



**EQUAL MEDIA &
CULTURE CENTRE
FOR SCOTLAND**

Transforming Culture for a Fairer Future

A manifesto for the Holyrood Election 2026, prepared by the Equal Media and Culture Centre at Engender

Housed within Engender, the Equal Media and Culture Centre for Scotland (EMCC) is an intersectional feminist hub for research, monitoring and advocacy in the culture and media sectors in Scotland. Our vision is of a Scottish society where women's equal contribution to culture and media is fully realised and recognised.

Right now, Scotland's culture and media sectors are not as safe, equal or fair for women as they need to be...

In Scotland, we love the arts. In 2022, 88% of us engaged with culture and 84% agree that Scotland is a creative nation. Scotland's cultural sector continues to grow, contributing over £5 billion to our economy and accounting for over 78,000 jobs.

At national, local and individual levels across Scotland, culture and media help shape societal attitudes and have the power to transform our communities for the better. In 2024, the majority of Scots agreed that culture and the arts make a positive difference to their local communities, and there is strong evidence that engaging with the arts enhances social cohesion.

Our culture puts Scotland on the map: each year, millions of international visitors come to our country to attend our festivals, concerts and events. Scottish creative talent is exported around the world: blockbuster movies are filmed in our cities; our novels are nominated for major literary prizes; and our theatre makers, screenwriters and actors walk award-show red carpets. In Scotland, culture brings our communities together, provides employment and career opportunities, and fosters our national pride.

And yet, Scotland's culture and media sectors are often not safe, equal or fair for women. There remains a persistent lack of representation of women and diverse voices in positions of power in Scotland's creative industries. Women do not earn equal salaries to men in the cultural sector, and the gender pay gap persists across Scotland's labour market. Self-employed workers continue to be undercut in the creative industries, with 69% of freelancers experiencing late payment, and 46% of freelancers losing work and pay when ill or taking maternity leave. Three times the number of women to men cite care responsibilities as a major barrier to their work in the arts, and over half of workers have experienced, or seen, bullying and sexual harassment in the creative sector.

We know that for women who face intersecting discrimination in society – Black and minority ethnic women, disabled women, LGBT+ women, carers, refugees and migrant women, and older and younger women – these statistics are even more troubling.

For these deep-rooted problems to improve, we need our leaders to commit to changing policies and practices that are currently holding women back from achieving their full potential. Our vision is for a Scottish society where women's equal contribution to culture and media is fully realised and recognised, free from discrimination. We ask that the new Government commits to this vision with us and takes the following three steps to remove barriers for women who make up Scotland's thriving creative industries.

We call on political parties to:

1. Commit to a baseline target for national arts funding that is above 1% of the overall Scottish Government budget.

Culture should be accessible for all women in Scotland, and not just the privileged few. Yet, post-pandemic, the rising cost of living alongside shrinking government spending on the arts has created an ever more precarious environment for those working in the arts and culture sectors in Scotland.

Our sector contributes billions to the economy and attracts millions of visitors to Scotland each year. However, despite public engagement with Scottish culture remaining high, the arts is often one of the first sectors to lose public funding during times of crisis or austerity.

Over the last ten years, the Scottish Government's spending on culture has decreased in real terms, local government revenue funding of culture and related services has fallen by 29%, and arts council core government funding has fallen by 22%. As a result, culture organisations are at breaking point. Organisations are surviving on limited resources, increasing the pressure on often underpaid, part-time and self-employed staff, the majority of whom are women. At the same time, libraries, venues and community centres continue to close.

We know that when public funding is limited, the arts is at risk of becoming the preserve for the privileged few who can afford to self-fund projects. This is already occurring, with the UK's creative industries employing four times as many people from middle-class backgrounds compared to those who grew up working-class.

The Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee of the Scottish Parliament has recommended that the Scottish Government's baseline target for national arts funding should be above 1% of the overall budget, bringing it in line with the European average of 1.5%.

In order to effectively tackle inaccessibility and inequality in the culture sector, **we ask political parties to commit to meeting that baseline target, to bring Scotland's national arts funding closer to the European average.** To ensure that women in the creative industries are not being inadvertently discriminated against and to assess the impact of Scottish Government funding designs, **we also ask political parties to commit to completing an intersectional gendered analysis of the arts budget.** This will give us a clearer idea of how to utilise arts funding to benefit whole communities.

1. Increase efforts to close the gender pay gap in Scotland's culture and media sectors

In Scotland's creative industries, 34% of workers say there is an issue of unequal pay in their workplaces, and the gender pay gap still has not closed across Scotland's labour market more broadly.

Occupational segregation continues to be an obvious problem in the culture sector. Women make up the majority of lower-paid and part-time roles, whilst men are more likely to be employed in leadership and decision-making positions, earning higher wages. Women who work in male-dominated creative

workplaces, including the music industry, are also more likely to experience sexual harassment. Evidence indicates that women in Scotland may be accepting lower-paid, part-time occupations to stay in safer, female-dominated environments. Self-employed women are even more vulnerable to low pay and unfair work practices, including lack of access to employee benefits like sickness or maternity pay.

Scottish Government is not powerless to address this inequality and has levers it can use to tackle the issue of the gender pay gap in the creative industries. A gendered analysis of Scottish Government's arts and culture funding decisions could be done to assess where women may be impacted by pay inequality; for example, if, when funding cuts are made, women in the arts sector are impacted at a disproportional rate to men. This analysis would enable restructuring of funding streams to close the pay gap and promote gender equality. Scotland's creative public funding bodies, such as Creative Scotland and Screen Scotland, should also undertake an intersectional gendered analysis of their existing practices to ensure that women do not face unnecessary or discriminatory barriers when applying for funds. The Scottish Government and public funding bodies must apply conditions to their funding and procurement practices to ensure that fair work for women and closing the gender pay gap remain central focuses for the creative industries.

Data is a vital tool in tackling the gender pay gap. We ask political parties to commit to gathering and publishing intersectional gender-disaggregated data on the scale and impacts of the gender pay gap in the creative industries.

The current Scottish Government has committed to becoming a Fair Work Nation by 2025, and the Culture Fair Work Taskforce is preparing to publish its recommendations this Autumn. This will be **an important moment for political parties to commit to closing the gender pay gap in the culture industries.**

1. Develop and implement a national strategy that addresses inequality, including gender discrimination, in Scotland's culture and media sectors.

Women's contribution to the creative industries is systematically, financially and culturally undervalued. Structural barriers, such as barriers in access to funding, inflexibility of roles, and a lack of consistent, well-paid work and high rates of sexual harassment and bullying, continue to disproportionately affect women's participation. Meaningful long-term change cannot happen without political parties explicitly acknowledging that the creative industries are not as safe, equal or fair for women as they should be.

In Scotland, our data on gender inequality in the creative sectors is severely limited. The Scottish Government must act to ensure that women's experiences in the culture and media sectors are adequately and ethically recorded, so that evidence-driven policy change and analysis can happen.

The next Scottish Government must commit to a strategy to end gender disparity and discrimination in Scotland's creative industries, including an intersectional gender analysis of budgets, funding decisions, fair work and EDI practices. The next government should also set out a realistic timeline for implementation of the strategy to ensure that the current and future generations of women can thrive in their creative work without barriers. **We ask all political parties to commit to transforming the culture and media sectors for women in Scotland.**

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