

# Cross-Party Group on Creative Economy

7 March 2023, 7-830pm, online via Zoom

## Draft Minutes

### MSPs Present:

Clair Baker MSP (Convener); Jenni Minto MSP (Depute Convener)

### CPG Members and Guests:

Gillian Macrosson (Witherby Publishing Group); John MacPherson (Bright Red Publishing); Katy Lockwood-Holmes (Floris Books); Joseph Peach (Culture Counts); Rhona Stevens (Federation of Scottish Theatre); Angus Morrison (Acair Books); Alan Grierson (Bright Red Publishing); Alan Bett (Creative Scotland); Trevor MacFarlane (Culture Commons); Matthew Ward (Dundee University); Gary Kerr (Edinburgh Napier University); David Goutcher (Polybius Games); Marion Sinclair (Publishing Scotland); David Martin (Skills Development Scotland); James Campbell (Sparisle Books); Orchid Liu; Ann Crawford

## 1 Welcome

Claire Baker MSP (convener) welcomed attendees to the meeting.

## 2 Group Purpose

Claire introduced the purpose of the Creative Economy Group.

*To exchange ideas and learning around the development and support of the future creative economy. The group will consider support for creative economy in Scotland, exploring barriers to success and highlighting any potential solutions.*

## 3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were moved by Jenni Minto MSP and seconded by Claire Baker MSP

## 4 Any Other Business

No additional business was raised at this stage

## 5 Meeting Theme: Scotland's Publishing Sector

Claire introduced the meeting's theme – Scotland's Publishing Sector

## 6 Presentation – Katy Lockwood-Holmes (Floris Books)

Katy Lockwood-Holmes has been Publisher & Chief Executive of Floris Books since 2011. Before that she worked in marketing for Edinburgh University Press, T&T Clark Edinburgh and Continuum in New York. In the last decade she has overseen three-fold growth at Floris, making it Scotland's largest children's publisher, and winning the Saltire Society publisher of the year in 2016.

Katy's presentation outlined the work of Floris books, and outlined opportunities and challenges faced by the organisation.

- The importance of Scottish children seeing culture, heritage and languages reflected back at them in the books they read
- Floris have previously been recipients of a Blue Peter Award, as well as Saltire Society Publisher of the Year
- Floris have an international focus – in 2022, half of books published were from other languages
- This focus is reflected in sales – 40% of Floris Books' sales are outwith the UK. This is important for spreading risk. In markets such as the US, a small market share can make a big difference
- Diversity is a vital topic – reflecting this in the titles published.

Challenges Katy touched upon include:

- Supply chain issues – around sourcing sustainable paper, shipping and selling into Europe post-Brexit.
- Rising costs are affecting salaries, printing and distribution
- There are difficulties in raising the price of books – prices printed on to titles can remain active for 3-5 years.
- Publishers can have difficulty in achieving critical mass and growing their business, and difficulty with eligibility for support, often falling outwith the funding remit of Creative Scotland, but not being large enough for enterprise agencies to consider support.
- A key stage in this growth is accessing export markets – an area which can prove challenging.
- Access to market data can be a challenge for many Scottish publishers, with cost being a key barrier.

Katy also highlighted the benefit that Publishing Scotland brings to the sector – supporting growth and professionalisation of the industry, as well as their involvement in Booksource – distributor for a number of Scottish publishers.

## 7 Presentation – John MacPherson (Bright Red Publishing)

John MacPherson is a Director of Bright Red Publishing, an independent educational publisher based in Fife. Twice winners of the UK Educational Publisher of the Year,

Bright Red produces a broad range of resources for Scottish teachers and students. As well as managing the business generally, his main focus is the commissioning and development of print and digital publications.

John's presentation outlined the work of Bright Red, as well as touching on landscape opportunities and challenges.

