



Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Partnership: Connecting Our Cultural Landscape Engagement Report (2026)

Introduction.....	1
Purpose of the Report.....	1
About the Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Partnership.....	1
2. About the Connecting Our Cultural Landscape Events.....	2
What Took Place.....	2
Who Took Part.....	2
How the Sessions Were Structured.....	2
3. What We Set Out to Achieve.....	3
4. What We Heard Across the Region.....	3
4.1 Access and Participation.....	3
4.2 Supporting Artists & Creative Practice.....	4
4.3 Celebrating Local Culture & Heritage.....	5
4.4 Culture Supporting Communities & Wellbeing.....	7
4.5 Collaboration & Growth.....	8
5. Opportunities & Areas for Development.....	9
5.1 Communication, Access & Connectivity.....	9
5.2 Spaces & Infrastructure.....	10
5.3 Sector Development & Creative Pathways.....	11
5.4 Cross-Sector Partnerships & Regional Growth.....	12
6. Vision for 2030.....	13
7. Conclusion and Next Steps.....	14
8. Appendix.....	15
8.1 DGCP Event Questions for participants.....	15
8.2 Stranraer Event Summary.....	16
8.3 Dumfries Event Summary.....	18
8.4 Castle Douglas Event Summary.....	20
8.5 Online Event Summary.....	23

Introduction

Purpose of the Report

This report brings together insights from the Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Partnership's *Connecting Our Cultural Landscape* events.

The purpose of this report is to capture what was shared by cultural leaders, organisations, community groups and practitioners across the region. It reflects the experiences, challenges and opportunities identified through a series of conversations, and highlights where there is strong alignment across Dumfries and Galloway.

The findings will help to inform the next phase of the Cultural Partnership's work, shaping how it supports the sector, strengthens connections and advocates for culture across the region.

This report does not present confirmed actions or commitments. Instead, it offers a clear picture of the current landscape, identifying areas where there is potential for development, collaboration and long-term growth.

About the Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Partnership

The Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Partnership (DGCP) is a region-wide collaboration working to bring together people, organisations and ideas from across the arts, heritage and creative sectors.

The Partnership is made up of four founding organisations:

- Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Dumfries and Galloway Museums and Heritage Network
- DG Unlimited
- South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)

The DGCP is not a new organisation, but a shared approach to working more collaboratively across Dumfries and Galloway.

We act as a connector and amplifier, helping people, projects and places work better together across the cultural landscape.

The Partnership exists to support the delivery of the Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Strategy. It recognises that arts and heritage are not an add-on, but a vital part of how the region grows, invests and supports its people. Culture plays a key role in wellbeing, identity and the local economy.

The DGCP aims to make it easier for people to connect across sectors, including arts, heritage, education, health, tourism and community development. By bringing together the public, private

and third sectors, the Partnership seeks to reduce isolation, share knowledge and create stronger, more joined-up ways of working across Dumfries and Galloway.

2. About the Connecting Our Cultural Landscape Events

What Took Place

The Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Partnership delivered a series of events across the region under the title *Connecting Our Cultural Landscape*.

Five events were originally planned to take place in Stranraer, Dumfries, Castle Douglas, Annan and online. The Annan session was cancelled due to low uptake. The remaining sessions took place throughout March 2026 and brought together people from across Dumfries and Galloway to take part in open conversation and discussion.

The events were designed to begin building a clearer picture of the cultural landscape, while creating space for people to meet, share and connect.

Who Took Part

The events brought together a wide range of participants working across the cultural sector.

This included:

- artists and creative practitioners
- cultural organisations and venues
- freelancers and independent creatives
- community groups and development organisations
- representatives from public and third sector organisations

Together, these voices reflect a broad cross-section of the cultural sector in Dumfries and Galloway, from grassroots activity to larger organisations.

How the Sessions Were Structured

Each event followed a similar format, centred around small group discussions. Participants were guided through a series of questions exploring:

- What is currently happening across the region?
- Where are there opportunities for growth?
- What challenges are being faced?
- What could the future of culture in Dumfries and Galloway look like?

The sessions were designed to be open and conversational, allowing participants to share their experiences, ideas and perspectives in an informal and collaborative setting.

Insights from these discussions were captured and have informed the findings within this report.

Note: This report reflects the conversations and perspectives shared by participants who attended the *Connecting Our Cultural Landscape* events. It should be understood as a snapshot of current experiences across parts of the cultural sector in Dumfries and Galloway, rather than a comprehensive audit of all activity taking place across the region. While every effort was made to engage a broad range of voices, participation varied across locations and sectors, and some communities and perspectives may not yet be fully represented. The findings should therefore be viewed as a starting point for ongoing dialogue, relationship-building and future engagement.

3. What We Set Out to Achieve

The *Connecting Our Cultural Landscape* events were designed to support the early development of the Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Partnership and to begin building stronger connections.

The events set out to:

- increase awareness of the Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Partnership
- connect people working across culture, heritage and the creative sectors
- create space to share current activity, experiences and priorities
- gather insight to help shape how the Partnership supports the sector moving forward

4. What We Heard Across the Region

4.1 Access and Participation

Across Dumfries and Galloway, there is a wide range of cultural activity already supporting access and participation. This includes community-based creative wellbeing programmes, open-access workshops and festivals, heritage and skills-based learning, and a significant amount of volunteer-led and grassroots activity.

Much of this work is deeply embedded within communities. Programmes focused on mental health and wellbeing are successfully engaging people who may not otherwise access cultural activity, while heritage organisations, museums and local groups are creating opportunities for hands-on participation through crafts, skills development and volunteering. Regular, community-based activity also plays an important role in building connection and reducing isolation.

