

Southern Uplands Partnership Services Ltd.



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Public Engagement to Develop a Culture Strategy for the Scottish Borders

Engagement Report, March 2025

Southern Uplands Partnership Services Ltd (SUP Services Ltd) was tasked with conducting public engagement that would support the development of a culture strategy for the Scottish Borders. The intention of this work was to support the development of a culture strategy that promotes inclusivity, accessibility and sustainability and which presents a strong representation of the objectives for cultural development in this region through engagement with the public and a range of sector stakeholders.

The deliverables linked to this piece of work were:

- a) Review of Scottish Borders Council (SBC) engagement work to date
- b) Review of the draft culture strategy to provide feedback and support engagement with content with the public
- c) Support SBC with engagement of a representative sector working group
- d) Create a plan, working with the engaged sector working group, for further engagement including; facilitation routes for targeted engagement with 'yet to be reached' groups, culture sub-sector groups and emerging sub-sector groups, communication considerations for further engagement
- e) Production of a report encompassing above activity, to include; recommendations for inclusion in draft culture strategy and next steps for engagement including identified goals, actions and indicators

- f) Provide guidance to SBC on implementation mechanisms and resource allocation to ensure adequate support for sustainable delivery of the strategy.

This report, with appendixes attached, concludes this piece of work, (e), summarises the approach taken and offers findings related to a, c and d in full. A draft cultural strategy was not available to review within this process and therefore we were unable to undertake all actions related to deliverables b and f. We have alternatively engaged the public and sector focus groups on the summary findings from SBC's initial engagement period and identified implementation mechanisms within this report linked to a further engagement phase.

Methodology for engagement:

During March 2025, SUP Services Ltd. engaged with 383 people to inform further learning on what should be considered when developing a culture strategy for the Borders, building on initial engagement undertaken by Scottish Borders Council and focusing on next steps for further engagement.

Public, drop-in engagement sessions were delivered in Kelso, Jedburgh, Burnfoot, Ayton and Peebles -as well as online.

We had direct engagement with 69 people during these sessions. One-to-one and group conversations were held with a further 14 people who were representatives of heritage, arts, film and education organisations or voluntary groups in the Borders. Specific sector group consultation sessions were held with a focus on culture and wellbeing through the Wellbeing Programme Board (NHS, Scottish Care, Borders Community Action, SBC) and a heritage focus session was held with heritage sector representatives (Historic Environment Scotland, SBC Archaeology officers, Park Archaeology, Trimontium Trust).

We formed a working group, Engagement Advisory Group, from volunteers who had come forward within culture and heritage sectors to support conversations on further engagement when thinking about developing a strategy. Two sessions were delivered with a group of 21 individuals with representation from Royal Society of Arts, Creative Scotland, Hugo Burge Foundation, Creative Coathanger, CABN, Southern Uplands Partnership (Connecting Threads), Scottish Borders Council (music and heritage officers), academic researchers from University of Edinburgh and Heriot Watt University, Historic Environment Scotland, Live Borders and Borders Music Festival.

An online survey, open to the public, was designed and shared through our networks – this received 272 responses.

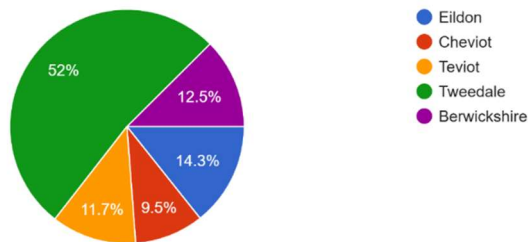
Outcomes from Public Engagement

Who did we reach?

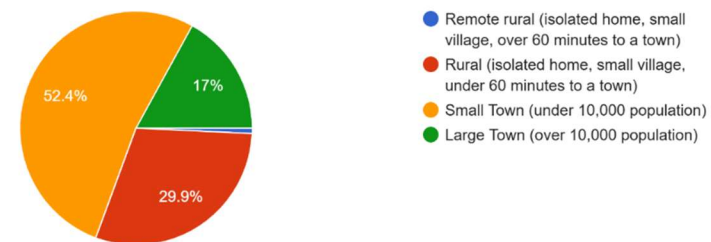
The majority of respondents to the online survey identified themselves as audience members or event attendees (190-200 individuals, 74% of responders). A high number of respondents also identified themselves as volunteers or community organisers (147, 38%). Students and workshop participants made up 40-50 people who responded and 93 people identified themselves as creative practitioners, workshop leaders or employees working within the culture sector.

