

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS

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

One of the major threats to sustainable funding of the arts is the decline of public funding. The various reasons for this are understood – the general decline in public funding and the specific decline of the lottery fund.

There is however very little public debate about the value of cultural funding or a robust political/public defense of such funding. It is often compared unfavourably with the need for housing or NHS and it is frequently trivialized as elitist.

There is an urgent need to consider arts funding within an economic overview – pulling together the statistics to demonstrate the role of arts and the cultural sector in the country's economy. That needs to be backed up with the kind of support that is given to more traditional areas of business and industry. While those traditional areas continue to decline and fail they receive apprenticeships based on nostalgia for an industrial base that has already disappeared. Retail and business that has been superseded by internet also receives support while the arts sector, growing and internationally respected, survives despite standstill grants or cuts.

The arts and cultural sector also play a vital role in the nurturing of democracy – providing space and a diversity of voices and opinion on social issues. The role of public funding means those voices and opinions can be expressed without the overwhelming pressure of commercial financial contributions.

This all needs to be allied to a robust public defence of public funding outlining the reasons for a sustained commitment.

Very specifically, the next round of RFO funding is also crucial. The RFO organisations are linked inextricably to artist and cultural freelancers as they only exist to provide platforms for those workers. The current standstill funding for RFOs effectively represents a cut and

many of the key organisations are now in decline and may not survive this approach. The approach is based on a lack of sufficient funding to keep those organisations afloat. From 1996-2014 there were large capital investments in Scottish arts venues and substantial lottery funding to support artists and programmes in those venues. As that has disappeared, the venue and the support infrastructure have begun to crumble. The international reputation of Scottish arts and culture, created by the initial investment, will quickly fade at this rate.

That leaves Creative Scotland with several deeply unpalatable choices – either petition and get more public funding, continue standstill which will quickly erode the arts infrastructure or radically cut the number of funded organisations and spread the existing funds more generously to the remaining organisations. Politically the last choice is the least attractive but perhaps the one that needs to be addressed if more public funding cannot be found. No matter which approach is adopted, discussions need to begin soon in order to prepare for the future. This will impact heavily on artists and cultural freelancers as the arts landscape around them could change significantly and so any change in funding should be considered holistically.

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

One of the most obvious challenges is for artists and cultural freelancers to make a consistent living. Applications for funding will include income for living and as the hit rate for applications cannot be high or regular, a reliable income and all that entails is hard to come by.

There is a question of bureaucracy though Creative Scotland have worked hard to make applications less onerous and this is recognized.

There does need to be an acknowledgement from RFOs and other organisations that work should be funded. If employees in arts organisations expect a regular salary then fees for artists and cultural freelancers should have equivalency (this only happens consistently when the freelancer is a 'consultant'). The culture of expecting artists etc to work for less, or for 'exposure' is not viable and would not be acceptable in other sectors. Likewise the

payment or non-payment of volunteers is also a key issue – some of the most striking offenders in this regard are major funders or government run projects that use large teams of volunteers under the banner of community and public participation. At the same time, RFOs and smaller arts organisations are frequently under pressure to pay everyone.

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

The most obvious action would be to increase funding pots as they do not seem sufficient to meet the credible demands of the sector. Another approach would be to ringfence funding for longer periods of time so that the various funding strands remained stable and constant. Consistency is one of the key elements

Something that is raised frequently is the addition of private, commercial or philanthropic funds. This model is generally based on North American examples. However, the accompanying tradition of that culture are not sufficiently cultivated here and the various tax breaks and financial incentives do not seem convincing. It will take time to develop such a culture so it cannot be ‘banked’ on in the immediate future.

Similarly there could be corporate funds but recent events with BP, Shell and the Sackler Trust have underlined the need to develop such funding under the auspices of ethics committees that can assess the suitability of those funds.

How could Scotland be innovative in attracting greater funding for the arts?

When it comes to funding it could commit to discussing the arts like other businesses in Scotland, comparable to more traditional businesses that receive apprentices. It is frustrating to see more ‘traditional’ businesses receive support for apprentice schemes, a decision that seems based as much on nostalgia for old industrial models as any economic sense. The arts sector is flourishing and one of the most internationally viable sectors in Scotland – it should be funded appropriately.

There should be a real accounting of the economic impact of the arts in a meaningful way to genuinely reflect its economic contribution and place in the overall economy. This should not though be considered without a parallel commitment to the arts from a political standpoint. The arts have vital importance in terms of wellbeing and the quality of culture in a nation. It will always be good to find ways to add to public funding but committing to the

concept of public funding is a commitment to creating space for a diversity of voices in society, to a more democratic public arena where new ideas can be tested out. Only public funding can provide the space for artists and organisations to deliver on this for audiences.

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

Increasingly funders should think about longer term support for artists rather than a one off production grants. For sustainability, artists need to know they can attract more than one grant every few years. There is also very little recognition of the impact of short term grant funding on artists with families. This makes maternity and child care vital issues that force the exclusion of many female artists in particular and those from poorer backgrounds. There is also a reluctance to think in terms of salary parity for artists. Staff members in organisations expect to get a regular salary comparable with many other sectors. Artists seldom receive a salary pro rata payment, often don't get a fee at all and find it difficult to assemble anything like an income from the little they get to produce new work that is at the core of culture and the cultural industries.

It is also important to consider areas of perceived imbalance or neglect. While fine artists produced from an accepted academic route find it easier to get funding there are many areas of society and many types of 'culture' that are not sufficiently recognized or supported.

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

Quality should remain an important factor. While recognizing that community and participatory projects are often as much about the experience and process as a high quality outcome there are still issues of quality in the organization and execution of those projects. It is also important to consider the impact of a project and to work on measuring criteria that go beyond numbers or short term publicity. The true impact of the arts is quite often less tangible and slow to reveal itself: evaluation techniques that are based on industrial models do not effectively capture these impacts.

The stage of career and the trajectory of an artist is also important to consider across a spectrum of backgrounds, age and art form.

It's also important to consider geographical locations and the spread of funding among those who are clearly very successful and those who are receiving less funding.

Actions to consider:

Encourage funders to allow freelance people to apply for funds to place their projects within the RFO network – this would give them access to funded facilities and break up curatorial monopolies, creating more porous organisations to the benefit of artists and freelancers.

Reassess the national arts infrastructure – examine whether the national organizations reflect today's Scotland. In particular examine the assumptions underlying the main pillars of the infrastructure. Many very large organisations have been funded very generously for a long time. This large funding and these organisations date from a period when the infrastructure was much smaller and when the definitions of culture were much narrower and 'classical'. This leaves almost no room for innovation or the emergence of new art forms. Consequently many potential audiences and artists feel alienated from public funding and government definitions of Scottish culture. If there isn't more money to fund all of the traditional infrastructure and new artistic models then there needs to be a bold restructuring of existing funds. Without this, arts strategy in Scotland will crumble.

One of the greatest dangers facing the arts in Scotland is the extent of political will to initiate radical change. Small but vocal lobbies that can intimidate parliament and deter meaningful restructuring of the arts infrastructure underpin many areas of the arts. Consequently, changes are incremental and as the infrastructure continues to grow, the available funding gets spread more thinly. In the last RFO settlement this meant widespread standstill that was effectively a cut. This begins to cripple organizations that shed staff internally and have little left to offer artists and freelance workers. If political timidity dominates the process then the next round will begin to see the collapse of organizations in a random fashion that does not reflect any strategic thinking. All of this breeds an environment in which artists and freelancers will quickly begin to think of new locations outwith Scotland