

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE SOCIETY

Since 2014, the Fringe Society has seen a sizeable decrease in its core public funding from previous years. Figures indicate that the actual cut in public funding, namely The City of Edinburgh Council and Creative Scotland is down from £166,530 in 2014 to £121,951 in 2018. A real time decrease of 27%, the rate of inflation over the same period, from 0.04% in 2014 to 2.51% in 2018, the real term decrease in the Society's core funding is 33%.

To offset this decrease, and enable the Fringe Society to deliver against our business plan and Blueprint, we have activated significant additional investment, from a range of private and public investors alongside self-generated income. The Fringe Society has already developed its box office to generate income, and with a further investment, can provide a significant self-sustaining model to generate revenue to reinvest in artists.

This year on year reduction to Fringe funding does not sit in isolation but is replicated, albeit not equally, across the culture sector in Scotland. The Fringe is the world's largest meeting place for artists, promoters and curators to do business. It is where shows are selected to tour around theatres and festivals across the UK and the world-class, work is produced, co-produced and commissioned. Whilst it provides a platform for artists across the Globe, it also is a vital platform to showcase work from Scotland and provides a career pipeline for the creative sector and beyond. In 2018, we saw over 900 shows from Scotland at the Fringe, which clearly defines the important role the Fringe plays as a career pathway, in particular for work showcased via Scottish Government EXPO funded Made in Scotland programme. Over the last ten years, Made in Scotland showcase has featured over 209 shows and the onward touring fund has enabled more than 85 productions to visit 39 countries across the world.

In addition, the Fringe provides in excess of 3,400 full time jobs across Scotland and generates an economic impact of around £200 million for the Scottish economy. Currently the Fringe Society receives less than 5% of public investment but delivers a phenomenal 267% return on that investment. It also contributes significantly to Scotland's positive reputation in the world, the Fringe is a global brand that represents Scotland as open, outward-looking and creative – a country that supports freedom of expression, international connection, intercultural dialogue and open access to its cultural places and spaces. The job creation, economic benefit, global reputation, civic pride and cultural and social impact of the Fringe for Scotland is dependent on artists developing and creating work. The artists are the lifeblood of the festival. Greater sustainability for artists will come from placing greater value on the role that artists and the arts plays in society, and to see this translate into greater investment of public funds on a cross departmental basis, and greater advocacy to unlock recognition and investment in the arts across business and private endeavours.

The Culture Strategy, currently being developed by the Scottish Government, is the result of a nationwide conversation and endeavours to set out a strategy for the arts in Scotland. The Fringe has been actively involved in, and supportive of, that conversation. We would like to see the Strategy activated and clearly implemented across all policy areas in

government so that culture is not viewed and defined as something separate from human life in Scotland. We welcome and encourage that political leverage and support the idea that funding be consistent and maintained, to ensure the Culture Strategy is a dynamic and effective mandate for government to invest in the arts. This will help ensure effective delivery against the National Performance Framework Indicator on Cultural Engagement. As such, we would support dedicated financial resource commitment attached to these outcomes across departments including health, education, housing, environment, communities, etc. This in turn should support and create more opportunities for artists to work across society, for example in schools, hospitals, communities.

The Fringe Society is developing programmes of work that provide a clear line of sight in what localised investment in the arts brings to society, for example our work with 30 community groups, some in the highest areas of deprivation in the city, and supports free access to the performing arts on the Fringe for thousands of citizens who had previously had no engagement with the Festivals. This work is already showing positive outcomes in addressing loneliness, social isolation, confidence building, disenfranchisement and has been the catalyst for marginalised groups to identify, enjoy and benefit from the Fringe experience, some of whom are now creating their own shows at the Fringe. In turn it is developing new audiences to see and experience the performing arts. We are also currently exploring matching artists looking for accommodation, from low/no funding background, with people in Edinburgh identified as suffering from social isolation and loneliness. There are many more examples of how to connect investment to social and cultural value.

With the implementation of schemes such as the Transient Visitor Levy, it is important to recognise the implications that this has beyond that of tourists. Already participants at the Fringe are citing that the single biggest barrier to participating is the cost of accommodation. Even with a suggested exemption for those visitors staying more than 7 days, we are aware that 33% of participants at the Fringe stay for less than 7 days. Governments, both national and local, are looking at ways to adopt a more strategic view of this fragile ecosystem, and we welcome a partnership working approach, rather than in isolation on policies that can fracture an integral asset to Scotland.

Similar to the aspirations of the Culture Strategy, the Fringe Society's role goes well beyond the performances in August and we work all year round to support health and wellbeing, inclusivity, diversity and equality, skills development and innovation. Therefore, for Scotland to be a champion to attract greater funding in the arts, we would encourage influential leaders to recognise the totality of what artists, cultural organisations, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and our fellow festivals bring to the nation, and clearly articulate and champion the value of these organisations, artists and the arts in its broadest sense. We would welcome an approach from political leaders and national agencies that would see the benefit of working with the Fringe Society as a strategic partner, irrespective of the level of public funding, to help attract and stimulate investment in arts and culture and more broadly in Scotland. The Fringe Society provides confident language and messaging on the value we bring to Scotland and is a strong, recognised brand that political and public sector leaders can clearly communicate, in particular the value and importance of arts to the economy, health and well-being of Scottish citizens and society and we would encourage the strengthening of this partnership.

It is important to differentiate between investment and subsidy funding, with investment provided to stimulate growth, particularly within the creative industries and industrial

strategy, and subsidy to enable artistic and creative incubation and development. Whilst the Fringe Society does not rely on public subsidy, we absolutely would benefit from targeted investment to stimulate and support specific vital areas of our work where it is harder to raise sponsorship or generate income, in areas such as access, equality, diversity and inclusion. We agree that artists should receive public subsidy to enable them to create new work, be innovative and test out ideas.