There was a majority of responses from Tweeddale with the lowest number of responses to the online survey coming from Cheviot.

Which Scottish Borders locality are you based in?
273 responses



How would you describe where you live?
271 responses



This was further broken down on a scale of rurality based on the Scottish Government's Rural Classification Index- the majority of respondents were living in a small town (52.94%) or a rural village or home within 60 minutes of a town settlement.

A higher number of respondents were women, with lower engagement from men. The survey engaged with a number of people who have a disability or long-term health condition (43, 15.9%) and those who care for an adult or child with a disability (11, 4%). There were 5 people who took the survey for whom English is not a first language (1.8%).

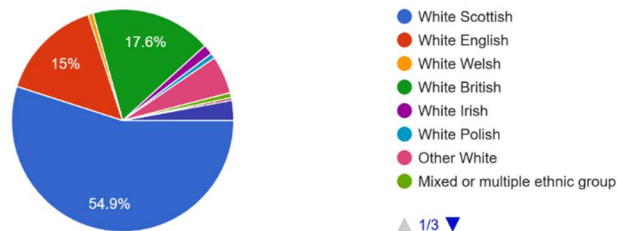
Our survey engaged a majority of White Scottish respondents (150, 54%). Only 3 people, 1.1% of the respondents identified as Mixed Ethnic / Multiple Ethnic Group (2) and Caribbean/ Caribbean Scottish/ Caribbean British (1). The 2022 Census information for Scotland recorded 1.24% of the population identifies within these ethnic groups.

The survey engaged a range of respondents with primary and secondary caring responsibilities.

Full survey data can be seen in **Appendix 2** and in the info-graphics below.

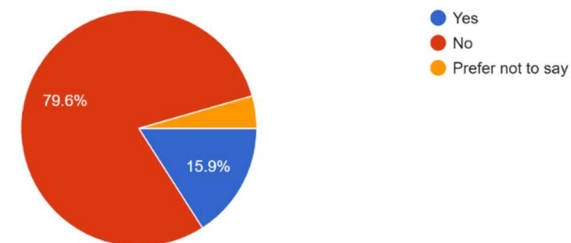
What is your ethnic group? Note: Ethnic group describes people's own perceived ethnic and cultural background and is not the same as nationality. This list is taken from Scotland's 2022 Census.

273 responses



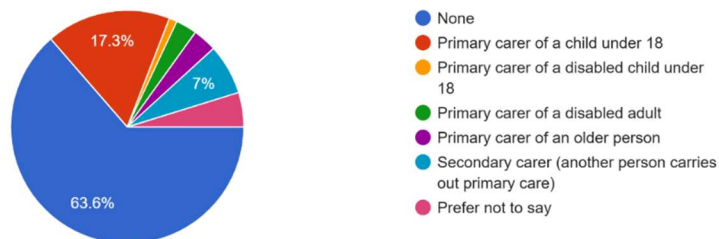
Do you consider yourself to have a disability or long-term health condition? According to the Equality Act, a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

270 responses



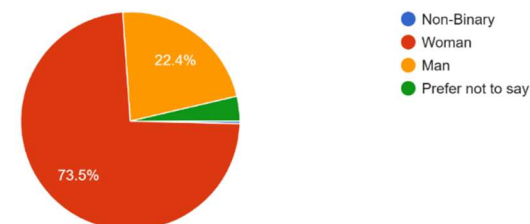
Do have caring responsibilities? Please select all that apply.

272 responses



What is your gender?

272 responses



What did we ask?

Public engagement focused on understanding what culture means to people in the Borders and finding out more about their current engagement with arts, local culture and heritage provision within their communities. We asked people to consider how culture interacts with other areas of their lives, building on the findings from the initial SBC engagement summaries, and asked about barriers people face to engaging with cultural provision in their area.

