

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Dance House Glasgow

Introduction

This submission from Dance House Glasgow is a copy of its complaint to the Chief Executive of Creative Scotland.¹

1 March 2018

Dear Janet

We are writing to you on behalf of Dance House Glasgow to express great disappointment that our status as a Regularly Funded Organisation with Creative Scotland has not been renewed for 2018 – 2021. Whilst we understand that Creative Scotland makes funding decisions based on a range of criteria we are writing to express grave concerns about the recent RFO assessment process. These concerns encompass advice we were given before submission, the lengthy delay before our outcome meeting as well as the decision itself.

Pre-application advice and guidance

In the first instance we would like to bring to your attention misleading pre-application advice given by Creative Scotland that brings into question your commitment to fair and due process. At a meeting on Friday 13th January 2017 at our office in The Briggait we were surprised to be advised against submitting an application for Regular Funding by Creative Scotland and actively encouraged to consider Open Project Funding. We were advised that if we did decide to apply, an overly ambitious application would be “swept off the table and not considered”. All of this was advised before anyone from Creative Scotland even had sight of our plans for 2018-2021. We are not aware of any other organisations being given similar guidance and feel we have been treated unequally and unfairly in this regard.

We were subsequently advised that any uplift we requested should be for core costs only and not project related. It is therefore frustrating to see so many significant uplifts for other organisations in our sector. Furthermore we were confused to receive criticism in our assessment for not including project costs for one of our major proposed projects when we had been specifically advised to frame any RFO specific uplift around core expenditure.

Factual inaccuracies in the assessment

We would also like to highlight a number of factual inaccuracies and speculative judgments in our assessment which evidences maladministration on the part of Creative Scotland.

¹ It should be noted that the references to individual members of staff at Creative Scotland have been changed so that the letter refers simply to Creative Scotland.

As raised in our email of 31 Jan 2018 to Creative Scotland, the Track Record section of our RFO funding assessment contains factual inaccuracies in relation to previous grants made by Creative Scotland to Dance House Glasgow. The assessment falsely claims that the company had not fulfilled our reporting obligations on 5 separate occasions and failed to claim a series of final grant instalments. As demonstrated and evidenced in our email at the time, our reporting and final grant instalments are all in order according to our records and it is therefore inaccurate for the assessment to bring into question our previous administrative capability and financial management. This misconception is cited again later in the overall assessment as a key weakness and implied as a contributing factor to our previous financial challenges. We are sure you'll agree it is unacceptable that inaccurate speculation has been allowed to form part of our assessment.

In respect of our overall assessment and outcome it would appear that internal monitoring issues and maladministration at Creative Scotland have had a direct negative impact on our score. We find the email response from Creative Scotland on 6 February 2018 explaining this away as a "glitch" in your systems that has not impacted our outcome to be completely unsatisfactory. This inaccuracy in our assessment has been seen and considered at every stage of the process that our application has gone through, including the reconsideration of our funding status at your emergency Board meeting. This is despite our repeat request on 1st February for these inaccuracies and our other concerns to be heard and considered in advance of that meeting (see paragraph below on follow up process). We would value clarification as to how this type of information and feedback is relayed to Senior Management and the Board of Creative Scotland. If these inaccuracies are not amended they remain on record and could impact any consideration for future funding of Dance House Glasgow.

Contradiction in assessment

We would also like to draw your attention to a significant contradiction present in the conclusions drawn by the specialist team regarding risk mitigation in relation to The Briggait Creation Centre.

Our initial assessment at officer level was recommended for standstill funding, rated 'Strong' in several areas, and despite the factual inaccuracies, scored very closely to that of organisations who were successful. The reason for **uplift** not being recommended was stated as (in relation to the Briggait Capital development not going ahead) "whilst this is less of a risk to current levels of operation, it does weaken the case for additional investment". As acknowledged by our assessor we clearly evidenced in our business plan that the demise of The Briggait Creation Centre was not a major risk to Dance House Glasgow at its current level of operation: "They have indicated in their SWOT that threats include the speed of the development of the centre; a failure to secure funding for it and a lack of dedicated space in the lead up to the opening. In their risk assessment, they state that they are not wholly reliant on the centre and that they are actively exploring other options for alternative spaces for the professional programme and classes (or part of them) in the short and long term".

We are therefore surprised that the specialist team contradicts this by citing "insufficient evidence of risk management in relation to the Briggait Development" as

the deciding factor to not recommend any funding to Dance House Glasgow. It is clearly evidenced in our Business Plan and acknowledged by the first assessor that the key risk to our operations is loss of regular funding from Creative Scotland **not** the realisation of The Briggait Creation.

We would highlight to you that we were advised Creative Scotland following the last RFO funding round 2015-18 that a key factor in the success of our application was our role in The Briggait partnership. Also this more recent application for 2018-21 was the **fourth** business plan we have submitted to Creative Scotland which anticipated the opening of the building during that business phase. As you will be aware, the collapse of the plans for the Creation Centre were entirely beyond our control and at the time of our RFO application, with three quarters of funding in place, evolved business model and visionary architectural plans, the realisation of the project was surer than it had ever been previously.

As an established member of the National Dance Network (NDN), Dance House Glasgow is the only organisation of its kind in the UK without its own studio base and indeed Glasgow is the only major City in the UK without a centre for dance, causing a critical gap in provision for the city. Over the past 20 years our organisation has operated as a 'dance house without walls' enlivening the urban canvas of Glasgow with our activities, however, the lack of a dedicated base for our work has also proved challenging.

