

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM APPLIED ARTS SCOTLAND

By makers for makers

Applied Arts Scotland SCIO (AAS) is a membership organisation with knowledge, skills and expertise in Scottish contemporary crafts, run from the ground up “by makers for makers”. Established in 1994, AAS has developed to represent Scottish makers as the landscape has shifted. It offers an authentic, collective and professional voice for the sector, directly from active practitioners. The current work of AAS includes development of shared apprenticeship models within making disciplines; delivery of critical appraisal sessions for practitioners at key stages during development of new work; development of a maker’s toolkit to support creative and business development; exploring sustainability of practice through use of materials; and international working as partner for the British Council’s Crafting Futures programme, including offering residency opportunities for creative and professional development.

The term “maker” is broad and encompasses a range of activities required to sustain a professional practice as an applied artist. Here, we use the terms “craft”, “designer-maker”, “maker” and “applied artist” to refer to the same professional practitioner, and consider that each of these designations holds equal value.

AAS members are professionals working predominantly in Scotland across a range of craft disciplines. They are typically solo practitioners who have entered the profession through a variety of routes, ranging from art school through to self-taught and approaching as a second or even third career. Most members juggle portfolio careers that combine commercial income-generating practices (including the research and development inherent in creating a new collection or delivering workshops) with “traditional artistic” activities, such as creating work for exhibition (and the research and development inherent in creating new work). The lines between these “commercial” and “artistic” activities are often blurred for makers, and their practice often falls between the cracks of current funding opportunities.

Falling between the cracks: Craft making is considered a “creative industry” and an “art form”

The challenge for craft funding from Creative Scotland (and elsewhere) is that craft is considered as both an art form and a creative industry within Scottish Government, falling within the policy remit for the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and

External Affairs as well as the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills. The value of craft within these distinct sectors is unclear, and visibility for practitioners and of funding streams is limited within current policy frameworks. Where craft is considered within policy, it is often in the context of heritage craft and culture¹ rather than contemporary craft and innovation. Makers are invited to submit craft applications but actually submit fewer applications than from other disciplines.

Feedback from our members suggest multiple reasons for this, including:

- The work of professional makers is not recognised within strategy/policy documents at national, regional or organisational levels.
- Available funding streams disadvantage the dual role of makers that spans artistic practice and creative industry, which – in practice – operate on a continuum with no clear delineation between them.
- Craft practitioners do not always see themselves or their modus operandi reflected in the stories of funded projects.
- There is patchy visibility among the making community of the funding available to them to support their activities.
- Career paths towards being a maker are patchy, with no standard training in place.
- There is limited training focused on completing funding applications.

A strategy for development of the craft sector is missing

The craft sector currently lacks any defined strategy for development and support of practitioners. No sector-specific research has been conducted by Creative Scotland into the needs of the craft sector, thus decisions around what does and does not get funded are based more on the ability of makers to articulate an idea in a funding application rather than on any strategic overview. This is highly problematic. Also, since there is no longer any Targeted Funding available for key and important craft-based projects, activities that promote the making community, such as Craft Biennale Scotland, have not been funded.

This lack of strategy for the craft sector affects funding administered at both national and regional levels. Regional strategies should cascade from a national strategy, allowing for variation to support regional needs. Currently, there is considerable variation in regional cultural strategies (and subsequently the funding available to support these) between local authorities, introducing inequity of opportunity across geographic locations. Furthermore, not all funding programmes are available across

¹ “A Culture Strategy for Scotland: Key Themes Report”, January 2019

all local authorities²; and organisations are treated differently to individuals³. This affects all creative practitioners, including makers.

Most funding available to individual makers is short-term and project-based with a broad scope ranging from support for creative development (eg Visual Artist and Craft Makers Awards, VACMA) to residencies. Many of these require the maker to deliver significantly against a community, audience or education engagement strategy often at the expense of the maker's own creative practice, and/or are skewed towards "artistic" practice. In particular, VACMA – regional awards for small amounts – offer makers the opportunity to take a first step onto the funding ladder and progress to further awards. However, as the infrastructure above crumbles, makers at many stages of their careers are competing for these limited funds.

