

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM PATRICIA CAIN

I would like to address the Committee as an independent visual artist/scholar, whose practice is funded primarily through sales of work, occasional prizes, and funding through residencies and other smaller charitable organisations.

I'm a mid-career artist who has benefited from winning some major art prizes, particularly at the beginning of my career. I also have a late adult diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome (a form of Autism) and ADHD and I've become highly aware of the impact this has on 'fitting in' to funding criteria generally.

The main challenges to funding my practice lie in the crossovers within practice, whether this be because of my thinking style, the juxtaposition of academia and practice, or being able to find external support for the kind of projects I'm trying to achieve. All of these have an impact on funding possibilities for me as an individual practitioner, and I'd like to go into these in more detail to address two questions the Committee have raised, namely

- What are the main challenges for artists and cultural freelancers in obtaining funding in Scotland?
- What factors should be considered and how should decisions be made about which artists or cultural freelancers should obtain public funding in Scotland?

Thinking styles

As for others with Autism, my style of thinking is complex, focussed and is the product of a differently constructed processing system that filters/interprets differently, to create different purpose/value. It is not our 'difference' in thinking that creates 'disability', but the systemic barriers that mean our ideas/needs are not listened to as organisations/people are not attuned to that difference.

Fitting my way of thinking into application processes that are essentially 'normalised' and economically-driven just doesn't work: that criteria is not going to value - and neither can it evaluate – the likely success/creative potent of my/other's work.

Extrapolating this further, any arts funding application process that does not fit with styles and values of arts/creative thinking, is likely to create a disconnect: its inflexibility will miss opportunities because it's underlying values are not relevant to that which it's evaluating.

Creative Scotland's application process is at present, very much like this. Its application forms are cut into sections that are truncated, serve primarily economic concerns, and focus on forecasting strategies that are incongruous with the creative process.

My own experience of applying to CS (within the last 6 months) for a project about Autistic Thinking, revealed that despite its strong emphasis on EDI strategies, these are hollow on the ground where Autism is concerned.

Despite asking about accessibility beforehand and obtaining post decision-feedback, no-one could tell me how the application process addressed EDI for autistic applicants. It proved impossible to speak to anyone at all about the overall strategy pertaining to autistic applicants, and a request for discussion was refused. This shows me that CS's behaviours and culture are not in line with the strategy. I believe that this is likely because the strategies have not been embedded within its process. The challenge this creates is that people like me are not going to try again having had such a negative experience and further, it has a real knock-on effect on the energy required to partake in practice more generally.

Addressing this means having a root change, so that the breadth and depth of thinking styles of creative applicants are embedded in evaluation and the creation of value through participation. This particularly applies to neuro-diverse thinking styles.

Suggestions for doing this:

Funding that fits the creative process more closely

A root and system evaluation change

Attunement through inclusion of participative diversity

The juxtaposition of academia and practice

My practice is post-doctoral, but I chose to practice art rather than take a university job, primarily because the main outcome of my PhD was the importance of creating knowledge through making – not just talking about it.

I'm perhaps not unusual in doing this, as more and more practice-led PhD's in Scotland lead to practitioner outcomes whose contribution to forward-thinking and advancing methods/ methodologies is post-doctoral in standard but foremostly creatively-led in practice.

I'm not sure I'd have the freedom to work the way I want to at a university, but the downside is that I don't 'belong', because there isn't a post-doctoral funding structure for practitioners like me. CS do not fund 'research' and post-doctoral 'outcomes' might not look like traditional 'artist outcomes' notwithstanding they're entirely artistically-led. This might mean that they are not valued by art funding streams to the same extent because they're more "peripheral".

The lack of funding for innovative academic post-doctoral-standard artists is particularly noticeable in the wake of the recent removal of funding seams for artists by the AHRC and the Leverhume Trust.

A different form of artistic loneliness exists in ploughing a lonely furrow to find funding opportunities when you are an individual who is not connected to a university or charity. This means it's not possible from this position to take the thought-leadership in projects, and where there is funding for an artist, this is often as an appendage, not the main event.

The missed opportunity here is in art/creative practice not leading/taking precedence over different disciplines, even though educational paradigms are hot on using buzzwords like 'interdisciplinary', and 'transferable skills'.

It is a missed opportunity not to have a funding stream that supports self-determined creative projects with a distinct academic/deep-thinking character to lead on projects that respond to larger questions in Scotland. The RSE does not for instance as an independent academic institution have the same emphasis on arts-led projects compared to science-led projects, or multi-disciplinary projects that are led by individuals outside formal academic institutions.

Suggestions for doing this:

A public funding stream for innovative high-level thinking projects where the arts can innovatively lead on larger public questions

'Being able to find external support for the kind of projects I'm trying to achieve'

This last comment relates to the ability of funders to support visionary/forward-thinking work that is not within their own knowledge, and the difficulty of being able to locate funding that supports the vision of the applicant rather than fitting in with the confines of the sponsor.

Firstly, what place originality, when contorting projects to fit within often narrow objects of a funding stream? Where is the space for identifying originality if the objects of the fund already dictate the parameters?

Secondly, support for the arts might not just be about money. Support might be the support an applicant really needs, not what a funder predicates. It's often money, but it could actually be networks, facilitation, e.g. Residency Unlimited in New York which *'provides customized residencies for international and local artists and curators in New York City focused on network support, project/production assistance, and public exposure'*. (<http://www.residencyunlimited.org/about/>)

In this way, funding could involve mixed economy values for more sustainable outcomes.

Finally, meaningful support of 'work that is beyond oneself' cannot happen via a disconnected paternalistic administrative process, but is more appropriately supported from *within* the process of funding itself, which means embedding forward-thinking, diversity, flexibility, participation *within the system*.

A funding process like this more closely matches what it is funding because there is a direct link between the funder and the funded. This might be via a feedback-loop system or 'autopoietic' self-referencing system (and I have many ideas about this).

Suggestions for doing this:

Innovative consideration of mixed-value economy funding

A self-generating participatory funding system

Many thanks for the opportunity of being able to contribute to this discussion and I look forward to your eventual report on funding.