The views below are provided in the context of my work as curator and director of a small, not-for-profit organisation funded by Creative Scotland, working in the visual arts in Scotland, but also as a member of the public – a ‘cultural consumer’.

1. The extent to which the new strategic and operational changes have helped Creative Scotland move towards meeting its objectives and rebuilding its relationship with the sector.

The changes made have been, in general, a significant improvement and have made a substantive contribution to the re-building of a functional relationship with both the professional sector and its audiences.

Key among these positive changes I would highlight –

- the recognition of need for artform expertise and the acceptance of differentiation between different sectors: visual arts / theatre / literature etc., all functioning in very different ways, both in production and dissemination or public presentation of work
- the re-introduction of grants for individual artists, which has been a very important, indeed vital component of the relative success achieved by many visual artists working in Scotland over the last 2 decades, with even small amounts of funding offering vital support at important moments
- the reduction in the ‘ambition’ for CS as a body to commission and curate, which is not the proper function of a government-funded body but is the task of the commissioners, curators and other expert producers working in Scotland and their partners / colleagues / peers world-wide
- the clarity and tone of communication is much improved and very welcome

What issues and / or negative response there was to the outcome of the Regular Funding process was largely, it seems, attributable to CS having insufficient funds for the scale and ambition of the sector. The organisation’s ability to manage this difficult, delicate process and the communication of and responses to its outcome was, in my view, undermined by the Scottish Government’s decision to fund Scottish Youth Theatre, despite its failure to secure Regular Funding through the due and proper process to which all organisations applying had been submitted. Such interventions run the risk of breaking down what confidence and respect exists.

2. How Creative Scotland will ensure it achieves value for money in delivering its priorities for investment.

If we look at quantity of activity, and if comparisons are made outside Scotland, Creative Scotland already achieves extra-ordinary ‘value for money’ through the organisations that it funds. In the visual arts at least, there is not a single funded
organisation in operation at anything like the level (turnover) of the main comparable organisations in England, for example (cf. Baltic, Ikon, etc.)

What we cannot however yet gauge – in the absence of the pending Visual Arts Review – is a sense of that sector’s achievements (for artists and audiences), in terms of quality and depth of engagement, and meaningful contribution to vibrant cultural life.

Creative Scotland is inextricably dependent on the work of the organisations it supports to achieve its work, including in respect of ‘value for money’. The task of collating and analysing the information that allows value to be measured needs to be carefully considered so as not to stifle the organisations that provide the crucial content and public face.

It is important to differentiate between ‘value for money’ and ‘cheap’. If we still want to achieve excellence and quality in our cultural offering and experiences – this is unlikely to be cheap. It is also incredibly important that it is not only those things that are most likely to be measurably successful that receive support – risk-taking, testing new approaches, ambitious, experimental work – all need to be part of the whole package, and are inevitably risky. There needs to be no fear of (occasional) failure.

3. The work Creative Scotland is doing to develop a set of performance measures and how performance is being evaluated in the interim.

Much of the work around performance to date seems to be focused on all areas except quality of work – which, as I understand it – was yet to be considered. This is obviously key as I would argue that if all the other indicators are positive, but the quality is low, the other areas are of lesser consequence.

The pressure on small-scale organisations to fulfill reporting and monitoring requirements is significant. Many funded organisations have single-figure staff, with finance and administration personnel often part–time. The combined pressure of increased data collation and reporting – including, for example, carbon footprint data introduced for the first time in 2015-16 – is difficult, if not impossible, for many companies to manage without the relevant increased staff resource to address.

Measures to make desired data capture and reporting more efficient would be welcome. For example, where CS is required to report on a certain heading to Government, it may be best placed to collate the data from online submissions, or in extrapolating averages from surveys.

4. The tangible benefits that have been achieved as a direct result of its funding structure and how these influence future funding guidelines and decision-making.

The confidence afforded those organisations offered 3–year ‘RFO’ funding is of substantial benefit in allowing better planning and efficiency. However, it is
unfortunate that the opportunity of 5-year agreements for larger organisations has been lost and I would hope that this may be re-introduced in future.

It is also important that future funding round have the capacity to accommodate the new, the flexible, growth and change – to avoid the very real danger of the sector ‘congealing’ around existent building-based organisations.

I am concerned that the restriction on ‘Regularly-Funded Organisations’ being able to apply for Project funding will inhibit a certain type of experimental work and ambitious, collaborative approaches that stand outwith the ‘normal’ programming of building-based organisations. While I appreciate some of the reasoning behind this – including scarcity of funds – it does mitigate against an important way of working for many and tends to standardize a very non-standard sector.

The structure does need to ensure that it has a mechanism for supporting the new, for growth and experimentation and ambitious, innovative forms of work.

Any additional and / or new demands on Creative Scotland and consequently on those delivering the work it supports – such as, for example, carbon reporting and equalities monitoring – must be met by an increase in funding to provide the resource for these tasks to be completed properly and without having a negative impact of the core purpose of the sectors and the artists and organisations that are its foundation.

5. How effectively Creative Scotland works alongside and complements other agencies, such as Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Enterprise, to grow the creative industries.

I have no experience or working knowledge of either Skills Development Scotland or Scottish Enterprise so cannot comment.

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