

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Eden Court

Making art is challenging, complex and fraught with difficult decisions. It often leads to great successes - sometimes it doesn't. Funding it is no different.

When art succeeds we are accustomed to celebrating it and when it doesn't, as a sector, we are increasingly good at being respectful to the artists who made it; polite; finding aspects of the work to say we enjoyed.

With funding it appears, perhaps, not so much.

When I arrived in Scotland as Chief Executive of Eden Court there was quite a storm brewing. A week before arriving Creative Scotland announced an annual £200,000 cut to our regular funding. A week later the Highland Council also cut our funding by the same figure. Over the next three years we therefore face a budget deficit of £1.2m. That's a huge amount of money for an organisation that succeeds on a fine balance of public sector investment (I prefer that term to subsidy), ticket income, fundraised income and income from our cafes, bars and hires.

Were we shocked, upset, hurt and exhausted by the decisions? You bet. Did they feel confusing; unexpected and were we panicked? Yes.

We decided, initially, not to proverbially scream from the roof of our beautiful building on the banks of the River Ness. Why? Because we needed to go on a journey of trying to understand why these decisions had been made. We took our shoes off and tried to put on the shoes of our colleagues (yes, we think it's important we call them colleagues) at Creative Scotland and the Highland Council. I'm not going to publicly share the ins-and-out of the decisions that were made about us. What I will say though is that we have accepted most of them. There were judgements made in our assessments that were based on factual inaccuracies. We have shared these with our funders and they have apologised.

Regular, multi-year funding is vital to the sustainability and creative vitality of the arts and culture sector in Scotland. Myself, my trustees and my team understand that balancing the regularly funded portfolio is deeply complex: by art-form; by geography and by size and scale of work produced. We understand that these sort of processes can't satisfy all applicants; that there will be hurt (remember, we are feeling it) and there will be relief and joy. I personally really feel for those organisations who joined the portfolio in this round. Their good news and reward got somewhat lost in the anger and the debate.

The relationship between artists and audiences is a very human experience and we must remember that Creative Scotland is full of humans too. It isn't a faceless organisation that makes funding decisions based on a piece of software with a complex algorithm. The Creative Scotland colleagues I have met are deeply insightful about their art forms; passionate about enabling creatively and making artists dreams a reality. They understand the responsibly they hold in the same way

that I understand the responsibility I hold for the artists I programme and the audiences I serve. I think Creative Scotland could do more to feel more human and to remind us they are a collection of people passionate about art.

Yes, things went wrong in the RFO funding round. Lessons need to be learnt. I'm pretty confident many have been learnt already.

The best teams learn from how other people and teams perceive them. They listen, support each other; brush themselves down and move on - together. That's what we're doing at Eden Court. We're all feeling pretty confident we will become stronger and more resilient from the challenges thrown in our path. I hope this is what now happens between Creative Scotland and the artists and organisations they support. Now is not the time for more division.

Some of the best theatrical collaborations are when the alchemy of direction, performance, design, sound and light come together in harmony. We need to strive for a similar harmony between artists, organisations and our funders. If we can do that then the cultural sector in Scotland can continue to thrive. The longer we fight, the longer we are divided, the longer we are not delivering our shared aim: to deliver to the people of Scotland a world-class programme of arts and culture that delights and that thrills.