

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Traditional Music & Song Association of Scotland (TMSA)

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

We were promised the process would be better than the previous RFO round, and were given a deadline date 6 months ahead. However it then was another 3 months before the actual guidance and application form came - not that much more time than previously to work on the substance of the application. This was especially the case for us as it was one of the busiest periods of the year for the organisation, and at that time we had one paid staff member working one day per week doing administration work only.

The time allowed was particularly critical given there was a restriction on the number of pages of the business plan, and the number of words in the application form. To be able to articulate all you wanted to include and had to be included, needed not just time to write the content but edit it to fit the limits. This put much more pressure on the volunteers putting together the RFO application (compared with organisations that had paid staff already that could take this workload).

In light of these limits, we find it difficult to comprehend that, while we had to cut back on some items of detail, we were expected to have found room to spell out the 'health benefits of participation in cultural activities', the 'role of lifelong learning' or social and community development – things we expect Creative Scotland to already understand.

Furthermore in the assessment, the comment was made that they wanted more information about the proposed new roles, yet the supplied guidance indicated we were to outline roles and responsibilities for the delivery of each aspect of work. If they had expected more information than was supplied then the guidance should have indicated this or asked for job descriptions, not 'outlines'. Similarly they would have liked to have seen more information about staff training though they did not ask for our Staff Development Policy to be submitted. The funding we included in the budget without a high level of detail because the best staff development approach is to work with the staff to identify what training is required and not dictate what the training would entail until they were in place!

However it seemed that what was being asked for was clearer. Gone was the message about putting in everything you wanted to do, be ambitious, be big – creating very large asks for funding. Instead the main message at the Information Session we attended was it was okay to be just about maintaining your programme, to build your organisation's sustainability and resilience.

Unfortunately the assessor's guidance appeared to contradict that message, as in our assessment feedback we had points such as 'It would have been beneficial to see more ambitious plans and a new direction for the organisation' or 'it is felt that

more new activity could have been developed' or 'there is a lack of innovation and new concepts in the application'. Another point was made that we should have put in for more funding to do more overseas travel for one project – before we had had the chance to try taking the group of musicians concerned to an overseas festival to see if it was something that could be a good thing to continue!

Other elements of the assessment feedback appeared to demonstrate misunderstandings or a lack of knowledge around our area of the traditional arts – particularly around innovation and experimentation, which cannot be measured against other artforms' ideas of what these concepts entail, as the essence of traditional arts requires looking back as well as looking forward.

We also felt there was a lack of understanding regarding the relationship between payment and not being paid, that the amateur in the original sense of the word, or volunteer, is predominant in the traditional arts – from performer to organiser. It is not always appropriate to pay people a fee as it could affect their benefit (eg pension), they may already have a fulltime job and for a small amount of earnings may then have to submit a tax declaration - or they may simply sing or play purely for the love of it.

In addition, we were criticised for not having 'considered our role in the sector more strategically, particularly in relation to working with other organisations in the Traditional Music sector'. We fail to understand how working with around 60 organisations on the annual TMSA Event Calendar to create a single marketing document for around 100 traditional music events and activities which is also promoted through the website and social media is not strategic enough.

We also feel it is incorrect to say that RFO Funding would mean a large increase in our finances - we should point out that it would in fact mean parity with a number of years whilst removing the need to apply for Project Funding on a regular basis.

We feel slightly aggrieved that we were criticised for having an all female Board (not for want of trying to recruit a mix of people), but pleased that we were commended for having half our Board aged 30 or under.

Finally, regarding ethnic diversity, we feel it should have been recognised that the nature of our organisation will reflect in the Board's membership, and it is essential that knowledge and experience of the artform we represent is paramount. To appoint a Director who did not have these qualities would be tokenistic. We should point out that one Board member was not born in the UK but this has not been recognised for cultural diversity.

The importance of Regular Funding to you or your organisation.

This all said we know from our assessment that we did get recommended for funding at the first stage of assessment though at a reduced level – it was at the second stage that we got knocked out due to some of the issues that we have raised above.

We applied for the minimum amount allowed, primarily to avoid having to apply annually for Project Funding, for example for the TMSA Young Trad Tour project – a recording and tour of the winners and finalists of the BBC Radio Scotland to their hometowns around Scotland. 3 year funding for this project along would save us

many volunteer hours duplicating the process annually as well as reducing staff time for Creative Scotland in assessing these projects. We are aware that you can apply for two years of project funding but each time we have done that so far we have only received one year of what we have asked for. It is frustrating when the results of the Impact Evaluation (funded by Creative Scotland) were consistently saying the main thing to improve was more lead-in time for planning and arranging the Tour project to make it a better experience. RFO funding would have given us that but we are now back to annual project funding.

