

## Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

### Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

#### Written submission from Sound

#### Background

**sound** is a new music organisation based in North East Scotland, set up in 2005. It aims to make new music more accessible to audiences, to encourage excellence and experimentation and to nurture talent. It runs the annual **sound festival**, organizes learning and participation opportunities throughout the year, supports composers of all ages, and commissions/produces and occasionally tours work in the UK and abroad.

We work closely with a number of local partners in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire to co-promote work and are an integral part of the cultural landscape in the North East. As one of the rare promoters of new music, we also a key part of the ecology of the Scottish new music scene, and were instrumental in setting up the sector support organisation New Music Scotland. We are a key player on the UK scene, and have numerous international partnerships, including a longstanding one with French new music festival *Musiques Démesurées*.

#### Creative Scotland/SAC funding background

**sound** has been funded by Creative Scotland or the Scottish Arts Council since its creation:

- Initially this was through various pots such as the Performing Arts Programming Fund or the New Work fund.
- In 2009 we were encouraged to apply for and were funded via the 2-year Flexible Funding pot for 4 years from 2009 to 2012, then again with Projects Forming a Programme of Work in 2013 and 2014.
- In 2014 the funding structure was re-worked and we applied for RFO funding. We were recommended for funding but were unsuccessful in the final stages, the reason given being that we were a festival. There was an outcry at the time, both locally and from the new music sector, with much press coverage. We met with the Chief Executive, and were awarded approx. £50K of transition money. We were advised to widen our programme so that we weren't just a festival (we were already doing a significant amount of work throughout the year) in preparation for the next round.
- Since 2015 we have been applying annually for Open Project Funding.

## **The process of applying for Regular Funding for the 2018- 21 period and your experience of that application process.**

### **Application**

From the decision in 2014, we worked continuously to widen our reach and our activity as encouraged, and to build our internal organisation to be able to successfully manage the growth in activity. In 2015 we worked with an experienced arts professional to advise us going forward. From early 2016 we started work on a 4-year strategic plan (2017-2018 to 2020-2021), and both the Board and the staff inputted into this activity across the year. Meanwhile we were increasing our national and international partners, and building our Learning and Participation activity.

We spent from December 2016 to late March 2017 working on the application itself, drawing from the business plan. The amount of information needed for 3-year funding is of course significant, and the amount of time dedicated to preparing such an application cannot be underestimated.

We submitted the application in late March 2017, and then the waiting began. Because we had been unsuccessful in the previous round, we were increasingly nervous as the date for informing us of the decision got gradually put back. After much discussion (would this give CS an excuse not to fund us?), we decided to submit an Open Project Application as a safety net. This was submitted late December (we will hear on the 28<sup>th</sup> March).

I actually spoke to the Deputy Chief Executive well before the application deadline, to express my concern for the arts sector in general if organisations were only to hear about their funding in late 2017/early 2018. I asked whether there would be something put in place for those who weren't successful to help them turn around Open Fund applications more quickly, as I was worried that a number of organisations would be extremely vulnerable if unsuccessful. I was told this wasn't possible, but that organisations could put in a parallel Open Fund application to Creative Scotland. This is a huge amount of extra work, and we did hesitate before deciding it was our only option.

### **Decision announcements and follow-up by CS**

- We were informed by email on the 24<sup>th</sup> January that we had been recommended for funding but ultimately unsuccessful. The reason given was Creative Scotland "recognised the high quality of the organisation's work, but in the face of a highly competitive funding scenario, it was considered that other organisations more fully met the strategic needs of the sector." We have had no clarification from Creative Scotland on what the "needs of the sector" are, despite having asked the question directly.
- We wrote to the Chief Executive of Creative Scotland on the 31<sup>st</sup> January to express our dismay at Creative Scotland's decision not to award us RFO status. We still have not received an answer to that email.
- We then received an email on the 6<sup>th</sup> February to let us know that our application had been reconsidered on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, but that we still were

unsuccessful. We had had no prior information about the meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, and no request for further information from us was made.