There are also examples of organisations actively working to widen access. These include outreach into schools and communities, free or subsidised tickets, and the use of digital tools

such as live streaming to reach people who are unable to attend in person. In some cases, organisations are beginning to explore additional accessibility measures, including BSL provision and alternative formats.

However, alongside this strong provision, there are consistent barriers that limit who is able to take part.

Transport was the most frequently raised challenge across all locations. The rural nature of the region, combined with limited public transport and high travel costs, makes it difficult for many people to access cultural activity. This is particularly significant for young people, those without access to a car, and communities in more remote areas. Even where activity is available, the ability to physically reach it remains a key barrier.

There is also a clear inequality of access across Dumfries and Galloway. Some areas benefit from a high level of activity, often driven by strong local organisations or individuals, while others have far fewer opportunities. This creates a postcode-based disparity, where access to culture depends heavily on where people live.

Awareness is also a major issue. Many participants felt that people do not know what is happening locally, or across the wider region. Communication is often fragmented, with information circulating within existing networks rather than reaching new audiences. This can result in activity being under-attended, even where there is interest.

Perception was identified as another barrier. For some communities, arts and cultural activity can still feel inaccessible or “not for them.” This is particularly relevant for people from lower-income backgrounds or those who have not previously engaged with the cultural sector. Participants also noted differences in who feels comfortable participating, with some groups less visible or less likely to engage.

Overall, there is a strong foundation of activity supporting access and participation across the region. However, this activity is often localised, and access to it is not evenly distributed. Addressing barriers relating to transport, awareness, inequality and perception will be essential to ensuring that cultural opportunities are genuinely accessible to all communities across Dumfries and Galloway.

4.2 Supporting Artists & Creative Practice

Support for artists and creative practitioners is currently shaped by a combination of organisational activity, community-led initiatives and individual effort.

Cultural organisations are actively working with artists within their capacity. This includes commissioning local creatives, delivering workshops and classes, and creating opportunities for artists to contribute to programmes, festivals and events. These opportunities provide important routes for engagement and visibility, particularly at a local level.

There is some collaboration and knowledge sharing across the sector, although this is often informal and dependent on existing relationships. Artists and organisations are connecting where possible, but this is not consistent across the sector.

Volunteering plays a significant role in enabling creative activity. Many organisations rely on volunteers to deliver programmes and events, and for some individuals this provides an entry point into the sector, offering opportunities to gain experience and develop skills. However, participants noted that this model places pressure on a relatively small number of people, with limited capacity to grow activity or support progression into paid work.

Across all sessions, there was a clear recognition that pathways for artists are limited. While there are opportunities to engage in creative activity, there are few structured routes into sustained, paid careers. Access to training, mentoring and long-term development support is inconsistent, and many practitioners struggle to progress beyond early or project-based opportunities.

Participants also described a lack of visibility and connectivity across the sector. There is currently no central way to identify who is working in the region, what skills exist, or how to connect artists with opportunities. This limits collaboration and makes it more difficult for opportunities, partnerships and paid work to be shared effectively.

Access to appropriate spaces was also identified as a challenge. Artists reported limited availability of affordable studios, rehearsal spaces and flexible venues to develop and present work. At the same time, there is a sense that existing spaces are not always being fully utilised or are difficult to access.

More broadly, there is a disconnect between the creative sector and other parts of the regional economy. While cultural organisations are supporting artists within their own programmes, there are fewer opportunities for creatives to engage with sectors such as tourism, business and the wider public sector.

A consistent concern across discussions was the retention of creative talent. Participants highlighted that many young people leave the region to pursue training or work and do not return, due to a lack of opportunities and clear career pathways.

Overall, while there is clear commitment to supporting artists and creative practice across Dumfries and Galloway, this support is often fragmented and limited by capacity, infrastructure and a lack of coordinated systems.

4.3 Celebrating Local Culture & Heritage

Heritage was consistently described by participants as a vital part of Dumfries and Galloway's cultural identity and community life. Across the region, museums, heritage organisations, archives, local history groups and community-led initiatives are actively preserving, interpreting and sharing the stories, traditions, collections and landscapes that shape the region's identity.

Participants highlighted the important role museums and heritage organisations already play within communities. Alongside caring for collections and historic knowledge, many organisations are supporting volunteering, lifelong learning, schools engagement, traditional skills development and intergenerational exchange. Heritage activity is helping people connect with place, understand local identity and maintain links between past and present generations.

There is a range of heritage based activity taking place across the region. This includes local history projects, archaeology and conservation work, heritage volunteering, Burns-related activity, schools engagement and community events celebrating local stories and traditions. Festivals and heritage-focused programmes were also recognised as important platforms for sharing the region's identity, attracting visitors and bringing communities together.

Participants also described a growing interest in how heritage connects with landscape, environment and place. Across Dumfries and Galloway, cultural identity is closely tied not only to built heritage and collections, but also to rural traditions, local knowledge and relationships with the natural environment. Traditional crafts and heritage skills continue to be passed on through museums, community groups and local organisations, helping preserve both tangible and intangible cultural heritage across the region.

However, alongside this strong foundation, participants highlighted a number of tensions and challenges.

One of the most significant challenges discussed was how heritage is framed and experienced. While there is strong value placed on preserving and celebrating the past, participants also highlighted the importance of ensuring heritage activity remains relevant, inclusive and connected to contemporary communities. There was recognition that heritage should not only reflect nostalgia, but also create opportunities for dialogue, participation and new interpretations of local identity.