In the 'Dance Sector Review' the lack of a dedicated centre for professionals/community in Glasgow and Dance House Glasgow's role within it, is highlighted multiple times as a key focus for dance in Scotland. Creative Scotland cited that the final evaluation stages of the Regular Funding Process would use this very same research to inform decisions. This u-turn in support for our organisation categorically calls into question the clarity around your decision making processes in line with your own strategic priorities. As you may recall, in a letter to you dated 14 December (5 days before the specialist dance team made the decision not to recommend our future funding), Annemarie O'Donnell, Chief Executive of Glasgow City Council re-affirmed their commitment to supporting Dance House Glasgow despite the news of the collapse of The Briggait Creation Centre development:

"This includes assistance with urgent short term accommodation needs and a renewed search for a sustainable home for the Creation Centre as envisaged. Please be assured the Council and all its services are committed to supporting the stated outputs and outcomes within the Creation Centre proposal which are reflected in the RFO applications currently under consideration. We would welcome a conversation about how we could work together to enable a sustainable future for the partner organisations".

We deeply regret that Creative Scotland does not appear to have taken up that conversation or attitude to this situation. Given the key aims specified in the Dance Sector review, our role in them, and current demand for high quality space in Glasgow still being an ongoing issue, we are surprised and disappointed that The Briggait Creation Centre has been used as a reason not to fund us, rather than an opportunity to work together towards solutions. This, combined with the significant investment of public money previously invested in the development of the project, leaves us bewildered and frustrated.

If Creative Scotland has decided that a dedicated centre for dance in Glasgow is no longer a priority or part of their wider strategy for sector development we would like to question what basis was this decision made and why they did not inform ourselves and other partners of this before the RFO application closing date.

As we consider our future and the vision and ambition with which we have contributed to Glasgow and the wider dance sector thus far, we continue to work with our “Briggait Dance Partners” YDance and Independance to realise the ambition for a home for dance. Glasgow Life, on behalf of Glasgow City Council recognise the value of this and have committed to working with us to see it realised.

Mixed messages and time wasting

The collapse of The Briggait Creation Centre plans in their current form was confirmed to the partners by WASPS on 12 December and on 19 December (which we now understand coincided with the Specialist Team decisions) we emailed Creative Scotland s on behalf of the dance partners to indicate our plans to remain to work together as partners towards solutions. We received a prompt response which requested that we meet in early January and we understood from the correspondence that the purpose of this meeting was to discuss the implications of this to our current business plans.

We arrived in Edinburgh for meeting on 16 January, having thoroughly prepared to discuss our plans for the future, and were promptly shut down and informed that we couldn't discuss our 2018-21 business plans in light of the sensitivity in relation to timing of RFO outcomes. Following the meeting we were confused as to its purpose and left with a strong impression that our RFO outcome had been unsuccessful.

We suggest that it was inappropriate that this meeting was convened and as no other Briggait partners were asked to attend, it once again demonstrates unequal treatment towards Dance House Glasgow.

Follow up process and post result meeting

While we fully understand that there are time constraints around meeting with all the organisations involved in the RFO process, we were most disappointed we had to wait for three and a half weeks for our follow up meeting. Given the nature our outcome and the need to make transitionary arrangements we fail to understand why priority was given to organisations that had successful outcomes (some of whom are based in the same building as us and met with the same Creative Scotland team).

Within this time frame there were two Creative Scotland board meetings at which point 5 organisations had their funding reinstated, yet, we still had no opportunity to air serious issues in the process with the executive management team. We would emphasise that when the 16th Feb was offered as the first possible meeting date we formally stated that Dance House Glasgow wished our concerns around the assessment process to be heard in advance of the emergency board meeting.

We received a formal email from Creative Scotland on 6th February informing us that our application had been reconsidered at the emergency Board meeting. It was wholly inappropriate for our application to be reconsidered without informing us of

this in advance, advising us on what basis it was being reconsidered or giving us the opportunity to raise all the issues detailed above. We are appalled that Creative Scotland's Board considered our application with factual inaccuracies still present, despite Senior Management being aware of these. We were shocked that other organisations had been reinstated to the network at this meeting under those circumstances.

Due to the nature of our concerns about the RFO process and the collapse of the capital project not being publicly announced by WASPS, we have thus far been quieter than other unsuccessful RFO applicants, however, we do have considerable support from the sector, partners and the wider public, and MSPs are aware of our position.

We do not feel that we have been treated equally or fairly before, during or after the RFO process and have lost confidence in the rigour, integrity and transparency of Creative Scotland's procedures as a result. In light of the issues highlighted above we would appreciate a fuller explanation of the strategy behind the decision not to fund us and for our application to be reconsidered at Board level with these concerns in mind in order to be treated equally to other organisations who were in this position.

Last year we worked with 3,000 community participants with regular weekly arts activity across 8 constituencies offering transformative cultural activity, talent development and training as well as pioneering models of participatory activity. We provided freelance employment for 46 artists in the delivery of these programmes and engaged 60 artists from across Scotland with professional development opportunities. We believe that all those people as well as the Dance House Glasgow team who consist of some of Scotland's most dedicated artists and arts workers deserve fair treatment and consideration.

We would be very happy to provide any further information or to meet for a conversation about all of this at any time and look forward to receiving your response as we continue to work towards defining our future.

Yours sincerely

Audrey McIntosh (Chair)

Ailsa-Mary Gold (Artistic Director/Chief Executive)