We also feel there is scope to fund longer term projects and the development of infrastructure to support all disciplines within the making community equitably across Scotland. The Creative Scotland RFO funding, which supports organisations on 3 year basis, funds four organisations that have a complete or partial remit for craft: *Northlands Creative* (a specialist glass facility in Caithness); *Panel* (activities focused on curatorial practice in craft); *Fife Contemporary* (craft and visual art practice in Fife); and *Craft Scotland* (showcasing and developing Scottish craft's local national and international profile). While funding for these four organisations is very much welcomed, there are significant gaps in the geographical areas and specialisms they cover.

While the scope and quality of the work done by Craft Scotland has grown significantly in recent years, there is an unrealistic expectation that they will be responsible for all areas of craft development in Scotland. We believe that **a healthy craft sector needs a variety of different organisations working collaboratively to the same goals and, crucially, the same strategic overview.**

Panel, in association with a group of individuals and organisations working in craft called the Craft Development Network are currently developing MAKE, a manifesto for craft in Scotland. A draft has been circulated and the next stage is a consultation with the sector. **This is the beginning of a strategic overview of the needs and aspirations of the sector and could form the basis of a strategic development plan for Scotland.** Creative Scotland's Creative Industries Officer with a responsibility for Crafts, Jessica Bonehill, is a member of this group.

² For example: (1) Visual Artist and Craft Makers Awards are available in 21 of 32 local authorities; (2) Aberdeen City Council offers "creative funding" to individuals and organisations that is not offered by Aberdeenshire Council.

³ For an example of this, see <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/leisure-culture-and-parks/creative-funding-awards-2019-20>. Organisations from outside the local authority can apply for creative funding to deliver activity within the local authority whereas *individuals* (including solo practitioners) must be resident within the local authority region to apply for funds.

Funding at the intersection of commercial and artistic practice is needed

The mixture of activities undertaken by makers necessitates a range of income streams, including from direct sales of work, delivery of workshops, or funded opportunities for activities across business development, professional development and creative practice. “Craft” is therefore considered distinctly both a creative industry and an art form, within Creative Scotland and the sector more widely. The lack of clear separation between these two viewpoints that exist *in practice* for makers often acts as a barrier to accessing existing funding opportunities, where any suggestion of commercial activity renders a maker ineligible for “artistic” funding, and vice versa. **Alternative funding models would allow makers to compete on a level playing field with others in the creative sector**, for example, by allowing for some commercial benefit from artistic endeavours.

Makers are often sole traders, and the time required to complete grant funding applications is often disproportionate to the awards available, and time-limited in a manner that may not be compatible with a practitioners strategic objectives for themselves and their business. VACMA go some way to recognising this with a short application process, and play a vital role. Small amounts could be offered as loans and the Craft Scotland pilot initiative with a credit union (CRAFT Flexible Finance) is a very easy option for makers, which we hope will be extended beyond the pilot period.

Within the sector there is a need for increased awareness among practitioners of the many and varied funding structures currently available, with case studies to demonstrate their application and effectiveness. This also needs to be supported with extended training in grant writing skills and perhaps implementation of peer mentoring schemes to improve the quality and number of applications submitted by craft practitioners, recognising that many makers have not learned this skill as part of their maker training and that entry-level awards are typically highly competitive.

Making career pathways

Beyond grant funding opportunities, an overhaul of funding for training and education schemes to support future development of the craft sector is required, particularly given the demise of specialist craft disciplines (including glass, ceramics and weaving) within art colleges and schools.

AAS have taken a leading role in exploring apprenticeships in the craft sector and have been working with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to deliver a pilot shared and part-time apprenticeship programme. This project is currently being evaluated, supported by funding from Creative Scotland’s Creative Industries Team, and findings will be shared with the making community, other creative sectors, funders, policy makers and other

interested parties. While the evaluation will create more specific findings, the immediate feedback has been that sole practitioners find it too risky to take on an apprentice without some kind of financial assistance to offset both the cost and time involved in training. Anecdotally, a sole trader taking on an apprentice may result in as much as a 25% reduction in turnover in year 1, and a further 15% in year 2 due to lost production time. An increase of 40% in year 3 goes some way to making up the lost revenue, but should that apprentice leave and (as is often the case) set up their own competing business, that initial investment and more is lost.