Participants also raised concerns about declining engagement with heritage among younger generations, alongside a need to better reflect the diversity of communities across Dumfries and Galloway. Some voices, histories and experiences are not yet fully visible within heritage activity, and there was a strong desire to broaden representation and ensure that heritage reflects the region as it exists today as well as its past.

Awareness and visibility remain ongoing challenges. Participants noted that many people are unaware of the museums, heritage sites, collections and local initiatives already operating across the region. This can limit participation, reduce opportunities for collaboration and weaken wider understanding of the region's shared cultural identity.

There were also concerns about heritage at risk, including historic buildings, museum collections, archives and traditional knowledge. Participants highlighted the challenges of maintaining and repurposing heritage assets, particularly within rural communities and in contexts where organisational capacity and long-term resources are limited.

Overall, participants described Dumfries and Galloway as a region with a rich and distinctive heritage landscape, supported by passionate organisations, volunteers and communities. However, there was also recognition that heritage activity can feel fragmented and unevenly visible across the region. Participants identified a strong opportunity to strengthen connections across the heritage sector, improve visibility and access, and support heritage as something living, evolving and central to the future cultural identity of Dumfries and Galloway.

4.4 Culture Supporting Communities & Wellbeing

Across Dumfries and Galloway, there is a strong and widely shared understanding that culture plays an important role in supporting wellbeing and strengthening communities.

Participants consistently described how cultural activity contributes to improved mental health, reduced isolation and increased confidence. Across the region, programmes are already engaging people through workshops, heritage projects and skills-based activity, creating opportunities for connection, routine and shared experience. In many cases, this work is deeply embedded within communities and responds directly to local needs.

There are clear examples of impactful practice. Structured creative wellbeing programmes are supporting people who may not otherwise engage with cultural activity, providing pathways from initial participation through to increased confidence and ongoing involvement. Regular group activity, often combined with informal social elements such as shared meals or peer support, was identified as particularly effective in building connection and reducing isolation.

This work is often delivered at a grassroots level, with community organisations and local groups playing a central role. It is typically responsive, relational and rooted in place, allowing activity to adapt to the specific needs of different communities.

There is also growing recognition of the role that culture can play within wider health and community contexts. Participants noted increasing links between cultural activity, community development and health, including emerging conversations around social prescribing and creative health. There are also strong connections between creative activity, heritage and the natural environment, with outdoor and place-based experiences contributing to both mental and physical wellbeing.

However, alongside this strong and valued activity, a number of challenges were identified.

One key issue is capacity. Much of this work is delivered by small teams or volunteer-led organisations, limiting the ability to expand or sustain activity over time. While there is clear demand, organisations often lack the resources to reach more people or develop work further.

There are also inconsistencies in how wellbeing-focused activity is delivered. Not all organisations have access to the training or support required to deliver this work safely and effectively, particularly when working with individuals who may have complex needs.

Participants highlighted a lack of clarity around roles within health contexts, including uncertainty about expectations placed on artists within models such as social prescribing.

Access to this type of activity is also uneven. As with other areas of the cultural sector, barriers such as transport, cost, health and confidence affect who is able to take part. While some communities benefit significantly from existing provision, others have far fewer opportunities to engage.

Participants also raised concerns about the wider systems surrounding this work. Funding structures do not always align with the way this activity operates, often prioritising measurable outcomes over the longer-term, relational impact of creative practice. This can create pressure on organisations to frame work in specific ways, rather than responding flexibly to community needs.

Finally, there is a lack of coordination and visibility throughout the cultural sector. While a significant amount of work is taking place, it is not always connected or widely understood. This limits opportunities to share learning, build on successful models and develop a more cohesive regional approach.

Overall, there is a clear and consistent message across all sessions: culture is already playing a vital role in supporting wellbeing and strengthening communities in Dumfries and Galloway. However, this work is often constrained by limited capacity, uneven access and systems that have not yet fully adapted to support it.

4.5 Collaboration & Growth

Across all sessions, there was a strong and consistent desire for greater collaboration and connectivity across Dumfries and Galloway's cultural sector.

Participants described a region with a significant amount of activity already taking place, often led by passionate organisations, volunteers and individuals working within their local communities. However, much of this activity is currently operating in isolation, with limited opportunities for coordination, shared planning or ongoing connection across the wider region.

Many participants highlighted a sense of fragmentation across the cultural landscape. While there is clear willingness to collaborate, connections between organisations, practitioners and communities are often informal, inconsistent or dependent on existing personal relationships. This can result in duplication of work, missed opportunities for partnership, and a lack of awareness about activity happening elsewhere in the region.

Communication and networking were identified as key areas for development. Participants expressed a strong desire for more opportunities to meet, share knowledge and build relationships across geography, artforms and sectors. There was particular interest in developing clearer ways for organisations and practitioners to share information, opportunities

and resources, including the potential for more centralised communication platforms or regional directories.

There was also significant discussion around the value of shared resources and more joined-up approaches to delivery. Participants highlighted opportunities to collaborate around areas such as marketing, funding applications, evaluation methods, environmental reporting, governance support and skills development. Many felt that greater coordination could reduce pressure on individual organisations and strengthen the sector overall.

A number of participants identified opportunities for stronger cross-sector collaboration beyond the cultural sector itself. This included potential partnerships with tourism, education, health, business and community development organisations. Participants noted that culture already contributes significantly to wider regional priorities, including wellbeing, regeneration, placemaking and the visitor economy, but that these connections are not always fully recognised or strategically developed.