- Bright Red work in the education publishing space, with their own range of revision books and past papers catering to the Scottish curriculum on behalf of the SQA.
- In 2013 their publications changed to move to the curriculum for excellence.
- Bright Red's business has a seasonal element, with higher activity around the time of exams.
- The business publishes into smaller curricular areas such as politics and accounting, as well as core subject areas.
- Bright Red developed a Digital Zone for learners – an online resource in collaboration with Professor Bill Buchanan. The project was supported by Interface and Publishing Scotland's Go Digital fund.
- Bright Red operate their own warehouse in Kirkcaldy.

Landscape opportunities and challenges mentioned by John include:

- Difficulties in accessing investment and support – Bright Red and many other publishers fall outwith the remit of Creative Scotland, but do not operate at a scale which would be considered for support by enterprise agencies.
- Rising costs impacting a number of areas: Paper, energy, transport as well as consumer demand
- Uncertainty in schools – industrial action and council budgets
- Uncertainties over the future of the SQA – changes in this area could impact the business.
  
- Bright Red are making the most of digital opportunities by making podcasts about subject areas and writers, further developing the digital zone and creating digital versions of existing publications.
  
- John also highlighted a need for more internships and early career opportunities for those looking to enter the publishing industry, as well as the possibility of further pooling of resources among smaller publishers, for example in the creation of co-working spaces.

## 8 Presentation – Gillian Macrosson (Wetherby Publishing Group)

Gillian Macrosson is Managing Director at Wetherby Publishing Group. Based in Livingston, Wetherbys publishes operational guidance and technical standards for the

shipping industry. They are one of Scotland's largest publishing companies, as well as the oldest independent publisher in the English speaking world, celebrating their 280th birthday in 2020.

Gillian's presentation outlined the history and work of Witherby Publishing Group.

- Witherbys began in 1740, publishing insurance books and books on shipping.
- The company moved from London to Glasgow in 2008. Since then it has grown considerably, from a team of 16 to 51, with turnover growing from £1.8million to £13million.
- In 2018 Witherbys celebrated their 300<sup>th</sup> book, and generally publish 35-40 books per year.
- Witherbys operations are almost entirely in-house, with their own software development team and warehouse. The only parts of their operations which are outsourced are typesetting and printing.
- Witherbys are the official electronic distributors for the International Maritime Organization and publish guidance titles with numerous shipping bodies and maritime NGOs. These include the International Chamber of Shipping, the UK Chamber of Shipping, BIMCO, OCIMF, SIGTTO, North P&I, the UK P&I Club, the International Association of Classification Societies, the Merchant Navy Training Board and the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST).
- Witherbys products are exported to 110 countries in both physical and e-book forms. Exports account for 76% of total sales. E-book sales take place through Witherby Connect – an e-book reader developed in house.
- Witherbys also operate a charitable trust, which reached £1million of giving in 2021.
- In terms of ensuring the future talent pipeline, Witherbys fund scholarships on Stirling and Edinburgh Napier Universities' publishing courses, as well as delivering a fund in partnership with UHI.
- Witherbys work to ensure positive working conditions for their staff, paying the real living wage and signing up to the Scottish Business Pledge. The organisation are currently conducting a 4 day working week trial, the results of which have been positive so far.
- Challenges faced by the business include paper and print costs as well as new customs barriers resulting from Brexit.

Gillian concluded by highlighting the value that training from Publishing Scotland has provided – in terms of sending delegates to book fairs, information on export and their international publishing fellowship.

## 9 Discussion

Following the presentation, the group held a discussion and Q&A with speakers.

Key themes and questions that emerged from the discussion included:

The importance of Publishing Scotland in supporting and developing Scotland's publishing sector.

The gap in government support for publishers – many publishers and projects are not eligible for Creative Scotland funding or funding from enterprise agencies.

The challenges of starting out as a publisher.

Environmental considerations when making decisions about where and how to print books.

The importance of continuing to develop the talent pipeline for publishing – through training and early career opportunities.

## 10 Actions

Claire Baker MSP, Culture Counts and Publishing Scotland to meet to discuss possible actions arising from presentations and discussions.

## 11 Date of Next Meeting (Sept 2023)

The date of the next meeting was proposed for September 2023. The aim is to hold a hybrid meeting in Parliament and online.