

## CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

### ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

#### SUBMISSION FROM AYR GAIETY PARTNERSHIP

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

The majority of funding for the arts in Scotland is derived from the private sector in the form of purchases – of tickets, media, visual artefacts and so on. Funding subsidy from the public sector, from charitable trusts and from private donations/sponsorship is only a small part of this picture. So as public funding for the arts declines or evolves, so the availability of, and routes into, the arts will become increasingly more market driven. In this sense there is no real threat to the overall sustainability of “the arts”, but there is a real threat to any form of risk taking, to new voices, and to the creation of and involvement in creation of any form of arts by those with limited income.

The generally austere public funding environment means that the levels of public subsidy have already declined. The full impacts of this in terms of a reduction of the volume of artistic activity and the level of creative quality and energy have not been felt so far. This is in good part because a high proportion of people in the artistic community work from passion, on low wages and in the hope of “jam tomorrow”. But many arts organisations and individual artists are already under severe pressure. It is likely that an increasing number will face severe financial difficulties in the medium term and that the level of artistic and cultural activity other than that which is viable in a marketplace, will decline.

Despite this, there remains a considerable level of artistic and cultural enterprise activity from individual artists, small collectives, and community based arts organisations.

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

Given that most funding for the arts and culture in Scotland does come from “sales income”, a key barrier for artists and cultural freelancers is the way that much of the arts sector is split (by arts funders) into funded “artistic” work and unfunded popular and “commercial” work. Because the public funding culture supports a false split between these it tends to fund artists to produce work that is primarily something they are committed to. But without building routes to seeking more popular recognition and the long-term sales income that can make an artist’s career, and the development of an arts organisation, sustainable.

Any public funding system is bound to fund only a proportion of artists and arts organisations – the main barrier is not really the system, but simply competition with other artists. It is fairly clear that the current system favours both writing skills and funding for individuals who are seen already to have proved their value.

There is no doubt that focussing on different ways of distributing funding could lead to a fairer process. But only if this is set within the context of the overall funding for arts, recognising that current split between “artistic” and “commercial” is false, can any funding approach support *sustainable* income for artists, cultural freelancers and arts organisations.

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

The first step in Scottish Government creating a more sustainable framework for arts funding is to clarify purpose. At present the principle of establishing “arm’s length” funding for arts and creativity has led to a situation where, to a large extent, Creative Scotland and the arts community have themselves determined the purpose of the public funding they use. This does not apply in any other field in receipt of Scottish Government funding. And there is no rationale for arts exceptionalism that the taxpaying public is likely to accept if asked. There is a genuine and understandable concern that government should not interfere in the detail of which art and artists specifically get funded as this is seen to be a form of censorship. However, defining purpose and broad focus does not mean taking individual artistic decisions. Scottish Government has established a cultural outcome and further clarity on what this means, and which other Scottish Government outcomes arts funding should contribute towards, is an essential first step.

A second step is increasing the emphasis on funding for artistic and creative activity that will become sustainable. There are many organisations, and much cultural activity in Scotland, which is almost entirely dependent on public funding. So in practice the art that gets produced is determined directly by Creative Scotland (acting as a sort of National Artistic Director across all art forms). Once the funding for the particular artwork has completed, the only method in which the next artwork will be created is through further Creative Scotland funding. The results of the recent RFO decision process are testament to this – where organisations that did not secure funding have either closed, or in some cases have been sustained through substitution of their funding from one Creative Scotland funding stream (RFO) to another (OPF or Touring Fund).

Most importantly arts funding in Scotland should be directed in a way that is determined to a much greater degree by the interests and views of the wider population rather than the interests of the narrow group currently involved. At present it is not difficult to characterise arts funding as being directed by, in support of, and for, a tiny proportion of the Scottish population who are in effect the “arts elite”. In a practical sense this can be seen, for example, in the audiences for most publicly funded theatre in Scotland. Regular theatregoers are largely drawn from a small sub-set of the more affluent sections of the population. And they include a significant proportion of playwrights, directors, other creative performers and the wider employed theatre sector (including marketers, administrators, technicians and so on). Despite access and inclusion initiatives at the margins, publicly subsidised theatre is rarely accessed by most people in Scotland.

