

## Statement for SCAN members on the Visual Arts Sector Review 19.10.2016

Creative Scotland launched its [Visual Arts Review](#) this week which follows the [Arts Strategy](#) published in August during the Edinburgh Festival.

It is nearly 70 pages long and I'm sure you will all make time to read it over the next few weeks – this review and the data in it will be as significant as we make it. There is lots of useful and important data within the review, and below I set out SCAN's first-take analysis on some of the central themes. I have not referenced every area, and I know everyone will have their own take on the findings including some areas that still need further research and analysis. However, I look forward to exploring it in more detail with you all in the weeks and months to come.

### Introduction

Within the first page of the executive summary, Amanda Catto, Head of Visual Arts, acknowledges that despite the high levels of excellence and activity generated, the sector is very fragile from both a personal and organisational perspective. This statement will be welcomed by many of our members who feel that recent dominant media narratives and particular success stories mask the harsh reality: organisations are committed but over-stretched, whilst artists and cultural workers are most often faced with a precarious and poorly paid existence.

The report covers the wider landscape including career progression, pay and conditions, education, equalities, infrastructure, income generation, funding and audiences, to name but a few. Some areas have more statistical detail than others, backed up by external research sources including the Scottish Households Survey and the two surveys conducted by SCAN. You can see a snapshot of the survey data [here](#).

Readers of the Review will note that further research to better understand the specifics of some areas is required, including;

- the funding and provision of contemporary art at a local authority level
- the scope of artist led activity
- the relationships and opportunities that exist within the Higher Education (HE) sphere.

Within the Review, the Arts Strategy, and the SCAN surveys there are common, often interlinked, themes. Most readers of the Review will find their particular context referenced in some way. Many of the findings mirror topics and issues that are being discussed regularly by our members, but it is useful to have them articulated and backed up by data; this knowledge is no longer confined to the Visual Arts Team and can now permeate wider through the funding body.

### Key Issues and Themes

Some of the most pressing themes in the Review include;

- the financial position of individuals and organisations
- the strong likelihood of continued reductions in public funding
- the desire for stronger advocacy and visible sector leadership
- the need for funded professional development across all career stages and contexts

I have focused on these themes further below for a reason: I see them as being interlinked and potentially all having an impact on each other in some way.

### **Resilient Organisations**

The Arts Strategy and the Visual Arts Review both reference the need for resilient organisations, new styles of leadership, innovative business models and also a shift in approaches to collaboration. Unfortunately, there are no case studies or examples of what these new styles and models are. Clearly each organisation is unique and many already display these capabilities, but as the Review concedes, they are almost certainly already working way beyond their capacity.

To enable organisations (who want) to research new ways of working and income generation, engage in strategic leadership and explore new collaborations, it is clear that initial investment will be required; freeing up staff time, creation of new posts, and access to resources to support this is essential. Importantly, collaboration must make sense; collaboration purely as a response to austerity is not a positive step. Most organisations regularly work with other organisations, often successfully but not always. For example, in the HE sector scale is an important factor. It is very difficult for a small three-person arts organisation to meet the bureaucratic demands of larger institutional partners. Members regularly report problems with developing UK collaborations due to the variance in budgets. A cursory glance at English NPOs shows significant variance in turnover and grants awarded. However, a detailed benchmarking would be essential for this argument to carry weight.

I think it's important to note also that ACE have led initiatives in recent times aimed at building resilience across the arts including Catalyst Evolve, their Fundraising Fellowship programme, the Fundraising and Philanthropy programme, and Arts Impact (Social Investment for the arts). What impact these have had on visual arts organisations specifically I don't yet know, but this type of support for Scottish organisations is currently lacking.

The survey data paints a clear picture that the vast majority of visual arts organisations are small in scale. Ever increasing reporting demands place a huge burden on small staff teams and have left many feeling pulled in different directions. Organisations whether RFO or in other funding contexts will welcome the invited opportunity to have a more open discussion with Creative Scotland about their strengths, specific organisational focus and ability to deliver on multiple policy indicators. It is essential to rebuild the trust between funders and organisations which may have been eroded.

### **Funding and Income**

Both reports suggest that increased - let alone standstill - public funding is unlikely. This is a marked difference to the seemingly more ambitious tone taken during the open sessions that preceded the first RFO process in 2013/14 (which in any case left many bitterly disappointed at funding decisions). Local authority budgets are being cut and most Creative Scotland grants are at a standstill, which in real terms of course means a decrease. We may not have felt the full force of public sector cuts that peers in England have, but this is the reality of our times and we must not be complacent. An unexpected cut in the Government's budget could be catastrophic and result in the immediate loss of some of our most financially fragile organisations. Unfortunately, we are already seeing this in practice; although we do not yet know the details of their financial position, the sudden demise of Inverleith House, one of Scotland's leading contemporary galleries, shows the precarious situation which many organisations are in. The Review calls on sector leaders to work collaboratively instead of in competition. But, as explored in more detail in the most recent [Common Practice](#) research paper, narrowing and diminishing funding streams UK-wide (alongside an austerity-driven need for collaboration) are heightening competition and putting the distinctiveness of small arts organisations at risk.

The Arts Strategy mentions a number of opportunities that Creative Scotland are exploring, including strategic work with trusts and foundations, and opportunities for arts organisations to benefit from their Creative Industries activity - but there is no further detail yet on what that will actually mean for individual organisations. I will make a point of exploring this further with Creative Scotland as soon as possible. Many organisations are innovating and finding success in diversifying their income streams

but we must be realistic about the potential of philanthropy, commercial models and new strategic partnerships for small scale visual arts organisations.