There was also interest in developing stronger regional approaches to programming and cultural infrastructure. Suggestions included shared touring models, collaborative festival development and increased partnership working between venues and communities across Dumfries and Galloway. Participants felt that greater coordination could help make activity more sustainable, widen access and support audience development for all.

At the same time, there was recognition that the strength of Dumfries and Galloway's cultural sector often comes from its grassroots and locally-led nature. Participants valued the individuality and independence of local organisations and communities, and there was some caution around approaches that might feel overly centralised or prescriptive. As a result, there was a clear sense that future collaboration should support and connect existing activity, rather than replace or standardise it.

Overall, participants expressed a strong desire for a more connected and visible cultural landscape across Dumfries and Galloway. While there is already substantial activity, knowledge and ambition within the region, there is currently limited infrastructure to consistently bring this together. There is a significant opportunity to strengthen collaboration, reduce fragmentation and build more joined-up approaches that support both local identity and regional growth.

5. Opportunities & Areas for Development

Across all engagement sessions, participants identified a number of shared opportunities to strengthen and grow culture across Dumfries and Galloway. While challenges around access, infrastructure and sustainability remain significant, there was also a strong sense of ambition, creativity and willingness to collaborate across the region.

The following areas reflect recurring ideas, priorities and potential approaches raised throughout the discussions. They are not intended as fixed recommendations or confirmed actions, but as emerging areas for future exploration and development.

5.1 Communication, Access & Connectivity

As with other areas of the sector, participants highlighted ongoing challenges around visibility, awareness and shared communication.

Participants consistently highlighted that people often do not know what activity is taking place locally or elsewhere in the region. Existing communication methods were described as fragmented, with information frequently remaining within existing networks rather than reaching wider audiences.

There was strong interest in developing more joined-up approaches to promotion and visibility. This included discussions around creating a central platform or regional directory that could bring together cultural activity, organisations, opportunities and events in one accessible place. Participants also highlighted the potential value of shared marketing and coordinated promotion across organisations and communities.

Alongside digital communication, participants also discussed the importance of direct engagement and audience development. There was recognition that communication alone does not always reach those who feel disconnected from culture or who do not currently engage with the sector. Some participants suggested the potential role of engagement-focused staff or outreach approaches that actively build relationships with communities, schools and groups beyond the existing cultural sector.

Improving access to activity was also identified as a key opportunity. This included developing more outreach-based approaches, taking activity directly into communities and exploring touring or shared programming models that could support access across rural areas. Participants highlighted the potential benefits of organisations working more collaboratively to share audiences, resources and opportunities.

There was also interest in improving connections beyond the cultural sector itself. Participants identified opportunities to strengthen visibility and understanding of culture within areas such as education, tourism, business and health, ensuring that creative activity is better recognised as part of the wider regional landscape.

Overall, there is a significant opportunity to create a more connected, visible and accessible cultural ecosystem across Dumfries and Galloway, improving both awareness and participation while strengthening relationships across communities and sectors.

5.2 Spaces & Infrastructure

Throughout discussions, participants identified opportunities to make better use of existing spaces and to strengthen the infrastructure supporting cultural activity.

A recurring theme was the potential of underused buildings and town centre spaces. Participants discussed opportunities to repurpose empty shops, vacant buildings and community spaces as creative hubs, pop-up venues, studios, rehearsal spaces and locations for cultural activity. This was seen not only as a way to support artists and organisations, but also as a potential contribution to wider regeneration and placemaking.

There was also strong interest in developing more flexible, multi-use spaces that could support a range of cultural and community activity. Participants highlighted the importance of spaces that are adaptable, accessible and able to respond to local needs, particularly within smaller towns and rural communities.

Participants also discussed the need to consider transport and accessibility more strategically within future cultural planning, including opportunities for shared transport initiatives, coordinated travel arrangements and stronger links between programming and transport infrastructure

Accessibility of venues and infrastructure was also raised throughout discussions. Participants highlighted the importance of continuing to improve physical accessibility, digital access and inclusive design, ensuring that cultural spaces are welcoming and usable for a wider range of people and communities.

Alongside physical infrastructure, there was discussion around the value of shared resources and regional support systems. Participants identified opportunities to develop shared tools, knowledge and infrastructure that could reduce duplication and strengthen organisational capacity across the sector.

Overall, there is an opportunity to think more strategically about how spaces, infrastructure and resources are used across the region, creating more sustainable and accessible foundations for cultural activity.

5.3 Sector Development & Creative Pathways

Participants consistently highlighted the need for stronger support structures for artists, creative practitioners, volunteers and cultural organisations across Dumfries and Galloway.

There was strong interest in developing clearer pathways for creative careers within the region. While there is a significant amount of creative activity already taking place, participants noted that opportunities for progression into sustained or paid work can be limited, particularly for emerging practitioners and young people.

Mentoring and peer support were identified as important areas for development. Participants discussed the value of creating more opportunities for artists, organisations and freelancers to share knowledge, develop skills and build long-term professional relationships.

There was also interest in strengthening training and skills development opportunities locally. This included both formal and informal learning, ranging from creative practice and technical skills to governance, fundraising, digital skills and project management. Participants highlighted the importance of creating development opportunities that are accessible within the region, reducing the need for people to leave Dumfries and Galloway to access training or career progression.

Volunteer development was another recurring theme. While volunteers play a vital role across the cultural sector, participants noted the challenges of relying heavily on a relatively small number of individuals. There is an opportunity to create clearer progression routes, recognition structures and development opportunities that support volunteers while also strengthening long-term sustainability.

Retaining creative talent within the region was identified as a major priority. Participants described a desire to create conditions where young people, artists and creative practitioners can build sustainable careers while remaining connected to Dumfries and Galloway. This includes not only employment opportunities, but also access to networks, spaces, development support and a visible creative community.

