

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM YDANCE (SCOTTISH YOUTH DANCE)

Sustainable arts funding is only simple to achieve if a much larger allocation of public funding, at national and local level, is made to the arts and cultural sector. Given that this is unlikely in the current financial climate (and has never really been likely at any time), arts organisations have always acknowledged the need to build a multitude of alliances across public, charitable and private sectors to support the creation of work over long periods of time.

There are, however, considerable challenges and difficulties which arise from the necessity to “cobble together” enough financial support to enable artists to produce high quality work, in whatever art form they operate. It increases the need for, and pressure on, professional administrative, fundraising and other support staff to work mainly on raising funds and sustaining relationships with public sector bodies, charitable trusts and private sponsors. As these support staff have to be paid, the amount of funding available for the art is reduced.

There is a limited amount of money to be had from all three funding sectors, and the competition is strong. This impacts particularly on organisations whose work is not high profile, including youth arts organisations which work with children and young people in all sorts of social circumstances in their own communities, and do not have the “showcase” performance events which large national companies use to attract and retain private sponsorship.

In terms of public body support, excluding Creative Scotland, Local Authorities, have seen unprecedented budget cuts across the board, and arts and culture has frequently been targeted for some of the biggest cuts. The creation of “independent” charitable trusts to carry out the functions of Local Authority Cultural and Leisure departments has increased competition for trust funding and private sponsorship, further reducing arts organisations chances of raising money.

To establish a more effective and sustainable model of arts funding in Scotland we have to look at the extent to which arts and cultural activity affects people in different ways and how it can make a difference not only by entertaining, enthralling, provoking, inspiring people who view performances or works of art, but also improve the lives of those who participate, effecting changes which benefit people’s health and wellbeing, confidence and creativity, improving lives at many different levels. This points to a model where, for example, culture is part of the country’s health policy and provision, contributes to the development of our children and young people as successful learners, helps to divert young people from becoming involved in criminality and encourages people who have been through the criminal justice system to make changes in their lives by showing them possibilities they did not know existed, and helping them to travel down a different path.

I have worked in youth arts in Scotland for over 30 years, and have experienced different funding and support systems all over the world. Whilst there is no perfect solution, and no-one in any country believes that their artists are well supported, I think that the best approach is to make the most of what we have, at least in the first instance.

Retaining an arms-length national funding body like Creative Scotland is important. Their strategy for disbursing funds is currently the subject of a number of reviews, but having a dedicated organisation for cultural support, with a reasonable budget, along with the inclusion of culture in the National Outcomes, signifies the importance of culture to the country.

There will always be more requests for funding than can be granted, however, the current three-yearly “free for all” covering all artforms does not seem to be the best way to allocate the Creative Scotland budget fairly. A more effective approach might be to take account of the published strategies for each art form, decide on a basic funding allocation to achieve the outcomes in the strategy documents, and then enable the artform specialist officers to sit down with client organisations and individuals, and non-funded potential providers, to allocate funding on the basis of discussions around the organisations and individuals own plans and ideas. This would be much more flexible, allowing different approaches for different art forms, and for types of provision including participatory work, which often does not fit the criteria or reporting requirements which suit those who provide public performances or exhibitions.

Direct Government funding for the National Companies also signifies the importance placed on culture in Scotland, although, having run two national youth arts organisations (Scottish Youth Theatre 1984 – 2001 and YDance: Scottish Youth Dance 2002 – present) I would raise the question of whether the unit should be extended to the National Youth Performing Arts Companies which should be of equal importance to their “adult” counterparts.

YDance (Scottish Youth Dance) and other organisations have been successful in partnering with government departments and public bodies to gain support for cultural activity which impacts on other policy areas, including health, social justice and learning. YDance has provided programmes aimed at increasing physical activity amongst marginalised teenage girls, contributing to achieving the aims of the government’s Physical Activity Strategy, and we are currently working in primary schools on a four year project using dance to teach other curriculum subjects. This project – Shake It Up – has not received government funding, but is supported mainly by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and it incorporates research by the Robert Owen Centre at Glasgow University, which is intended to inform future practice in the use of dance to teach other subjects in schools.

The work done by arts organisations in support of other policy areas has proven very successful, however it is not sustainable under the current system. Funding is allocated on

a short-term basis (1 – 3 years) and there is a lack of understanding of the way in which arts organisations work, and how they impact people's lives, amongst civil servants and / or public bodies such as SportScotland and NHS Health Scotland, who have been our lead contacts in our physical activity programmes since 2005. Initiatives like the Attainment Challenge could benefit from using cultural organisations to work in schools using innovative approaches to encourage non-traditional learners, however there seems to be no mechanism for connecting the two worlds, particularly since the Cultural Co-ordinators in Schools network was brought to a close.

My point is really that culture should form part of the thinking in decisions across different policy areas and government departments, and opportunities to contribute to the delivery of certain appropriate outcomes of government policy should be opened to cultural providers as a matter of course. Continuing dialogue between cultural organisations and the Government could be facilitated and co-ordinated by the Department for Culture, Europe and External Affairs, and other departments should allocate funding towards delivery by cultural organisations.

At Local Government level, as well as ensuring that Local Authorities fulfil their commitments to deliver and support cultural activity in their areas, much better use could be made of non-financial resources such as local halls, school premises and the like, particularly as many authorities no longer use all of their existing building assets. In the 1980's when I first worked for Scottish Youth Theatre, the annual Summer Festival was supported by a different local authority each year. Much of their support was in-kind, including free use of college premises for rehearsal space, discounted costs for residential accommodation in colleges, and provision of transport to enable shows to tour the country. Scottish Youth Dance had similar support in its early years.

With colleges now being independent of local authorities, and even local authority culture provision being "privatised" we face a situation where we cannot afford to hire decent rehearsal space, participants pay full cost for accommodation and we must spend a considerable part of our budgets on transport. The intention of new school "community campuses" to be hubs of activity after school hours and at weekends was laudable, however financial reality means that access is restricted to those who can afford to pay hire charges and staff overtime, as schools and colleges are required to generate income from external sources.

YDance has experience of working with youth dance companies in Belgium (Retina Dance) and Germany (DeLoopers) where they have free access to schools in the evenings and at weekends, on an entirely informal basis – they are basically given keys. While such a system would not necessarily work in Scotland, we could surely find a way of enabling such use at low or no cost for arts organisations and practitioners. It should not be beyond us to create conditions where arts and cultural organisations can make use of school and college facilities which otherwise sit empty, while dancers rehearse in draughty church halls because that is the only affordable option.

People working in the arts in Scotland – freelance practitioners, employed artists or support staff – are generally practical and we are aware that the prospect of significant increases in the national culture budget are unlikely. We will continue to draw in support, both in cash and in kind, from a wide variety of sources. That said, the pot needs to be bigger, and if it is acknowledged that artistic participation, as audiences or participants, has a positive effect on people and therefore impacts on other policy areas, then it should be possible to enlarge the funding base for the arts in Scotland without impacting on the overall budget and maybe even leading to savings in the long term, if some of our citizens benefit from early involvement in culture which lessens the need to spend money on health care, or stops them from becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

Arts organisations and practitioners in Scotland have a long, successful track record of working in partnership with other sectors, and around the world, and bringing the best of their learning to impact on Scotland. To improve the arts funding system the best thing we can all do is keep talking and listening and work in partnerships wherever we can create them.