

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM MARY BOURNE

- What are the major threats to sustainable funding of the arts in Scotland?

The shrinking of public funding is the obvious threat to the arts and culture in general.

However, another huge and avoidable pressure is the way that funding is being swallowed up by the excessive administrative demands being placed on small arts organisations and artists by public funding bodies, including Creative Scotland.

From my own experience as a self-employed artist working on publically funded projects for over thirty years, I have found recently that the reporting element of the projects has grown hugely, and I am faced with the choice of doing this reporting unpaid, or using the already pressurised project budget to pay for my time to do it. I deeply resent using money that could be used to deliver quality arts on paperwork that may be read once and will then just be archived, making no positive impact on anyone. But equally working for nothing is not sustainable.

Similarly, I have found as a member of the Boards and Chairperson of two small arts organisations on and off for the last 20 years, the reporting pressures on the staff in these organisations has grown so great that sometimes they can't leave their offices to visit the projects they are designing and managing. An identical situation exists for freelance project managers. This burden includes, for example, repeated frequent demands for business plans and massive amounts of evaluation. While both of these are necessary and beneficial to the effective running of arts programmes, the frequency and quantity of work required now has reached a point where it is interfering with the efficient delivery of the core project mission. Artistic directors and project managers are highly motivated, indeed passionate about their work, but I have seen how the overwhelming amounts of paperwork are grinding them down and interfering with their ability to do their work with the effectiveness and passion that will engage people. Often the burden is to some extent alleviated by the use of consultants, further draining the funding away from the core activity of delivering arts projects.

There is also an issue around the disparity between the pay of curators organising projects and the artists whose vision inspires them, and who deliver them. Budgets for artists are generally getting smaller, and fewer well paid opportunities exist; it is getting harder to survive as a self-employed artist (see research by Scottish Artists' Union and others). At the same time, relatively generous salaries are being paid to artistic directors and curators, draining funding away from the realisation of projects.

- What are the main challenges for artists and cultural freelancers in obtaining funding in Scotland?

Again, the massive amount of work required to complete an application means that it is not feasible to devote the time to them for those on low incomes must work harder and harder every year to earn the same pay. For freelance project managers, they again contribute to the deskbound grind that is soaking up their time.

In addition to this much of the funding available will be very focussed – for older people or for recent graduates, or relating to the sciences or mental health, for example, making it very difficult to sustain a direction of travel in your own work as an artist if you don't have the good fortune to neatly fit one of these categories.

The wide differences in the priority placed on arts and culture in different parts of Scotland can also be a problem for those in areas where no local authority support is available.

- What measures could the Scottish Government take to ensure a sustainable level of funding for the arts?

A requirement for local authorities and enterprise companies to deliver on the arts and culture would help. Some local authorities say they cannot afford arts and culture, but others make good provisions, for example Moray and Aberdeenshire respectively. Those who do make good provision prove that those who claim they cannot should be able to do so.

Less funding wasted on evaluation, plans and reports that will never be looked at, and less spent on admin and consultants, with more going directly to artists and freelancers would immediately result in more activity. Some guidance on rates of pay for arts administrators which compares what they receive to what artists receive, rather than what business people receive, would also help create a fairer landscape, diffusing existing resentments.

- How should public money be made available to support artists and cultural freelancers in Scotland, including any relevant international examples of best practice?

Project managers and artists across Scotland with track records for producing quality work should be trusted to organise programmes of work. Every single detail does not need to be vetted and evaluated where an individual has proved they can be trusted; a broader more hands off system of evaluation needs to be established. Guidelines for fair treatment of artists and fair rates of pay for both artists and arts workers should be a pre-requisite of this work.

The over-direction of funds should be avoided to enable wider access and more creative use of funding.

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

Quality of work

Quality of plan to present work to public

Geographical spread

Viability of budget/fair rates of pay

Decisions should be made by a panel of respected professionals for each artform, including practitioners and arts workers used to delivering projects on the ground around Scotland. Small numbers of employees at Creative Scotland should not be responsible for these decisions.