Overall, participants identified a strong opportunity to strengthen the long-term sustainability of the cultural sector through more connected, accessible and supportive pathways for creative development.

5.4 Cross-Sector Partnerships & Regional Growth

Throughout the engagement programme, participants highlighted the significant role culture already plays within the wider social, economic and community life of Dumfries and Galloway.

There was strong interest in developing deeper partnerships between the cultural sector and other areas including tourism, health, education, business and community development. Participants recognised that culture contributes to a wide range of regional priorities, from wellbeing and skills development to placemaking, regeneration and the visitor economy.

Tourism was frequently identified as a key area for collaboration and growth. Participants discussed opportunities to strengthen connections between cultural programming, heritage activity and visitor experiences, while promoting Dumfries and Galloway as a destination for culture alongside its natural environment and landscapes.

There was also increasing recognition of the relationship between culture and health. Participants highlighted the growing role of creative wellbeing programmes, community-based activity and social connection through culture, alongside opportunities to strengthen partnerships with health and wellbeing services.

Education and skills development were also seen as important areas for future collaboration. Participants discussed opportunities to strengthen links with schools, youth organisations,

colleges and universities, supporting pathways into creative careers while ensuring that young people are able to engage with cultural activity within the region.

Participants also highlighted opportunities to strengthen relationships between culture and local business, including partnerships that support sponsorship, skills sharing, entrepreneurship and regional economic development. There was recognition that a thriving cultural sector contributes not only to quality of life, but also to attracting people, investment and activity into the region.

More broadly, participants described culture as playing an important role in shaping identity, strengthening communities and supporting vibrant places. There was a clear sense that culture should be viewed not as a separate sector, but as part of the wider social and economic future of Dumfries and Galloway.

Overall, there is a significant opportunity to strengthen cross-sector relationships and ensure that culture is embedded within wider conversations about the future development of the region

6. Vision for 2030

Participants across the engagement sessions were asked what success could look like for culture in Dumfries and Galloway by 2030. Responses reflected a strong sense of ambition for a more connected, visible and sustainable cultural landscape across the region.

Participants envisioned:

- a cultural sector that is more connected, collaborative and less divided
- stronger partnerships across organisations, sectors and communities
- clearer pathways for artists, young people and creative practitioners
- sustainable organisations and long-term resilience across the sector
- culture and heritage being recognised as central to community life, placemaking and regional identity
- stronger support structures so people “never feel stuck” and know where to go for advice, guidance and support
- more opportunities for skills development, apprenticeships, mentoring and alternative routes into creative careers
- improved communication, visibility and awareness of cultural activity both within and beyond the region
- Dumfries and Galloway being recognised nationally and internationally for culture, creativity and innovation
- stronger infrastructure supporting participation, including transport, accessibility and digital connectivity
- vibrant and inclusive communities where culture is embedded within everyday life
- greater support for grassroots and community-led activity
- arts and heritage working “hand in hand”

- culture being viewed not simply as a sector, but as “a vector for growth and cohesion” across the region

Participants also described aspirations for:

- a more multicultural and representative cultural landscape
- stronger links between culture, tourism, education, health and business
- better use of local buildings, spaces and heritage assets
- increased opportunities to attract people, businesses and investment into the region through culture
- improved infrastructure including roads, public transport and rail connectivity
- stronger support for film, media and digital industries, including media training and production opportunities for young people
- a region where creativity is valued, visible, adventurous, optimistic and community-rooted

Words and themes repeatedly used by participants included:

- vibrant
- inclusive
- connected
- embedded
- empowered
- valued
- thriving
- adventurous
- joined-up
- multicultural
- uplifting
- optimistic
- varied

Overall, participants envisioned Dumfries and Galloway as a region where culture and heritage are visible, valued and fully embedded within the identity, wellbeing and future development of the region.

7. Conclusion and Next Steps

The Connecting Our Cultural Landscape events showed that Dumfries and Galloway already has a rich, active and deeply committed cultural sector. Across the region, artists, organisations, volunteers, community groups and public sector partners are delivering work that supports creativity, heritage, wellbeing, skills development, local identity and community connection.

The report also identifies a number of shared challenges. These include transport and rural infrastructure, uneven access to activity, fragmented communication, limited sector capacity, a reliance on volunteers, and a lack of clear pathways for artists, young people and creative practitioners. These challenges are not isolated to one place or one part of the sector, but reflect wider structural issues affecting cultural delivery across Dumfries and Galloway.

At the same time, the conversations revealed significant opportunity. Participants described a strong appetite for collaboration, better communication, shared resources, cross-sector partnerships and a more joined-up cultural landscape. There was a clear sense that culture should be recognised not as an add-on, but as a vital part of how the region supports its people, strengthens its communities and plans for the future. This aligns with the report's earlier framing of DGCP as a connector and amplifier across the region.

The findings suggest that the next stage of work should focus on building the conditions for stronger connection and sustainability across the cultural sector. This includes improving visibility and communication, strengthening networks and partnerships, supporting creative development pathways, and ensuring culture and heritage are more clearly embedded within wider conversations around health, education, tourism, placemaking and regional growth.

The engagement programme should be understood as a starting point rather than a final conclusion. The conversations captured through these events provide an important foundation for future partnership working, advocacy and sector development across Dumfries and Galloway.

