



THE FUTURE OF SCOTS

Project report on Creative Industries workshop

Introduction

This report addresses the themes that have emerged during a workshop with participants involved in Scots and the creative industries. This workshop was part of a series which were conducted for the Future of Scots project, a collaborative research project aiming to understand how a community-driven language policy could be developed in the case of Scots in Scotland.

Before the workshops, the Future of Scots team designed and conducted an online survey addressed at the general public. This was done in order to have an understanding of the views on Scots and its use in various domains such as education, media, culture, and in policies. The workshops were then designed to engage with the survey results. The purpose of the creative industries workshop was to hear from stakeholders not only their views on Scots as a whole and its relationship with the arts and creative practice, but also to discuss issues and how they could be addressed.

In addition to the moderation team, 7 participants joined the discussions for a total of 2 hours. All the participants had been involved with the place of Scots in the arts, either as creative artists or as part of organisations promoting the arts and culture. Before the discussions started, participants listened to two brief presentations, one about the survey results obtained thanks to the Future of Scots project, and the other one dealing with language policy. The starting point for the discussion was the use of a prompt (*“There should be more support for use of Scots in arts and culture”*) presenting the results that were obtained to it by 1616 self-selecting respondents who were overwhelmingly in favour, across all age groups.

From the discussion with the participants, several themes arose and are summarised in this report: 1) making use of existing support, 2) recognising Scots, 3) Gaelic, Scots, and English, 4) gate-keeping and narrow focus, 5) negative attitudes, as well as 6) further ideas on how to improve the situation of Scots in the creative sector.

Discussion themes

1) Making use of existing support

All participants agreed that the use of Scots in creative industries, from publishing to music, has had a growing trajectory for the last 20 years. These successes, also commercial, provide a good base on which to build future support for Scots in arts and culture. The participants talked about existing support, such as publication grants and status-raising Scots Language Awards. However, there is a need for more targeted activities and structures, especially within government-funded bodies with a creative remit. For example, a Scots Language Coordinator, working alongside a similar role for Gaelic in various institutions, would provide a specific reference point. Another suggestion was for more pro-active action on the part of national creative institutions, for example through running high-profile projects with high visibility and prestige. A simple win could be providing application documents and any funding paperwork in Scots, to encourage legitimisation and recognition of the language.

2) Recognising Scots

An important theme that appeared during the discussions was whether Scots is actually seen as a “thing” by its users. Indeed, a challenge is that some people who speak Scots do not recognise that they are using Scots, and the participants felt that was especially true in creative arts. For example, some authors would say that they use “dialogue” or “slang” rather than “Scots”. In music, for example in hip-hop and rap, while the performers may use Scots vocabulary, they would talk about their practice as “using their own voice” or “using their own language”. Participants thought education was crucial to make Scots users more aware that the linguistic variety they use can be simply labelled as Scots, which would then give the language further recognition.

3) Gaelic, Scots, and English

Gaelic, Scots, and English and the dynamics of support in creative industries for these three languages were also a topic of discussion. For the participants it was clear that Gaelic and Scots should not be grouped together as their respective language communities have different needs and priorities. Despite their differences, it was stressed that Gaelic and Scots should not be pitched against each other. The goal is for both to have parity with English. It was noted that when a Scots-related project is proposed, it attracts questions as to why the funding is not spent on other languages or other professions, but when a similar project has

an English focus, no such questions arise. While there have been many positive changes for Scots over the last decades, some participants expressed the need for an equivalent of Bòrd na Gàidhlig for Scots. Having a Scots Language Board or a Scots Language Council would give status to Scots and create accountable structures and processes, also with regard to securing and distributing funding. Related to that, there was hope for a Scots Language Act among the workshop participants (see also the Policy-makers Workshop Report and the government consultation on the proposed Scottish Languages Bill). That said, the participants were equally aware that any such legislation would come at a challenging moment, given the current cost of living crisis affecting the United Kingdom.

4) Gate-keeping and narrow focus

Some participants felt that the creative space is being limited by the Scots speakers themselves, acting as “gate-keepers”, judging what is acceptable, and producing content according to traditionally established roles for the language. Such roles include comedy and working-class characterisation in particular. There seems to be a need for more experimentation and a variety of voices, and breadth of expression should be encouraged. In general, it was agreed that some creative industries are doing better than others, for example publishing as opposed to theatre. Film industry was identified as a great ally in changing perceptions about the language, as well as creating jobs.

5) Negative attitudes

During the discussion, it was recognised that Scots as a language of expression and creativity faces difficulties. In addition to the aspects identified above, participants felt there was a strong negative influence from the media when it came to attitudes towards Scots. They also noted that views about Scots were polarised, especially on social media. In contrast to the participants of the Media Workshop (see report), the representatives of creative industries felt that online abuse should be addressed. They also agreed that general awareness campaigns as well as more targeted training sessions for staff at institutions with a creative remit would be able to counter negative opinions and misinformation.

6) Further ideas

In addition to the points raised above, the participants offered further ideas to take into consideration. One was the importance of raising awareness of Scots and about Scots. Some such initiatives and campaigns are already in place, but the participants felt that it was never enough. A campaign to raise confidence in using Scots was also suggested. With regards to funding applications in the creative arts, it was suggested to have a tick box asking whether there is a Scots language element to the project. For education and schools, participants suggested that in addition to the Scots Language SQA Award, there could also be a National

Five or a Higher qualification in which pupils could study Scots history, policy, literature, and culture. Assignments could include, for example, making short videos in Scots, to encourage creative practice through education.