

## CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

### ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

#### SUBMISSION FROM PLAYWRIGHTS' STUDIO, SCOTLAND

This response has been synthesised from [a submission made to the Scottish Government](#) in response to the draft Culture Strategy for Scotland. It was gathered from a group of 22 freelance playwrights at different career stages and from different geographical areas, all currently working in Scotland. It is also informed by ongoing consultation with playwrights and underpinned by the findings of the biennial [Survey of Playwrights](#) commissioned by the SSP and Playwrights' Studio.

#### What are the major threats to sustainable funding of the arts in Scotland?

##### **Political and organisational instability**

The Scottish Government is to be commended in its strong advocacy of the arts and for maintaining funding when other nations of the UK, and other countries around the world, have not. However, political and organisational instability at different levels – UK Government, local authorities, Non-Departmental Public Bodies and others, impacts on confidence that there will be sustainable funding into the future. Similarly, how the different bodies involved in public funding for the arts work together (or not) contributes to concern about future sustainability.

##### **Longer-term policy**

We welcome the development of the Culture Strategy for Scotland. However, the fact remains that there is no guaranteed long-term commitment or policy for continued funding of the arts. Is there a clear understanding at the highest level of Scottish society about why we fund the arts? Are current priorities based on a realistic understanding of the immense value the arts contribute?

##### **Recognising the infrastructure**

No organisation or individual deserves continuous, unscrutinised public funding. However, a strong, recognised infrastructure for the arts in Scotland would be a positive step. Artists and organisations are inextricably linked and interconnected. Decisions made about one part of the ecosystem undeniably affect another part. It is important to provide long-term funding for certain organisations to fulfil their role (whether this is support for individual artists or facilitating participation of communities). It goes without saying that rigorous review against funding objectives should be built into the process.

More must be done to meet the needs of those who have been excluded from public funding, but doing this at the expense of long-term funding for others has the potential to destruct rather than redress. A healthy ecosystem benefits everyone.

##### **Stewardship of policies**

We note the prioritisation of the Edinburgh Festivals and film in Scotland, driven from the ground up, resulting in clear policy and resultant financial support.

Distinct art forms have distinctive needs. Whilst one size does not fit all, the support and funding needed to sustain different art forms should be equitable. It would be positive to look at other high functioning areas of the arts, such as playwriting, and how this could be likewise supported and elevated.

Within the discussion that led to this submission, there was a suggestion that playwriting in Scotland becomes recognised and supported as a strategic priority, national asset or protected sector. This was based on the fact that playwriting in Scotland is already achieving many of the aims and delivering the actions and outcomes described within the draft Culture Strategy.

### **What are the main challenges for artists and cultural freelancers in obtaining funding in Scotland?**

There is enormous pressure on all funding sources. Competition is extremely high. The energy and expertise required to continually research and apply to new income sources means that capacity within individuals and most organisations is at breaking point.

The 'one size fits all' approach to applying for funding is hugely problematic. Individual artists applying for small amounts of money are required to complete similar amounts of paperwork to organisations applying for more complex projects.

It is almost impossible for individual artists or artist-led micro-businesses to progress to different models (e.g. small to medium enterprise).

There is a lack of funding to meet basic needs, e.g. equipment, time to write/create. Individuals are being forced to design complex projects in order to pay themselves or create their work and, in the case of playwrights, to become producers when this is not their area of expertise. There are risks inherent in this in relation to the writer being adequately paid for their time as a playwright.

On a basic level, there is a lack of availability of information on funding sources or affordable training in this area. (The Scottish Government's focus on empowering the social enterprise sector is a model that could be looked at for artists and smaller organisations in order to allow them to progress.)

### **How should public money be made available to support artists and cultural freelancers in Scotland, including any relevant international examples of best practice?**

From the perspective of the playwrights we consulted with, structures need to change to remove the necessity for them to rely entirely on theatre companies. It was recognised that these companies may also be struggling financially to deliver their overall aims and ambitions, to support artists, diversify the work on their stages and develop audiences.

Examples of solutions included:

- The recognition of new writing as a specific sector within theatre
- An explicit policy for its sustainability and growth, including ring-fenced funding for commissioning

- A dedicated creative hub for new writing which could distribute funding through a central resource, in a 'triangular' model connecting writers with organisations, improving national and local support.

For example, the New Play Network in the USA or scaled-up versions of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland\* or CABN with specific roles of distributing funding, publishing or other aspects of playwriting which are not currently fulfilling their potential

Other ideas included:

- Bursaries to write which are relatively simple to apply for and for the applications to be administered
- Streamlined application processes which separate individuals from organisations
- Evaluation undertaken at a macro level by the funding distributor, not the individual artist (i.e. where artists have been awarded funding against a particular priority, there would be no need for complex evaluation of small projects)
- \*Making best use of organisations such as Playwrights' Studio, Scotland in terms of intelligence, overview, expertise and ability to deliver projects, incubate projects for playwrights, and distribute financial awards.

### **What factors should be considered and how should decisions be made about which artists or cultural freelancers should obtain public funding in Scotland?**

*Factors include:*

Less reliance on historical 'gatekeeper' models, particularly in relation to playwrights and the performing arts.

Valuing the freelance artist and their distinctive role within the cultural ecosystem.

The needs of artists based on the realities of the particular art form they are working within.

Quality, professionalism and accessibility. Artists are deeply connected to their communities whilst also striving for excellence in their practice. For example, playwrights work consistently in local communities and environments such as schools, universities, for youth, elderly and community organisations and in prisons.

The track record and ambition of the artist who is applying and whether the funding meets their needs at that particular career stage.

Does the artist have a support network or are there organisations that could help them by incubating projects or providing other support?

*Decisions should be made in the context of:*

A clearly articulated policy of support for artists with simple and transparent guidelines, including a consistent articulation of what costs are eligible and which are not (e.g. childcare).

A straightforward application process that does not take a disproportionate amount of time to complete, in comparison to the financial award.

Specific, high level skills and expertise within the distributing body's staff team to adequately assess the needs of artists, and to provide feedback.

A sophisticated knowledge of the cultural landscape and the particular art form the artist is part of. This may be changing rapidly.

The impact the funding (or its refusal) will make on the artist in the immediate and longer-term.

The distributing organisation's ability to own its decisions and, where necessary, defend the artist.