As a next step, the Dumfries and Galloway Cultural Partnership will:

- Share the findings of this report with participants, partners and stakeholders.
- Continue conversations with organisations, communities and practitioners to ensure a wider range of voices and experiences inform future work.
- Explore opportunities to strengthen communication, visibility and connectivity across the sector.
- Use the findings to help shape future partnership priorities, thematic work and cross-sector collaboration.
- Identify areas where further mapping, research or collaborative development may be beneficial

The Partnership's role moving forward will not be to replace the grassroots activity already taking place across Dumfries and Galloway, but to help strengthen connections, amplify existing work and support a more visible, joined-up and sustainable cultural landscape for the region.

8. Appendix

8.1 DGCP Event Questions for participants

Question 1-5: What cultural activity is already happening in your work or community that relates to:

- **Participation & Access-** Ensuring that everyone across Dumfries & Galloway can take part in cultural activity, regardless of age, background or location.
- **Supporting Artists & Creative Practitioners-** Creating opportunities for artists, makers and cultural organisations to develop their work and sustain creative careers in the region.
- **Celebrating Local Culture & Heritage-** Recognising and promoting the unique cultural identity, stories, traditions and heritage of Dumfries & Galloway.
- **Culture Supporting Communities & Wellbeing-** Using culture and creativity to strengthen communities, improve wellbeing and reduce isolation.
- **Strengthening the Cultural Economy-** Supporting culture as a driver for tourism, place development and economic growth.

Question 6: Where do you see opportunities to strengthen or grow cultural activity across Dumfries & Galloway?

Question 7: What challenges or barriers do you face in delivering cultural activity?

Question 8: Looking ahead to **2030**, what would success look like for culture in Dumfries & Galloway?

8.2 Stranraer Event Summary

Thank you to everyone who joined us in Stranraer. This session brought together local organisations, creatives and community representatives to explore culture, heritage and community development across the west of the region. Below is a short summary of the session you attended. The ideas and opportunities captured here reflect the contributions of participants during the session. They are intended to inform ongoing discussion and development, and do not represent confirmed actions or commitments at this stage. Once we have concluded this round of events, we will be collating all of the data and writing a more detailed report that will be shared with you at a later date.

Key Themes

Participation & Access

There is a strong level of cultural activity across the area, however access remains a challenge, particularly across rural communities.

Supporting Artists & Volunteers

There is a need for more opportunities for artists to connect, collaborate and develop their work. While there is a strong volunteer base, it is often the same individuals, with challenges around attracting new people and creating progression pathways.

Local Culture & Identity

There is a clear opportunity to better celebrate and promote local identity, stories and heritage, while improving awareness of what is already happening across the region.

Wellbeing & Community Connection

Culture plays an important role in reducing isolation and strengthening communities, with a strong desire to build more inclusive and accessible opportunities.

Collaboration & Growth

There is strong interest for better partnership working across the region, sharing resources, knowledge and opportunities to strengthen the cultural offer.

Positives Identified

- Strong grassroots activity led by passionate individuals and organisations
- Successful and well-recognised events such as Wigtown Book Festival
- High levels of volunteer involvement and community commitment
- Existing collaboration between organisations and willingness to grow this further
- A rich cultural identity and heritage unique to the region
- Opportunities emerging around film, media and creative industries
- Strong community pride and desire to develop local opportunities

Challenges Identified

- Transport barriers limiting access to events and activity
- Limited public transport and high travel costs
- Accessibility of venues and infrastructure
- Difficulty attracting and retaining new volunteers
- Lack of awareness of what is happening locally and across the region
- Challenges in retaining and attracting skilled creatives
- Limited progression routes into paid opportunities within the sector
- Accommodation and capacity challenges linked to major events

Ideas & Opportunities

Participants shared a range of ideas and potential approaches to address challenges and build on existing strengths across the region, including:

- Exploring transport solutions, such as revised shuttle routes, shared travel initiatives and coordinated access to major events

- Developing film and media opportunities, including skills training, education provision and stronger links to industry and regional strategies
- Improving communication and visibility of cultural activity, ensuring people are aware of opportunities both locally and across Dumfries & Galloway
- Creating networking and connection opportunities for artists and organisations across the region
- Developing clearer pathways for volunteers, including recognition, progression opportunities and better matching of skills to organisations
- Supporting youth engagement, including working with schools and youth groups while addressing barriers such as safeguarding requirements
- Exploring the development of a cultural toolkit to support individuals and organisations (e.g. funding, governance, digital skills and project delivery)
- Strengthening partnership working, including cross-artform collaboration and sharing of resources across communities
- Expanding the cultural offer through multi-artform programming, including opportunities to integrate theatre, music and film into existing events and festivals
- Positioning Dumfries & Galloway as a destination for culture, supported by improved infrastructure and stronger external promotion

Looking Ahead

This session is part of a wider programme of engagement taking place across Dumfries & Galloway. Once all sessions have been completed, a more detailed report will be produced, bringing together insights, opportunities and actions from across the region.

We encourage you to stay connected with the Dumfries & Galloway Cultural Partnership by signing up via our website, where we will share updates and notify you as soon as the full report is available.

Thank you again for contributing to this conversation and helping to shape the future of culture across the region.

8.3 Dumfries Event Summary

Thank you to everyone who joined us in Dumfries. This session brought together local organisations, creatives and community representatives to explore culture, heritage and community development across the west of the region. Below is a short summary of the session you attended. The ideas and opportunities captured here reflect the contributions of participants during the session. They are intended to inform ongoing discussion and development, and do not represent confirmed actions or commitments at this stage. Once we have concluded this round of events, we will be collating all of the data and writing a more detailed report that will be shared with you at a later date.

Key Themes

Participation & Access

There is a wide range of cultural activity already happening across the region, however access remains unequal. Barriers such as transport, location and awareness continue to limit participation for some communities.

