

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

**ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY**

**SUBMISSION FROM KIRSTEN GOW**

I am an artist and creative freelancer.

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

As I am more familiar with arts funding at an organisational and individual level, I will comment on it from that point of view, rather than from a funding provider's point of view.

The project based nature of much funding is always going to pose sustainability issues, though I acknowledge it allows small, grassroots projects to get off the ground which is key to the health of the sector.

Alongside this, fair pay continues to be an issue in the sector and has an impact on the job security.

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

As a creative freelancer

Many of the projects I have developed and gained funding for have started with a small band of volunteers who have been collaborating on a small scale for a while and who now have with an idea which requires external support. Often these groups do not have the experience of developing projects or writing bids and, as a creative freelancer, I am often asked for unpaid help and advice at this stage as there is little availability of funding for project development.

Whilst the hustle of bringing a project idea together is all part and parcel of being a creative freelancer and certainly gives me 'exposure', and whilst exploring the potential / finding ways to make a project work is one of the things I get the biggest kick out of, I have to pay my bills just like anyone else. I would like to see a system where I could refer these voluntary groups to low level micro-funding to employ me for a couple of days to help them flesh out their ideas, which may turn into full blown funding bids for a project, or may end up with them deciding that they are happier continuing to work as volunteers on a smaller scale, albeit with a bit of a clearer picture as to the way forward after working with a specialist project developer.

Whilst I recognise that funders like Creative Scotland already have support networks for those seeking funding, my experience is that these tend to be reactive (you have to know what kind of questions you want to ask for a start) and that many voluntary groups feel slightly daunted by the prospect of approaching a national organisation with their partially formed ideas.

Having a network of project development specialists supported by a 'pitch fund' could both give organisations the confidence, and access to knowledge, to develop their project and also allow creative freelancers to get paid for the consultation and assistance they often offer on an unpaid basis at present.

In terms of pay, whilst I appreciate efforts made by many funders to ensure that those employed in the creative sector are fairly paid, there is still some way to go in this regard. I still regularly encounter people in the sector who feel they can 'get away with' paying what amounts to less than the minimum wage once costs like insurance, technology, holiday pay and sick pay are taken into account.

Along with low day rates in general, often this is disguised by the fact that the 'day rate' does not acknowledge that the freelancer is required to work 10 hour days (in the case of covering festivals, for example) or that the freelancer is expected to work over several locations in a city during a day but is not reimbursed for travel cost or travel time.

Whilst I always ensure that I include an appropriate daily rate for my services when I am applying direct to funders, it can be a battle to ensure that I get the correct daily rate for my work when working direct with organisations.

#### As an artist

On an individual level, I have found there is a gap in funding for those seeking creative development who are between the student phase and 'established artist' phase, particularly for those of us who were mature students and cannot access programmes / funding aimed at young people. There is particularly a lack of support to develop some of the specialist, technical skills required to become a master crafts person without further academic study, where many of the routes to gain this experience require private tuition or unpaid internships.

Whilst there have been several programmes for emerging makers in recent years focussing on professional development / bringing your art to it market, these have tended to concentrate on business elements such as branding. In order to develop my technical training in glass blowing without taking a further degree, I have had to self-fund further training in Estonia and the Czech Republic (there being a lack of such training in the UK and it being cheaper to study overseas even where there were opportunities here), having been advised by Creative Scotland that I would not be eligible for funding from them as I was not yet established enough.

In order to save this money I had to go into paid employment which did not relate to my creative development, which has stalled the my creative development. Having spent time and money developing my skills overseas I have had to accept that this is not sustainable and, whilst the experiences continue to influence my creative development, I have had to take the decision to pursue glass in other forms.

In summary, I have found it a challenge to identify support for developing specific technical skills which would have allowed me to develop my artistic practice because of the stage of my career as there is a lack of funding for personal development of niche technical skills outside the academic route. This is of wider concern as we have seen a sharp decline in formal glass education in this country and I believe that we are in danger of losing key skills if this continues.

Supporting artists to develop these skills not only invests in individuals, but also opens up opportunities for master artists / craftspeople to be compensated for passing on their skills, thus supporting the creative economy and ensuring these skills are not lost.

On a smaller scale, there is a lack of small scale funding to assist artists who could make a difference with a couple of hundred pounds – for example by buying new materials to experiment with; travelling to visit the International Festival of Glass in Stourbridge; visiting an artist's studio at the other end of the country; mentoring etc. The impact of small scale funding cannot be underestimated and I particularly like the model used by Eigg Box to distribute micro funding on an ultra-local level.

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

No response.

