

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Visible Fictions

I am writing as Artistic Director/Chief Executive of Visible Fictions in order to help inform the debate around public support for art and culture in Scotland and express our unease around the choices that seem to have been made in the recent decision-making process of Creative Scotland's Regularly Funded Organisation (RFO) programme.

The very notion of RFO, Scotland's version of sustained funding, is predicated on a belief that a core professional infrastructure needs to exist to give a strong basis for things to flourish. To this end, the theatre and performing arts industry funded by Creative Scotland is a connected and balanced ecology and RFO companies are a crucial part of a network that enables Scottish theatre to function with purpose and strategy. This symbiotic ecology is comprised of the following:

- regularly funded venues/receiving-theatres
- regularly funded artist-led companies
- established artists and companies
- and emerging companies/artists

These strands all feed and fuel each other. Regular, sustained funding is crucial to ensuring a professional infrastructure exists - one that serves programmers, artists and ultimately our audiences.

RFO venues/receiving theatres are the physical buildings with a programming capability. They are needed in order for work to be presented, giving employment opportunities to established and emerging artists alike. RFO artist-led companies are a bedrock of Scotland's touring infrastructure and enable venues/receiving-theatres to be able to regularly plan and programme work that deliver for our audiences. These companies also give much employment opportunities to established and emerging artists alike. All RFOs seem to support emerging companies/artists, giving them routes to support and guidance whilst also demonstrating a clear pathway of evolution and career progression. This pathway and career outline cannot be stressed enough in a professional sector.

A senior technical staff member of one of Scotland's major producing theatres shared his response with me about Creative Scotland's apparent vision for Scottish theatre, *if it hadn't been for me cutting my teeth and learning with companies like Visible Fictions, then I could never have systematically built up the skills and knowledge needed to give me the job I have now.* This sums up well the message we hear time and time again from artists and creatives. This ecology is evidently crucial – and if dismantled, as it appears to be happening, cannot help our buildings, our creative people and ultimately won't deliver for our audiences.

Sustained funding is crucial to enable artist-led companies and venues/receiving-theatres to plan, nurture relationships, fundraise, source partnerships and build

tours. This behind-the-scenes work all takes time and people - and only longer term, sustained funding like RFO secures that for organisations. It is widely reported by venues that they are unable to programme strategically and to be diverse in their programming because more and more they have to respond to companies and artists awaiting project funding decisions.

The specific removal of artist-led RFO organisations is a plan that will never help the touring theatre sector. It dismantles the sector, hinders the already limited career paths of theatre artists, creatives and producers, and more worryingly, encourages a model that works for everyone but the artists themselves - never being sustainable nor strategic and forcing artists into the equivalent of zero-hours contracts, more working 'for free' than being paid and ultimately moves the professional theatre-making sector into one that functions like a fringe-theatre. What appears to be happening is ultimately the de-professionalisation of the theatre sector. A solid, sustainably funded infrastructure that creates and tours work is a model that strengthens everything.

In this last RFO funding round, it appears that approximately £4.7 million was moved directly to organisations which might be broadly described as 'second tier', umbrella or development organisations. It is greatly concerning to see so much public funding departing from the frontline of artistic-delivery. Creative Scotland is hugely important because they are rare in funding the direct production of art in our country - and it has not been made clear by Creative Scotland how this strategy will improve and strengthen theatre and performing arts production in Scotland. The introduction of a Touring Fund is a welcome move but it needs to go hand in hand with sustainable funding for theatre producers.

Of course we recognise that funding decisions are always complex and difficult and that we are also mindful of the need for the important refreshment of any portfolio – however on this occasion this didn't seem to happen. Without a backbone of artist-led touring companies, presenting venues/receiving-theatres cannot do their job effectively, and emerging companies/artist have no place to progress to - with ultimately none of us able to serve best the people we are here for – the audiences of Scotland.

Ironically, having well-supported artist-led RFO touring theatre companies and venues is in fact the key to helping Creative Scotland grow the audiences and nurture the artists of our country – it's an opportunity to share and collaborate with them, and bring their skills, extensive knowledge, their established management structures and experience to build an infrastructure together. It is an opportunity for informed strategic cross collaboration between each of them in consultation with Creative Scotland – with clear direction and necessary financial support to build networks, to create more strategically directed work and develop more artists; it is an opportunity for the goals and ambitions of Creative Scotland to be delivered in dialogue with a professionally robust and funded sector. By investing in these organisations and as part of a clearly articulated funding agreement, these companies can deliver more for our artists, for our creatives, for the venues and ultimately for our audiences. However, this requires a clear theatre strategy from Creative Scotland, created in consultation with the theatre community, and an ever-deepening conversation between RFOs and Creative Scotland to really work together and to deliver.