

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from the Scottish Arts Forum interim steering group

A Facebook group was set up on 3 February 2018 as a first step towards widespread dialogue across the arts in Scotland. The result was an astonishing level of engagement and debate, and the group grew quickly to over 2.6k members.

The level of engagement was so high and grew so quickly that one of the many constructive outcomes was a smaller sub-group beginning the process of creating a more permanent “Scottish Arts Forum”.

This “Interim Steering Group” is now focused on that task. As of March 30th, it is developing a non-Facebook online discussion platform, as well as working towards a large public meeting. It is also in the process of drafting the beginnings of a constitution, such as considering routes to a permanent elected steering group, seeking out best practice in equalities, diversity and inclusion policy and consulting on any other relevant issues.

The driver for this is a non-hierarchical and inclusive group that embeds the creative community within the decisions that affect it.

The first action of the Scottish Arts Forum was to draft an Open Letter to Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary Fiona Hyslop. This letter gained 1133 signatories and states that they are:

“deeply perturbed both by the way in which the RFO decisions have been made – and reversed – and by the values that these reflect in terms of Creative Scotland’s support of the arts in these straitened times. The lack of clarity in decision-making, inconsistencies across all art forms in the rationales given for support or denial of support, and the poor level of communication - particularly with unsuccessful applicants - has resulted in deep misgivings amongst us around Creative Scotland’s role and strategic direction in supporting the arts within our country.

A depth of feeling and sense of urgency has provoked the clear belief amongst us that, in order to create a strong and sustainable creative sector, artists must be involved at a policy level in the development of arts funding strategies.”

As what’s driving us is to create something that is a collective voice, we’d like to ask you what you think about the following ways of getting the ball rolling;

1. To submit to the Scottish Parliament Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee a progress report on the actions of the Scottish Arts Forum. Comments made so far reveal a need for a greater, more diverse voice for artists in matters such as the RFO process. The momentum in this direction goes far beyond this steering group, and various other constructive actions are being taken by individuals and groups, all of which are essentially pursuing this same thing. This in itself is evidence of the scale of the issue, which we believe is worth noting.

2. To summarise and make visible the broad range of discussion which has been raised so far by the approx 2.6k group members. Steps are being taken to move members' discussion to a more public, more accessible platform. This summary of ideas and areas of concern (taken from members comments and listed below) will form a basis for discussion as it begins on that new platform. These initial concerns and ideas for change are provided for information and do not represent the policies or proposals of the Interim Steering Group or the Scottish Arts Forum. These will be developed and agreed by engagement and decision-making by the wider membership of the Forum as we move forwards.

3. We are interested in ideas about how the broad spectrum of creative practitioners in Scotland can come together yet speak meaningfully about the needs of their specific practices and be part of the decision-making process that serves their needs. In particular, we have been having discussions about open space models that encourage open discussion, equality for all, and where a collective voice can emerge from its own workings. We are also interested in suggestions about how a model of organization founded on these ideas might responsively engage with organisations such as Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government. Please let us know what you think about these ideas.

We have created an edited list of concerns and issues that have been raised by individuals in response to the debate thus far. We welcome any comments on any of the points made above, or on this list below.

A. Concerns

- a Regular Funding application process every three years is far too short for organisations to really undertake any strategic work
- some RFOs were told they were failing to do things they didn't know they were supposed to be doing let alone have an agreed plan for. Organisations shouldn't arbitrarily be dropped because of shifting priorities without warning
- a select few organisations are deemed worthy of infrastructural funding and everybody else takes their chances on a project funding system that has an 80% fail rate
- Open Funding applications every year or two years is also too short, especially when so much effort by so many people is mostly wasted because of the high level of unsuccessful applications
- the spread of funding is uneven and unfair between different art forms, different types of funding and geographical areas e.g. rural and island areas
- Creative Scotland's funding application processes are too complex, too time-consuming and involve too much managerial language
- the burden of free administrative work is damaging artists and slowing down cultural production. Let artists be artists, support them rather than burdening them with unpaid work, most of which is unlikely to pay off

- Creative Scotland funding moves in circles between venues, artists and support agencies causing a lot of undue administration
- in some cases feedback from Creative Scotland has been unclear, inconsistent and not that helpful
- ‘there is a lack of humility and basic manners from the funders’, from artists’ experiences. The artist has to jump through hoop after hoop. Most of the staff in Waverley Gate are artists themselves, the hoops come from Board Level and Holyrood who aren’t artists, they’re MBA PPE people
- artists feel disconnected from not only the arts agency, Creative Scotland, but from the policy makers in Government. That needs to change
- is there a communication problem between CS and local authority Councils?
- some Councils support artists and arts organisations more than others e.g. music teachers in primary schools, but spending cuts are adversely affecting the arts in all Council areas
- artists in Scotland generally don’t feel valued.