- As suggested by Creative Scotland, we have since met with Creative Scotland in order “to help you to understand our decision, as well as providing guidance on other potential funding options for you to consider in due course.” Not only were they unable to explain the music sector needs, but no advice was offered other than to apply for Open Project Funding.

### **Assessment of applications**

- The questions in the application process are of course pertinent, however there is a lack of transparency and clarity in the marking process of applications. If different assessors are used, how is this evened out so that organisations are compared fairly?
- Why are some of Creative Scotland’s Ambitions not assessed at all (International, Place, Leadership)? Why aren’t Creative Scotland’s Ambitions weighted more heavily than other questions in the marking scheme
- Certain questions are marked oddly – how can some organisations have their “fair pay” questions assessed as outstanding, others as good and others as satisfactory? Surely either you pay fairly or you don’t? This question had the same marking structure as the Ambitions, with the same weighting.
- In the interests of fairness, Creative Scotland should provide more detail on what it is that makes a category receive a satisfactory, strong or outstanding result, as is common in, for example, the Education sector.
- If applications are to be judged on the strategic needs of a sector, it is essential that those needs are made clear prior to an organisation going through the lengthy process of applying.

### **The importance of Regular Funding to you or your organisation**

Not having regular funding leads to huge insecurity for an organisation. In particular for organisations, like ourselves, that commission new music, it means that, as well as being hampered in your ability to plan and deliver activity, it is almost impossible to develop work with key composers as they often have 2-3 year waiting lists to produce new work.

Open Project Funding is not a satisfactory solution as it gives no sustainability, little opportunity to build on core activity and impedes long-term planning and vision as you are only able to apply for a “project” and not for your organisation’s overall activity. There seems to be little strategic allocation of the Open Project Fund, so you are never entirely sure whether you will be successful, even if your existence is key to your sector.

Since 2014 we have worked hard to develop our year-round activity, planning to give more opportunities to talented youngsters in the North-East and increase our support for composers, and had ambitious projects to work within regeneration areas, in

health settings and with minority ethnic communities. It is difficult to see how we can now continue to develop the latter and the former will depend on the outcome of our outstanding Open Fund application.

Practically speaking you are also then engulfed in a circuit of annual applications and reports, which reduces the time you are able to spend on crucial strategic and artistic matters.

Your reputation is damaged – internationally other arts organisations and composers were shocked that as one of Scotland’s major new music promoters and the only festival of its kind, we were not being funded by our National Arts Funding organisation on a sustainable basis.

Other funders also question your ability to deliver: we are a recipient of funding from the PRS for Music Society Foundation, and this year’s grant has come with the condition of a discussion with them following the outcome of our Open Project Fund Award. If the latter doesn’t allow us to deliver the majority of our planned activity, I’m assuming we may lose our PRSF grant. We may experience the same problem with other funders.

RFO funding isn’t only important for the ability to forward plan and be sustainable. You are also left questioning the value of what you do. And you are excluded from networking with the group of key Scottish cultural organisations that have been recognised by Creative Scotland. Not only do you struggle on a day-to-day basis, but you have less opportunity to build exciting collaborative plans and learn from others, all of which is central to helping an organisation grow.

**The challenge that Creative Scotland faces in allocating funding when applications for funding exceed the funds available.**

This is a challenge, but I don’t think it’s insurmountable. It just needs to be looked at from a different angle. The aim should be to support more organisations on regular funding, and for project funding to be uniquely for real time-specific projects.

At the present time organisations have to include projects within their Regular Funding applications, and are not supposed to apply for additional project funding (although there are exceptions). Regular funding should purely be for the core activity of an organisation and NOT for any projects. This would mean that more organisations could be supported for their core activity (some of which don’t need large amounts), giving them the secure base from which to apply for project funding. This would mean that some organisations would have to submit extra applications for projects, but those who gained RFO status would see their burden reduced.

