

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Literature Alliance Scotland

Literature Alliance Scotland (LAS) is the collective voice for Scotland's literature and languages. We are a membership organisation committed to advancing the interests of literature and languages at home and abroad. As Scotland's largest network for literature and languages, with more than 30 member organisations, we bring together writers, publishers, educators, librarians, literature organisations and national cultural bodies.

Last week we surveyed our membership anonymously for their views on Creative Scotland funding. We asked them to share the survey among their own networks and obtained 34 responses, which have informed this submission.

Respondents are writers, poets and people who work in publishing, festivals, teaching, charities and organisations involved with the literature, publishing and languages sector. They are based across Scotland, from the Outer Hebrides to Aberdeen and from Shetland to Wigtown.

Of the 121 organisations in the 2018-21 Regular Funding Network, nine represent the literature, languages and publishing sector. They were awarded just over £7m of the total RFO budget of £101.6m.

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

More than half of respondents (53%) consider Regular Funding to support the arts and creative organisations throughout Scotland 'a great deal', or 'a lot' (19%) while 22% say 'a moderate amount' and 6% 'a little'.

The impact of awards for Regular Funding on other funding streams

This was a comment-only question. Key comments include:

- With shrinking budgets and more money for RFOs, other funds such as Open Project Funding will become even more competitive with longer waiting times thereby inhibiting support for innovative work from individual artists and smaller organisations, especially those outwith the central belt.
- Regular Funding offers stability and can open access to other match- or part-funding resources. However, it takes up a large share of the total arts budget and can lead to unsuccessful bid organisations turning to Open Project Funding, involving more time spent on form-filling and rendering it even more oversubscribed.
- Open Project Funding needs to be redesigned to accommodate the wide variety of applicants, from large organisations to individual writers and artists.
- With so much focus placed on Regular Funding, the possibility of other funding sources being sustainable for an organisation's future can often be ignored.

- The exclusion of RFOs from applying for Open Project Funding could be perceived as an inhibitor of spontaneity over the three-year funding deal. Any deviation from the three-year programme of work would need to be in agreement with the organisation's lead officer at CS and would mean that something else on the programme would need to give to allow a new initiative a chance.

Other relevant issues

6% said there were errors and 3% said there were speculations in their RFO assessment. Another respondent stated that in addition to errors there were also assumptions and contradictions in their RFO assessment. 6% said there were no errors, assumptions or speculations in their RFO assessment. 65% of respondents didn't apply for RFO.

47% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement 'I am concerned that the recent RFO process introduced major strategic change at a late stage in the process without consultation.'

Link strategies to funding decisions

97% agree or strongly agree that there should be a clear link between Creative Scotland's strategies and its funding decisions (assuming the strategies are sound).

Key comments:

- Clear, well-communicated strategies are a must for organisations distributing public money. This also ensures equitable treatment of those applying for funds and makes it clear why applications were not successful.
- However, there should be caution around strategies becoming agendas, and essentially reducing those strategies to a box-ticking exercise as part of the application process.
- A policy of positive discrimination was suggested in order to contribute to the revitalisation of Scotland's languages among all art forms and to adequately represent diversity.

Funding flexibility

70% of respondents agree or strongly agree that there needs to be more flexibility in Creative Scotland's funding routes and timescales to meet different needs within the sector.

Key comments:

- Review all existing funding routes and strategic development routes, funding purposes, application processes (one form does not fit all), and the language used to make them more artist- and organisation-friendly, less competitive, and to encourage a more stable sector that is able to plan ahead (even if organisations are not RFOs).
- Flexibility should be supported by transparency and accessibility.

- A positive comment about the Open Project Fund application was that it was exceptional in the timescales and with the help and advice offered during the application process.
- Suggestions were put forward for a rolling programme for Regular Funding rather than once every three years. This would help with CS cash-flow and relieve the intense pressure in assessing applications, affording more time to better understand organisations being assessed, to fact-check and source evidence thereby reducing assumptions and errors.

Decision-making and peer review

64% strongly agree or agree that decision-making should include appropriate peer review.

Key comments:

- Peer review would empower artists by enabling the years of experience within the sector to reflect and influence its future.
- Respondents questioned how to define 'appropriate' peer review and cautioned of the additional cost peer review is likely to entail and the potentially onerous impact on funding, timescales as well as the challenge of finding unbiased peers representing Scotland-wide, not just the central belt.
- Alternative suggestions are for consultation with artists in setting criteria for funding and for strong formal and informal opportunities for feedback on decisions, or a panel of appropriate (non-CS) peer reviewers.
- Other comments noted the strong backgrounds of CS officers in their art forms and highlighted the need for CS to rebuild trust and confidence so their expertise is respected and they can stand by decisions, which are rigorous and evidence-based.

Future priorities

Members were asked what Creative Scotland's top priorities should be for the future as a comment-only question. The range of views have been prioritised below by volume.

- Review all funding streams with input from artists and those working in the sector
- Advocate for the importance of Scotland's cultural sector by demonstrating its value
- Be transparent in funding, decision-making and communications
- Increase equitable access to culture
- Equity in funding organisations and individual artists, and work Scotland-wide not just Central Belt.