Based on the feedback received at the in person drop-in consultation events and through the online survey we have summarised findings below against these four areas. Full information gathered from the public engagement sessions and the approach taken can be found in **Appendix 1**.



(Key words, generated from the online public survey, open responses on accessing and engaging with cultural activity in the Borders)

1. What do we mean by culture?

Across the engagement, cultural experiences which members of the public valued were community-based heritage or arts groups, festivals or events programmes, libraries, arts centres, museums, built heritage sites, community spaces offering mixed activities, celebrations like the Ba in Jedburgh and the Common Ridings in Hawick. Complete lists of gathered examples can be found in **Appendix 1.**

2. What was people's experience of cultural activity in the Borders?

'I agree that there is a huge amount of cultural activity in the Borders – It tends to be grass roots so although it is valued and celebrated by those who create it, participate in it, form audiences for it, it is not thriving or supported at a higher level politically.'

Member of the public, Peebles

In Peebles, there was a feeling of centralised activity around the major towns of Hawick and Galashiels. There was major concern linked to proposed funding cuts to the Eastgate Theatre and how this would impact the local communities access to cultural activity – as well as the social and wellbeing implications of potentially losing or limiting the ability of this community space. There was a feeling of strong community buy in for arts and heritage activity.

In Jedburgh, there was concern about a limited pool of volunteers and a lack of appropriate or affordable community spaces which inhibited cultural activity and development of new initiatives. There was discussion about the value placed on historical events and buildings in this area and how this focus can grow or adapt to better engage with the current nature of the town and a changing populations needs and interests. Traditional cultural events in the towns being orientated to men was raised. There was demand for more activity for children and young people.

In Kelso, opening hours of facilities that are on offer in the town were discussed.

In Burnfoot, there was a positive impression of creative activity happening at the community hub, or supported engagement elsewhere through the hub, which had left a lasting impact – particularly referenced was the work of Alchemy Film and Arts. There were concerns

relating to lack of public transport after dark and people feeling unsafe to walk into Hawick to attend evening events due to discrimination.

‘Stronger strategic marketing and digital engagement could help position the Borders as a cultural destination in its own right. Initiatives like the River Tweed Trail are a good example of efforts to integrate arts, culture, and environmental appreciation, highlighting the region in a unique way.’ Member of the public, Jedburgh

In Ayton, lack of evening transport and challenges of driving at night were raised as a major issue to travelling elsewhere to take part in activity and an ageing population was a concern for continuation of activity within the community which is largely volunteer driven. Limited social care provision and lack of affordable housing were raised as innately linked to the sustainability of cultural activity and opportunities in the area. Ayton community members also raised concerns about built infrastructure being unfit for purpose for use by community groups in the area. There was a strong interest in local heritage and will to record and preserve this for the future.

‘Drop in events like the Ayton Hall coffee morning are key to finding out what is going on in the area, more events like this could support information sharing, lots of communities don’t have a gathering space anymore.’ Member of the public, Ayton

3. What barriers did people face when thinking about accessing arts, local culture and heritage activity?

The below barriers to engagement were indicated to be most important when preventing or limiting access to cultural activity, drawn from the online survey and across the conversations at the public engagement drop-in sessions.

- Lack of public transport
- Finding it hard to know ‘what’s on’
- Cost of participating
- Limited and inconsistent provision across the region



4. How does culture interact with other areas of people's lives, wellbeing and community development?

As part of the engagement process, SUP Services Ltd carried out a specific consultation with members of the Wellbeing Programme Board as a cross-sector group which could support us to build understanding about existing collaborations between culture and health in the Borders, as well as identifying gaps or opportunities for development that could be supported within a culture strategy. The session was attended by representatives from the NHS, Borders Community Action and Scottish Care. Key messages generated through this session have been summarised below and full notes can be found in **Appendix 7**.