While the situation of individual craft businesses may not seem statistically significant to the Scottish economy, what must be appreciated is that craft practices are often integral to rural communities and tourist income. Indigenous craft skills and practices are being lost at a rapid rate as is detailed in the Heritage Craft Association Red List of Endangered Crafts <https://heritagecrafts.org.uk/redlist/>. As noted earlier, craft is an important ingredient in Scottish heritage and identity, and can be brought back from the brink of extinction if there is a will to do so. The story of Harris Tweed is a testament to that.

Apprenticeships in craft also offer a valuable alternative for young people to develop career options outside of formal education, and acquire transferrable making and business skills. Funding to support small businesses to take on young people is patchy, and again geographically variable. AAS have accessed Scotland's Employer Recruitment Incentive (SERI) funding to support young people with specific additional needs on our pilot apprenticeship project, but this has been difficult to access at the right time to suit the businesses working calendar. Creative Scotland funding in association with Creative and Cultural Skills was available at the beginning of our project, with £6k available to supplement the apprentices wages and offset the employers other costs of employment. This was an excellent way to support apprentices, and give the employers the flexibility to take on the right person at the right time. We would warmly welcome the reintroduction of such a funding stream.

Going back further, the inclusion of craft disciplines within further education (eg foundation apprenticeships) and (re)embedded within the school curriculum (as for slöjd in Sweden) is critical to ensuring that the value of craft is rooted within society and the skills developed from a young age, and funds to enable this should be identified.

Having clearly defined career paths into making could also then enable funding for career re-entry after periods away from the sector, in turn making the sector much more inclusive for individuals with (eg) health issues or care responsibilities.

This should be a core element of any craft strategy for Scotland.

Contributors

The information provided here has been collated by the current board of Applied Arts Scotland in consultation with members. Key points have been synthesised and direct quotes from members are appended below.

From the ground up: quotes from AAS members

What aspects of the existing funding mechanisms work well for you as a maker living and working in Scotland? How do these fit with what you want to achieve as a maker and support available to you to do this?

“Funding is a vital part of life as a maker in Scotland. Until craft and design is valued by our society as a vital and much needed job, and until The Arts, galleries, theatres, libraries are seen as the important places they are within our community funding will continue to be the only way we can all survive.”

“I have previously found that the current structure of applications are great and I have achieved some small awards.”

“I have found funding mechanisms difficult to identify and apply for. They put me off applying when I occasionally see any that might be suitable as the amounts are not sustainable.”

“I have not been able to directly access funding as I am presently a student. Funding would allow me to develop a higher skill level which would advance my education beyond the specific technical level available in undergraduate art & design courses. This would empower me to be more productive commercially after graduation.”

“I have made use of several funding rounds in Fife through the FCAC and Business Gateway. These have been essential to the growth of my business enabling me to buy equipment, allowing development time to research and introduce a new material to my work then finally a grant to support my first attendance at 2 trade fairs. I would definitely like to access more funding for equipment.”

“I have received support in the past from Craft Scotland to show work abroad internationally and I have received the craft makers award from the City of Edinburgh Council. I don't actively look for funding but I am not sure there is much there for me.”

What would you change about the current funding mechanisms, and why?

“I would ensure that funding is available to a wider variety of people. I don't know how it's spread at the moment but I think making sure it's inclusive is important.”

“I have been mentally ill for years, have just about hung on to a mundane job and my creative practice has stagnated. What little I do manage are design commissions of little personal interest. I'm too broke to make new work and struggle to justify applying for help. It would be great to have a separate pathway for awards that accommodated this. I'm desperate to buy equipment to make things but can't afford to. I can't get awards without proof of work. I can't make a business plan for a loan

without proof of product. I would love to see creative healing awards toward finding a way out of this and regaining my makers confidence. I would so gratefully apply for one of those.”

“Like myjobscotland, there should be a place where you register then all your details are there you just need to make the applications. Also, I think that there should be a minimum monthly payment to allow people to get started - almost like a small wage - not enough training or opportunities to really understand the system”

“Funding is generally limited to non students. I am a mature student gaining qualification in my professional studio practice, namely art glass. Advanced training in glass techniques is expensive and I cannot access funding to assist with my development due to my student status.”

“I find that the application process is very time consuming and this now puts me off now my business is established due to time constraints.”

“More visibility, advertised more widely through AAS and Craft Scotland.”

“Provide adequate funding to allow universities to produce excellent graduates (we do already do this but staff are stretched very thinly indeed and it is only a matter of time before the system breaks). Excellent graduates lead to better economies and a stronger country.”