

## **Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee**

### **Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21**

#### **Written submission from Starcatchers**

#### **Introduction**

Starcatchers is Scotland's National Arts and Early Years organisation. We create performances, installations that tour across Scotland and internationally and deliver programmes of artist-led activity in communities working with babies, toddlers and young children alongside their parents, carers and Early Years Practitioners. We also support artists through programmes of professional development and have pioneered a Creative Skills Programme for Early Years Practitioners.

Our work is funded through a variety of sources including:

- Creative Scotland (project funding from 2009 until we secured Regular Funding in 2018)
- Children Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund from Scottish Government (both core and project funds)
- Big Lottery Scotland
- BBC Children in Need
- The Corra Foundation
- The Robertson Trust
- The Cattanach Trust

Starcatchers was originally a project in North Edinburgh but became a constituted organisation in 2011 following the overwhelming success of our activity and the potential for growth and development.

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

Starcatchers has been in regular receipt of project funding from Creative Scotland since 2011. In 2014, Starcatchers submitted an application for Regular Funding, the first time we had been eligible to apply for core funding following changes to funding streams. This bid was unsuccessful, although the assessment identified the organisation to be fundable.

In 2017, Starcatchers developed a second bid for Regular Funding. We felt, based on the guidance presented by Creative Scotland, that we were in a very strong position despite concerns regarding the level of resource that Creative Scotland would have available. The body had indicated that it was seeking to reduce the number of companies included in the portfolio.

Having undergone the process in 2014, Starcatchers was well prepared for the 2018-21 application. However, we were surprised by how few changes had been made to the application process in 2017 considering the challenges with the process in 2014.

The process for applying for Regular Funding is particularly time consuming and involved contributions from several members of Starcatchers' core staff team, the Board and the independent artists we work with. For the duration of the application process the majority of Starcatchers' senior management team were focused on the development of the funding bid, which detracted from delivery of our regular programme of work. As a small organisation this puts huge pressure on existing resource.

The application required an application form and a business plan tailored to strict guidelines set by Creative Scotland. This meant that we had to create a business plan from scratch, specifically for the funding application, rather than being able to submit a working business document.

We appreciate the fact that organisations are seeking substantial funds over an extended period of time. However, the application process should be more streamlined and efficient, particularly given the limited resources that the majority of organisations are working with. For example, a staged process, as prescribed by other funders, with a brief first stage application and additional information required only if organisations progress to the next stage.

The Regular Funding process had a significant impact on the whole arts sector in Scotland with organisations committing between two and three months to the development of their bids. With a 10-month turnaround from Creative Scotland the process is imbalanced and creates high levels of uncertainty. If organisations have not met the initial assessment criteria, they should be told at the earliest stage to enable them to plan effectively with other funding streams available to them.

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

Regular Funding is important to Starcatchers. Securing the consistent resource offered contributes to the core of the organisation, delivery of key activities and development of new activity – all of which is central to our long-term sustainability and security.

Starcatchers was fortunate to receive some core support from the Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention fund for three years from 2016-17 (now extended for a further year to 2019-20). This support has had a positive impact on the organisation, connecting us with the wider Third Sector and the priorities set out by the Scottish Government.

Applying for and securing Creative Scotland Regular Funding is an opportunity for Starcatchers to ensure that work for and with our youngest children is prioritised by our national arts funding body, increasing their understanding and appreciation of the role of arts and creativity in Early Years.

Regular Funding not only offers a consistency of financial support, it also:

- Allows Starcatchers to plan effectively over an extended period of time without the insecurity of project funding
- Minimises the resource requirements in submitting and reporting to multiple project applications (although we recognise the high levels of data gathering and monitoring required by regularly funded organisations for Creative Scotland, which is far greater than any other funder we work with)

- Enables Starcatchers to develop a relationship with Creative Scotland not offered through Open Project Funding
- Provides a lead officer within Creative Scotland, ensuring our activity is better understood across the funding body
- Places Starcatchers on a platform alongside the other RFO organisations, which provides a level of status and increased visibility
- Improves dialogue, networking and opportunities with other RFO companies within the portfolio.

