

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Ginnie Atkinson

I am currently the Chair of an organisation which recently did achieve RFO status. The organisation did not achieve RF in the first round 3-4 years ago which provided an interesting perspective on Open Project funding and survival in that context.

However, this is not my only perspective; I made a successful application in 2014 on behalf of another organisation where I was Interim Director; I have been involved with acquiring funding for arts organisations for over 20 years having been CEO of the Edinburgh Int Film Festival (15 years 1995-2010), a Board Member of two other organisations who went through the process in the first round – one successful, one not; and a long time ago I was on a major theatre Board before this iteration of funding existed (but ‘regular’ funding was available in other ways).

The arts funding organisations (SAC, CS) have never been popular – in other words as long as I can remember there has often been a big fuss about how decisions are made... : *is there peer review?, what is the rationale that caused x to get funding and y not to.*

Something to bear in mind is that in the past there were what might be called mini sector eruptions when an organisation failed to get funding and it was considered unjust but there were various factors in play then that mitigated full blown ‘scandale’ such as recently:

- the greater number of routes to funding that existed which meant that the process for regular funding (usually 2 or 3 years) was much quicker and there were other avenues to pursue if that failed
- there seemed to be fewer arts organisations / practitioners
- the funding seemed less restrictive – nowadays RFO is the *only* way that overheads can be covered for example - it is now ‘all or nothing’ for 3 years which if you are a building based organisation means near death due to the restrictions of Open Project Funding
- for a while corporate sponsorship was a real option in terms of acquiring significant chunks of money for 3 years or more (this finished with the crash of 2007)
- and the non existence of social media which enables the fomenting of discontent.

So the big question becomes How does Creative Scotland decide who to exclude, given that organisations *have been deemed to deserve funding on the internal assessment?*

This is where transparency of criteria and decision making is crucial.

There is great store set on the matrix of criteria in the application and this must be the reference point?

In the recent debacle, Creative Scotland seemed afraid of just saying – “this is why we made these decisions, this is our rationale and the level of funding we have to disperse only allows for X and this is how we made these decisions”.

Having an infrastructure that supports this outcome – towards trusted decisions that officers can also support in their sectors – is essential.

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

The process was clear and sensible in what we were asked to provide.

The importance of Regular Funding to you or your organisation.

Absolutely crucial to enable all types of strategic and business planning *and* actualisation of an artistic programme.

You can't stagger from one set of restricted project funding to another (which is what Open Project Funding offers) and remain at the cutting edge of high end delivery that is demanded in order to achieve funding.

For organisations with a small infrastructure and permanent staff, rent to pay, equipment to buy, etc. etc. on a regular basis, constantly being on the precipice and having to use time to make applications is counter productive.

Given the all or nothing scenario in terms of organisations with overheads (rent, permanent staff salaries, requirement to build reserves, capital requirements - equipment renewal etc.) if there is not enough funding to go round all the deserving applicants the option is for CS to advise organisations to apply for one-off Open Project Funding (which becomes an annual process while organisations wait for the chance to apply for RFO again); this *explicitly forbids the inclusion of O/H* in the budget beyond that which can be shoehorned in to the category of supporting The Project (which is only going to be a small percentage of the actual organisation's need).

This is a real stumbling block to the present 'two routes to funding'. When I raised this at an open meeting the reaction I got from Creative Scotland 'a puzzled look' i.e. was clearly one of not understanding the point, and this was concerning.

Organisations that have a history (not moribundity) of great delivery should not feel they are on a precipice every round of Regular Funding – just because there is not enough funding available TO Creative Scotland. They should have a reasonable expectation of getting funding.

The challenge that Creative Scotland faces in allocating funding when applications for funding exceed the funds available.

Yes this is real but if they use their criteria and can *believe in and stand by their rationale for their choices* then that could work.

Basically the Scottish Government needs to consider increasing the amount of money CS gets because the Culture budget is such a small percentage of the whole and the benefits of culture and the arts etc. to the nation are fundamental and all encompassing. See Culture Counts evidential research and look at other nations etc. There is endless evidence for the value of culture especially in place of poverty, social deprivation etc.

Suggestion: a special fund is given to CS to disperse for intervention in such areas. This happened in the 70's under the banner of 'community arts' and communities and lives were transformed.

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

I don't know about artists but I do know about organisations. Transparency and confident communication about decision making is essential.

Creative Scotland needs to have a strong belief in their decision and choices. For that to happen they need to use their own matrix and refer to it in communications about their selection.

The peer group input needs sufficient turnover and 'mix' in the group to avoid accusations of cronyism.. and possibly non-rival representation.

It seems like the idea of the touring fund was a mistake. Regular Funding needs to be universally accessible for all the sectors' organisations. Or rather it shouldn't be *sectors* that are cherry picked to provide a solution to the lack of funds.

Suggestion: Routes to funding. Why not have a separate fund for organisations that provide sector network support and put them on a different cycle so the assessment process is more manageable?

They do a different job to arts organisations and individuals/ projects and it would be useful to see the provision for that function on its own across Scotland.

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

I think RF is a very good thing and seems to be well spread across the nation. There's just not enough of it.

The impact of awards for Regular Funding on other funding streams.

See all of the above about

- the finite pot
 - the limited number of funding streams per se
 - the restrictions on O/H in Open Project Funding
 - the management of expectations
 - the transparency re rationale for decisions
- Any other issues that you consider are relevant.

The main issues in the last debacle seem to be :

1. Tunnel vision:

CS seemed to get tunnel vision and not appreciate how the invention of the theatre touring fund was a. a red herring and b. would need to be explained to the touring theatre community *before* denying them RFO. A calm external perspective at a key juncture might help – is this the job of the Board?

2. Communication (see above) and also a question –

Why is CS so afraid of stating the facts about the rationale for decisions made?

The lack of robust defence of their decisions indicated a lack of understanding of the cultural sector – as in a confident articulation of “Why we did what we did”.

On the other side...I noticed that Joan McAlpine who was the Convenor of the Committee when Creative Scotland gave evidence, posted on Facebook suggesting condemnation of Creative Scotland when SYT announcing closure.

This seemed to indicate a prejudice in the middle of a process, expressed in the public domain.

I think this is completely unacceptable and borderline unethical. It's highly questionable that someone in public office should express/ imply a prejudice - and worse, doesn't seem to know where the lines are in the first place.

Are MSPs allowed to comment on Government business on social media when they are actually involved in a process?

These are my personal views in the context of my experience described at the beginning.