### **Comparative sectors, profile and advocacy**

Clearly there is also direct support for high profile cultural initiatives from Government; with the SNP making manifesto commitments this year to refresh the Youth Music Initiative, Sistema, the creation of the Cultural Experience Fund, supporting touring of our National Collections and a further investment into the EXPO fund to support theatre touring across Scotland. The Film sector lobbied loudly this year around the Film Studio saga and have secured a manifesto commitment that may yet see the film unit at Creative Scotland enhanced financially.

It is interesting at this point to consider the wider impact of these high profile cultural initiatives and how they can influence higher level advocacy. Many respondents to the survey felt that the profile of other art forms was much higher than that of contemporary art, and that we need stronger advocacy (as well as better media coverage). Initiatives like Book Bug, YMI, Made in Scotland, and the new Imagine project which stages a play in a primary school in every constituency across Scotland, are a few that spring to mind. As we saw with Generation, high profile projects like these contribute significantly to raised public profile and raised awareness with policy makers. What can we, in the visual arts sector learn from these annual events?

### **Pay and working conditions**

Perhaps most shockingly, the data revealed the disparity in pay between genders at all careers stages; for those who spent more than 35 hours on their visual arts work, women were on average earning 56% less than their male counterparts. Average total income (from all sources and for both genders) is £14,000; earnings from visual arts work alone is very low with nearly one third earning less than £5,000 in their best year. In the main survey the data backs up the findings of the annual SAU members survey (although our data also includes other workers including curators and workshop facilitators etc).

SCAN will be working with some of our members to share examples of best practice and payment policies for artists. We will consult further and respond fully to the a-n paying artists framework that launched earlier this month. We would hope to be able to look at best practice for other freelance cultural workers including curators in the near future.

It will be difficult to make an impact on the precarious nature of freelance life in the short term. Fair payment and transparency is essential; increasing the number of paid commissions and opportunities would be ideal, but challenging, considering current funding restrictions; but the fact that most, whether employed or freelance, self-fund the majority of their professional development also needs to be addressed. Access to funded opportunities would immediately release some financial pressure on those working independently. Artists, curators, and directors of organisations must be able to focus on their practice and research if we want to maintain high levels of excellence. Time out of organisations for research, if well thought through, could also allow for diverse voices to contribute to organisations through freelance curatorial positions; leaders could have time for new organisational research or training unique to their specific needs and existing skill set.

### **Diversity**

The majority of respondents identified as being White. Clearly this isn't good news, and the percentage of BAME students studying at art school is similarly low (4.4%). Unfortunately, we have a worsening issue with visas which results in many of the talented artists trained here being unable to stay on after graduation. Data on the diversity of artists being exhibited here could be useful in the same way it has informed the [gender debate](#) internationally. Organisations feel that we lack useful data on the diversity of attendees, but UK wide data is available and it points towards issues specifically around a lack of diversity within socioeconomic backgrounds. As the review and survey shows there is a clear desire and commitment from organisations and artists to address social inequalities and improve diversity. The review commits to exploring this further, and it is essential that

expert view-points are brought in to inform this issue.

### **Other headline findings**

Some other important issues that stand out from the Review and Survey include;

- the large drop in those taking higher art at secondary school
- the need for a distinct international strategy
- that 65% of organisations have capital requirements but no open fund at Creative Scotland to apply to
- the lack of assistant and visiting curatorship opportunities
- And finally, worryingly less than 10% of all awards made to organisations through the Open Project Fund were awarded to visual art projects (individuals fare better at 22%)

### **Solutions**

There are no solutions or fixed initiatives offered by Creative Scotland at this time. Of course, the review isn't a strategy. However, there is lots of information within the Review and in the commitments of the Arts Strategy that could be used to argue the case for unique sector-led initiatives. Throughout the Review there is reference to some potential actions that organisations, individuals, bodies such as SCAN, engage Scotland and Creative Scotland can respond to independently. However, I very much feel that within the executive summary in particular, that a challenge to the sector is being issued; that responsibility for solutions to these problems rests with the sector itself, not Creative Scotland alone. The sector doesn't need dictated to, that is for sure. However, many may want to see better leadership from Creative Scotland on these bigger strategic themes; but it's clear that we will need to take the initiative. We must collectively drive forward and lead the agenda, working together (with Creative Scotland) to agree development priorities and strategies for action.

There is a challenge and opportunity here for SCAN as well to explore how we can most effectively facilitate collegiate action on strategic issues. This report and the data from the surveys can now be used by SCAN and the sector to help reframe the current narrative and ensure that those in positions of power and influence at policy level fully understand the challenging landscape that contemporary art organisations, workers and artists operate within. SCAN looks forward to exploring and unpacking these priorities in more detail with our members, and as a partner with Creative Scotland at their event in late November.

*Seonaid Daly, Director, Scottish Contemporary Art Network*

### **To note:**

As members will know, SCAN was commissioned by Creative Scotland to undertake mapping research as part of the wider review process. Our two research reports are included as Appendixes to the full review. They were compiled for SCAN by researcher Rachel Blanche and they report the key data gathered in the two Mapping the Visual Arts in Scotland surveys (of individuals and organisations working within contemporary art).

We have also created a new digital map which plots all the organisations that we identified during our research as working within contemporary art, from a Scottish base. We hope that this site, in its first phase of development, will be a useful research tool for artists and cultural workers, and that it will help to increase visibility of the wide variety of funded and unfunded activity that is happening right across the country.

[www.sca-net.org/map](http://www.sca-net.org/map)

[Creative Scotland Visual Arts Review & supporting documents](#)