We would point out that we included other projects for Creative Scotland to fund, along with some part-time core staff support which would have taken the burden off volunteers who are currently undertaking these roles. One of these other projects is the TMSA Event Calendar that we have been working to eventually be self-financing. We have been gradually working towards, building trust in the publication so that participating organisations see it as a worthwhile investment. We only needed c. £2,000 a year to get us further along that road.

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

The challenge is making sure that what you tell applicants is going to be the basis for the criteria for funding is reflected in the assessor's guidance.

We would also suggest that engaging in a dialogue as part of the RFO Application process could be useful to all.

It would allow Creative Scotland to bring up the questions they would like to ask the organisation to clarify, and importantly to ask if anything has changed since the application was put in (especially with the length of time between it being submitted and decisions being communicated this time around).

For example, within the time of submission to decision, we took the TMSA Young Trad Tour to the Lorient InterCeltic Festival as part of the festival's focus on Scotland. The TMSA committed a lot of its reserves to making this happen as well as the TMSA Convener & her partner voluntarily running the CD/merchandise stall for two weeks (12 hour days), creating an outlet for two thirds of the sales made by the artists at the event. It would have been helpful to have been able to give Creative Scotland the feedback we got from a main driver behind the Team Scotland effort at Lorient - about how the TMSA Young Trad Tour was a vital part of the programme able to be presented in the main Pavilion as well as the other help we gave. We also developed an interactive music map supported by VisitScotland's Growth Fund and our own funds again, which is a resource being promoted to visitors and Scottish residents alike who would like to learn about Scotland's various music traditions – geographically and thematically.

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

An issue is how specialist knowledge and expertise is fed in to the assessment processes at all the relevant point especially when it gets to the final stages.

It also sometimes feels like there is an aversion to risk and allowing for trust in an organisation to try things out, even if everything not fully articulated. You can't ask for innovation and experimentation if you are then not happy to take a risk on it by supporting the organisation because they do quality work, but haven't quite been able to give you a precise idea of how things will be done, happen and turn out! We know it is public money and perhaps Creative Scotland is just being cautious because it is aware it IS public money too.

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

One of the key issues for many arts and voluntary organisations is having a core that you can then build developments from. That is ideally what Regular funding should be. Maybe an idea could be to set a specific amount that organisations get for the core work, on the basis that project work can be supported from this core. We've worked out that if we can get £50,000 a year we would be able to find the rest to cover the other work from earned income and other funding streams.

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

We understand if organisations get RFO status they couldn't apply for any project work that was in their plan, unless it was a completely new development. This did and can take out some of the competition for Project Funding.

Any other issues that you consider are relevant.

We appreciated that we were able to talk to Creative Scotland staff very quickly after receiving our decision and feedback. We are aware that not every organisation had that experience. It felt rather unfair that before we were able to have our meeting with these officers to put our points across, the Creative Scotland Board had met and 'reconsidered' our application. This 'reconsideration' was a process that had not been instigated by us nor was allowing for the Creative Scotland Board to take time to see if there were any over-arching issues arising from the collected views of successful and unsuccessful applicants, they would also need to investigate.

We are concerned that the role Traditional Arts plays in Scotland's cultural offering is not being recognised and supported as much as we feel it should, because if Scotland does not nurture its heritage no-one else will. We are not always certain that Creative Scotland is in the best position to help safeguard and develop Traditional Arts especially around having enough funding to cover this area.

When being awarded project funding sometimes special conditions are required to draw down the money without maybe taking account the capacity of the organisation to meet them without the resources of a paid staff member to gather/create the information to meet them. There is a reason you apply for funding – to get such resources – but then have the hurdle placed in front of you to get what you need to get over such hurdle!

We would suggest that Creative Scotland make it easier for organisations/individuals who do not have much financial capacity (ie not in receipt of core funding) to not have to carry so much of the burden before they get their final report payment. Carrying a cash flow of 25% report payment is not easy for many smaller groups and

individuals. We would like to see a 90%/10% (or 75%/15%/10%) split offered as a matter of course, rather than having to ask to get this changed.

Communication is such a key lesson for any institution to learn. We have seen this from the failure to communicate to the theatre organisations about the touring funding changes meant to be coming in around the RFO decisions. We made the point earlier when we talked about the guidance given at the information session in comparison to the guidance which appears to have been given to the assessors.

Another example is no communication appears to have been carried out in connection with a change required in the evaluation of current projects through a revised project monitoring form introduced last year. It should be clear from the start of any project exactly what is going to be required, and data collection requirements should ideally not be changed during the project. It is not a good use of volunteer or paid staff time to have to source information not previously requested and effectively have to re-do a completed report.