, stigma, discrimination, and injustice.

[Public Health Scotland](#) has highlighted that the biggest public health challenge facing Scotland is a stall in life expectancy. Data shows that profound differences in income, wealth and power are important drivers of health and health inequalities in Scotland. For people to thrive in Scotland, the building blocks of a healthy society need to be available for everybody. The [Scottish Health Survey 2023](#) shows that Scotland continues to record a significantly lower life expectancy compared to other countries in the UK and Western Europe, as well as continued disparity in health outcomes between those living in the most and least deprived areas. Improving the



health and wellbeing of Scotland's population is a key challenge at both a local and national level.

In 2024, Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Directors of Public Health published [Better Places](#). This outlines how professionals operating in the public, private, third, voluntary and community sectors can adopt place-based approaches to improve outcomes and ensure that areas with greatest need receive more investment. Scotland's [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#) also includes a civic outcome that outlines the importance of identity and belonging. It argues that everyone should be able to benefit from a place that has a positive identity, culture and history - and that people should feel like they belong and are able to participate and interact with others.

The [Culture Strategy](#) for Scotland was published in 2020, followed by an [Action Plan](#) in 2023 detailing how the ambitions will be delivered. The Action Plan commits to strengthening cross-Scottish Government working on culture and health and wellbeing policy development and delivery through mobilising new policy compacts and by embedding culture at the centre of policy making. This has been actioned in the recently established [Scottish Government Culture and Health working group](#).

Taking part in art, music, creative and expressive activities, including through social prescribing, can lead to [a wide range of benefits](#), including increased social interaction, decreased stress, adoption of healthy behaviours, and improved outcomes such as skills and employment. The arts can [help meet major challenges](#) that face health and social care: ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health. Evidence also shows that the arts can help save money in the health service and social care. In 2021, Creative Scotland identified [119 organisations](#) working in the arts and health and there are [multiple models of provision](#) in operation across the country. Many of these models take a person-centred approach to care, linking local networks and expertise across sectors.



Creative Scotland's [Strategic Framework](#) priorities are on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Sustainable Development, Fair Work, and International. Through the [Participatory Arts and Mental Health Fund](#) 2023, delivered in partnership with the Baring Foundation and the Mental Health Foundation, Creative Scotland aimed to increase and improve the quality of arts and mental health provision in participatory settings at a community level across Scotland. Led by the Mental Health Foundation, the annual [Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival](#) (SMHAF) is dedicated to creative approaches to mental health. SMHAF explores how the arts and creativity can help to prevent mental health problems and support people to live mentally healthier lives. The festival combines high artistic quality with grassroots support, community engagement and social activism and has been replicated internationally.

The [AHRC Creative Communities Scotland Policy Lab](#) 2024 identified opportunities for culture to create a stronger, fairer economy and society through delivering cross-sector into health and wellbeing targets in Scotland.



Devolution Context: Scotland

In Scotland, some matters are still governed by the UK Government and the [Milestones for Mission-Led Government](#) are central to this. Scotland is represented at the UK Parliament in Westminster by fifty-seven [Scottish MPs](#). Scotland also has its own devolved government with 129 [Members of Scottish Parliament](#).

The Scottish Government governs in policy areas that are [devolved](#) from Westminster. These include: the economy, education, health, justice, sport and culture, tourism, rural affairs, housing, environment, equal opportunities, consumer advocacy and advice, transport and taxation.

Many societal, economic and place-based factors are involved in our experiences of health and wellbeing and how we access and engage with culture as part of our attempts to “live well”. Devolved policy plays a key role in unlocking the potential of arts, culture and the creative industries to address opportunities and challenges arising from health and wellbeing contexts in contemporary Scotland.



Policy Solution Suggestions

* Inclusive Creative Health

Systemic change is required to eliminate funding barriers for creative and community practice and for organisations to recognise the value and impact of this work with policy makers

► Key Takeaway

Creative practitioners report that they frequently face financial barriers when working in creative health, including being paid appropriately for their time. As a result, they can sometimes find working in creative health settings to be an extractive and unequal experience.

The value of creative practice in delivering into creative health programmes must be recognised. Payments to creative practitioners need to be fair, taking into account the entirety of the creative process they are contracted to co-deliver, including planning, network and partnership building, facilitation, collaboration, and evaluation.

There is value in policy makers witnessing the benefit of creative practice. Culture organisations, universities and major funders should develop routes to share these creative outputs – and to raise the profile of the work of creative practitioners and of the impact this work can have for communities.

