

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM CATHERINE WHEELS THEATRE COMPANY

Dear Members of the Committee for Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations,

I write following your call out for views on Arts Funding in Scotland.

Catherine Wheels, as one of the five organisations who had their regular funding cut then reinstated in January 2018, submitted evidence to the Committee's call out for views on Creative Scotland's Regular Funding process in March 2018.

Catherine Wheels creates award-winning work for young audiences. We are part of a creatively strong sector, however while theatre and dance for children and young people is one of Scotland's success stories, it still does not receive the recognition, support and investment it deserves. Scottish theatre and dance for children and young people is in high demand and plays to packed houses internationally. In the last 18 months we have toured to France, Malta, Italy, China, Australia and were part of a special Scottish Focus programme at a Japanese festival. Next year alone seven Scottish children's theatre and dance productions (including one of our own shows) will be presented in China – however the sector still struggles to find an audience in Scotland. Our European neighbours recognise the vital importance of funding theatre and dance for young audiences – Denmark, which has a similar population, has over 70 full time companies – but Scotland continues to lag behind, despite the fact that the work here is recognised as some of the best in the world.

What would a sustainable model of funding look like?

A sustainable model of funding for the arts in Scotland would provide a way for both individuals and organisations to be given longer term funding.

- **What are the major threats to sustainable funding?**

The current 3-year cycle of funding is little time for organisations to create longer-term plans and to spend time looking for other income streams/applying for additional funding. Projects can often take 2+ years to even be developed, and the current model doesn't give any security for longer, far-reaching projects. This directly affects the Regular Funded Organisations such as ourselves, but also to the whole sector – we do not work alone. We are part of a symbiotic network of artists, freelancers and arts workers.

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

Application processes are complex and require time (usually unpaid), skill and experience. It is a daunting process for even those who are experienced. It is also a very specific skill, and relies on the applicant being able to express their ideas in the right words. Current systems also expect artists and freelancers to have very specific

skills beyond their creative/technical talents, such as marketing and audience development.

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

Re-instate cultural co-ordinators, but linked to Scottish Government rather than to each individual local authority. They enabled artists and organisations to link & create successful relationships with local authorities – including with council run venues, and specifically for the young audiences’ sector, with schools.

Focus on the value of arts for arts sake. Acknowledging that value, and working towards placing more value on culture

Support local authorities to put funding into the arts, to see it as essential for their communities rather than an extra or a luxury. Venues that sit within councils are required to prioritise making money, so instead of having a balanced programme of work they increasingly focus on commercial content.

Ensure that Creative Scotland acts as a funding body, focused on the work and supporting that work.

How should that funding be made available to artists?

Catherine Wheels is an artist-led organisation. In order to answer this question, we contacted our current network of over 40 independent artists and freelancers. The latter term we use to include all other freelancer workers within the sector, such as technical staff. We received very few responses. I think it should be noted that I, as a full time employee, have time to write this response whereas these artists & freelancers do not have full time employment, and are already juggling projects to make their lives at any point financially a bit secure.

In addition to our personal contact with these artists & freelancers, we, along with 3 other young audiences organisations, organised an open sector event. Amongst other things we discussed current & possible future funding. This was a successful way of asking artists & freelancers to engage with these questions, and so while I have included some of their responses below I would ask that the Committee consider attending one such open sector event, so they could speak directly to the artists & freelancer arts workers.

Placing a distance between the strategists who, with all best intentions, create strategies without working alongside those that they are aiming to help, creates more issues than solutions.

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

Recognising that an individual is different from an organisation; they should not be expected to provide the same level of complex application; nor the same burden of bureaucratic paperwork. Allowing them to tell the story of their work, and its success or failure, in their application and evaluation.

Follow the example of many funding Trusts and use multi-stage applications. If a one-page application passes to the next stage, there is a conversation about the work - a meeting to discuss the project and hear from the artist directly. Make the art the focus of the application.

Peer appraisal should be incorporated into all decision making; acknowledging that it requires balanced assessment which includes peers who understand specialist artforms e.g. very contemporary interdisciplinary work which the artists understand but funders consider risky.

We could look to France where artists are supported annually as 'intermittent du spectacle' – whereby an arts industry worker between jobs receives a basic income which allows them to support themselves. While the envy of arts professionals across the world, it has its grey areas and isn't perfect; however, it evidences a much higher value on the importance of the arts in society than we currently do here in Scotland. It allows mid-career artists to stay in the industry, rather than having to look elsewhere to find any financial security.

As one artist responded -

The current funding system is so competitive that it can harm the industry. Companies and artists are keen not to be seen to ask for too much money because this might hinder their chances of being successful. One knock-on effect is that performers and artists employed through the funding grant are offered Equity minimum rates only as a normal practice. The result is that a performer that has been working for the past 10 years in shows, receiving the same rate of pay for those 10 years. Equity minimum rates are there to set standards for the minimum wage you can pay an actor. It is not normal in any other profession for the rate of pay not to increase due to experience over a 10 year period. Effectively one can be paid industry minimum wage for the last 10 years or for the rest of their working lives, and this is true for most performers in the UK. However, I understand why companies and artists, try to appease the system by not increasing rates of pay in budgets submitted to Creative Scotland because people are the most expensive part of any budget and because they want the proposal to be successful so they try to keep the budget down.

When working in France I learnt that actors are paid according to their age and experience. In effect the rate of pay is increased with age, read experience. Actors starting out get paid the basic wage, and actors with more years' experience get paid according to which bracket their years of experience falls into. It wouldn't have to be law, it could be introduced into Scotland as a charter to be followed by companies, an endeavour to move towards.

Freelance performer & theatre creator

It shouldn't place all the risk on the artist themselves. In a recent response from Creative Scotland to a funding application I was asked to factor in a back-up plan in case the partner venue (who is regularly funded) didn't deliver on their side of the partnership agreement; getting participants to join the project

Freelancer theatre maker