4. a) Thinking about how wellbeing and health are included in a culture strategy

- Regulatory processes need to be taken into account when considering cross-working between health services and the culture sector
- Growing peer support within communities was seen as a key step to supporting engagement with culture for wellbeing
- Promoting cultural activity as an opportunity to reduce social isolation and provision of therapeutic creative activity e.g dance for parkinsons were ranked most highly by the group as ways the culture sector could support the Wellbeing Programme Boards priority of tackling isolation and loneliness
- The group felt that cultural collaborations could support their Wellbeing Programme Board pathways of 'empowering communities and individuals' and 'removing stigma through alternative sources of support'

4. b) Supporting engagement within the health and wellbeing sector

- Flexible approaches which recognise diverse lived experiences are necessary
- Developing trusted relationships through long term working is important
- Demonstrating action following engagement is important

We also asked the public to think about culture within their wider lives and how they see this interacting with or impacting wellbeing, social development, economic development and tourism within their communities in the Borders. These categories were identified within the SBC initial engagement summaries and the public survey asked people the extent to which they agreed with these identified areas of interaction.

65% of respondents (177 people) agreed or strongly agreed that our cultural identity, arts and heritage activity attract visitors to the Borders.

47% of respondents (129 people) strongly agreed that arts, local culture and/or heritage events and activities acted as a social glue in their communities.

52% of respondents (143 people) agreed that they can take part in, see or experience arts or heritage activity in their day to day lives in the Borders, 22.4% of respondents (61 people) strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had access to this.

61% of respondents (165 people) strongly agreed that arts, local culture and/or heritage events and activities supported their wellbeing.

‘I believe that a vibrant creative arts offering is a vital part of our wellbeing. I do not believe that it is an economic drain on the public purse to support the arts, heritage and local culture sector however an investment in a healthier and happier population.’

Online Survey Response

Outcomes from Culture Sector Engagement

SUP Services Ltd worked with SBC to form a temporary working group which would create a plan for further engagement on a culture strategy. The Engagement Advisory Group was formed of volunteers identified from SBC’s initial round of engagement activity who were invited to participate. We delivered two meetings with invitees, one in person in Galashiels and one online. The Terms of Reference for this temporary working group and list of participants can be seen in **Appendix 3**.

The first Engagement Advisory Group meeting brought together 19 people from within the culture sector in the Borders. The session focused on engagement approaches, considering sector specific needs, opportunities for collaboration and identifying ‘still to be engaged’ groups when thinking about developing a culture strategy for the Borders and forming a representative advisory group.

We engaged the group using a mixture of techniques including using the Lego Serious Play methodology to build ‘positive invitations to engagement’. Key questions and findings generated at these meetings are summarised below.

1. What might prevent engagement within the culture sector?

Low capacity- organisations/ individuals working in the culture sector are stretched in terms of staff capacity and underfunded for their time making it difficult to commit to additional engagement activity or input.

Outcome is not felt to be relevant– a region wide culture strategy is at risk of feeling irrelevant to groups or organisations working at a hyper local level, many of whom generate income through private donations that are not linked to national or regional priorities.

Lack of trust– track record of central support for the culture sector from SBC and Live Borders has not met many people’s expectations, more so the arts sector than the heritage sector. Fear of the strategy not being an actionable plan or living document.

Language use -ensuring a strategy resonates with distinct areas of the sector is important, the goals of these sub-sectors are often similar but the language used to articulate the work is different and is often linked to national approaches.

2. What are the approaches that would support engagement with the sector?

Parity & esteem – the sector is made up of many levels and layers of community-led and organisational-led activity, people need to be met where they are and invited to participate on an equal footing



Appropriate time scale – it takes time to input and have conversations, sustained conversation and ongoing opportunities to have dialogue was felt to be important to making engagement meaningful

Fees for non-salaried contributors and consideration of fees for organisations for whom this is not their remit – important to ensure that the strategy is set by a diverse group of people, not excluding those who cannot afford to give their time without payment

Ensure there is clarity of organisation/ individuals roles – delineation of those participating within the advisory space who may also be acting as potential delivery partners within this next phase

3. Who are the groups of people and organisations which SBC should be engaging with in the next phase of Culture Strategy engagement and development?

