

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM TRADITIONAL MUSIC & SONG ASSOCIATION OF SCOTLAND

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

1. The budget allocated for public investment in the arts – especially for the government’s main cultural agency - is proportionally far below what cultural activity’s impact is on the economy and wellbeing of the country.

2. Lottery funding has become a less reliable source of funding particularly with the deregulation and proliferation of different lotteries as well as relying on a form of gambling and people’s desire to win money to relieve their personal circumstances. The loss of local authority funding for arts and cultural activities as budgets have been squeezed so non-statutory spending becomes the focus for cuts and the definition of ‘adequate’ provision is very open for interpretation. The creation of ‘arms-length’ leisure and cultural trusts or similar has also meant more bodies then looking to gain from the already limited pot of public funding, private trust and corporate sponsorship to replace local authority monetary input.

3. Not giving due recognition to the importance of the amateur / volunteer organisers and their vital role in giving individual artists the opportunity to make a career out of their cultural practice. The range of activity they support is diverse from international exchanges to activity in deprived areas organised by residents themselves. In traditional arts volunteers make up the larger part of those organising activity and audience for folk/trad artists, musicians and teaching. Often these volunteers don’t need huge amounts of money but what they ask is useful to them keeping a large amount of activity going.

For example one TMSA Branch that runs a small festival based on cultural exchange around the North Sea, giving a platform to new and upcoming talent that find it difficult to get an opportunity elsewhere and championing innovative collaborations – all things that Creative Scotland often says it wants to support - has not been able to get funding on a regular basis from the government agency even though it has rarely asked for more than £4,000 due to ‘there not being enough money to support all the projects that have applied’.

A concern in this area is volunteer burnout. The money in the public subsidy system is unlikely to match the amount of inkind activity and money from volunteers’ own pockets but funding their activity every so often will help them keep the activity going and stave off burnout when people become exhausted trying to sustain activity without little support. We estimate the return on investment is already very large – so funding it better will keep it.

4. Another major threat is the financial challenges over the last decade for trusts and foundations – particularly those reliant on the stock market to keep their investments producing the relevant income to then be able to fund groups and individuals. Generally things have been recovering but there is still economic uncertainty ahead with the prospect of Brexit looming.

5. Leaving the EU has other challenges funding wise such as the loss of access to the collective cultural funding which is usually proportionally greater in return than the

proportion of the funding the UK contributes. There has been no clear indication whether a portion of the money 'returning' to the UK funding pot will be directed to cover this loss of funding directly or used by the UK to keep access to some or all of the EU funding schemes. This access is possible if a country is prepared to pay into it as there are non EU countries which are part of the schemes already due to contributions they put in. Brexit will also impact other funding programmes and resources such as town twinning and informal cultural exchanges down by groups inviting groups or individuals. It is not yet known if visa costs may make such work also financially untenable especially if amateur artists will also need specific visas.

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

Recognition of the ecology of funding for artists and cultural freelancers isn't just about how they individually access funding but how the bodies that often employ and/or contract them get funding to do so.

A fair balance between individuals and organisations seeking funding is not an easy one to achieve as whilst there should be the opportunity for the individual to seek funding for their individual creative activity, there is also benefit for individual artists and freelancers in organisations being funded to provide work/contracts for them as well. One of the benefits is that organisations then take on the burden of sourcing the relevant financial resources rather than it falling on an individual to have both the requisite creative and funding application writing skills.

One of the reasons that this organisational way of supporting individuals is problematic is the limited access to genuine long term funding to ensure longer term stability of employment or contracts for career artists. Another is that the creative path of the individual may not coincide with a support organisation at certain times of their development so the challenge then often arises around a lack of relevant skills and experience to make their case for support within different funding processes.

Regarding trusts and foundations – not many fund individuals – one reason individuals then seek a partnership with an organisation, or create an organisation (eg Community Interest Company or CIC) which allows them an element of control but also an organisational structure to access a greater range of funding. Though of course running an organisation alongwith seeking the funding can also get in the way of artistic practice! So a challenge is how individuals can be collectively supported in organisational and funding skills. This is where network bodies have often been set up by individuals for this support. The point made in the Inquiry context paper about individuals competing against network bodies highlighted the need for both to be funded but there not being enough money in the system to support either with sufficient resource.

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

We suggest that it is worth reviewing the results of previous consultations. For example instituting as a minimum the key recommendation from the Cultural Commission (2005) that 1% of the overall Scottish budget be solely allocated to supporting cultural activity – and in a separate cultural budget - not simply counting arts funded by other budget headings to create the 1%. This move would also set a precedent of funding levels for future Scottish governments.

This would then start properly supporting the inclusion of culture as a new national outcome in the Scottish Government's national performance framework and the Scottish Government's forthcoming culture strategy.

Another challenge where a Governmental measure could be taken is in the area of organisations set up by practitioners to create opportunities for themselves. Encouraging better recognition and acceptance of particularly Community Interest Companies (CICs), which is a relatively new legal structure, would help as quite a number of funders do not yet allow them to apply to them for support. For example the Scottish Government's community asset buyout funding does not allow CICs to apply, yet owning an asset that is community locked is often a good way to create sustainable income.

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

One possibility that has been mooted was creating a cultural fund which would draw on the diaspora for support which in turn would fund activity in Scotland. There are of course organisations that already do this on an individual basis – particularly those who have had the benefit of long term funding stability (such as the national companies) to employ staff to build the relevant links and relationships. Maybe it would be possible to create such a funding body or strand that would do this work on a collective basis to then benefit those groups and individual artists that don't have the resources to replicate such channels?

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

Two examples we have seen that could be useful from Nordic countries that we are aware of particularly from the traditional arts aspect of things:

1. A separate agency or fund to support artists to travel outside of the country usually covering travel to the country as a minimum, sometimes other costs such as visas or accommodation and subsistence. This expands the opportunities for artists and freelancers to seek alternative ways of being funded for work through fees being paid by work in other countries.

2. Provide more long term paid opportunities to work in the education system as tutors, teachers and performers so schools can access more cultural and artistic activity either through regular visits or specialists on the staff team or both. The Youth Music Initiative is one model of delivery within Scotland but another could be a government programme to provide artistic and creative support to all state Schools as a minimum provision. This would also bring the well-documented wellbeing and academic benefits of participation in creative activity to more children – giving them a better start in life.

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

The note was made in the context of this committee inquiry that individual artists had to compete for funding against network organisations in the most recent regular funding round. There was also another related major issue in the regular funding round in that volunteer based/run organisations also had to compete against organisations with paid staff members who had more time to concentrate on the regular funding application process than those who were doing it between other commitments.

Many practitioners are volunteers when seeking funding and many volunteers who are seeking funding to run projects which provide employment or contract opportunities are also practitioners. This voluntary factor does not seem to be truly taken account of when funding decisions are being made. Often the inkind value is only considered within a financial context rather than the fuller contribution it makes towards sustainability of the opportunity for artists. We are aware there can be issues around voluntary organisations paying sustainable rates and management of the workers but much of this would be eased if the volunteers were able to access more consistent and longer term core funding to take on paid workers to support their organisation and its artistic aims.

For example in the recent regular funding round, the TMSA applied primarily to have the resources to run its TMSA Young Trad Tour project, which gives some of the top young musicians in the country the opportunity to develop relevant career related skills. The three year funding would have allowed the organisation to have a longer term part-time member of staff or freelancer to run the project, looking to try potentially other ways of delivering the project as well as build alternative forms of resourcing. We did not get this so instead have ended up having to rely on volunteer effort to put in a separate funding application for each individual year of the project creating a lack of 'job security' for the person running the activity (and thus quite a turnover of personnel) and the participant artists (who get paid to take part). The TMSA was advised at one point to apply for two years' worth of this project by Creative Scotland staff, which it has done but has never been awarded more than the equivalent of one year's funding - the main reason given is 'not enough money to fund all that applied for that particular open project funding round'.

In the traditional arts a large number of groups, are relying on similar voluntary effort or very small staff teams (frequently a single worker) that are also trying to ensure they have the money to run the projects that then give artists and cultural freelancers their opportunities to earn a living. Whilst they should always be able to apply for large sums of funding often smaller groups do not need a very large amount. We see that there is a potential gap in the national public arts funding sphere around the lower level of funding decisions and speed of the decisions. The traditional arts Tasgadh fund covers up to £1000 but next level is Open Project funding of up to £15,000. There had been talk of an up to £5,000 project fund in Creative Scotland with a quicker turnaround time of c. 4 weeks but has never materialised. Awards for All can cater up for £10,000 but is not often suitable/able to be got due to there being an aspect about it that is not solely arts focused. Plus Awards for All is also is reliant on lottery funding.

Because of the precariousness of obtaining adequate funding there are voluntary run traditional music festivals that do not even attempt to get funding to cover paying fees to performers except maybe for special events such as anniversaries. Instead they work at a level that allows them to cover expenses but still keep running. These festivals are usually long established events and a number of the artists that want to take part are interested in contributing to their local event and/or not placed to earn a living from such work – preferring to keep their contribution on a voluntary/expenses paid basis. They are also often in rural areas where there is not always the resources in the community to afford higher ticket prices. This model should not be decried as 'wrong' as it has proved to be more sustainable one than the 'boom and bust' that often happens when chasing funding constantly becomes part of the process – which can also lead to volunteer burn out and loss of the activity long term!

A final thought is related to the Creative Scotland RFO process based on recent rounds. Maybe more organisations could be funded on the basic level of c. £50,000 so they have a

stable core of resources including paid worker support to try new ideas and build other funding/income streams to fund the further development work.

Submitted by Fiona Campbell, TMSA Convener