

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM DR ALISON F BELL

What factors should be considered and how should decisions be made about which artists or cultural freelancers should obtain public funding in Scotland?

In response to this important question, there currently exists an implicit understanding that the allocation of public funding for individual artists should be based on the value of the potential economic return of the funding investment. In other words, the younger the artist the more potential value they will be able to give back in terms of years. As a result, older artists (60 years+) with a long creative practice applying for funding tend to be excluded. Indeed, there are almost no funding opportunities aimed specifically at older artists. (I don't mean those choosing to enter the arts after retirement, there have been funding opportunities for them recently).

There is certainly an economic argument to be made for this approach. However, in focussing on exclusively on younger artists and thereby avoiding older artists, this sends a very negative message to those same younger artists, of what lies ahead for them as they too become older and might want to seek funding. Making the generalisation that after the age of 60, an artist no longer holds creative ambitions, or might want or need time spent on professional development, skills training in new directions or with new materials, is overlooking something fundamental. Firstly, a lifetime spent as an artist does not necessarily equate with a good pension let alone any disposable income. Secondly, harbouring creative ambitions does not stop after 60.

A lifetime as an artist teaches us many things, not least proven resilience and a sense of values far removed from those of our consumerist society. It could be argued that funding older artists to pursue their dreams would in fact yield a very positive return in the form of potentially reducing NHS costs in care for the elderly (artists) by enhancing a sense of autonomy, agency, wellbeing and self-worth. In addition, as a group, older artists are very predisposed to sharing their life experience with those embarking on a life in the creative arts or with those already in mid-career. The cross-generational potential could be considerable. Life as an artist is a choice and is just that: for life. By showing how older artists are valued members of society who continue to grow regardless of age, would send

a very positive message to the next generation and also society at large. Perhaps it is worth remembering; ageing comes to us all. We all need to feel valued.