

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from YDance (Scottish Youth Dance)

Process

YDance (Scottish Youth Dance) was awarded standstill funding of £550,000 over three years in the 2018-21 RFO round.

We found the application forms themselves to be relatively straightforward, and similar to the previous round. Being able to reference points in our Business Plan was useful, as it meant we did not have to state things twice, in the plan and on the form. I would, however, comment that there seemed to be much more emphasis on our policies and processes than on the quality of the artistic work undertaken.

There were two main problems with the process –

1. The length of time between submission of the application in April 2017 and the announcement of funding in January 2018. Whilst I understand the delay in announcing was largely due to the fact that the government budget, and therefore Creative Scotland's budget, was not set until December, in the previous RFO round applications were not due in until July, with results in October. Even July – January would have been better than the 10 month wait we had. During that period YDance (and, I am sure many other applicants) developed new projects and reviewed existing project to improve them, none of which could impact on the funding assessment. According to our Assessment report, the assessment by an officer was completed on 28th July, and the Quality Assurance by the Head of Dance was completed on 14th November. I have no idea what they did with the application for the 3 months in between.
2. The complete lack of dialogue between Creative Scotland and applicant organisations during the assessment process. In common with many other applicants, YDance's assessment contained errors of fact and wrong assumptions, which could have easily been avoided by a quick phone call if the assessor was unsure about anything. The Creative Scotland official who was our main point of contact was banned from attending Board Meetings and required to ask permission to come to see any of our work. That official was not allowed to come to a YDance performance because Creative Scotland wanted to keep a "level playing field" for applicants new to the RFO process and those of us who were previously funded. This reinforces the notion that Creative Scotland were making decisions based on policies and processes and not on the quality of the work.

Importance of RFO for YDance

I wrote to Creative Scotland following our assessment meeting, and I have appended a copy of my letter and the response to this submission at the end of this document. I do not feel that Creative Scotland has actually addressed any of the specific points made in my letter, and I intend to ask the same questions again until I get an actual answer.

YDance is a National organisation, working across Scotland with children and young people. Our status as a Regularly Funded Organisation is very important as it implies a level of quality of work, approved by the central arts funding body in the country which assures the schools, youth organisations and other client groups with whom we work that we are a reputable organisation.

Challenge of Funding allocation

Of course, there are always more requests for funding than can be granted, however I am unconvinced that a three-yearly “free for all” covering all artforms is the best way to approach the decision making. Each art form has a strategy document which should form the basis of funding decisions but does not appear to be used in that way. It would be better to decide on a funding allocation per artform and allow the specialist art form officers to engage with their clients, and non-funded organisations who want to be part of the process and allocate funding on the basis of fulfilling the outcomes of the strategy.

Impact on other funding streams

As you will see in my letter below, the funding award to YDance this year will have the effect of removing other funding from a Trust Fund already committed to a project, and this will have a knock-on effect in the future as that Trust is unlikely to fund us again.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this evidence to the Committee and I look forward to further engagement on the wider issues of arts funding in the future.

Letter to Janet Archer

14th February 2018
Janet Archer
Chief Executive
Creative Scotland

Dear Janet,

Following the recent awards of Regular Funding for 2018-2021, and our meeting with Creative Scotland, I write to question why YDance (Scottish Youth Dance) was awarded only a standstill grant, despite being recommended for an increase of £30,000 per year in our assessment, supported by our the Creative Scotland official who was our main point of contact. This uplift was requested in order to enable YDance to continue the national Youth Dance support programme “YDance Routes”, which was established in 2011 and initially supported through Cashback for Creativity.

The assessment states that YDance “delivers strongly against most of the mandatory and optional criteria” and in relation to YDance Routes states that “There are good arguments to continue this work through RFO funding as it strongly addresses our Access, Place and Leadership ambitions as well as our Creative Learning and EDI themes. It has the potential to achieve national coverage whilst strengthening progression pathways outwith the formal education sector. There are probably no other existing Scottish dance companies that would have the capacity to deliver this kind of approach”.

The Creative Scotland official who was our main point of contact notes that “This unique strategic offer is further evidenced in other projects they deliver, such as their ‘Routes’ project. This is an annual 3-day event for youth dance groups from all over Scotland to come together. The young people have an opportunity to work with other choreographers, produce different work, perform their work to peers and for the youth dance leaders to receive training. This is not only a valuable support network for youth dance but also supports the development of skills and aspirations”.

Despite these outstanding recommendations, Creative Scotland decided to award a standstill grant of £550,000 over three years, stating that “The limited funding available to spend on the RFO network meant it was not possible to recommend Scottish Youth Dance at the level recommended by the assessing officer. Specifically, it was considered that there was insufficient evidence for an uplift to support the programme to which other sources of funding had been withdrawn”.

In response to that statement I would firstly point out that it was not the case that “other sources of funding were withdrawn” from YDance Routes. Cashback for Creativity began in 2011 as a targeted fund supporting dance and film for young people. Over the past 7 years it has evolved, and the criteria changed to directly target young people who are socially and financially disadvantaged, therefore YDance Routes no longer fits the criteria. YDance now runs a different project – “Take the Lead”, targeting young people in deprived areas and in HMYOI Polmont, which is supported through Cashback.

There seems therefore to be no real justification noted for the decision not to award an increase in our Regular Funding.

In 2017, we supported the performance platform element of YDance Routes – Destinations - from our own resources and then were given permission to apply for Open Project Funding to continue the programme in the current financial year, as a bridge to ensure continuity until we would be able to request that funding for the network be included in our Regular Funding award. The Open Project application was successful, and the programme has continued in 2017-18.

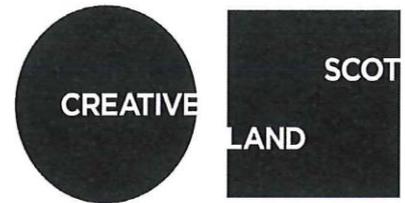
The reason given citing “limited funding available” is mystifying, as some other companies were given increased funding, including Indepen-dance, Barrowland Ballet, and Curious Seed. I find it difficult to understand why the national company for youth and children’s dance, which employs 14 core staff and freelancers, should be awarded less support than, for example, Bodysurf Scotland, which covers only the North East, or the Work Room, which has only 2 staff.

We would appreciate the opportunity for further dialogue with Creative Scotland to discuss the future of the YDance Routes programme. In addition to removing a support network from local youth dance groups all over Scotland, the lack of funding for Routes will also lead to YDance losing some or all of our annual £14,250 grant from the Leverhulme Trust, which provides bursaries for local groups to attend YDance Routes events (as well as Project Y), meaning that our standstill funding will actually reduce our resources overall.

Given that Creative Scotland has already reconsidered other funding decisions in the RFO process, YDance would request that Creative Scotland reconsider their initial decision. I would be available to meet with you to discuss this as soon as possible.

Yours,

Carolyn Lappin
Executive Director



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

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14 March 2018

Dear Carolyn,

Thank you for writing to me explaining your dissatisfaction with your RFO funding award level. While I do understand your frustration, I am afraid that our full budget for RFO 2018-21 is now committed following our final Board decisions to fund 121 organisations over this period.

Overall our RFO budget represents a standstill budget from the previous RFO period 2015-18, as the additional £6.6m provided by the Scottish Government has replaced the significant downturn in National Lottery income, rather than comprising an increase to our budget. You will understand that has meant we have had to make difficult decisions in many instances.

Please let me know if there is anything I can do to support your fundraising efforts elsewhere. I have written notes for others to support bids to trusts etc. and am happy to do the same for you, should you find it useful.

All best wishes,

Janet Archer
Chief Executive
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