Supporting Artists & Creative Practitioners

There is a clear need for stronger infrastructure to support creative careers, including better networking, mentoring and opportunities for collaboration across the region.

Local Culture & Identity

There is a strong cultural identity across Dumfries & Galloway, with opportunities to better promote and celebrate local stories, heritage and diverse communities.

Wellbeing & Community Connection

There is strong recognition of the role culture plays in supporting wellbeing, reducing isolation and building life skills. There is an opportunity to strengthen links between culture, health and community support.

Collaboration & Growth

There is a shared ambition to improve partnership working, reduce duplication and create more joined-up approaches to delivering cultural activity.

Positives Identified

- A strong and diverse cultural sector with passionate individuals and organisations
- High levels of community-led and volunteer-driven activity
- Existing successful organisations and partnerships across the region
- Growing recognition of culture as part of wellbeing and community development
- Opportunities to use empty spaces for creative activity and regeneration
- Willingness across the sector to collaborate and share knowledge
- Emerging ideas around digital platforms and shared resources

Challenges Identified

- Transport barriers, particularly for rural communities
- Unequal access to cultural activity across different areas
- Lack of awareness and visibility of what is happening
- Perceptions that culture and the arts are not for everyone
- Limited funding and over-reliance on volunteers
- Lack of structured pathways for artists, freelancers and volunteers
- Limited access to affordable and flexible venues
- Gaps in coordination, communication and shared information

Ideas & Opportunities

Participants shared a range of ideas and potential approaches to address challenges and build on existing strengths across the region, including:

- Developing a **centralised platform or directory** to improve visibility of cultural activity, including a “who’s who” of organisations, creatives and opportunities
- Creating **shared resources and tools** (e.g. templates, environmental reporting frameworks, evaluation methods) to support organisations and reduce duplication
- Exploring the use of **empty shops and town centre spaces** as studios, pop-up venues and creative hubs, particularly to support regeneration and increase visibility
- Strengthening **networking and collaboration opportunities**, including cross-sector and cross-artform partnerships
- Developing **clearer pathways for artists and volunteers**, including mentoring, progression routes and potential models for shared or pooled staffing
- Improving **communication and audience development**, ensuring activity is visible, accessible and relevant to a wider range of communities
- Supporting **youth engagement and skills development**, including links with education, apprenticeships and alternative training routes within the region
- Exploring opportunities to connect culture with **tourism and economic development**, including festival routes, seasonal programming and partnerships with VisitScotland and other agencies
- Strengthening **links with academia and research**, including potential partnerships with universities
- Supporting more **inclusive and representative programming**, ensuring multicultural communities and underrepresented voices are reflected in planning and delivery
- Improving understanding and infrastructure around **culture and wellbeing**, including clearer frameworks for social prescribing and artist support in health contexts
- Advocating for **infrastructure improvements**, particularly transport and access, to enable wider participation across the region

Looking Ahead

This session is part of a wider programme of engagement taking place across Dumfries & Galloway. Once all sessions have been completed, a more detailed report will be produced, bringing together insights, opportunities and actions from across the region.

We encourage you to stay connected with the Dumfries & Galloway Cultural Partnership by signing up via our website, where we will share updates and notify you as soon as the full report is available.

Thank you again for contributing to this conversation and helping to shape the future of culture across the region.

8.4 Castle Douglas Event Summary

Thank you to everyone who joined us in Castle Douglas. This session brought together local organisations, creatives and community representatives to explore culture, heritage and community development across the region.

Below is a short summary of the session you attended. The ideas and opportunities captured here reflect the contributions of participants during the session. They are intended to inform ongoing discussion and development, and do not represent confirmed actions or commitments at this stage. Once we have concluded this round of events, we will be collating all of the data and writing a more detailed report that will be shared with you at a later date.

Key Themes

Participation & Access

There is a range of cultural activity taking place across the region, however awareness and access remain key challenges. Participants highlighted that many people simply do not know what is happening locally or across Dumfries & Galloway.

Social media was described as limited in reach, often creating echo chambers rather than engaging new audiences. There was a clear need for more visible and accessible ways to share information.

Transport continues to be a significant barrier, particularly for young people. Even where activity is available, schools and communities often cannot afford travel costs, limiting participation. This raised questions about whether activity should be more regularly taken into communities, rather than expecting audiences to travel.

Supporting Artists & Volunteers

There is strong commitment to supporting creative activity across the region, with venues and organisations programming work, hosting events and creating opportunities where possible.

However, there is a need for more sustainable structures to support artists and organisations, including better funding timelines, clearer communication around opportunities, and stronger local investment to support applications and development.

Local Culture & Identity

There is a strong interest in celebrating local heritage and identity, alongside a desire to connect this with contemporary culture and future development.

Examples included ambitions to revive events such as Kelton Fair and ongoing work exploring local history through projects such as Thornhill Living History. Participants also noted a tension between heritage-focused activity and the need to engage younger audiences, with opportunities to better connect the two.

Traditional crafts and skills were highlighted as a valuable way of bridging this gap, particularly through work with schools and younger people.

Wellbeing & Community Connection

Culture was recognised as playing an important role in strengthening communities and creating shared experiences. There is an opportunity to further develop activity that brings people together across generations and interests.

Collaboration & Growth

There is strong appetite for increased collaboration across venues, organisations and communities.

Participants highlighted the potential for a more coordinated touring network across the region, allowing venues to share programming, audiences and marketing, and making activity more viable.