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

Continuing to highlight the value of the creative economy to those outside the sector, alongside the social and cultural value, is crucial in attracting greater arts funding both in terms of potentially opening up new funding streams from those who want to invest in the sector and for continuing to make the case for public investment.

It is interesting to see how tourist taxes are starting to be used in some areas of Scotland to help pay for the infrastructure and services of those visiting the area. I would argue that a share of any such income should also be used to support and develop the arts, culture and heritage in these areas since this is often what brings people to the area in the first place.

I am aware that several organisations which support arts / business partnerships exist, but these still feel relatively peripheral and I would like to see the development of these to proactively support grassroots arts projects as well as established artists. I see no reason why grass-roots cultural projects should not be seen as attractive or ripe for investment as other business start ups – we just need to find a way of assessing and highlighting the value of these. I think we have a thing or two to learn from tech start ups which show no obvious income generation potential but still attract investment.

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

Whilst my experience of working with Creative Scotland to gain project funding and my experience supporting Regularly Funded Organisations and the National Arts Organisations has been generally very positive, I do believe there are challenges with a national organisation understanding the needs and opportunities of local areas in a country as diverse as Scotland. Even within my own region of Argyll, with areas as diverse as Helensburgh, Colonsay and Carradale, it takes time and effort to understand the varying needs of artists and communities.

Whilst I would not advocate devolving funding to regions entirely, I particularly like examples such as Eiggbox which makes funding and creative development opportunities available on an ultra-local level.

In terms of regional funding, I believe that the understanding of and support for artists and the creative sector amongst local authorities is extremely variable and that this lack of expertise, alongside the wider public pressures they face, make them less than ideal candidates for administering local arts funding. Instead I would suggest that any national funder, such as Creative Scotland, seeks to develop its own network of practitioners and freelancers (not arts consultants) actually based in the areas to help influence local provision.

Regular, local consultation to ensure effective support could be offered in multiple guises – from an ‘armchair critic’ role where you are emailed, say, three questions a month for your feedback; to involvement in local focus groups and beyond. This kind of grass-roots engagement could also allow funders to develop a more diverse range of candidate for their boards in the long run.

Funders should work to ensure the right geographical balance of coverage. Whilst it could be argued that more money should be allocated to areas with more people, we also need to bear in mind that those in more remote areas have less access in general to publically funded art, or are required to pay higher costs (transport / overnight stays) to access it.

In the past I have regularly encountered well-meant efforts of folk trying to ‘bring art to remote areas’ and this is generally appreciated. However, it is interesting to note that many people still think that ‘engaging with local communities’ means bringing something in to that community, rather than enabling communities to share their creative projects with a wider audience.

I point to the ‘Growing opportunities for remote participation’ session at XPO North 2017 as an example of this. This session focussed on how online solutions can help bring art into local communities, but the idea of how it could be used to transmit art from local communities had not been considered when a question was raised at the end of the session.

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

In terms of geographical coverage it is also frustrating to find a project which is 'parachuted in' to your community and run by someone from outside the area without any liaison with those working locally. Public money for projects engaging with a community should only be available to artists who have shown that they have made proactive and reciprocated efforts to engage with the community and the creative sector in the areas they plan to enact the project.

Projects involving participation should have to show they have actively worked to mitigate the challenges of engagement in relation to the areas they work in – this could include childcare provision in community workshops, reimbursing travel for those on low incomes / in remote areas, ensuring that events are held at times when the venue is accessible by ferry / bus / train, etc

It is not uncommon for me to come across opportunities funded for the Highlands and Islands which are pretty much inaccessible to me without a significant investment of time and money. Whilst I accept that my remote location means I do not have the same access to facilities and opportunities as others, the lack of awareness of the challenges faced by those of us working in remote areas by those working on projects purporting to support us is still often stark. As evidence I point to the example of a 'creative hub' set up in Inverness for the Highlands and Islands which one of the project team told me was free for me to use as an islander – ignoring the fact it would take a minimum of 2 ferries and a day's travel each way, and a minimum of one overnight stay, just to access the 'free' facility for a few hours.

Additionally, in terms of encouraging a wide geographic spread of activity, where appropriate I would like to see funders challenge the requirement for posts they fund being located in specific areas.

I have worked as an arts manager and creative freelancer for years now, previously based from my home in the Central Belt and now based on a remote island. The job has been very similar in both locations, with the majority of work carried out over the phone or online and occasional visits to specific locations. I regularly see opportunities advertised online which could easily be worked on this basis but require you to be based in a specific location (let's face it – usually Glasgow or Edinburgh). I feel that funders are in a unique position to encourage organisations to consider working in a more flexible way in terms of staff location, in order to make the most of the wide range of skills and experiences available and to ensure the benefits of the funding are spread over a wider area.