

Speech: Michael Ellis speech to the Edinburgh International Culture Summit

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the partners and volunteers involved in organising such a wonderful event, and especially to the Presiding Officer for graciously hosting us in this magnificent chamber.

This summit provides a brilliant opportunity for ministers, artists, practitioners – and for this year’s summit notably young practitioners to come from across the globe to discuss, challenge and formulate cultural strategies.

Culture has the power to bring people, places and nations together and enrich the lives of all citizens. So I applaud everyone who has made the effort to come to Edinburgh this year and engage in such lively discussions.

Everyone here today knows that culture make our lives better. And we also know that the opportunity to be an awed audience member or a participant of the arts should be open to everyone.

Listening to the speeches this morning highlighted the positive role that culture can have on our lives.

Whether it’s the research that Dr Habibi presented on the power of music on brain development or the work that Professor Bloem showed highlighting the impact of art on Parkinson’s whilst amazing us with evidence that the choice to become an artists reduces the likelihood to contract Parkinson’s! And what a privilege to see such a wonderful performance from Mr Herman.

I think we can all agree that we as policy makers in this room we must continue to explore the potential use of our cultural assets in bettering the lives of people in our countries and across the globe. And I think we can all agree that we have heard some powerful evidence that we can take back to our own countries and use as we develop future policy.

It’s an exciting time for those who advocate for the role of arts in health. My former DCMS colleague, in his new role as Secretary of State for Health, Matt Hancock recently announced £4.5million for new or existing social prescribing projects in England. There is a great opportunity here for cultural organisations and arts practitioners to further demonstrate how their work can ensure a healthy society.

Social and cultural relationships are key to good health and I think anyone here today who has sung in a choir, volunteered at a museum, or taken part in any other of the number of ways we give our time to the arts can attest that the relationships forged can be truly meaningful and at times, life-changing.

If we can work together to demonstrate to others the true impact of arts and culture, society will become healthier and happier.

So to conclude, I hope everyone here has had the opportunity to engage in positive, and sometimes challenging discussions and can take back thoughts, ideas and best practices to help formulate future cultural policies.

I know that we have. We, as the UK Government look forward to keeping these conversations going in the future with you all. I hope you all have had the opportunity to enjoy the festivals across Edinburgh during your time here. Thank you.