

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

Aberdeen City Council (ACC) is a major external funder of culture primarily through its Creative Funding for individuals and organisations, and core funding for partner organisations. It also delivers the Visual Artist and Craft Maker Award and the Place Partnership Programme with funding from Creative Scotland. In addition, ACC employs artists and freelancers to run workshops and outreach events through our Creative Learning Team, Libraries, and the Museums and Galleries Service.

Aberdeen's recent 10 year strategy - Culture Aberdeen - included 5 key ambitions with associated aims that address the sustainability of the sector as a whole and which will aid artists to sustain their practice. It can be viewed here: <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/leisure-culture-and-parks/culture-aberdeen-cultural-strategy-2018-2028>

- What are the major threats to sustainable funding of the arts in Scotland?

All types of funding appear to be reducing at present, with national and local government budgets squeezed, National Lottery spending down, and less corporate sponsorship available (in Aberdeen at least). This has led to cuts and uncertainty in the sector, with many organisations and artists unable to find alternative funding when cuts are made. It seems unlikely that this scenario will improve in the next 5 years given the challenges associated with Brexit, and other economic factors.

Artists and freelancers need a consistent funding landscape, not just for funding that is awarded to individuals, but for organisational funding too as they provide the bulk of commissions and opportunities for individual artists. Current public funding arrangements appear to be unsustainable with the budgets allocated to them nationally and locally.

Additionally, many artists find themselves working for less than minimum wage or even for free as they work to build portfolios, develop new projects, or help other freelancers/organisations. The Creative Scotland Visual Arts Sector Review found that 55% of self-employed visual artists had an income below £10,000 in their best year, despite 63% working more than 35 hours.

Aberdeen City Council will this year run Creative Funding with a total budget of £180,000, and this is open to individuals and organisations. This is a significant investment but ACC anticipate demand will again exceed the funds available.

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

Feedback from artists is that they need to be funded for their time but many funding options limit this. The Visual Artist and Craftmaker Awards for instance do not fund artists time, meaning it is limited to items of equipment, fees for courses or travel costs. This means only certain projects or artists with other sources of income are able to access this fund.

All funding for individuals also requires an application for each project, therefore artists need to develop application skills and learn how to navigate the funding landscape to sustain their practice. This puts some artists at a disadvantage and leaves artists lacking security and on low income. Completing applications is itself a time-consuming task which is very rarely recompensed.

ACC run advice sessions to help artists understand the funding process as well as mentoring and training programmes. However, artists and organisations tell us that Creative Scotland don't have much visibility in the area and this results in less applications from the region as there is a perception that Creative Scotland funding isn't awarded to artists in Aberdeen.

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

Sustainability isn't solely about funding, but opportunities and how those are distributed so that artists have access to them. Artists tell us that most of their opportunities come through social networks or access to arts organisations who commission new work or projects, yet all the national arts organisations are based in Edinburgh or Glasgow. The Scottish Government could commit to decentralising the arts sector in Scotland and finding ways to support regional creative economies by requiring Creative Scotland to establish offices outwith the central belt. Additionally, ACC believes the following could be explored:

- A new or existing National Company to be established in Aberdeen, Scotland's third biggest city should have a national arts company. This would help the region's aims for inclusive growth as it seeks to diversify its economy and help develop a key growth sector.
- More funding to be devolved regionally to support arts and culture.
- Income support for professional artists seeking to develop a body of work. There are a number of approaches that could be taken for this, including tax breaks, benefits or an artists income.

- Issue guidance on how the new 'Outcome for Culture' and associated indicators included in the revised National Performance Framework should be incorporated into local authority LOIPs and if that should have a statutory impact on local authority culture spending.
- Establish new investment funds as a long-term security or replacement for National Lottery funding which is facing a serious decline. Possibly through Scottish National Investment Bank.
- Examine the issue of opportunities paid with 'experience', where artists and creatives are exploited with the promise of portfolio experience instead of money.
- Meaningful, regular engagement with local authorities and Creative Scotland around challenges facing artists across Scotland, not just in Edinburgh and Glasgow. These communities feel disconnected from the bulk of the arts sector and need further engagement and support.
- Legislate to allow local authorities to introduce a tourist tax and investigate additional ways for local authorities to raise their own budgets.

