

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Indepen-dance

Indepen-dance is an inclusive dance company, providing opportunities for disabled and non-disabled dancers to come together to dance.

Over the 22 years of its existence Indepen-dance has grown and now provides not only outreach and creative movement classes to over 350 individuals on a weekly basis but also has created a professional development route that has allowed learning disabled dancers the opportunity to develop a career path as professional dance artists, which would not be available now through any other route.

Although the work Indepen-dance undertakes has grown considerable over the years we are a relatively small organisation of 16 staff, of whom only three are full-time. As a company that supports inclusion our staff group reflects that commitment and 6 members of staff have a disability.

We welcome the financial grant we receive from Creative Scotland and are pleased that we continue as an RFO. However, we found the process time consuming and onerous detracting staff significantly from the day to day running of the company.

Our main criticisms are as follows:

- The application form was cumbersome, in some cases repetitive and lacked absolute clarity on what supporting evidence needed to be submitted;
- There was no opportunity during the process to engage in any discussion that could have brought clarity to some of the detail of the application - this is not our experience with other grant funding bodies.
- Moreover, the assessment contained factual inaccuracies, which as there was no dialogue we were unable to correct, for example although we were recognised as a diverse employer, there was an error in the assessment on the proportion of staff who have a disability;
- The company has run a biennial festival for the last four years and the commitment to continuing with this has been well known. The assessment suggested that this was too frequent and while we accept there may be a validity in this argument this should have been raised with us earlier – we had already spent time planning the event before receiving the assessment from Creative Scotland;
- We regretted the fact that we were advised that the lead contact for the organisation from Creative Scotland was not allowed contact with us during the process;

- We understand that the date for decision making had to be delayed because of lack of clarity about the overall budget available, however this did not make it easy to plan for the next financial year, particularly since the limited general information received suggested that there was no guarantee of continued funding;
- While we were relieved that our grant continued with a small additional uplift, it was less than we bid for. The assessor recommended a grant of £535k but the award has been reduced to £346k with no explanation of why. It may be because of the limited funding available, but there is a considerable difference between what was recommended by the assessor and what we have received;
- The overall change to the range of funds available was not detailed, leading us to wrongly assume that over the period we could apply for new funding for developing activity. It appears this will no longer be the case. For example, we have subsequently been advised that we are not eligible for funding from 'Awards for All', despite having such funding 2 years previously during the previous RFO. If we had been aware of that we would have addressed this in our application;
- Along with other companies, we were advised because of the delay in advising about grant funding we would receive an interim payment in May. When we met with Creative Scotland in the middle of February we were advised as we were now a funded RFO we would not receive any funding until June unless we submitted a draft budget by beginning of March. This placed a considerable administrative burden and didn't allow for Board scrutiny before submission. We had to do it because of the implications for our cashflow. We had wrongly assumed the interim payment would be deducted from our grant allowing time to prepare a properly scrutinised budget;
- We are very clear that we need to be accountable for the spending of public money, however on an ongoing basis the level of administrative demand takes no account of the burden on small companies with limited infrastructure, where we are expected not just to prepare an annual report detailing activity and a financial report but also to produce a review and a number of other activities including equal opportunities and diversity, annual statistical survey and using the Creative Carbon Claims Expenses programme to record our carbon emissions.
- The assessment document had a considerable number of factual inaccuracy.
- The guidelines could have been clearer about the optional attachments being expected as we were criticised for not including them.
- In the assessment there was an outcome relating to partnerships, where we were rated relatively low, but all the assessment comments were extremely positive talking about our links with schools, care providers and dance partners, with no clear evidence as to why we were rated low in that section.