B. Ideas for Change

Funding

Regular Funding

- Could Regular Funding Organisations be funded for e.g. 6 years on the basis that they would become sustainable in that time? Thereafter they could apply for project funding. This would open up regular funding to other companies.
- Timescales for funding applications and decision-making need to be changed. Making decisions in January for starting in April is ludicrous. This has a destabilising effect when it happens to all RFOs at the same time. Spread the decisions out over different years.
- RFO funding could be capped e.g. at £50-100K per year so they do not become too dependent on it.
- All current RFOs could apply for 5% less next time on condition that the extra £5m is used to bring new companies or artists into the portfolio or boost the Open Project Fund.
- Moving an RFO to Open Project based funding and vice versa is a severe shift. A sliding scale of RFO funding of e.g. one to five years would spread the assessment load over different years and enable more organisations and artists to be regularly funded.

- 3 year cycles limit strategic planning, an ACE traffic light system should be considered.
- Rejected RFO bids falling to Open Project funding put pressure on limited resources and create even more competition.
- Pay everyone the same rate including managers, administrators and directors. Some company directors are on large incomes while the artists that work for them are on minimal incomes.
- There should be salaried positions for artists to run organisations to avoid work overload of having a full-time job, an organisation to run and your own art practice.
- The application process needs to reflect the difference in complexities at different scales of organisation. One size fits all doesn't work. It shouldn't exclude individual artists or smaller companies from regular funding.
- Divide funding between arts service providers (galleries, theatre, dance-centres etc.) and artist and artist-led organisations.
- Funding applications for artists should be judged on ideas and reputation. Funding applications for service providers should be judged on artist support and public engagement.
- If CS wants a plurality of culture it needs multiple streams for building based, touring, music, theatre for young people etc.
- RFO venues should provide free spaces to artists as a condition of their funding and be prohibited from undercutting other arts organisations by offering free arts to Councils, schools, health service providers, prisons etc.
- RFOs maintain infrastructure, others build theirs in response to funding. Could infrastructures be provided centrally? What does sustainability mean?

Open Project & Other Funding

- Open Project funding should be for up to 3 years.
- Should National Companies be allowed to apply for OP funding when already funded by the Scottish Government?
- Open Project funding should take a more developmental approach, offering support to artists and companies throughout the application process.
- Arts funding needs to be increased. The current division of funding between National Companies, Regular Funded, Open Project Funded, Artist's Bursaries and between the various art forms is inequitable and needs to be reviewed.

- All art forms should be valued equally and this should be reflected in the funding made available to each art form.
- Funding applications from artists should be judged on their ideas and past work reputation rather than projected outcomes and audience numbers. Funding for service providers should be judged on how well they support the arts and artists and generate public engagement.
- The problem of uneven levels of support for the arts in different local authority areas should be addressed. Ring fenced funding to local Councils from Scottish Government?
- Do we need clearer parameters around Management Information System funding, and how can non-core funded organisations/artists be supported to more effectively access this fund?
- Increase philanthropy and other funding sources in order to expand the funding available.
- Regional/national trusts and endowments could make a difference.
- There is a need for a quick turnaround funding stream that enables opportunities e.g. to tour abroad or in UK, to be taken up.

The Funding Process

- Onerous and time consuming paperwork and admin overwhelms projects and opportunity. There are large hidden costs of working during 'free time'. There should be more room for creativity.
- Clearer guidelines, targeted funding and strong partnership working could save time and energy if designed well.
- Simplify the language used in application forms to be clearer, less business driven and more artist friendly.
- There should be peer review of artist proposals and artist support organisations, a structure and guidance/training. Recusal when panel members are too close to applicants. Staggered appointments of five years at a time, similar to the peer review college of the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
- Knowledgeable and skilled assessors who are active in their field, staged systems with formative feedback.
- Create panels of practitioners but include those from other sectors and from the audience/users.
- There should be communications from the funding officer and clarification prior to decision to allow fair representation. Conditional offers would help.

- Introduce new online application systems and software which is considerate to the human experience. E.g. <https://www.awardforce.com>.
- We need a streamlined online process, allowing applicants to start, save, and return to applications, where columns intended to hold numbers are formatted to do the same, and company policies, biogs etc are stored to avoid duplication of work.
- A staged process should be followed.
- First Stage- present the creative idea in isolation from the cost.
- Second Stage - an ongoing panel with expertise in the relevant area makes choices from 1st stage submissions.
- Third Stage- if approved, submit a budget. Payment to artist/organisation to develop the project.
- Fourth Stage - the funder examines the budget and assists if required.
- Fifth Stage - full budget approval. Need time to arrange events/tour.
- An arts body could provide in kind infrastructural support to individuals and small projects rather than financial support for infrastructure. Staff employed by the arts body would work with artists to develop projects.
- Place milestones into the approved funding to extend or reduce based on the success of the original idea. It must be continuously earned.

Artists

- Individual artists should not be asked to compete with organisations for funding from the same strand. An individual doesn't normally have an admin team or paid members of staff attached to them.
- Some art forms have other income available to them eg ticket sales and some do not eg exhibiting in galleries that are open to the public free of charge. The exhibiting artist tends to get either not paid at all or paid very little. This needs to be addressed.
- Community arts projects provide vital services for some of our most vulnerable people. Their funding must be protected and taking funding from practising artists to cover this is not an acceptable solution.
- A short form/short timeframe 'let's do it' fund is needed which individual artists could apply for to enable them to undertake short notice projects.
- Fund visual artists to exhibit outside of Scotland. It's very important but financially inaccessible for many.