There is also interest in exploring stronger links between culture, enterprise and sustainability, including how cultural activity can contribute to wider community development and environmental goals.

Positives Identified

- Strong commitment from organisations and individuals working across the region
- Existing venues and community spaces supporting cultural activity
- Ambitious plans for future development, including new spaces and programmes
- Strong interest in heritage, identity and local storytelling
- Willingness to collaborate and share ideas across communities
- Emerging connections between culture, sustainability and enterprise

Challenges Identified

- Lack of awareness and visibility of cultural activity
- Transport barriers, particularly for young people and schools
- Financial barriers limiting participation and access
- Tight funding deadlines and short delivery timeframes
- Limited local investment to support development and applications
- Challenges navigating planning processes and community asset transfers

- Disconnect between policy, infrastructure and cultural delivery
- Difficulty attracting and retaining people in the region due to wider structural challenges

Ideas & Opportunities

Participants shared a range of ideas and potential approaches to address challenges and build on existing strengths, including:

- Developing clearer and more visible communication platforms to promote activity across the region
- Exploring ways to bring cultural activity directly into communities, particularly for young people
- Creating a more coordinated touring network between venues to share programming and resources
- Strengthening links between culture, enterprise and local economic development
- Exploring how funding from sectors such as renewable energy could support long-term cultural infrastructure
- Supporting the development of multi-use spaces, including outdoor learning, events and creative hubs
- Encouraging entrepreneurship and social enterprise within the cultural sector
- Improving transparency and forward planning around funding opportunities
- Creating spaces for artists to develop ideas and test work within the region

Looking Ahead

This session is part of a wider programme of engagement taking place across Dumfries & Galloway. Once all sessions have been completed, a more detailed report will be produced, bringing together insights, opportunities and actions from across the region.

We encourage you to stay connected with the Dumfries & Galloway Cultural Partnership by signing up via our website, where we will share updates and notify you as soon as the full report is available.

Thank you again for contributing to this conversation and helping to shape the future of culture across the region.

8.5 Online Event Summary

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the online Dumfries & Galloway Cultural Partnership session. This session brought together organisations, creatives and practitioners from across the region, including those who had been unable to attend the in-person events.

Below is a short summary of the session. The ideas and opportunities captured here reflect the contributions of participants during the discussion. They are intended to inform ongoing development and do not represent confirmed actions or commitments at this stage. Once we have concluded this round of events, we will be collating all of the data and sharing a more detailed report.

Key Themes

Participation & Access

There is a strong level of cultural activity happening across Dumfries & Galloway, however access remains unequal. Barriers such as transport, infrastructure and wider social inequalities continue to limit participation for some communities.

Participants also highlighted challenges around reaching people in more isolated or supported settings, including care homes, where access to cultural activity can be limited.

Supporting Artists & Volunteers

Organisations across the region are actively supporting artists within their capacity, commissioning work and delivering opportunities. However, there is a need to strengthen connections beyond the cultural sector, particularly with business, tourism and other industries, to create more sustainable opportunities and career pathways.

Local Culture & Identity

There is a strong sense of local identity and pride across the region. Ongoing work is taking place to celebrate heritage, stories and place, with opportunities to continue expanding how this is shared and accessed by wider and more diverse audiences.

Wellbeing & Community Connection

There is clear evidence of the role culture plays in supporting wellbeing, reducing isolation and building confidence and skills. Creative wellbeing activity is in high demand, with opportunities to further strengthen links between culture, health and community support.

There was also recognition of the potential for cultural activity to play a greater role in settings such as care homes, supporting both residents and staff.

Collaboration & Growth

There is a shared ambition to strengthen partnership working across Dumfries & Galloway. Participants highlighted the importance of improving connections between organisations, sectors and communities, and creating more joined-up approaches to delivery.

Positives Identified

- Strong commitment across organisations to supporting artists and communities
- High demand for creative and wellbeing-based activity

- Existing inclusive practices such as outreach, free tickets and digital access
- Growing use of online platforms to widen participation
- Strong sense of collaboration and openness within the sector
- Recognition of the value of culture in everyday life and wellbeing

Challenges Identified

- Transport barriers, particularly for rural and young people
- Financial barriers and wider inequalities affecting participation
- Limited accessibility of some venues and infrastructure
- Capacity pressures within organisations and small teams
- Limited engagement with private sector and non-cultural industries
- Ongoing funding challenges and reliance on short-term resources
- Lack of national understanding of rural cultural delivery
- Difficulty reaching some groups, including those in more isolated or supported environments such as care settings

Ideas & Opportunities

Participants shared a range of ideas and potential approaches to build on existing strengths and address challenges, including:

- Strengthening partnerships between the cultural sector and business, tourism and other industries
- Expanding digital access alongside in-person activity to reach wider audiences
- Improving communication and visibility of opportunities across the region
- Building stronger networks and connections between organisations and practitioners
- Developing more sustainable pathways for artists and creative careers
- Strengthening links between culture and health, including creative wellbeing programmes
- Increasing advocacy for rural cultural provision at a national level
- Exploring ways to extend cultural activity into underrepresented settings, including care environments

Looking Ahead

This online session forms part of a wider programme of engagement taking place across Dumfries & Galloway. It has provided an important opportunity to ensure a broader range of voices can contribute to shaping the future of culture in the region.

Once all sessions have been completed, a more detailed report will be produced, bringing together insights, opportunities and actions from across Dumfries & Galloway.

We encourage you to stay connected with the Dumfries & Galloway Cultural Partnership by signing up via our website, where we will share updates and notify you when the full report is available.

Thank you again for contributing to this conversation and helping to shape the future of culture across the region.