

## **Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee**

### **Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21**

#### **Written submission from Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society**

##### **The process of applying for Regular Funding for the 2018-21 period and your experience of that application process**

Without going into the full detail of what was a frustrating experience for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, our main recommendations would be as follows:

If decisions regarding the RFO funds are being made against a clearly defined strategy, then all applicants should be made clear on what that strategy is and the priorities therein. One of the lines of justification of the new entrants to RFO was that CS wanted to support more network or umbrella organisations, this makes it harder to understand how one of the best nationally and internationally networked organisations in the country didn't fit.

In our case it now seems clear that it was pre-determined that we would not be successful in RFO funds and would be directed towards other CS channels of support. Clarity on that in the first instance would have saved time, effort and relationship and reputational damage.

A much better level of discussion/communication with organisations in advance, especially where there is already an inclination that they are unlikely to be successful.

We would have preferred a discussion prior to the funding round in order to better understand the advice from Creative Scotland as to whether to apply under project funds or as a strategic partner. This would have been fair treatment of an established and valued organisation and would have stopped time wasting and negative press on both sides.

The physical application process for Regular Funding is time-consuming and overly generic. The form has not developed over the years and proves frustrating to complete; it very much lends itself almost exclusively to traditional arts organisations, theatres and producing companies which are categories we do not easily fit into. Given the fundamental importance of festival's to Scotland's creative landscape, it seems odd that the form does not cater easily for the likes of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society.

As was the case with many of the organisations who lost funding, we had a high-scoring assessment and were actually recommended for RFO funding, only to be ultimately unsuccessful. It would therefore be useful to understand the parameters at which successful applications are judged to come to a decision not to award funding.

Following the decision, we had to wait two weeks to meet with Creative Scotland and receive any feedback on our application. Within that time, our application was

reassessed without our knowledge or additional input, and without understanding the strategic priorities or additional criteria that the additional money was addressing.

It is unacceptable not to have clear processes around reversing decisions. For additional money to appear and be distributed on the basis of those that shout the loudest, is not good. As Creative Scotland had further funding to distribute, we should have had a clear understanding of the priorities for these funds.

To receive a second rejection was surprising and insulting, particularly as the application was assessed for a second time without our knowledge. We were given no understanding of why this had been done or that there was indeed an additional £2.6 million funding pot that was being distributed. It seems, again, that this decision pre-determined as there was no communication around the parameters for reassessment.

## **Communication**

It is essential that organisations (of national/international scale) have an opportunity to work with Creative Scotland to agree constructive messaging. There was no opportunity to consider the communication or messaging.

As a result, decisions were communicated purely as a list of those successful, and included no context, rationale or understanding as to how the 2019-21 RFO funding portfolio sit together.

Having worked closely with Creative Scotland for many years, the way the message landed felt incredibly impersonal. At the point of dealing with only 50 groups, it should have been personalised and not generic, particularly given the gravity of some of the decisions made.

The Fringe Society had to solely deal with the fallout from how the message landed (ie. Edinburgh Fringe 100% funding cut by national arts agency), this was a time-consuming process to field enquiries from stakeholders and the media, exercise damage limitation and redress misinformation. The Fringe has a global reputation and so the reputational risk for us was high impact.

## **The importance of Regular Funding to you or your organisation**

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is the biggest arts festival in world, and under-pinning this international, relevant and inclusive festival is the Fringe Society, an organisation which works consistently to support artists who want to play a part in this valuable platform. The Fringe has sat at the heart of the arts and festival landscape in Edinburgh for over 70 years and is unrivalled in its contribution to Edinburgh as a cultural capital.

We support venues, artists, street performers, arts professionals, venues, cultural organisations, other festivals, Creative Scotland, City of Edinburgh Council and many, many more through the work we do. Given the impact of the Fringe on the cultural landscape locally, nationally and internationally, it is difficult to comprehend why we would not be supported by Creative Scotland, particularly given that the

reputation of Fringe is globally recognisable brand with a strong international reputation.

In light of this global impact and reputation, we believe there is significant value in the Fringe Society becoming a core creative partner for Creative Scotland, rather than a more conventional funder/funded relationship.

### **The challenges that Creative Scotland faces in supporting individual artists and organisations from different areas of the arts**

In times of funding cuts, there will always be challenges. From the perspective of the Fringe Society, having met with Creative Scotland in the weeks following the decisions - it was clear their understanding of our work required focus and understanding, and we would welcome more regular opportunities to fully brief CS on the current nature of our work.

### **The extent to which you consider Regular Funding supports the arts and creative organisations throughout Scotland**

Regular Funding has the potential to be a supportive fund for the arts in Scotland, however if there is a strategy or a rationale that decision-makers are working from to make their funding decisions it needs to be clear and open

It seems at odds that at the same time as saying they want to fund more artistic networks, Creative Scotland have decided not to fund one of the most nationally and globally networked organisations in the whole portfolio. In 2017 alone, there were 814 organisations from Scotland performing at the Fringe – 24% of the programme. The opportunities the Fringe Society offer for artists whilst in Edinburgh in August include 100s of free events at Fringe Central, our performers hub which cover everything from funding and marketing, to access and personal development. It would be valuable for Creative Scotland to consider the reach of the Fringe Society's network and how they could connect with this through an established partnership.

The funding we have received in the past has been small but leverages a massive return on investment for Creative Scotland and gives them brand association with the biggest arts festival in the world. It feels like a double own goal to neither fund us nor look to agree a communication strategy.

### **The impact of awards for Regular Funding on other funding streams**

This is something that feels like a huge unknown to the arts community. It has not been made clear where the additional £2.6 million funding pot came from and indeed the parameters of the new touring fund that has emerged in the RFO funding decision fallout.

### **Any other issues that you consider are relevant**

The relationships between national arts organisations and Creative Scotland needs to be much more porous, the information communicated needs to be transparent and up to date. Regular direct briefings between senior management teams need to take place, otherwise knowledge will be assumed and out of date.

Relationships need to move to a position of mutual respect and trust. We could have agreed an approach and communications strategy jointly, rather than a them and us scenario emerging. Open-ness and transparency are key to positive relationships moving forward.

It feels like a good time for Creative Scotland to reassess timescales, processes and the overall communication approach for arts funding in Scotland, and to present that strategy to the arts community in Scotland. As an organisation, Creative Scotland need to work towards being porous, mutual, respectful, and outward-facing.