Some of the ambitions outlined in the draft Culture Strategy for Scotland may aid Local Authorities to work closely with the Scottish Government on this. Scottish Government needs to engage more fully with individual Local Authorities to recognise the unique challenges in each area and to work jointly on solutions in partnership with local arts organisations. A holistic approach is needed, not just more money.

- How could Scotland be innovative in attracting greater funding for the arts?

The Birmingham Cultural Investment Enquiry (<https://culturecentral.co.uk/features/birmingham-cultural-investment-enquiry-2016>) completed in 2016, identified a plethora of new and innovative approaches to funding culture. Crucially, they found that a mix of models would be needed to deal with the growing funding challenges ahead and that open communication between national and local funders was important. They recommended framing a citywide cultural investment proposition, highlighting the overall value to the city of investment in the arts and helping to attract more funding. Birmingham recognised that they need to use Anchor institutions such as the business and higher education sectors to unlock further investment in culture across the city and that this would bring benefits to all. This model can have benefits for cities and Local Authorities across Scotland. There may also be individual elements identified within the Birmingham enquiry that National and Local Government feel could be explored further, such as use of BIDs or Social Investment Funds.

As mentioned earlier, Scotland could also look to use the recently established National Investment Bank to establish a National Endowment for the Arts as a security against or long-term replacement for National Lottery funding which is in decline. This would provide

long-term consistent funding for the arts sector nationally but may require a significant initial investment.

There may be lessons to learn from American and Canadian fundraising models which are far less reliant on public funds but have incredibly strong cultural sectors. Could some of their practices be established in Scotland as an addition to our commitment to public funding of the arts?

The recent controversy around Creative Scotland regularly funded organisations highlights an issue in public funding. How do funders bring new organisations into a funding portfolio while ensuring organisations which leave are still viable? There are no easy solutions to this but perhaps a phased-stage model of organisational funding could see organisations moved out of regular funding portfolios as they become more resilient and develop other funding streams during the lifespan of their funding agreement. This could be contracted as part of their funding and the organisations offered support and mentoring to develop this aspect of their business. It may not be suitable for all regularly funded organisations and thorough research and testing would be needed prior to establishing this model in Scotland.

Lastly, could regular funding be introduced for individual artists or freelancers to provide consistency over a period of time and allow them to build up a body of work? Again, care would need to be taken to ensure it doesn't become a closed shop and practitioners develop onto other funding or business models, but could be invaluable to artists seeking to explore or develop aspects of their practice.

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

There are a number of international models which may be relevant here, including the Irish Aosdana model which provides an annual stipend to approved artists. Germany count funding and scholarship applications as job applications for benefit purposes, allowing professional artists to claim state benefits if they are on low-income.

Funders have a responsibility to spend public money responsibly and transparently, yet have difficulty responding publicly to criticism particularly if it challenges specific funding decisions as funders are not able to discuss an application candidly in public. Funders need to strike a balance between governance and accessibility, which can be difficult.

ACC would support further devolution of cultural funding to Local Authorities or National culture funding to be committed on a geographic spread across the country to ensure a more equitable disbursement of funds.

- What factors should be considered and how should decisions be made about which artists or cultural freelancers should obtain public funding in Scotland?

There are issues around accessibility and ensuring Scotland's diverse population is represented through arts funding. This requires co-ordination and collaboration across local and national governments, community partnerships and Creative Scotland to address.

Additionally, the National Companies, arts support agencies and Creative Scotland are all based in Edinburgh or Glasgow and there needs to be a concerted effort to provide consistent and visible support across other parts of Scotland. Does the current national funding model reflect the regional identity of Scotland or does it present a homogenised, central belt version of our country?

Lastly, all stakeholders could improve communication and co-working to better support and signpost artists in finding opportunities and funding. ACC would welcome any opportunities to develop this further.