All members of the Engagement Advisory Group, were happy to be invited to participate within the next phase of strategy reflection and development. The group worked to generate the below lists of organisations who were not perceived to be engaged within the strategy development and who it was thought should be invited to participate within the next stage of engagement.

Scottish Borders Culture Sector/s:

- Borders Book Festival
- Borders Young Musicians
- Local heritage groups
- Little Art Hub
- Melrose Literature Society
- Studio providers e.g Marchmont Studios
- Community Choirs
- Amateur Theatre Groups- HAOS, KAOS
- Historic House membership
- Archaeology groups

- Borders Writers Forum
- Duns Playfest
- Freelance creatives
- Heritage Alliance
- WASPS Studios
- Local history groups
- Re-enactor groups
- Funders, trusts, benefactors
- Touring performance programmers

National Culture Sector/s:

- Scottish Chamber Orchestra
- Museums & Galleries Scotland
- Creative Scotland
- Screen Scotland
- Heritage Crafts
- Outreach/ Engagement officers (national organisations)
- Craft Scotland
- National touring performance programmers e.g rural touring network
- CreaTech (creative technology industries)
- STV/ BBC
- Napier University
- Edinburgh Futures Institute

Scottish Borders – other sectors:

- SSDA
- Tweed Forum
- NHS
- Cyrenians
- Older People Active Lives
- Commercial Sector e.g restaurants
- Borderlands
- Local Development Trusts
- Borders Additional Needs Group
- Youth Borders
- EDI specialist organisations
- High schools
- Home school groups
- Childcare groups
- Village hall committees
- Abundant Borders- Allotment groups
- Borders Community Action

National – screen/crea-tech sub sectors:

- Napier University
- Edinburgh Futures Institute
- ECA- work in Linlithgow Abbey
- Digital modelling / Minecraft Heritage Programmes
- Commercial contractors such as drone film makers

National - Other Sectors:

- Verture (Adaptation Scotland programmes)

The Engagement Advisory Group additionally identified groups with whom further public engagement should be prioritised, whose voices were perceived to be missing from the engagement activity carried out by SBC to date:

Groups identified for further focused public engagement:

- Children
- Young people
- Private art collectors
- Travelling community
- Older people
- Working people
- Youth leaders
- Educators
- LGBTQ+ Community
- Global majority people living in the Borders
- Creative Practitioners
- Members of community groups
e.g allotments, village halls, voluntary groups
- Walking groups
- People that are new to living in the Borders

The second meeting of the Engagement Advisory Group was facilitated by SUP Services Ltd online, see **Appendix 5** for full notes and list of attendees. This group built on the initial session by thinking about identified groups above and considering approaches to further engagement as well as communication routes and considerations when thinking about further engagement with a Culture Strategy.

The Engagement Advisory Group identified the below list of publications, toolkits and bodies or organisations that could support SBC with the development of engagement approaches around the Cultural Strategy going forward.

YELL – [YELL – Youth Engagement Listen to Learn Strategy – Young Scot](#) Youth Participation and Engagement Strategy, *How to Guide*’ written by local young people to support agencies in the Scottish Borders, to involve young people in their work.

Make Your Mark [Make Your Mark | New Inclusive Volunteering Toolkit published](#) -Part of [Scotland’s Volunteering Action Plan](#), the toolkit was created in partnership with the University of Strathclyde, and is supported by the Scottish Government and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

CYAA Children's and Youth Arts Advocacy - Children's and Youth Arts Advocacy (CYAA) is a collective of leading arts agencies united to drive change for Scotland's children and young people.

Recommendations on Next Steps for Engagement

Actions & Evaluation Framework

The below recommendations are a consolidation of recommended aims and objectives for further engagement activity in support of SBC developing a culture strategy. This includes linked recommended actions which were raised and discussed within the Engagement Advisory Group sessions (**Appendix 5**) which SBC could consider taking forward. The indicators are suggested measures for demonstrating success of these actions based on these conversations. The noted potential offers of support are not exhaustive and only reflect what was brought forward within the Engagement Advisory Group sessions as potential implementation routes or mechanisms.

