

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Dunedin Consort

Background

Dunedin Consort was founded in 1995 and under the musical direction of John Butt, Gardiner Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow, it has established itself as Scotland's leading Baroque ensemble. None of the National Companies or the other music organisations supported by Creative Scotland has received the same level of critical attainment, particularly for its recorded output, or enjoys the same international touring profile. Dunedin Consort has two Gramophone awards, a Grammy nomination, 3 BBC building a library recommendations and two Scottish Album of the Year nominations to its name. It has a residency at London's Wigmore Hall, where all its performances to date have sold out, and has concerts scheduled until 2021. It performed at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2016 and 2017, with a further appearance scheduled for the current year, and it gave its acclaimed historically informed performance of Bach's John Passion to an admiring and engaged BBC Proms audience in the Albert Hall in August 2017, a performance that was later televised by the BBC (this performance can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPZC5OJhKSU).

In addition to performances across Scotland and elsewhere in the UK, Dunedin Consort has performed in Canada, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Israel, France, Mexico, Netherlands, Malta, Norway and Poland, with planned visits to the United States, Bolivia and Brazil over the coming years.

Creative Scotland Regular Funding

Over the past three years Dunedin has delivered everything that was required of it under the terms of the RFO agreement, and the support from Creative Scotland (at the level of £100k per annum) has been a major contributor to this success.

Creative Scotland funding currently accounts for 20% of our annual turnover (where other music organisations receive support between 46-74%), representing exceptional value for public money.

The application for renewal of Regular Funding was submitted in March 2017 and Dunedin was informed at the end of January 2018 of the decision to terminate support. A robust challenge was made, with strong input from Dunedin's friends and supporters across the world, and the decision was reversed.

The arguments deployed can be seen on the Dunedin website (www.dunedin-consort.org.uk/news/points-made-in-representations-to-ceo-creative-scotland/) and there is no need to repeat them here. But two points must be stressed:

- Dunedin's work is focussed on excellence of performance, combined with the originality and freshness that comes from research on performance practice. The support from Creative Scotland over the past three years has enabled Scottish audiences to benefit from and enjoy this. A strong home base is essential.

- Dunedin’s work outwith Scotland is undertaken on a fee earning basis and the recordings are the subject of specific fundraising, so the loss of Creative Scotland funding, which supports our performances and educational work in Scotland, would have had a very direct and differential adverse impact on Scottish audiences.

Observations on the Creative Scotland Regular funding process

The process lacked clarity. Creative Scotland gave instructions on what it was looking for in the application, such as the requirements to align with the ambitions, connecting themes and the Scottish Government expectations on Programme for Government, enterprise and skills, the economy, screen, partnership working, community empowerment, educational attainment, themed years, international strategy and corporate expectations of NDPBs. However, as acknowledged by the interim Chair, Ben Thomson, the system is very complicated and the strategy could be a lot simpler and clearer (see CTEER Official Report of 22 February 2018, Col 24 and Cols 35-36). Moreover, the criteria by which recommended applications were ultimately prioritised was made were entirely unclear.

Where did sheer excellence, innovation and creativity come in? At our briefing meeting we were told that “excellence could not trump everything else”. Excellence can be found right across the range of performance and other creative disciplines. But it sits at the other end of the spectrum from the work of encouraging participation among those not yet engaged with the arts. Whilst Dunedin Consort undertakes work in this area and our EDI plans were assessed as strong, policy should allow room for both ends of the spectrum to be supported, and the policy framework for that needs to be articulated.

The process lacked transparency. There was no feedback during the process or any attempt to seek clarification of points of doubt. It would surely be of benefit to all if there had been some discussion to help work out what was on the right lines and what was not, and also to give some signals to prepare the ground for the eventual decisions.

Since the last funding round, priorities for the music sector appear to have shifted. The rationale for this shift, the expected outcomes and discussions on how it would impact funded organisations have not been communicated to the sector. These include the desire to bring more non-classical music into the RFO portfolio and the very strong emphasis on outreach work and EDI provisions, over and above all else, and a further emphasis on supporting sectoral development agencies.

A two-stage application process would have been welcomed. This would have alleviated some of the problems outlined above and avoided unnecessary, lengthy work preparing applications which had no chance of being funded from the outset.

The process seemed arbitrary and unfair. In the case of Dunedin, despite a meeting very soon after the decision was communicated (for which we were grateful) there was no credible reason that could be given for the decision – which was to override the expert recommendation that was clearly backed by strong assessments of the application that were made available to Dunedin. And after the subsequent volte-face, there was still no credible explanation. If more attention had been paid to clarity and transparency, that could have been avoided.

The process lacks external, possibly international, validation. Contrast the Research Excellence Framework for universities, with international scrutiny and assessment. Scotland need not be afraid of this, given the many elements of world class achievement it possesses in the creative domain. A process that looks outward could bring enhanced authority to the case for funding the creative disciplines and give enhanced credibility to the decisions taken.

The process failed to recognise the practical realities of running a performance organisation. There was a long wait, a late decision with no warning, and a completely inadequate offer of transitional support. In short, there was no sign that Creative Scotland recognised the world in which its clients operate, with devising programmes, booking of performers and venues etc. That does not give confidence.

Conclusion

Board members and management of Dunedin would be happy to elaborate on these points in writing or in oral evidence if the Committee would find this helpful.

All involved with Dunedin Consort feel proud to represent Scotland on such a broad international stage and feel justly privileged to be representative of the wide artistic achievements that Scotland has engendered.