Organisations that work with creative practitioners need to put realistic costs in their budgets that reflect creative practitioner time and expertise. This would provide more role security for creative practitioners. Creative practitioners should be paid fairly and appropriately for their time and effort, in line with the [Fair Work First](#) Scottish Government policy, Creative Scotland [Rates of Pay Signposting Guide](#) to industry standards, union rates and codes of practice from key lead bodies, and at least the [Real Living Wage](#).

Existing networks and organisations must be encouraged to innovate to make funding pathways more accessible, including smaller low-administration grants for grassroots organisations. New and innovative ways of allocating funding must also be considered, including funding resources controlled by communities and creatives. It is essential this happens in a bottom-up approach, where participatory budgeting is inclusive, and members are paid for their participation.



* Lived Experiences of Creative Health

Evaluation of creative health provision in devolved settings should be extended, to enable culture for wellbeing to become part of an established whole-system approach to health and wellbeing in Scotland

► Key Takeaway

NHS Scotland should develop a pilot project between a health board and creative practitioners that evaluates practice and tests whether perceptions of siloed working are an issue. The aim would be to understand what creative practitioners and healthcare workers experience when they are working together, and the overall benefits of creative practice to healthcare provision.

Research into existing interdisciplinary and cross-sector projects should also be undertaken to identify the benefits and barriers experienced by creative practitioners when working as part of a healthcare team.

This should form an evidence base for a feasibility study on how to scale up and support the sustainable delivery of culture for wellbeing as part of a holistic and whole-system approach to health and wellbeing in Scotland.

This connects with the ambition in the [Culture Strategy Action Plan](#), to strengthen cross-Scottish Government development and delivery through a [Scottish Government Culture and Health working group](#). Findings and recommendations from NHS Scotland should then be fed back and actioned by the working group.



* The Value of Cultural Health

Culture can deliver health and wellbeing outcomes when delivered in partnership with cross-sector stakeholders

► Key Takeaway

Evidencing the value of culture to health and wellbeing is a persistent economic challenge. Decisions on when to include culture in healthcare are often made by health leaders or policy makers. This leads to a feeling of tokenism within the culture sector and of not being included in more important conversations about social and economic value, impact and strategic direction.

Creative Scotland should strengthen its evidence base and communication of the social and economic benefits of culture for health and wellbeing. It could achieve this by including creative health as a priority in its [Strategic Framework](#) and [Annual Plan](#).

Creative Scotland and Public Health Scotland could also form a partnership, working alongside broader culture sector and funding partners, to ensure that culture interventions are accessible for all as part of health and wellbeing support and social prescribing. This would enable further data collection and evaluation into the value of creative health. It would also contribute to the [Better Places](#) place-based approach and Scotland's [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#): enabling communities to feel they belong and are able to participate and interact positively with others through culture for wellbeing.



* “Grow Our Own” Policy Making

Co-creation approaches to policy making in communities can create a new generation of policy makers and co-created policy solutions by and for Scotland

► Key Takeaway

For communities, finding out where the policy door is, finding a way in and navigating their way around policy making can be a difficult and complicated process. Communities should be resourced to take part in policy making properly, with policy makers working with communities rather than speaking for them.

Scottish devolution presents the opportunity to bring communities closer to policy making through “grow our own” initiatives, rather than bringing in Westminster policy makers. Engaging communities in policy making should be a long-term initiative by Scottish Government that focuses on developing the next generation of policy makers, so that young people from diverse communities around Scotland have opportunities to engage and viable routes into policy making careers from a young age.



Scottish Government should create a wide-reaching talent pipeline scheme that targets raising awareness of policy making in schools, colleges and universities. This would signpost young people from diverse communities to youth policy making opportunities, including through [Community Learning and Development](#), the [Scottish Youth Parliament](#) and the [Scottish Government Apprenticeships](#). Mechanisms should be put in place to increase capacity of policy-specific roles through the Scottish Government Apprenticeships scheme and to support a wide range of young people to take part in it. This would ensure that future policy makers are more representative of the communities their policies impact, bringing more local knowledge and lived experience into the future policy making process.

Barriers to accessibility and inclusion must be considered, along with “not for me” attitudes which might affect some young people’s willingness to take part in a policy making process.



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AHRC Creative Communities

Creative Communities is a major research programme funded by the AHRC and hosted by Northumbria University, exploring how co-created culture can enhance belonging, address regional inequality, deliver devolution, and break down barriers to opportunity with communities in devolved settings across all four nations of the UK.

Authors: Helen Apsey, Policy Lead | Email: helen.apsey@northumbria.ac.uk
Prof Katy Shaw, Director | Email: katy3.shaw@northumbria.ac.uk

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