Aim	Objectives	Recommended Actions	Indicators	Offers of potential support
Strategy engages with the culture sector -across all areas and sub-sectors	Engagement with students, educators and adult learners Engagement with freelance practitioners and grass-roots volunteer groups Engagement with Heritage sector Engagement with Screen sector	Engagement sessions to be delivered with Borders College for students and staff on campus Consultation to be carried out through existing networks e.g organisations working with existing freelance networks, artist collectives or sector forums Consultation to be carried out through existing heritage group networks.	Higher numbers of participants from target sub-sector groups	CABN engages with an existing network of freelance creatives in the region and can share ongoing assessment results around skills development, networking and communications needs. Hugo Burge Foundation offered engagement through their artist studios event. Borders College offered hosting of an event and

		Engagement could be carried out with local film clubs and film making networks.		<p>carrying out further consultation with students and staff.</p> <p>SBC Heritage Officers have a network of voluntary groups they support which could be a route to further engagement.</p>
Strategy reflects national priorities and integrates best practice approaches and learning	<p>Understanding of national priorities for the culture sector/s</p> <p>Understanding of recognised best practice approaches around engagement within the culture sector/s</p> <p>Understanding of other local authority approaches to culture strategy development and delivery that can inform SBC's approach</p>	<p>Meetings to be arranged with national organisations 'engagement' staff who have a remit within the Scottish Borders</p> <p>Meetings to be arranged with sector development organisations and local authority staff from other regions of Scotland and England- particularly those pursuing a similar model of cultural partnership delivery</p> <p>Desk review of national arts and heritage strategies</p>	<p>Draft strategy includes aims which align with national strategy</p> <p>Further engagement strategy aligns with best practice methodologies</p> <p>More organisations within the Borders leverage funding at a national level (long term indicator)</p>	<p>See toolkits, guides and strategy documents raised by the advisory group on p13/14 and national strategy documents on p17 of this report.</p> <p>Alchemy Film & Arts are able to offer potential consultancy linked to their engagement approaches.</p>

Strategy is shaped by further public engagement which invites a range of people to take part and get involved	<p>Participants have multiple ways to input</p> <p>Engagement with those from identified 'yet to be reached' groups (see pg 11)</p>	<p>Engagement could be hosted by cultural organisations as part of existing events in the region</p> <p>Artist led delivery and/or public creative call outs could be commissioned and promoted</p> <p>Engagement delivery could be commissioned through or in partnership with organisations who regularly work with groups we are hoping to reach</p> <p>Review of engagement toolkits (see p13)</p>	<p>Participants have a chance to engage in cultural activity as part of the consultation</p> <p>A broader demographic range of people are recorded within the next phase of engagement</p>	<p>Borders Music Festival, HES and Hugo Burge Foundation came forward offering potential host events for further engagement activity</p> <p>Alchemy Film & Arts have working relationships with a number of specialist organisations and have engaged with some of the identified 'yet to be reached' groups through their work.</p> <p>GRTHM Scot and Article 12 as organisations were identified as working with GRT/ travelling communities.</p>
Communication encourages broad engagement	<p>Strategy communicates in a way that is relevant for the whole sector</p> <p>Strategy feels engaging and relevant for the public</p> <p>Strategy communicates relevance for other sectors</p>	<p>Graphics or images could be developed through a public call out or artist commission</p> <p>Video or audio communication options could be developed</p>	<p>A broader demographic range of people are recorded within the next phase of engagement including those with</p>	<p>Borders Music Festival has had success in engaging with broadcast tv channels in the past and can advise on this.</p>

	Engagement offer is accessible and wide reaching	<p>Elements which form the term culture should be broken down and explained in simple language</p> <p>Marketing and communications specialists could be engaged</p> <p>Access audit could be carried out of engagement messaging and draft strategy content</p>	<p>communication access needs</p> <p>Positive feedback on clarity and accessibility of the draft strategy</p> <p>Borders artwork features within the communication of the strategy or further engagement messaging</p>	
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National Strategy Reflections

As the draft culture strategy was not available to review, we have not carried out a review of this in the context of national culture strategies and policies. We have identified the below publications as resources to support SBC to carry out this review, as recommended within our Action & Evaluation Framework relating to next steps of the culture strategy development. These resources have been identified during conversations during the Engagement Advisory Group meeting and specific sector meetings.

