

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Vanishing Point

General Response

Vanishing Point's experience of the RFO application process was generally positive.

The communication and application process was clear. The application procedures seemed reasonable, as did the type of information requested and required. The requirement of submitting a three-year plan and budgets to relate to it is extremely clarifying in preparing an artistic programme, establishing partnerships, consolidating artistic vision with financial reality and reacting to the aims and objectives of Creative Scotland. We have no concern that the process or application forms are inherently difficult to understand, although we acknowledge this may be due to the experience we have of the processes (see below)

We found Creative Scotland to be knowledgeable about our company and our work. They were always available for questions and offered clarity when we were uncertain about one or two elements of the application forms.

It is possible that Vanishing Point, as a company already in receipt of Regular Funding, potentially had an advantage over companies new to applying. For example, Vanishing Point has a good understanding and experience of contributing to CS objectives - Creative Learning, Environment, EDI & Digital. These are complex areas that must be connected to an artistic programme - which itself may have been conceived independently of these objectives; good art cannot be a *response* to funding objectives, but must be able to *relate* to them. For existing RFOs and new companies to be applying on exactly the same grounds, therefore might seem unfair.

Timescale Problems

The timescales for applying and being notified of success or failure created difficulties. The applications were reviewed in July but no one was notified of the results until February. Whilst we appreciate the reasons for this, perhaps there should be a 2-stage application process so that those who have not been successful can be given more notice and those who have been successful can begin to plan, even if the exact level of funding has not been decided. The timescales of decision-making in relation to the realities of artistic planning and delivery were very problematic. For example, Vanishing Point was not able to commit to presenting a show at the Lyceum Theatre in the spring of 2019 because we could not guarantee being able to deliver that show. The Lyceum, on the other hand were closing programming for that season in January 2018.

Funding Priorities

The fact that everyone (artists/artist led organisations/umbrella organisations/development organisations) must apply for the same pot of money doesn't seem right. Artists or creative companies competing for funds with an organization such as

Creative Carbon Scotland (which seems to have been created to fulfil CS's obligations to contribute to Government Environmental objectives), the *Federation of Scottish Theatre* or *Arts and Business*, leads to a lack of clarity and an unease among arts organisations about the priorities of Creative Scotland. How can there be good theatre if more money is going to organisations that don't generate theatre and – arguably – are not crucial to the creation of theatre?

Communication

Communication, particularly around the new Touring Fund has been poor. It seems that it hasn't been developed yet and that it is to be co-designed with the sector.

Reaction to Decisions and Importance of Expertise in Decision-making

We were very concerned that the reaction to the funding announcements was dominated by social media. The reality is that there is not enough money to go around and difficult decisions will *always* need to be made. In a world where – on every level – social media tends to dominate and even control policy and public opinion, we would defend the importance of experts and express concern that social media can have such an effect on decision-making procedures. Certainly, we work with many people in Creative Scotland who have an excellent knowledge of how theatre is created, the timescales and planning that is involved and who are experts at guiding us in relation to the priorities of Creative Scotland. We value these experts and believe that they are crucial in making clear decisions about funding in Scotland.

We believe it is important that peers, as well as Creative Scotland, are involved in decision-making, but believe it is important that this is part of a structured process. It is also important that these peers are eminent or leading practitioners in their field. The 'quality' of work could be partly measured by how many other organisations wish to work with an artist or organisation, what they are prepared to invest in that relationship, the prestige of the venues at which the work is invited to be presented, and so on. These things are a good measure of 'quality'. There may always be a problem encouraging eminent arts practitioners to take part in decision-making committees because they themselves are competitors for funding. Therefore, there can be a problem that practitioners who are willing to sit on decision-making committees are those with less experience and, sometimes, a more entrenched political agenda.

Importance of Organisational Structure

We would underline how essential longer-term funding is to the success of certain arts organisations. Preparing artistic work is about good ideas, but it is also about important partnerships (national and international), strategy, building and developing relationships. For example, an international co-production *Vanishing Point* is currently working on, and that will be delivered in 2020, began its planning stages in 2016. The infrastructure of an organisation is crucial in allowing and enabling this - in terms of vision, planning and workload. We would also emphasise the importance of our producers as an essential and creative part of this and dismiss the notion that producers can somehow be 'shared' by artists. The producers represent the individual voice of the company and understand its artistic vision better than producers who may represent multiple artists or organisations.

Going Forward

We believe the most important factors going forward are *communication*, *collaboration* and *knowledge*: Communication and collaboration - between artists and presenters, between arts organisations and both central and regional promoters, between funded organisations and their clients. Knowledge – the importance of funders and civil servants with deep knowledge of the arts sector and of the artists and companies operating within it.