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

This is a challenge for any funding body, not just Creative Scotland.

What we expect from Creative Scotland is a clear strategy in the decision-making process that is effectively communicated to the sector and the wider public. On this occasion, that did not happen.

As an organisation applying for funding, we should not be coming up with lots of new ideas in the hope that these may take the funders fancy. We should be framing the work we deliver and the ambition we have to develop that work to meet the strategic needs or frameworks of the funder. This is not possible to do if there is no framework or strategic agenda set out. The result is it makes funding decisions very challenging for all concerned and gives no structure for why applications deemed to be fundable are turned down or only partially funded.

The issue is compounded by the restrictive funding structure that has been introduced. The re-structure to Creative Scotland funding streams in 2014 has meant that there are limited pots of money to which organisations and individuals can apply. Everyone is constantly in competition with each other, particularly through the Open Project Fund. This rolling system does not work. The outcome of the OPF system is that applicants are having to find ways to 'play the system' knowing that, often, applications will be turned down in one cycle but have a greater chance of being funded after being resubmitted.

Creative Scotland has a history of partially funding projects and organisations. Many of Starcatchers' OPF applications have been funded at a reduced amount and our Regular Funding award is 50% of the funds requested and approved during the assessment process. This means that organisations are financially less able to deliver activity well. We need to be able to prioritise work effectively, backed up by clear reasoning and strategy.

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

Again, this is a challenge faced by any funder with different priority areas.

The challenge has been compounded rather than mitigated by the Open Project process where individuals and organisations from across art-forms are applying for the same pot of money. This is further challenged by the sense that Creative Scotland is trying to work across art-forms, despite there being specific needs within art-forms. For example, the needs of film are fundamentally different from those making theatre, which are different again from those working in visual art.

There is a lack of understanding within Creative Scotland around work for children and young people. Although the focus on participation through Time to Shine and the Youth Arts Strategy has supported the development of particular participation-based activity, the role of children and young people as audience has been overlooked. This has had a significant impact on the Children's Theatre sector, demonstrated in the withdrawal of funding for Catherine Wheels and Visible Fictions.

Scotland's Children's Theatre is recognised across the world as being some of the most innovative, high quality and magical work that is being made for children and young people. During the week of 19th March 2018, two Scottish productions – Black Beauty from Red Bridge Arts and Hup from Starcatchers – were presented in New York at the New Victory Theatre and Lincoln Center respectively. This should be celebrated, nurtured and funded properly. 15 years ago, there were five fully funded (RFO equivalent) children's theatre companies in Scotland. Now there are just two. Starcatchers is only partially funded, which means we cannot produce the work we are known for.

There are some within Creative Scotland who are very supportive of this work, but there is a lack of expertise.

There should be consideration of the differences and challenges faced by individuals and small organisations applying for funding. Writing funding bids takes time, energy and resource. For individual artists who are freelance and who need to work in order to earn a living, writing funding bids can be particularly difficult and not always practically possible.

Given the detail required in funding applications, the competition for available funds and the lack of communication around the strategy for decision making (as outlined above) for many individuals, they do not have the necessary experience to complete the application process and gather enough supporting information to be successful. This then makes applying for funds off putting for those who often need it the most.

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

The RFO portfolio needs to be more balanced. Ensuring that there is support for organisations working in different parts of Scotland is important for protecting the wider arts infrastructure and enabling as many people as possible to engage with or participate in arts experiences.

Given the focus of population, it is unsurprising that the majority of funds sit within organisations based in the central belt. However, many organisations do work in different parts of the country – touring work or, as Starcatchers does, working in partnership with other organisations to deliver high quality provision in different communities.

There is also an ongoing challenge with reductions in local authority funding for the arts, which has a knock-on impact on Creative Scotland's ability to meet the needs of communities across the country. Local authorities often cut arts budgets as this is not deemed to be as important as statutory services. However, arts and culture's contribution to health and wellbeing is well documented, and in making these cuts, local authorities are letting people down. Despite the evidence of impact, it can be hard to make the connections across the health, education and cultural departments

within local authorities to support creative activity. It would be good to see Creative Scotland pushing this agenda in order to build understanding and hopefully increase local authority connections and support.