Creative Corridors Report, Arts Council England 2024 - [creativecorridors_report_oct2024.pdf](#)

Creative Scotland Strategic Framework (2021)- [Strategic Framework and Funding Criteria | Creative Scotland](#)

Screen Scotland Strategy to 2030 - [Our Strategy | Screen Scotland](#)

Time to Shine- National Youth Arts Strategy (2013)- [time-to-shine-scotlands-youth-arts-strategy.pdf](#)

Heritage Creates - Heritage Alliance (2025) [Heritage Creates: Heritage and the Creative Industries - The Heritage Alliance](#)

Our Past, Our Future- National Historic Environment Strategy (2023) [Our Past, Our Future | Historic Environment Scotland | History](#)

Culture Sub-Sector Meetings

1.Screen Sector

SUP Services Ltd carried out a review of the recently published South of Scotland Screen Strategy in relation to development of a Culture Strategy for the Scottish Borders and carried out a one-to-one conversation with Michael Pattinson, Alchemy Film & Arts, and Dale Clancy, Borders College to gather further input on what was important to include within a culture strategy related to the creative screen sector. Full notes from the screen sector conversations can be found in **Appendix 4**.

1. a) Thinking about supporting the ‘screen sector’ within a culture strategy for the Borders:

-Film making as a literacy tool and accessible medium for developing social skills could be integrated into the culture strategy. Upskilling teachers with production skills is something which Alchemy Film & Arts has been delivering within parts of the region.

-Alchemy Film & Art is the only place based, screen led organisation in Scotland-and is recognised for its work outside of the Borders- this positioning within the national context could be recognised and leveraged within the regional culture strategy.

- The Borders College’s E Sports offer is advanced compared to other local authorities in Scotland – it is further ahead in this development than other campuses offering this option within Scotland – this could be recognised and leveraged within the regional culture strategy.

-Borders College welcomes potential collaborations for supporting film and broadcast skills development for adult learners within the campus.

- Alchemy Film & Arts supports a pathway for presenting artist moving image and developing future creative talent in the region.

-Film exhibition and in particular local film clubs present an opportunity to build community cohesion, increase skills, diversify local venue use, encourage participation and generate income for communities.

-As the creative technology industry is not geographically tied there are opportunities for rural areas to develop these work streams.

-A culture strategy could be supporting a fairer creative sector – this includes supporting standards of pay.

1. b) Supporting next steps with screen sector engagement

-Alchemy Film & Arts have working relationships with specialist organisations working with marginalised groups including Border Womens Aid and Borders Additional Needs Group.

-Alchemy Film & Arts have been recognised for their engagement approaches and there is an opportunity to offer learning to the wider sector

- Borders college has trained staff and processes for supporting engagement with those facing barriers to main-stream education as well as access to student support teams, translators, bilingual dictionaries etc. and the spaces at the college have undergone access assessments

2. Heritage Sector

There was less representation within the Engagement Advisory Group and initial SBC engagement activity from the heritage sector. To address this, SUP Services Ltd facilitated an online group conversation focused on heritage within the culture strategy attended by SBC Heritage Officers, Historic Environment Scotland, Trimontium Trust and Park Archaeology. We additionally carried out one-to-one conversations with 10 individuals working or volunteering within the heritage sector in the Borders. A full list of individuals spoken with and notes from the heritage conversations can be found in **Appendix 6**. The conversations focused on what was important to consider when thinking about supporting heritage through a culture strategy and what could support further engagement with those engaged with this aspect of the sector.

