

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Glas(s) Performance

This submission is a copy of a letter of complaint submitted to Creative Scotland¹

Re: letter of complaint

Dear Creative Scotland

Following our meeting with Creative Scotland officials on Friday 9th March 2018 we were advised to submit a formal complaint to Creative Scotland about our recent experience of the process of applying for RFO funding as well as experiences we have had to date with the Open Fund.

For the purposes of clarity we have tried to be concise and outlined our key points in turn below:

The poor quality of feedback

1. The feedback we received is inconsistent in its framing of our company name. In the one document we are referred to in the following incorrect ways:

Glass Performance (no brackets)/ Glass Productions /Glass Projects

- RFO Feedback 2018

2. There is a fundamental misunderstanding of the company genesis and narrative. The feedback we received states:

Glass Performance was established in 2004 in Glasgow. The company grew from a project, Junction 25, a collective of young performers based at the Tramway.

- RFO Feedback Page 1, 2018

This is not true and is not featured as a narrative anywhere in our business plan or application form.

It also states:

The success of Junction 25 propelled Glas(s) Performance to establish itself as a company with a 'participatory arts practice' approach to theatre making. RFO feedback Page 1

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 or the 'assessor'.

This is not true and is not featured as a narrative anywhere in our business plan or application form.

3. We are confused about having been given 'Satisfactory' on Creative Learning when we are currently on CS website as an example of best practice in this area. We feel this gives us mixed messages and makes it feel difficult to identify areas for development.

A misunderstanding of the relationship between Junction 25 - Glas(s) Performance and Tramway

Our application is very clear that although Junction 25 is one of the major projects we produce, our RFO bid was for the work of Glas(s) Performance and not Junction 25.

The RFO assessment we received refers to the work of Junction 25 above any of the other projects we propose which are arguably larger and involve more partners – some of which get a passing reference and suggests a lack of clarity in planning regardless of the fact we have supplied letters of agreement.

Junction 25 project remains its main signature work in Scotland and perhaps its benchmark for this proposal.

- RFO feedback Page 3

A significant aspect of the work programme is the reprisal of Junction 25 across the three years of funding

- RFO feedback Page 2

Also, after a series of conversations with Tramway and Creative Scotland it was decided at the point of RFO planning to transfer all core costs of Junction 25 to Tramway's RFO as co-producer. This it felt would clarify the ask of Glas(s) Performance for support with a separate portfolio of work. This is also very clear in the budget and narrative.

All core project costs for Junction25@Tramway have been requested through Tramway's RFO application as discussed with Creative Scotland. Glas(s) Performance will then be commissioned to deliver Junction 25@Tramway and this is referenced as income across our 3 year budgets.

- Glas(s) Performance, Budget Narrative (Appendices)

We feel that this demonstrates a lack of communication and joined-up thinking within Creative Scotland and makes it very difficult for us as a small company trying to progress and plan a variety of projects.

Creative Scotland evidencing negative views on our art form

We wanted to express some concern about we feel to be some worrying comment made by assessors about participatory or socially engaged art as a practice and indicates a bias in terms of form in theatre.

The material demonstrates that the company wishes to deepen its practice and in so doing give both intellectual and theoretical validation to the form of theatre it practices in Scotland. Overall, the programme is reasonably curious. While it is consistent with the type and form of practice associated with the applicant, its overall innovation is limited, as tends to be the case with applied theatre forms.

- RFO Feedback Page 16

The success of their work seems to depend more on relationships – with subjects/targets and hosts than the work's inhaled artistic quality or innovation

- RFO Feedback Page 27

Concept pieces can be artistically mediocre, however the central focus is on the experiences of the participants.

- RFO Feedback Page 22

The last time we applied for RFO (2015-18) we raised a similar issue about the quality of feedback from Creative Scotland. At this time we outlined our concern that it felt that assessors had not taken the time to understand what we do and that specific comments made on our assessment were not accurate. At this time, we had a long and detailed conversation with Creative Scotland assured us of our value in the sector and that such analysis of a 'lack of innovation' in our work would not be repeated.

We also do not refer to our company as 'participatory theatre' in our business plan or application at any stage and yet it is continuously referred to as such in our feedback.

The issue of touring the concept

One of the key challenges we face as a company is touring work more widely due to the fact that we often work with inter-generational casts who are sometimes not able to travel for long periods. As a result we have wanted to develop a new model that allowed us to make a show in one location and then tour the concept to other places and in doing so engage with new, local casts to provide content.

We have given robust and detailed reasons why this model has worked for other organisations that are critically recognised internationally: Mammalian Diving Reflex, Quarantine, Rimini Protocol and yet this is something that is to be repeatedly questioned as a valuable prospect through our assessment.

The success of their work seems to depend more on relationships – with subjects/targets and hosts than the work's inhaled artistic quality or innovation. Every work will require a different architecture of artistic, learning and preparatory collaboration for it to take off successfully in the first place. This is what makes the sustainability of the model of practice difficult within the RFO regime. In addition, there are the following unresolved issues within the application

- RFO Feedback, Page 16

This feedback was also given to us in our 2014 assessment for RFO from the same assessor and again when we have tried to develop our ambition (and expertise in this area) through Open Fund:

While your project was considered artistically promising, the description of the project as a touring work does not appear justified given the separate productions in each venue. Your application would have been stronger if these structural issues had been addressed and the methodology and connectedness of the project expressed with further clarity.