- If artists were awarded bursaries they would produce much more creative work than in the current system. E.g. an artist can spend about 60% of her/his time seeking funding and preparing project budgets, partnerships, timelines, contracts etc.
- A universal citizens wage will solve many problems for artists and everyone else in Scotland. If you do not require the wage you should be permitted to opt out. The benefits would be no more 'benefit fraud' (the investigation of which must cost millions, and brings untold distress to many), and equality for all genres in the arts.
- If you give an artist £5,000 they will do at least £20,000 worth of work with it. Providing artists with a basic income will generate much more work than requiring them to prepare onerous funding applications, most of which are unsuccessful.
- Extend the existing pilot in 4 local authorities to one or more category of artists e.g. writers whose average income is less than £5k per annum. Invite artists/art forms to volunteer for pilots.
- We need a 'parity with London' funding pot to enable performers/artists in Scotland to take up good opportunities. Could there be a top up fund to enable artists to take these up?
- Locally based artists' groups should be encouraged by e.g. Government grants, as in the Basque country.

Diversity

- Diversity is consistently overlooked, particularly in terms of artists of colour, especially in theatre.
- Diversity has to be an active process, be visible, and go beyond the superficial and token representation.
- Organisations are not always the best placed to develop artists of colour. In training and professional development joined up thinking is needed.
- There need to be routes out of training into the arts industry and not some kind of holding pen from which some artists can never graduate.
- It should bear some relation to sustainability in the arts sector and be responsive to need, not a 'make busy' tactic to bump up statistics.
- The same goes for certain types of 'development'. Why fund it if there is no intention of seeing it through to the end result? It's wasteful apart from anything else.

- If the sector is to be diverse there has to be an acknowledgement and acceptance that members of certain groups will not come through traditional routes, e.g. drama schools. Other routes should be appropriately funded.
- Diversity cannot be achieved by random short-term initiatives, it has to be ongoing, indefinite.
- All decision making needs to be influenced by more diverse voices with a better balance including artists in training, emerging artists, teaching artists, wider art form reach, etc.
- Publicly funded work should have minimum quotas for diversity. It works in other countries, and, since the status quo here isn't working, it's time to trial them.

Arts Venues

- Open a dialogue with venues and promoters, balance their costs/charges as part of the funding process. Provide a balance between populist work and lesser known artists. There should be room to experiment.
- Budgets should allow for production fees.
- CS funded venues/promoters should have compulsory requirements to pay MU or equivalent rates to performers - no more splits, low guarantees etc. – to ensure fair pay. They should have minimum diversity quotas.
- Local volunteers play a key role in many venues and in generating audiences. Professionals and volunteers should be encouraged to work together.
- Establish how many existing arts venues there are in Scotland apart from RFO funded ones, and allocate each as much as can be afforded, e.g. about £5k per year for their events programmes on condition that they guarantee artists' union rates and report annually. This would avoid the competitive process which creates 'haves' & 'have nots' and save on Creative Scotland assessment costs.
- Not all venues throughout Scotland have good broadband connections. Provisions should be made for their use of the internet in those communities.
- There should be free quality venue showcases for artists who rent studios or work at home.

International work and touring

- Support is lacking for grassroots artists to take their work to other countries. Funding and opportunities should not rely on outdated stereotypes and the western European traditions, as can be the norm.

- A short form/short timeframe 'let's do it' fund would be particularly useful for international work and touring.
- There is a lack of access to support for international work by grassroots artists. More should be available.
- Some artists of colour need and would benefit from a live connection to the cultural sector in their countries of origin, as a key part of their development.

Structures

- Are Creative Scotland's operational costs necessary and/or sustainable?
- There should be a thorough independent inquiry by MSPs and independent artists (not consultants) into Creative Scotland. It should have a broad remit and make recommendations for the future delivery of the arts in Scotland.
- There should be a full, detailed scoping to assess the value of the arts and creative industries to other sectors such as tourism, heritage, environment projects with Arts/CI at the core of their delivery and where arts are used to obtain funding.
- Should the funding of creative industries companies, including screen and film, be located elsewhere? The budget to serve the needs of this sector under the legislation is insufficient.
- Establish a Creative Scotland 'Artists Board' to ensure artist input into funding processes, its focus and function. It should not be simply advisory but should be involved in the governance of the organisation. A simple constitutional change would give artists a real say in the ongoing activities and strategies of Creative Scotland.
- A Highlands and Islands arts body is needed. Hi-arts nurtured the arts and is sorely missed.
- Remove the quango, put the word art/arts back into the name. Nominate and elect artists' agents employed by a Council of Arts who are accountable to the public. They would deliver the funding and if they if they mismanage it, we un-elect them.
- Close Creative Scotland and replace it with 8 regional funding authorities who would allocate funding according to local need. These artist-led authorities would be elected and could serve a maximum of 2 or 3 year terms. Rotation of arts administrators would be a core principle. Remuneration would be expenses plus a salary based on the median local cultural wage. An overview national funding authority should be relocated from the central belt.