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

More innovative funding would stem from a significant change of direction. It would involve the following:

A move from funding to underpin not only artistic risk, but also financial risk. So that more art might be produced that has a chance, but by no means a certainty, of securing sustainable levels of sales income from the general public. Creative Scotland does use this approach to an extent in its work in supporting film and publishing. While the mechanisms used may not be perfect, the intention is appropriate.

Secondly, arts funding should be directed more to help artists engage with audiences. At present “audience development” generally means a process by which artists and those working with them persuade potential audience members that what the artist has produced is worth seeing/attending. Only a limited number of artists and arts organisations (and few any with significant funding) engage directly with audiences and potential audiences to understand their interests and create work for and with them – except at the margins of their work. Ultimately this would lead to more art being created and co-created with communities rather than in “temples”.

A further and important dimension to funding decisions from Creative Scotland would be to change the organisation’s competencies, so it understood the impact of funding on organisations and organisational development. Most art is created with the support of art organisations and most audiences are brought together with art through the same route. Taking account of organisational learning, organisational functioning and the ability for some organisations to deliver far more for the same amount of funding as others would lead to those organisations being able to secure much greater return for the public pound than is often the case at present.

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

At present most funding through Creative Scotland is made available through a process of applications, application deadlines and decision committees that are largely separated from engagement with the individuals and organisations who their decisions affect. It has become an increasingly bureaucratic and technical process with everyone in the sector, from new developing artists through to long established organisations, having to spend considerable time and resource on developing and applying the skills of funding application.

There is a place for small-scale “starter” grants to be available on a competitive but relatively easy to use process (for example, the “Awards for All” process run by the National Lottery Community Fund) to support new talent and promote accessibility to funding from unexpected and new directions. However, a move to a much more engaged process is appropriate for most arts funding.

Firstly it must be recognised that short-term project funding does not support organisations or individuals. The current Open Project Funding and Touring Fund sources provide significant sums of funding but for time limited periods. This means that considerable voluntary effort is devoted to submitting applications – most of which are unsuccessful. And when they are successful, projects spring into being and then fold at the end. Only individuals and organisations skilled and lucky enough to secure serial funding approval have anything approaching the secure existence required to create great art and fulfil their potential. Even the 3-year “Regular Funding” involves a massive effort and considerable uncertainty that lasts at least half of each funding period.

An alternative would be to engage with organisations and individuals chosen on a strategic basis to help meet CS and Scottish Government goals. Identifying and supporting geographically distributed arts hubs would allow support and funding to flow through local mechanisms suited to and influenced by each area. A much smaller Creative Scotland with

highly expert staff (who understand how arts organisations and artists work) would support from the core. Funded organisations and individuals would be accountable for meeting agreed outcomes and there would be a clear mechanism whereby persistent failure to do would lead to loss of funding. This approach is called sometimes called Account Management by other funding organisations.

If instead, Creative Scotland is to continue simply to invite and process grant applications, this might be completed more efficiently and effectively using well established and robust processes available through the National Lottery Community Fund. At present it is difficult to see what “added value” Creative Scotland apply to the funding they distribute.

Funding decisions should also take much greater account of where the work will be and who it will engage with, particularly in terms of socio-economic background. It is appropriate to ensure that funding can support artists on lower income. But since few artists earn significant income from their artistic activity, this distinction fails to separate out and provide additional support for those people whose socio-economic background prevents them from pursuing any artistic activity in the first place. So while individual artists are undoubtedly, for the most part, poorly paid, this means that most have to have either another income or come from a socio-economic background that allows them to pursue their interests in the absence of income, at least for a time. Again this highlights the need to focus a far greater proportion of funding for art and artists on artists (as well as audiences) with limited economic means.

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

Key factors include:

- What is such funding for – is it to “support artists” or is it to reach government outcomes (including the new cultural outcome)?
- The importance of economic inclusion for determining arts funding.
- The importance of geography in determining funding decisions.
- The need for geographic spread – with most arts funding concentrated on the Central Belt and many areas of Scotland without any form of funded or significant artistic organisation.
- A recognition that, in the absence of sufficient resources for all, broad priorities should be set for the use of public money by government, not by a funding agency.
- Ensuring the public funding levers and effects other funding, most of which is ultimately sales income.