

Update from SCAN on the situation of the visual art sector with regards arts funding and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

Document for CTEEA Debate on Arts Funding

2 November 2020

In April 2019 we responded to the CTEEA Arts Funding Inquiry. At that point we signalled a crisis in the visual arts due to years of standstill funding and cuts to local authority culture budgets. Some extracts are at the foot of this paper.

Since that time, the Government's Culture Strategy has been published – and we welcomed its commitment to putting culture at the heart of national wellbeing, focusing on both artists and organisations both of which bring inspiring, life-changing art to communities across Scotland.

However, the Covid-19 crisis has threatened the good work being done, and the steps being made towards recognition by government that the culture sector should be supported and recognised as an engine for change across all National Performance Framework areas.

The precarity that our members face has been worsened to the point of near collapse. We understand that this pandemic has led to unprecedented pressures on national budgets. However we do feel that the focus on emergency funding, without clear sight beyond March 2021 and how that will impact our sector, has left many with little hope for the future.

Emergency funding for artists

Artists were impacted hard and fast by the Covid-19 restrictions and, nine months in, many are still without recourse to funding. The speed at which the recently announced Creative Freelancers Hardship Fund was responded to is indicative of great need. What future do Scotland's artists have beyond the next round of emergency funding? Who will remain to act as the bedrock for Scotland's world-leading cultural sector?

As the fund remains open we are yet to survey members on take-up, but are closely following this fund to identify any gaps that emerge.

Emergency funding for organisations

We also await the decisions of the Cultural Organisations and Venues Recovery fund, which was aimed at organisations expecting to be insolvent by March 2021. We had key concerns about this fund, quoting from our letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture in a letter dated 8 September 2020:

'We believe the scope of this fund represents two major risks to the future of culture in Scotland. Firstly that the wide scope of the fund means that resources will be stretched too thinly to be meaningful and, secondly, that the assessment of not-for-profit cultural organisations alongside for-profit business risks creating long-term damage to the sustainability and viability of our sector.'

We know that 62% of our members surveyed did not apply to the COVR fund. The most cited reason for not applying was because the organisation did not face insolvency between October 2020 and March 2021 (26%). Other reasons were because they were part of a university or part of a local authority where an application had already been made to the Performing Arts Venues Relief Fund, rendering their application ineligible.

It is vital to note that while those who did not apply for the main reason of not facing insolvency in the period October 2020-March 2021, the scale of need remains urgent and threat comes soon after that period:

'We will manage until April 2021, our biggest concern is June onwards.'

'COVR only addressed jobs and lost income rather than giving an opportunity to really address value or how to renew and recover. I was assured by Creative Scotland staff that they believe that is still to come.'

'The uncertainty about the future has worsened.'

'The lack of facility income (courses and members etc) as well as sales we have managed to juggle. However that situation has been compounded by the remaining threat of massive service charge increases and more significantly the lack of support from Glasgow City Council as a result of the recent decisions on the Glasgow Community Fund.'

'Staff are off furlough and there is less support available with no real end in sight to the effects that Covid is having on our income.'

An ongoing emergency

All of our research and input points to an emergency with a far longer tail than March 2021. While the Government has put additional rescue funding towards flagship organisations, and has widened its pool of support to a whole range of cultural activity, it's vital that the contemporary visual arts – which feed so much cultural activity, attract jobs and investment, connect with communities and achieve real societal change – are seen as worth saving.

A commitment from Scottish Government to Creative Scotland funding levels

We need a firm commitment from the Scottish Government to a settlement for Creative Scotland of at least the equivalent of 2020/21, and we need this as soon as possible, for the benefit of the entire arts infrastructure. The ecology of the arts is interconnected; organisations provide work and income for artists, and artists provide the work that organisations show, share and support.

A commitment from Scottish Government for a realistic culture budget for 2021 onwards

We now need to see firm commitment to the aims of the Culture Strategy through strategic, far-sighted investment. In June, we urged the Cabinet Secretary to take bold fiscal action through:

- An ambitious ring-fenced investment for cultural renewal where citizens can creatively address recovery locally
- A nationwide investment programme for artists, production facilities and cultural civic spaces which forms the bedrock of imagination for renewal and recovery.
- Additional investment for cultural input into curricular and extra-curricular learning that embeds creative skills for future generations.

We believe that our ambitions are essential for an ambitious renewal programme, and would be deliverable within the wider context of a **doubling of the current cultural budget and providing a five-year stabilisation deal for the cultural sector**, so that we are able to contribute fully to the national recovery and build a cultural workforce based on the principles of equality and fair work, enabling publicly-funded organisations to pay union rates and support the living wage.

Paper written by Clare Harris, Director, SCAN

2 November 2020

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Appendix:

Extracts from SCAN Feedback on the Arts Funding Inquiry, April 2019

The contemporary visual art sector in Scotland is high-achieving, highly-regarded and seen by many outside the country as containing models of good practice, creativity and collaboration that are to be celebrated and followed. Eight Turner prize winners and a further 16 nominees in 35 years have been Scottish, Scotland-based or educated in Scotland;; its creative communities from Glasgow to the Northern Isles are vibrant and inspiring, producing work that not only challenges the viewer but that in many cases has a real and lasting impact on community wellbeing. As the Scottish Government itself has stated: *'Scotland has an enduring world-wide reputation as a centre for ideas, learning, education, creativity and innovation.'* (A Culture Strategy for Scotland, gov.scot)

The strength of the sector's achievement and ambition, however, is not matched by the support provided it. We're talking about a crisis.

There are several key points to make about the status quo, which in turn inform our submission on how a sustainable funding model could look:

Response 1: Strategic thinking to avert crisis

Many visual arts organisations were awarded standstill funding deals in the most recent round of regular funding (RFO funding) from Creative Scotland. By the end of this period (2021) that means a real term drop in funding of around 15% since 2014.

Running concurrent to this, recent cuts to local authority budgets have placed arts provision across Scotland under serious threat;; in some areas facing decimation.

We call for a funding model that will put the sector back on a stable footing and will work strategically with the sector to ensure that available funding is put to best use.

Response 2: Understand and commit to the value of art at the highest level

A firm commitment is needed at government level to put the value and support of the arts at the heart of policy and decision making. Societal links between cultural activity and wider wellbeing should be more clearly understood and set within the government's strategic direction.

Q2 How should that funding be made available to artists?

Response 1: Ensure funding is administered through an arms-length body

While we have clearly stated the need for local and national government to place art and its impact at the heart of policy, the distribution of public funding is best-placed within a politically-neutral arms-length body, which is not steered by the prevailing political wind.

Response 2: Create funding cycles that allow for development

The three-year funding cycle for regularly-funded organisations and the annual open project funding scheme (both Creative Scotland) have been acknowledged as restrictive and difficult to administer for organisations and individuals in the sector. In layman's terms, complex application and reporting processes demand significant amounts of time, from small, often part-time teams of staff and/or volunteers.

A return to the five-year cycle of Foundation Funding, for example, would be one way to ease this burden

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