2. a) Thinking about supporting heritage within a culture strategy for the Borders:

- Improved access is needed for local people and visitors to engage with heritage sites – transport, access routes, regulations, interpretation and support to build confidence and engage.
- Pathways to support for voluntary/community groups to undertake heritage activity – a strategy should support and amplify pleas for funding or permissions to undertake work at a local level.
- A heritage asset can be a community asset too with a social impact, more recognition of this would support the sector to develop in new ways.
- Better leveraging of our heritage sites as a tourism offer, learning opportunity and catalyst for community pride and identity.
- There is some cross working taking place between heritage organisations and between arts and heritage sectors in the Borders but this is limited in scope and success to date largely due to capacity, there is potential to do more at a more strategic level.
- Encouraging the development of understanding and shared best practice around EDI approaches within the sector would be beneficial.
- Flexible and responsive approaches to heritage engagement that work for a new generation – what works in terms of engagement is evolving and changing.
- Engaging with local, community knowledge is key for successful development and delivery for the sector.
- There is plenty of existing, tested alignment within national organisations approaches to heritage within the context of community wealth building, job creation, community empowerment and wellbeing that we should draw on for our strategy.
- The strategy should reflect what we already know is happening, what we have and what is emerging.

2. b) Supporting next steps with heritage sector engagement

- There are over 60 volunteer heritage groups running across the Borders which can be reached through SBC heritage networks
- Partnership working and delivery of engagement as part of existing events and heritage celebrations
- HES have doors open days in September in the Borders and the Festival of archaeology / Scottish archaeology month takes place in September

Conclusion

As a result of this engagement period and review of the initial SBC workings the below opportunities and challenges have been drawn out from the breadth of conversations, survey results and public engagement. They identify areas which a culture strategy in the Borders could address or strengthen.

Opportunities:

- There is a strong sense of community empowerment and self-propelled, volunteer led community action in the Borders. We have an opportunity to support disparate groups and individuals engaged in cultural activity to feel part of a bigger picture and find value in their collective impact.
- There is a vibrant and valued network of grass-roots arts, culture and heritage activity taking place on a hyper-local, community basis across the Borders which is already seen as contributing to social-wellbeing.
- Local publications and community-based organisations already support information sharing within localities.
- There are existing networks within the creative sector that can support engagement and collaboration e.g CABN
- There are organisations offering skills development within artform specialisms already e.g MacArts, Borders College, CABN, Creative Coathanger, Alchemy Film & Arts, Hugo Burge Foundation
- There is an abundance of town 'lore', local history collecting and storytelling which contributes to building strong identities of place in communities in the Borders. There is an opportunity to empower people to place value on their own stories and include new identities in the Borders through this work.
- There is innovative work happening in the culture sector in the Borders, organisations are putting the Borders on the map and being recognised for their work nationally and internationally particularly linked to heritage technology, film and socially or environmentally engaged approaches.
- There are fewer barriers between artists, audiences and volunteers within the Borders– many people are producers, consumers and creators of culture.
- The nature of rural relational working supports interconnectivity across sectors with people engaging in many different ways in their communities already.

- Given the Borders geographic positioning there are opportunities to build on cross-region and cross-border connections, collaboration with neighbouring areas presents a particular opportunity given communities have already told us they tend to engage in this way when it comes to looking for cultural activity.

Challenges:

- Funding access- the processes to apply to funding have changed in the lifespan of many groups work, more regulated processes mean volunteer led groups can be left behind and there is a lack of core funding that can support growth and development within the sector.
- Creating a dynamic solution to communicating ‘what is on’ within the culture sector that will reach the public, connect organisations and remain up to date and relevant to different areas of the sector will require ongoing investment and a multi-faceted approach to delivery – we know one size does not fit all.
- Volunteers are aging, society doesn’t support working age people to participate as volunteers – this is linked to lack of accessible housing, missing transport infrastructure and lack of care provision.
- Those living in different geographic areas of the Borders interact very differently with provision within the region e.g radius of their activity, where they travel to engage, where they look for what’s on, cross-border engagement with Lanarkshire, D&G, central belt, Northumberland
- Varying skill levels and standards of practice across the sector and sub sectors means achieving consistency and skills development is difficult particularly when the sector is reliant on volunteers
- Practical costs of running activity – energy costs, space rental- have become more expensive
- Short-term funding inhibits long term planning and development opportunities
- Promoting and platforming innovative socially engaged work which is ongoing is not as easy as promoting festival or events