Finance Committee

Public Services Reform (Scotland) Bill

Submission from the Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland

What is the TMSA?

The aim of the TMSA (Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland) is to promote, present and preserve the traditional music and song of Scotland. We believe that this internationally recognised heritage provides a core for the people of Scotland “to express our identity as individuals, as communities and as a nation”. (Scottish Arts Council).

Established in 1966 to promote and present the traditional music, song and story of Scotland through organising festivals, workshops, concerts, ceilidhs and competitions across Scotland; the TMSA is a membership organisation drawing support from performers, organisers, collectors, festival and ceilidh attendees, publishers, instrument makers and other enthusiasts concerned with fostering interest in the traditional arts of Scotland.

The TMSA is led by a voluntary Management Board, with the national role of advocacy for Scottish traditional music and song and overall responsibility for the organisation. At grassroots level, members belong to their local branch, each run by a local volunteer branch committee. The Management Board together with a representative from each branch make up the National Committee.

The branches provide opportunities for participation (as performer and audience) for members and others by running a range of activities including educational classes, workshops, competitions, ceilidhs, concerts, sessions and festivals. These activities help create an environment in which old and new interpretations of traditional music and song can flourish and interact with other types of music and cultures.

Local branches are also the ideal mechanism to preserve, foster and promote local styles, songs, tunes, stories and dances – the language and style of the bothy song of the northeast is a world away from that of a border ballad. The TMSA branches are spread between urban and rural bases and reflect the complex nature of Scotland’s cultural heritage of agricultural and industrial traditional music and song. Local tradition bearers help to ensure that the wide diversity of Scotland’s culture is maintained.

The genre of traditional music is intrinsically inclusive and the TMSA is committed to providing opportunities for participation for people of all ages and abilities, many of whom have no desire to progress beyond activities at a local level. Nevertheless, most artists who go on to have professional careers in traditional music get their first experiences of listening and performing within their own communities. The festivals, events, workshops and classes enable every-one (of all ages, abilities, gender, ethnicity, disability) to take part in the arts.
The TMSA possesses a huge knowledge reservoir and is a point of contact for many external bodies seeking advice and information. Passing on the tradition from one generation to the next is central to the work of the TMSA. The TMSA supports and provides opportunities for people to learn and teach Scottish traditional music and song at a range of levels, thus laying solid foundations for development and innovation whilst not losing the important strand of safeguarding our diverse heritage.

We have welcomed this opportunity along with others to comment on the Bill laid before the Scottish Parliament. We have also worked with Voluntary Arts Scotland on their response to the Bill and agree with the comments they have put forward so do not propose to repeat them in our response. We have a few additions from our perspective though we have detailed below that we would like the relevant committees to take into consideration – particularly with regards to the Creative Scotland aspect of the proposed legislation.

**Specific comments on the Bill 30 Directions and guidance**

(1) The Scottish Ministers may give Creative Scotland directions (of a general or specific nature) as to the exercise of its functions.

(2) But the Scottish Ministers may not give directions so far as relating to artistic or cultural judgement in respect of the exercise of Creative Scotland’s functions under section 27(1) or (3), 28(3) or 29(4).

We also believe there needs to be a certain element of direction from the Minister as the agency will be spending and allocating public money and the organisation needs to be accountable for its decisions (which does not always appear to be the case at the moment). Comment from many arts practitioners and groups supports our own opinion that decisions taken by the current agencies cannot always be justified even against their own set criteria. Whilst never expecting that the Minister would rule on every case, we would expect to see clear direction over what the government expects to be outcomes from the public purse and strong principles of equality and access to that support. There needs to be an awareness that some ‘artistic’ decisions have masked excluding practices. For example, some of the results of the last flexible funding round appeared to discriminate against traditional arts organisations and those more concerned with infrastructure – which was not clear from any criteria published or even an expectation at the time we gather.

**Schedule 5**

2 (1) Creative Scotland is to consist of the following members—
(a) a person appointed by the Scottish Ministers to chair Creative Scotland, and 30
(b) no fewer than 8 nor more than 14 other members appointed by the Scottish Ministers.

Could this system of appointing the Board not also result in ‘artistic’ direction and priorities chopping and changing to fit political priorities after each election?
164. ‘The Government believes that Creative Scotland’s functions as proposed in this Bill will allow it to develop and lead a strategic approach to the delivery of arts and culture, garnering input from others in order to act as principal advisor to Ministers on arts and cultural policy.’

We are happy that Creative Scotland has such functions, though we would like to see a greater understanding about the differences between active participation and being an audience member. Sometimes, putting the two aspects together does not help accurately portray how people are actually taking part in arts and culture and may not help with designing policy and projects to encourage both.

**Part 7 - Charity trustees’ indemnity insurance**

We are also very pleased to see this issue being cleared up!

Kay Thomson, National Director:
Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland