

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM ANONYMOUS

One Perspective from a Cultural Freelancer (Performing Arts).

Introduction

The current approach to supporting the arts is based upon a business model that aspires to create a sustainable arts sector. This model prioritises profits and quantitative evaluation above quality of experience and reach.

This is one of the key reasons that organisations who are unsuccessful in their application to continue as part of the RFO Portfolio, frequently close upon their removal. If these organisations, who have been well resourced over a number of years and created a strong following with both the artistic and wider community, have not succeeded in developing sustainable business models that will enable them to exist out with the portfolio it is clear evidence that the aspiration of sustainability is unattainable.

In reality, a sustainable model of funding would be better designed to acknowledge that in a country with a relatively small population compared to landmass, the arts can only provide quality experiences through acknowledging that the work requires full subsidy and that the majority of projects cannot be approached as short-term profit-making ventures. In this instance, projects could be offered with the resources needed to offer maximum long-term impact and which would increase the likelihood of developing revenue from more engaged arts audiences and patrons. Any profit generated could be strategically reinvested.

The current approach, funding a series of disjointed efforts and parachute projects, does not create space for people who are currently not engaged or invested in the arts to become so and as such is stunting the potential for the arts to generate any revenue or in kind investment (for example accommodation when touring rurally, rehearsal space or equipment loans which all absorb a large amount of the funding given to touring projects).

With a more strategic approach that removed this income generating pressure from individual artists and small organisations through subsidising the true cost of the work, some funding could be ringfenced to develop key roles that have a national strategic vision at their core which would result in greater long term impact, leaving artists to do their work.

For example, a national arts marketing team who have an understanding of the needs of each area and the performance work that is available to them so that they can liaise directly with artists and create an approach that not only encourages audiences to attend one performance but strategically directs them to others they may choose to watch.

A national fundraising team who could generate an increased income for the overall arts ecology or for specific projects with a knowledge of all of the work being undertaken in that period. Thus, limiting the pressure on artists applying to multiple funding strands but also reducing the likelihood of multiple artists wasting hours of time applying to the same funders or approaching the same donors and having to directly compete with each other. This could enable the sector to develop a stronger relationship with donors/ funders over time as the national team could learn from application feedback and apply it, unlike the current system where by those with the capacity for a fundraiser become more successful at through this insider knowledge leaving others to waste time repeating this learning process.

Finally, relationship based roles which employ individuals to simply have a connection to and over view of the work being done and issues arising so that an actual strategy can be implemented, assessed and adapted in place of the current series of jargon based aspirations that cannot be assessed in a transparent manner. Further this would create a sector more inclined to discuss their failings without fear of reproach so that the work being done can reach its full potential.

Roles such as these would enable there to be a reduction in the funding of administrators that support gatekeepers and cause a vast amount of money to be wasted on bureaucracy whilst supporting Scotland to retain specialist skilled individuals who often leave the arts sector due to precarious conditions, lack of career progression or the need to 'do it all.'

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

A system which invests more in administration than it does in artists or work, creating less quality work, less consistent access to art and creating a lesser offering to audiences.

Consistently asking those with the least resources and most precarious working conditions to undertake multiple roles for which they have not been trained and that distract from their skill set and the impact their work could have whilst simultaneously burning them out.

Elitism, nostalgic cultural leaders and individuals holding on to power beyond the period in which they have been effective thus creating silos, nepotism and a distinct lack of diversity.

Believing that sustainability is solely a financial term. Neglecting to recognise that if people are burning out in order to undertake their work, their work is not sustainable.

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

Artists beyond the emerging category are under resourced and opportunity is lacking, creating less likelihood of artists becoming familiar names and creating a following that will contribute to the sustainability of their work and the overall sector.

The process of obtaining funding is unpaid, time consuming and requests that artists

understand jargon-based language designed by those who do not understand the lived experience of those working in the field. The processes also respond to the needs of funders and not to the needs of artists, for example budgets in word documents instead of excel spreadsheets.

There is no consistency of funding, so artists are having to propose 'new' projects instead of developing tried, tested and successful methods of audience engagement.

Artists are increasingly being asked to upskill in a multiplicity of entrepreneurial areas which see funds redirected to training and business institutions whose remit is to teach artists how to be business people, meaning that the business specialists are training the artists to be business people and nobody is fully investing in making or disseminating the art.

Artists are increasingly asked to understand the needs of the whole sector and tailor their relatively low cost work to cover the short comings of the whole sector as opposed to being placed at the centre of the work that takes place: for example a theatre will cover all of their staffing, building and marketing costs prior to employing any artists. If a production is underfunded this will result in lighting designers, movement directors and sound designers working over hours or not being able to work enough hours on the project to fulfil the projects potential – yet, there will still be plenty of free wine on press night. Similarly, if theatre has visual description and touch tour elements (essential access requirements), in major institutions actors will be asked to volunteer their time for this. Demonstrating that artists not only face barriers to sourcing funding but face barriers to getting paid for the time they work when employed.

Knowledge is not shared, so artists make the same mistakes repeatedly without room to learn and networking events are the privilege of the salaried or administrative class who can more easily ring fence time to attend because it is part of the role they are paid to do.

Transparency and parity is lacking making application processes a task in trying to meet the funders needs instead of talking honestly about the work.

Regularly Funded Organisations and major institutions are distracted by their own agendas and reporting requirements. They are therefore not fully engaged with artists and fail to respond to the needs of artists with valuable resources going to waste. Many of these historic organisations, such as The Royal Lyceum or The Traverse, will not be removed from the RFO Portfolio because there would be public outcry – as witnessed in the last funding round. Therefore, the basis of them reapplying for RFO every three years at the same pace as small artistic organisations sets up a naïve and false sense of parity which proposed the portfolio is a level playing field.

Artists who are willing to challenge inappropriate behaviour or power structures place themselves in a vulnerable position which could directly impact their opportunities.

Those of us who are working or heralded as 'successful' are exhausted and becoming increasingly unhealthy as a result of increased workloads and rates of pay which do not reflect our hours of work.

Artists who have chosen to live and work locally in Scotland are perceived as less valuable than those with an international practice, which is impossible without financial support.

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

Reduce waste in all aspects of the arts:

- Commercial Rates for van hire when touring (buy, maintain and insure some vans)
- Hotel Rates when touring (build/ buy key venues accommodation that can be utilised or build community partnerships so artists stay with the local community.
- Stop wasting people's time in competitive and time consuming application writing processes.

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

Investing more, as above, to generate more with a long-term mind set.

Investing in fundraisers who are not project based but have a wider remit to explore the national development of funding for the arts, as discussed above.

Investing more money in artists than administration and vanity projects (buildings without cultural significance, branding, vacuous jargon-based strategies, merchandise, wine) etc so that more people can consistently experience the positive benefits of the arts first hand.

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

Regularly Funded Artists/ Individuals.

Long term funding that invests in artists to undertake a period of work not just a one off project. See: Dancers/ Actors Alliance in Sweden.

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

- Equalities, diversity and inclusion.
- Track record: emerging artist support is essential and can potentially be short term as a learning ground however longer term funding is essential for mid-career artists.
- Their return contribution to the sector: do they provide feedback, take responsibility for evaluation and advocate for the sector so that it can become more sustainable? Could these artists be board members to increase on the ground input at a management level.
- Evidence of a growing practice and building links beyond Scotland to ensure the practice remains strong on an international level.