

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM DAVID LEDDY, FIRE EXIT THEATRE COMPANY

OVERVIEW

- **Peer review panels** should be used for funding decisions above £10k
- **Creative Scotland staff should only administrate the system.** They should not make funding decisions.
- **Ongoing qualitative assessment** must take place (as it did under Scottish Arts Council)
- **Artistic excellence** must be prioritised first, ahead of social engineering targets.
- **Creative Scotland staff should do secondments in arts organisations** and vice versa.
- **Prioritise organisations that create art and pay artists.**
- **Two-stage funding** process would save everyone time and money.

DETAIL

- **Peer review panels** should be used for funding decisions above £10k
 - Rolling panels of well-qualified peers should make the funding decisions, guided by CS staff to ensure that funding priorities are being served.
 - Panels should be large enough to ensure that bias and/or favouritism cannot unduly influence decision-making (eg. ten people)
 - Panels should include an equal balance of artists and administrators. Past panels have been dominated by administrators.
 - Panels should include people who are not currently funded to ensure the system does not become insular and closed.
 - Panel membership should be open to application as well as some members being invited to join (because highly qualified, useful people often don't apply)
 - Peer review could go through a two stage process such as:
 - 1 – A large group of 30 peers read applications and offer feedback using a simple pro-forma ratings system. This could be done digitally

without peers needing to travel to meetings. This could also be a way to include high-level professionals who do not have the time for day-long panel meetings.

- 2 – A different, smaller group of 10 peers meet and discuss the successful applications in full detail.
- Academia has useful models of peer review to learn from.
- **Creative Scotland staff should only administrate the system.** They should not make funding decisions.
 - A funding body is unlikely to ever attract staff of high enough quality to make high-quality decisions. Instead, those staff should administrate and guide the process and the decisions themselves should be outsourced to better qualified people.
- **Ongoing qualitative assessment** must take place (as it did under Scottish Arts Council)
 - The old SAC system of ongoing assessment worked well and should be reinstated.
 - Organisations should not receive funding unless 80% of their assessments in the last two years have been rated 'very good' or 'excellent'.
 - This could be done as part of a wider peer review process where all applicants and recipients are expected to review other organisations at least once a year in order to be eligible for funding.
- **Artistic excellence** must be prioritised first, before other targets.
 - After Fire Exit's funding was withdrawn Creative Scotland's senior leadership told me "Creative Scotland is not very good at funding art and we'd like you to advise us on how we could do that better." This situation needs to change.
 - Reinstating a system where a high level of artistic excellence is the *first* priority. Currently it is simply treated as one target amongst many. The other targets are easier to quantify and thus organisations are effectively penalised if they prioritise artistic excellence over social engineering.

- **Prioritise organisations that create art and pay artists.**
 - Too much focus is given currently to peripheral organisations that do not pay artists or create art.
 - Creative Scotland often fund organisations who do not pay union rates and this is highly problematic.
 - Every organisation should be required to calculate what percentage of their budget is spent on paying for artistic staff as well as artistic production costs.

- **Creative Scotland staff should do secondments in arts organisations** and vice versa.
 - Many CS staff have little or no knowledge of the real pressures faced by an arts organisation. Often their professional experience of the sector (if they have any) was at a low level and a long time ago.
 - Secondments in organisations of differing sizes would help them to understand the realities of the organisations they deal with.

- **Two-stage funding** processes would save everyone time and money.
 - First application stage would be a short overview containing the proposal, organisation's history and an overview budget.
 - Peer review panels would advise applicants whether or not to move on to stage two. A possible option here is that applicants are not precluded from applying to stage two, but are warned that their application is unlikely to succeed.
 - Second application stage would require full details, budgets and so on.
 - Wellcome Trust has a useful model to look at here.