

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM KATRIONA HOLMES

Cultural freelancers are vital and vulnerable

Cultural freelancers are a vital aspect of the Scottish cultural ecosystem. They have much to offer. They are incredibly resourceful, resilient and fleet of foot - not being beholden to a bigger organisational structure. They make up some of the most motivated and passionate cultural workers – with no formal support or guidance, their motivation and drive has to come from within. They always work the extra mile to deliver.

Cultural freelancers face a lonely challenge when obtaining funding. Every funding application takes resources, time, skills, experience. Every funding application is, essentially, a gamble. Larger organisations are able to absorb more funding rejections. For freelancers and very small organisations one too many rejections can be the end. If the Scottish arts industry loses experienced cultural workers it is haemorrhaging its assets.

There is no maternity leave for a freelancer - it can only be statutory maternity pay. As many cultural freelancers are women this is a particular challenge. In addition, being out of the scene for only a few months caring for one or more young children, can make it hard to maintain connections and forge new ones. Primary child carers (usually mothers) lose work and sometimes cannot return to the job later. There is no free child care available for self employed people until standard nursery care at 3 years old.

Producers and the Cultural Ecosystem

The conversation is often reduced to large organisations v artists. Actually there is whole cultural ecosystem of which these are only two parts. Small organisations and independent producers are vital to this ecosystem's health. Some artists are good producers, others are not. The producer role needs to be more formally recognised.

Cultural producers are relatively invisible

No funding programmes that I have come across acknowledge the amount of work that goes in to develop a project to the point BEFORE it is ready to apply for funding. In an organisation with a salaried development post this work is reimbursed, for cultural producers this work is rarely reimbursed and usually invisible.

In addition, there are still funding programmes that do not allow for or recognise a producer fee. Often if a funding application comes back partially funded it has to be the producer fee that gets cut to allow the project to happen. Technically this is not possible, in reality the independent producer will often take themselves to breaking point to make a project in which they have invested so much happen.

I have to say that there has been much talk recently about paying artists and musicians which I fully support. Musicians stating that they will not 'pay to play' is a commonly heard phrase. I am quite regularly (or was before I had a baby) asked to talk on music panels or judge funded initiatives to help musicians and artists and rarely offered a fee to do so. There is never any discussion around this.

Suggestions, further areas that need to be considered

A list of producers could be made available for artists and organisations. At the moment it's all done through 'who you know' - there is no formal or recognised process. This would in addition provide profile and opportunities for newer, talented producers coming up into the scene. It needs to be a non arts specific organisation who provides this platform. Part of the ever evolving arts scene is the break down of arts 'silos' and this is important for the development of challenging and innovative work in Scotland.

Could there be a way to recognise and support cultural freelancers with a good track record? If not through any kind of basic financial reimbursement then perhaps through other means such as free working space, child care or crèche facilities. (the Scottish Parliament crèche does an amazing service to support cultural freelancers in Edinburgh but this is not recognised). Other things that would be helpful would be funded mentoring programmes and support for networking for independents.

Could there be a formal way to recognise freelancers who have a track record and have been proven to 'deliver' Like 'RFO's but 'RFI' 'Regularly Funded Individuals'. Or year round grants that they can apply for which provide a basic level of financial support to see them through the 'hard times' and rejections.

Or find ways to reduce the high amount of risk involved in applying. Could there be two rounds of funding applications? One a simple first stage to work it up to second stage which would essentially be funded if conditions were met. Informally this is kind of already happening. Anyone who has their wits about them meets with or chats over a new idea with a funder. After getting a feel for how their idea will go down they then put in an application. Often if that comes back rejected Creative Scotland will stipulate what needs to be done to get it through if the candidate were to reapply. Generally the second time if those conditions are met that application will go through.*

*I am aware of times when a second application has been rejected – which I think is unacceptable. An applicant should not be encouraged to reapply with an amended application and then rejected. This is a lot of time for one person or small organisation to lose.

Or fund projects in two stages? - smaller amounts of cash is made available to bid for in a very simple application process to secure 'development' funding. This is awarded on the back of a project outline and a meeting, to trusted cultural freelancers and organisations.

The amount of work for small amounts of funding sometimes can make it hardly worthwhile. Small grant amounts should be light on reporting conditions and admin. Some funding, in

my experience from local authorities, can be low on amount but high in recording and reporting requirements.

It is definitely the case that good application writing does not necessarily equal good creative work and so grant writing professionals should be made easier for artists to access and consult.

Please note that this work is all being done in on unfunded time while I have childcare, so please excuse any bad grammar and unclear points – with more time I could articulate everything much better!

Katch Holmes

Independent creative producer.

I've worked on the Knockengorroch music festival for 21 years. I left 7 years at Arts & Business Scotland to take part in the Clore Cultural Leadership programme. I've worked on numerous projects at grassroots and institutional levels, my own and others.