

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Imagine

Imagine promotes, develops and celebrates theatre and dance for young audiences in Scotland and produces the Edinburgh International Children's Festival. Imagine is 29 years old and has been consistently supported by Creative Scotland. In this round of funding Imagine was successful, receiving standstill funding of £365,000 per year for three years. As a festival producer, committed to including the best of Scottish work on the international platform of the Children's Festival, a stable children's theatre sector is vital to our success. It goes without saying that the children's sector welcomed the reversal of the decisions in terms of Catherine Wheels and Visible Fictions, but it highlighted an issue that goes deeper and is more complex than a case of process and systems. The issue is how we want to value children in Scotland and provide high-quality, artistically rich opportunities for them to experience theatre as an audience member.

- Scottish theatre for children and young people is a Scottish success story

Scottish theatre for children and young people is respected around the world. This is why there was such a strong and immediate response to the January decisions from venues, professionals and audience members from Scotland, the rest of the UK and internationally. Scottish theatre for young audiences tours the world as well as the length and breadth of Scotland and is valued. Sustained multi-year funding has been instrumental in creating this success story. As well as giving a secure base to develop long term plans and partnerships, RFO has a status. When other countries look at the most "important" companies in Scotland they look at the list of RFOs. Removing theatre for young audiences from the RFO network, sent a message to the national and international arts world that children's theatre is no longer valued in Scotland.

- Children's Theatre Companies have a wide geographic reach in Scotland

As well as touring extensively and successfully internationally, Scottish children's theatre has a history of touring high quality theatre throughout Scotland, reaching communities from the most isolated island communities to urban areas of deprivations. Children's theatre is flexible enough to perform in a variety of spaces from school halls, to community centres to conventional theatres, meaning the work can be seen by every community in Scotland.

- The child as audience member is as important as the child as participant

We all want children in Scotland to have the very best childhood. This includes having the opportunity to experience theatre as an audience member. It is not only a valuable experience for a child, it also says that we, as a nation, value our children enough to give them theatre that is professionally crafted and appropriate to their age and stage of development. There is a lack provision of opportunities for children as audience members in Scotland. Creative Scotland stated that 83% of RFOs have

programmes for young people but it is unclear what a “programme” is – it could be anything from a one-off workshop to running a nation-wide dance project. However, these are all opportunities for participation, not being an audience member. Denmark has a similar size and population to Scotland. They have over 60 full-time regularly funded theatre companies for children and young people, we have three – and if the decisions in January had not been reversed for the children’s sector, there would have only been one, and that company, Starcatchers, focusses on children under 5.

- There is an inequality of provision of theatre for young audiences

If we are truly committed to the UN Convention of the Rights of the child, we are falling short in terms of Article 31:

*Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to **participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities** for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity*

Around 20% of people in Scotland are children and young people. Even with the re-instatement of Catherine Wheels and Visible Fictions only 12% of the RFO theatre budget goes to children and young people. Even in the Year of Young People, activities are focussed on people over the age of 8, so there is another inequality in the year that we claim to be celebrating young people. Creative Scotland say that there is a higher percentage of funding towards theatre for children and young people through the Open Project Fund, but this is one-off project funding and does not create a stable and sustainable children’s theatre sector.

- Scotland needs a clear, stated commitment to young audiences

A major date for funding Children’s Theatre in Scotland is 1997. The Scottish Arts Council held an open space event a Tramway for the Theatre Sector and the overwhelming message from the sector was that 20% of the drama budget should be spent on children’s theatre. The next 10 years saw a huge boom in children’s theatre – with six children’s companies becoming “core funded” and a significant rise in the international profile. Since then regular support has declined as the commitment was not enshrined. The child as participant has been protected through the Time To Shine Youth Arts Strategy and the Creative Scotland Creative Learning Review. It is time for the child as an audience member to be protected in a similar way.

Concluding remarks

The re-instatement of Catherine Wheels and Visible Fictions cannot be a temporary reprieve. Children in Scotland deserve the best experience of being a child, and that includes seeing the best theatre that has been created by professional artists, appropriate for the age of the child and accessible to all. Supporting Scottish children’s theatre companies through multi-year funding must be made a priority for Creative Scotland and a enshrined in a stated commitment for now and for the future.