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

There is concern about the impact on other funding streams given the reversal of particular Regular Funding decisions. There has been a lack of clarity about exactly where this resource has come from.

In the previous round of Regular Funding, additional money was released from the Open Project pot to support Regularly Funded organisations. This had an impact on the amount of funding available to individuals and small organisations meaning that they were further disadvantaged.

With ongoing issues regarding the amount of funding available in the Open Project pot, such as the decline in Lottery funding available to Creative Scotland, any further reduction to this fund directly impacts on smaller organisations and individuals which will have an impact on the wider sector, and in turn on audiences and participants across the country.

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

#### **Salami-slicing and Organisational Impact:**

The Regular Funding decision-making process was fundamentally flawed. The sector was told by Creative Scotland that organisations would either be fully funded to the amount they had applied for or not funded at all – there would be no ‘salami slicing’ of funding requests to make the portfolio work. This was not the case in the end.

Starcatchers has been successful in receiving Regular Funding in this round. However, the award is at 50% of the amount requested (and recommended through the assessment process). This figure was determined at the end of the process by a ‘specialism team’ who identified us as a high priority for funding, however the only information provided about the figure awarded was that ‘Starcatchers should be supported within the RFO network but at a level which was both viable within the budget available and still a valuable contribution to the core work of the company’. There was no sense of how a 50% award might impact on the organisation in trying to deliver the programme of activity we have proposed.

The reality is that we will actually receive less money than if we applied for the activity we planned through individual Open Project Fund applications. This leaves us in the paradoxical situation of being seen as a successful new RFO when, in fact, we are in a less financially secure position than receiving OPF money year on year and, as a result, will actually deliver less work than we have done without RFO status.

The 50% award is not sufficient to allow Starcatchers to deliver the programme of work originally proposed in our application. Significantly, it means that whilst we can develop new productions and provide professional development for artists working with and for our youngest children, we are not in a position to fully produce and tour this work.

This decision has also meant that the organisation is currently in limbo as we are unable to confirm our programme of activity with Creative Scotland until we hear about an Open Project Application (an application that was always outlined in our plans to be funded through the Open Project Fund). We have developed a number of scenarios that have been presented to Creative Scotland for consideration. The onus has been placed on Starcatchers to offer solutions to this funding outcome creating prolonged uncertainty, further increasing our workload and detracting from our day-to-day delivery.

This has had significant impact on the staff team. Where we should be celebrating the achievement of securing this resource, we have been left frustrated. This was compounded by the decision to reverse the withdrawal of funding to some organisations. Where we were told there was not sufficient resource to fully fund our programme, Creative Scotland were able to find the additional £2 million required to reinstate companies that had been cut.

### **Introduction of new funds:**

There is concern about the introduction of a new strategic touring fund during the Regular Funding assessment process, as this initiative was introduced late in the process. Organisations are being recommended to look to this funding stream as a mechanism for support, however the fund has not actually been created as yet. Whilst we do not object to the potential for additional funding streams, it is impossible to plan based on a fund that does not currently exist and has no set parameters. Whilst it may provide a welcome means for additional support, it is also possible that when these parameters are set our organisation is not eligible to apply to it. This then serves to continue the ongoing uncertainty and frustration for the sector.

### **Communication and understanding:**

The communication around the Regular Funding decisions was poor, both to organisations and to the wider public. This has created increasing pressure on arts organisations and artists to have to justify why they do the work they do and why it needs public subsidy. The arts are a fundamental part of what it is to be human, yet we consistently have to justify this to a greater extent than any other service.

There was a lack of acknowledgement by Creative Scotland about the poor assessment and decision-making process and the impact of this on the sector.

For organisations to have to wait 10 months from submission for a decision on long-term funding that begins in April 2018 is unacceptable. Organisations are fluid and our plans constantly evolve. The decisions on regular funding were originally due to take 6 months from submission. This is already a significant time period. However, with the delays in the announcement of funding decisions and the timing of the announcement just two months before the start of the new financial year, this means that many organisations have been judged on plans that have now gone out of date or are impossible to put into action in 2018/19 as the required planning time has now been lost.