- Open Fund Feedback 2017 (over 15k)

This is all doubly confusing given the fact we have just been awarded funding from Made in Scotland with the proposal to tour OLD BOY as an international touring work.

Ongoing difficulties with Open Fund

Both in 2014 and in 2018 our RFO final assessment suggested that Open Fund would be a better fit in order to grow our organisation.

Overall, the case put forward is strong in respect of the need to secure the roles/posts of the joint-artistic directors. While reasonable, there is no reason to suggest that project funding cannot support the company's work. It is suggested that its current operational methodology will be more suitable to Open Fund.

- RFO Feedback Page 20

In our business plan we clearly state all the reasons why in order for our organisation to reach its potential we need a supported infrastructure.

However - evidence shows that we are not being supported to increase our ambition or provide any infrastructure through Open Fund.

The following examples outline the ongoing issues we have had through a number of different projects. An example of this can be found in the case study of Old Boy supplied (below).

Old Boy:

In January 2017, we submitted an application to tour a concept of a show called 'Old Boy' to Scottish venues working in partnership with each venue to work with local families to produce a different version of the same show. On 24th April 2017, we heard that we hadn't received the funding in this email it states:

You are able to reapply for Open Project Funding once more for this project. Please note however that if you choose to reapply, you should address any issues identified above in your re-application.

To help with this if you have any questions regarding our decision please contact the assessor who assessed your application. They will be happy to discuss the reasons your application was unsuccessful in more detail.

- Open Fund Feedback, January 2017

On the 26th April 2017, we emailed the assessor to requested a meeting to discuss our feedback before we submitted another application. They did not reply. We then emailed back on 5th May to which we did receive a reply but then no other replies to any of our subsequent attempts to contact them help and advice.

We then submitted an application to the Open Project fund under 15K on May 7th, 2017 to enable us to try and pull together one version of the show in time for the Luminate Festival 2017. On the 28th June 2017 we contacted CS to enquire was to when we might hear about the decision and were told that they could not find it in the system. We later received an email back saying that our application had not been processed due to 'a human oversight'.

We have now had an opportunity to look into this issue, and unfortunately, discovered that due to human oversight the application material has not been fully processed and you were not notified at the time of application of issues that required to be amended within the submission documentation in order to proceed to the next stage. This means that your application has not been assessed.

- E mail from CS, June 2017

The application was then processed and we then received confirmation of funding asked for on the 13th July 2017 although we were not granted the full amount. Our budgets are always fairly calculated and are not inflated in any way. The timing of this late result and the fact we are still expected to pay artists properly meant we had unexpected deficit in the financing of the project at a late stage. It also left us feeling like we were receiving mixed messages for Creative Scotland.

We invited the assessor to come and see the show so that we could discuss the idea of the concept touring with the assessor but received no response to that email.

Aside from this example we have experienced issues with other projects; late payments (4 weeks late - May/June 2017), applications rejected because of 'missing information' that had in fact be included (March 2017) and lateness of responses.

Through this time we have found Open Fund cryptic and essentially a process of 'chance'. We appreciate that this might not how it works for you in practice but feel it important to acknowledge that this is the reputation it has among artists on the ground. The criteria for assessment is unclear and any strategy or priority remains invisible.

In conversations with other organisations we have also been advised that we should 'never expect to get it the first time it goes in' and that is really down to luck as to other projects applying at the same time. In this way, small companies like ours are often going up against larger organisations and Festivals.

No Lead Officer

As a company we have been working professionally in Scottish theatre for 14 years. During this time, we have had a number of significant successes with a number of awards, critical press, consistently high engagement figures and high level partnerships. In these ways we feel we have contributed a great deal to the sector as a whole and to the ongoing arts ecology. However for saying we have been working consistently and securing funding for this time we have never been assigned a lead officer or given any formalised support system by Creative Scotland.

In 2013 we received £250,000 for the award winning Albert Drive project which we Co- produced with Tramway. The Officer assigned to this was responsible for the 'First in a Lifetime Fund' and has since left CS.

Over the years we have also had support from some individual officials within Creative Scotland for various projects but no-one was assigned to us as our lead officer.

The situation we are in now that since 2015 we cannot achieve over £15k funding for any of our projects and although we have tried to engage with the assessor and and invite the assessor to see our work the assessor does not engage with us.

As we are sure you appreciate, applying for funding is a huge undertaking. It requires a massive amount of investment, resource and planning and this can be a real strain on a small artist-led organisation without the security of a sustainable funding structure. We put a huge amount of time and effort into presenting a case of a high quality and to outline our ideas in a researched and considered way. We do not expect to be successful in all of our applications and understand that there is a finite pot of money to support a dynamic arts scene in Scotland. However, we do expect a quality and transparent process of feedback and evidence of due care and attention taken especially given the significant waiting times between application and result.

Given the poor quality of the document we have just received and in light of these continuous issues we feel we have experienced through the administration of Creative Scotland we now feel moved to express our concern about the quality of these processes and the lack of care shown around the experience of smaller organisations with no operational infrastructure. It feels difficult to see how we can progress and we would welcome some formal correspondence with CS about next steps.

We are left thoroughly disappointed and devalued by these processes and feel our concerns require further discussion at sector level.

Yours Sincerely

Jess Thorpe and Tashi Gore
Co Artistic Directors
Glas(s) Performance/Junction 25