We have been told by officers at Creative Scotland that we should be grateful as we receive large amounts from Open Project Funding. That is missing the point. We would have preferred to receive slightly less but receive it as 3-year funding. If the RFO pot was widened to include more organisations (each receiving less money) we believe that there would be a much stronger and more vibrant sector. It would need a lot of thought and re-working but it should not be impossible.

## **The challenges that Creative Scotland faces in supporting individual artists and organisations from different areas of the arts.**

Because of the way the funding system operates actually, many larger organisations have to compete with individual artists and cross art-forms for project funding. This doesn't seem fair. As mentioned above, if RFO funding could be widened, then the Open Project Fund would be on a much more level playing field, with more real projects and individual artists supported.

It might also help to separate out umbrella organisations from organisations creating, producing or promoting art work. Although some of these organisations can be useful, in some cases it seems strange to be funding support organisations over those producing activity, and unhelpful to be trying to compare the two. The way the system currently operates means that organisations such as Creative Edinburgh or Creative Dundee have come into the portfolio, increasing the already high support level for both those cities at the expense of other geographic areas as well as of those directly producing art activity.

Equally, the Creative Scotland picture is distorted by the fact that Scottish Government directly funds a number of national companies. So even though the music funding was less significant than that for dance, theatre and the visual arts within Creative Scotland, the fact that a number of national music organisations are funded is used as a reason for giving less to music, and in particular to classical music. This should really be clarified, as it seems unfair that smaller musical organisations are thus being effectively pitted against organisations such as the RSNO or Scottish Opera.

## **The extent to which you consider Regular Funding supports the arts and creative organisations throughout Scotland.**

The picture is clearly Central-Belt orientated as can be seen by the following figures we have put together of RFO funding per head of population/per annum (we can provide a more detailed table if you are interested):

Aberdeen City/shire	£ 7.40	Highland	£25.81
Angus	£ 2.56	Na h-Eileanan Siar	£57.60
Argyll and Bute	£18.32	Inverclyde	£ 7.50
City of Edinburgh	£84.33	Moray	£ 6.30
(City of Edinburgh (no EIF)	£70.14)	North Lanarkshire	£15.38
Dumfries and Galloway	£ 3.77	Orkney Islands	£61.90
Dundee City	£57.66	Perth and Kinross	£19.17
East Dunbartonshire	£ 3.74	Shetland Islands	£33.78
Glasgow City	£47.80	Stirling	£10.11

This is shocking. Although some companies do tour nationally, this doesn't replace the importance of having locally embedded organisations. There is a definite lack of awareness of the high quality of work that is done in other areas of Scotland, and of the extra difficulties involved in being in non-Central Belt locations. Previously this was always put down to a lack of applications from these areas, but that argument doesn't hold up when you consider that **sound**, as an Aberdeen City and Shire

organisation was recommended for RFO funding (so is obviously of a high-enough quality) but was turned down in favour of Central Belt or umbrella organisations.

(NB Music organisations receiving RFO funding are either based in the Central Belt or on Orkney. There is nothing in between).

### **The impact of awards for Regular Funding on other funding streams.**

As mentioned above the impact is that many unsuccessful larger organisations have to apply to the Open Project Fund to be able to continue to deliver activity. This puts pressure on that fund, and unfairly puts smaller or individual projects up against larger organisation “projects”.

### **Any other issues that you consider are relevant**

The ecology of a given sector or a geographical area does not seem to be taken into account. In the new music sector you need ensembles, promoters and artist projects to be supported. Otherwise the sector is fragmented and weaker. We work closely with Red Note Ensemble, who are an RFO. However, their budgets are largely entwined with ours (we co-commission work and have joint projects). With no clarity on our situation, theirs becomes more vulnerable. Similarly, composers depend on us to have work performed. With no promoters, there is no place for artists work to be heard.