

**CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY**

**SUBMISSION FROM PROFESSOR RICHARD DEMARCO CBE**

**Prioritisation of Arts Funding**

1 – As I approach my 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, and in this year of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci, I have cause to reflect on the funding of the Arts, not only during my lifetime but also over the centuries. In particular, I consider that I am in a unique position to review the various models of funding ( direct patronage, state support, commercialisation and the like ) which have operated to support the arts over the years in the context of the results which been produced and the contribution which these results have made to the enhancement of the lives of the generations, past and present.

2 – By way of preliminary observation, for the purposes of this submission, I define the ‘arts’ as all the arts to include the visual arts, performance ( theatre and dance ), music, events, literature and indeed all activities which are by their nature the product of creative activity by an individual or groups of individuals. ( I reserve my position on whether or not random output of machines – such as computer-generated ‘music’ - can be considered art.) Put another way, for me art is that which is the product of the human mind, irrespective of the medium which is used to express that product.

3 – Also by way of preliminary point, my fundamental position is that ‘Everyone is an artist’, as espoused by my friend and collaborator, Joseph Beuys whom I and many, many others regard as the leading avant-garde artist/teacher of the Twentieth Century.

There is therefore a fundamental error in seeking to divide the world into Artists and non-Artists. To do so is abhorrent to me as it fails to recognise the latent talents which every single human being has. It is irrelevant to consider that only those who choose to seek to make their living by using their artistic talents can be considered ‘artists’. My extensive experience dictates that some of the greatest art has been created by individuals and groups of individuals whose circumstances would not suggest the possibility of such creation- the prisoner, the refugee, the oppressed. Indeed, I question the artistic ‘worth’ of many of the products of the rampant commercialisation and consumerism which threatens to destroy creative endeavour.

4 – Another basic norm of mine is that, following the assertion that Everyone is an artist, education – in the widest sense – is a fundamental contributor to the realisation of artistic endeavour. The etymology of ‘ education ‘ is to ‘lead from within’. And so, the latent talents which every individual has need to be brought out. From my experience over many, many years, I firmly believe that the secondary and tertiary education systems have done a

2 of 4

sterling job is suffocating any talents that lie within. Art schools, universities and the like have managed to place an unacceptable stricture on individuals by conditioning their thinking and contrary to what many maintain, limiting freedom of expression.

Only in primary schools is there still, in some limited places, the unfettered opportunity to truly create. I return to this theme below.

## **5 – What would a sustainable model of funding look like?**

There are two features which I believe need to be part of a sustainable model of funding.

5.1 - I consider that it is fundamental to the future for funding for the arts which is to come from the public purse for it to be removed from the vagaries of politics. It seems to me that as long as there is the possibility of control of funding remaining with those whose decisions and directions are determined by the political expediency of the moment, then it cannot be considered sustainable.

Art is not a commodity whose supply tap can be turned on and off at a whim and subject to funding. Many truly artistic endeavours have been many years in the formation; many artists require to be allowed to gain much experience in their particular medium before their true genius shines through and many artists, particularly those working collaboratively, require periods of time working with others for the combined talents to come together to produce a total which is far greater than the sum of the parts.

So longevity of funding timeframe is essential. Short timeframes of funding such as three years require a large proportion of the relevant time to be spent engaged in the dispiriting exercise of securing follow-on funding.

So, at a Scottish Government level, there needs to be agreed an arts funding settlement which goes beyond the life of the then current Government. ( There is a comparable argument that such long term funding is also required for the health and primary and secondary education sectors, but that is a digression.)

I think there is a consensus across the party political spectrum that 'Art is a good thing' and should be supported. But when there are other and increasing demands on the political purse, it is easy for those responsible to raid the 'Arts' budget to meet demand elsewhere. This creates division, uncertainty and certainly a lack of sustainability.

So a longer term settlement agreed by all concerned is needed. That is my first feature of a sustainable model of funding.

The delivery mechanism, including who is accountable for its delivery, for that settlement also needs to be agreed cross-party to minimise uncertainty.

5.2 There must be tax incentives given to individuals and businesses to support the arts. I understand that such tax incentives are commonplace elsewhere, particularly in the USA.

3 of 4

I refer above to the rampant commercialisation of art which has occurred in recent years where art is seen as a 'good' investment. Whilst I deplore this as it obscures true artistic merit, it does indicate that there are very wealthy individuals and others who are prepared to 'invest' in the arts. The Art Fund has been a success in encouraging individuals to purchase artworks which otherwise might have been beyond their immediate financial capability.

These trends should be capitalised on by establishing tax incentives to invest in a prescribed list of charitable arts organisations whose objects are the promotion of the arts. Such incentives should be over and above the current gift aid provisions.

The prescribed organisations would include the National Galleries, organisations which hold or obtain the 'recognised Collection of National Significance' status, registered charities devoted to the promotion of education in the arts and so forth. A set of criteria would require to be developed for such organisations to qualify.

For private collections to qualify, these would require to be open to public inspection for the majority of the year and to make their items available on loan for minimum specified periods to National Galleries and the like for public display.

So, incentivising individuals and businesses to support the arts through a dedicated tax regime is my second feature of a sustainable model of funding.

## **6 - How should that funding be made available to artists?**

I turn now to my view of how the majority of the available funding should be made available to artists. It addresses the concern as to what are artists to do to 'earn' a living to enable them to enjoy the basic securities of life ( food, clothing, accommodation ) which in turn create a climate in which their artistic talent can be productive. This is a considerable pressure on the present funding system.

6.1 My simple answer is for artists to be offered part time ( half full time equivalent ) employment through the education authorities to facilitate the teaching of art, particularly in primary schools. This would help nurture the talent of youngsters and at the same time allow the artist the guarantee of a basic salary which would allow them to develop time and space to devote to their art and also crucially, to obtain funding through patronage, sale of their works and other commercialisation routes. Such contracts of employment would require to be for a period of say five years. This funding would require to be ring-fenced and not subject to alteration by the local authorities responsible for its administration.

I would suggest that a considerable percentage, say up to 50%, should be allocated to this stream of funding.

How does this contribute to the sustainability of funding? Quite simply, it removes the pressure on the funding system of endless 'projects' being dreamed up and applied for,

4 of 4

having to go through an application process, having to be monitored and evaluated with all the associated administrative work. Such elimination would reduce the administrative cost on the funding system.

6.2 In respect of the balance of available funding, my view is that a grants application system should continue to be operated with the following features:-

(1) A body truly independent of government should be charged with responsibility for funding packages which should be offered on a five year basis. The Board for this organisation should reflect a wide range of experience and skills and be appointed after public advertisement.

(2) It should be guided by advisory committees in the various disciplines composed of practising artists who are remunerated for their time involved.

(3) There should be no restrictions on the purpose for which funding is applied nor a requirement to adhere to themes or pre-set topics.

(4) The programme of funding awarded would be on a rolling basis over 5 years with 20% of the available funding being awarded in the first year, 20% in the second year and so on. The balance of available funding in each of the initial four years would be available to offer tapering-off grants to organisations to whom funding has already been offered.

I hope the forgoing comments are of value to the Committee in its deliberations. Should further explanation of my comments be required, I would be happy to provide these.

Professor Richard Demarco