

**CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY**

**SUBMISSION FROM NORMAN BISSELL**

I previously submitted my views in response to the Scottish Parliament Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee call for evidence on Regular Funding in 2018.

I read the Committee's subsequent Report on Regular Funding and Creative Scotland's response to it. I consider Creative Scotland's response to have been dismissive of the Committee's concerns about the way the organisation administered Regular Funding in 2017-2018. Employing a consultancy firm to try to negate the widespread concerns of artists, arts organisations, MSPs and the public about its conduct is no way to proceed in my view.

Although Creative Scotland says it is conducting a review of its funding, I see little sign of change or improvement in its policies and procedures. Therefore I welcome the Committee's decision to seek evidence on the funding of the arts in Scotland and I hope it will recommend much needed radical reform of the way the arts are funded in Scotland.

As I indicated in my previous submission, I have considerable experience as a writer, venue promoter and voluntary organisation and Community Trust activist in submitting applications for arts funding to Creative Scotland and other funders over many years. Some were successful and others unsuccessful.

**Concerns based on my experiences of Creative Scotland funding**

Since I am unaware of any significant changes in the way the arts are funded through Creative Scotland since my submission in 2018, I wish to reiterate and supplement some of my concerns.

1. Creative Scotland application forms are very time-consuming to complete and this takes up a lot of valuable time for an artist which could be better spent creating new work, and also for a community volunteer whose time would be better spent carrying out other voluntary work.
2. There has been limited engagement by funding officers in responding to applications, and the feedback received when unsuccessful has been in general terms and has usually referred to how competitive that funding round has been.

3. By way of contrast, the two stage Big Lottery Scotland capital funding stream I found very helpful because, having successfully completed its first stage, funding was allocated to our Luing Community Trust to try to obtain second stage full funding, which we did.
4. The amount available for artists' bursaries is insufficient and Literature has too small a share of the total budget. Adapting George Orwell's slogan in *Animal Farm*, 'All art forms are equal but some art forms are more equal than others.'
5. The current practice by Screen Scotland of funding film producers to commission screenwriters to write short and feature film scripts means that most of the funding goes to producers rather than to writers who are then in a weak position to negotiate fair rates of payment with producers on whom they are dependent for work.
6. The lack of guaranteed funding for rural and island arts venues adversely affects the range and quality of artistic work available to rural and island communities.
7. The Touring Network and its Supported Touring scheme is one of the few bright spots in the funding of the arts in the Highlands and Islands which include Argyll and the Isle of Luing where I've lived for 11.5 years.
8. Open Project funding becomes even more competitive and difficult to achieve as a result of companies who have been unsuccessful in Regular Funding bids and National Companies applying for Open Project Funding.
9. There is very little support from Argyll & Bute Council to individual artists or to arts organisations. In my experience, the £200k funding by Creative Scotland and the £160k awarded by Argyll and the Islands LEADER to the Council in November 2017 for the Culture, Heritage and Arts Assembly (CHARTS) project has made little difference to the promotion of the arts in Argyll and Bute. This is because the budget has been spent on employing a team of consultants rather than on promoting the work of artists and arts organisations within the Council's area.
10. Far too much of the arts budget for Scotland is spent on administering funding by Creative Scotland instead of funding artists and arts provision.

### **Proposals for Change**

11. The current level of arts funding is inadequate to meet the demand and needs to be increased significantly. The current division of funding between National Companies, Regular Funded, Open Project Funded and Artist's Bursaries is inequitable and funding needs to be redistributed. This should take place over a

period of years to avoid more closures and redundancies of staff in existing arts organisations.

12. All art forms should be valued equally and this should be reflected in the funding made available to each art form. Literature and writers, in particular, should be allocated a greater share of the total available budget if we are to maintain our justified reputation for the quality of our writing.
13. Screenplay writers should be funded directly instead of being dependent on film producers commissioning them using Creative Scotland funding.
14. A basic citizen's income for artists would generate much more and better artistic work than requiring them to prepare onerous funding applications, the majority of which are unsuccessful. The lessons learnt from reports and inquiries into the benefits of Universal Basic Income in Scotland and other countries should be applied to provide funding for individual artists.
15. The current Scottish Government funded basic citizen's income pilot in 4 local authorities should be extended to one or more category of artists e.g. writers and visual artists whose average income is around £5k per annum or less.
16. Uneven levels of support for the arts in different local authority areas should be addressed e.g. by ring fenced funding to local Councils from Scottish Government, as has been the case with some education funding.
17. Funding application forms should be simplified, and their language made clearer, less business driven and more artist friendly.
18. There should be peer review of applications by artists and artists/arts organisations.
19. A staged and simplified application process for artists and arts organisations would cut down on the time wasted on form-filling.
20. Extending diversity, equality and inclusion will only be achieved by sustained ongoing work in providing training and minimum quotas in arts organisations.
21. A register of existing arts venues in Scotland, other than RFO funded ones, should be created and each should be allocated as much funding as can be afforded, e.g. about £5k per year for their events programmes, on condition that they guarantee artists' union rates and report annually. This would make sizeable savings on Creative Scotland application and assessment costs.
22. A deep going independent inquiry into all aspects of the work of Creative Scotland by a committee made up of MSPs and independent artists should take place as a matter of urgency. It should have a broad remit and make recommendations for the future delivery and funding of the arts in Scotland.

23. The independent inquiry into the work of Creative Scotland should consider its abolition unless radical reform can be achieved within a reasonably short timescale. Its staff should be redeployed within the arts sector and should contribute to and lead some of the proposed changes outlined above. A new body should be considered made up of artists, representatives of arts organisations and arts trade unions to carry out all of Creative Scotland's functions and be responsible to the Scottish Government.
24. Savings achieved by reducing the cost of Creative Scotland and its administration should be ring-fenced and spent instead on funding artists and arts organisations.
25. In the short term a Creative Scotland Artists' Board should be set up to ensure artist input into all aspects of its strategies, funding, governance and activities.
26. Because of the detrimental effect of the closure of Hi-Arts on the arts in the Highlands and Islands, a new artists' body should be set up in the area which would nurture and promote the arts and address the current ongoing inequalities and lack of arts provision in the area.

Norman Bissell

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