I got into films, particularly animated films, as I felt, as many now working in the Scottish creative sector do, a lifelong passion – to tell stories, emotionally connect with an audience, all over the globe, no matter what nationality or background, with appealing fairytales and identifiable characters, that would inspire the imaginations and feelings of children (and the child in every adult), which they can look back on fondly and pass onto their own children. Films that can find a new audience every generation – that will truly stand the test of time and live forever as classics. I was not, as I assume nobody now working in the creative industries was, inspired to enter my field to fill out forms.

Creative Scotland is simply too cynical for this passion. When that pessimism impacts on our creative people, they stop trying to make something beautiful. Through the negativity displayed by Creative Scotland, with the obsessive adhering of guidelines, suffocating attitudes enough to crush any visionary spirit, and a narrow-minded drive to tick boxes, they are failing to empathize with our roots and reality as filmmakers and artists, and the ultimate reason of why we make motion pictures or anything else creative.

The principle of “why” is fundamentally abandoned in Creative Scotland’s strategy.

This inadequacy of strategy would certainly be clear in the financial underperformance of the films it has supported and unleashed upon the public. “Under the Skin” cost $13.3 million to produce, with Creative Scotland’s investment of £300,000, a fragment of its total, and only made back $5.7 million. “The Illusionist” had a budget of $17 million and grossed $5.6 million. “What We Did on Our Holiday” also earned a skimpy $8.4 million. This signifies to me that the films we are producing do not have significant enough appeal to a general and worldwide audience. We are not even able to say that nothing is for art and everything is for money when our films flop. It means we can do better.

The box office failures of these films suggests that while it is essential to have people who know how to handle money, the people making the decisions must have creative backgrounds and be far more in-touch with what the public want, and what people will find appealing enough to depart with their money to see.

Upon presentation of my in-production 30-minute animated film “Operation Alley Cat”, which has yet to receive real assistance from Creative Scotland despite its significant public and media attention since being in the works as far back as 2011, and has so far pushed ahead with little to no funding purely by the
The dedication and commitment of its crew and voice cast, Creative Scotland told me the body would prefer my company to make a shorter animated film that would be seen by a tiny minority at a few film festivals and then likely forgotten afterwards. I refused, as not only would this be an abhorrent waste of taxpayers’ money, it neglects the general public audience for which the film, and all films, should be created and shared with, which Creative Scotland appear to be fine with. That is not acceptable.

Many filmmakers and creative sector professionals would agree there is a lack of clarity on criteria used to win funding, as well as demands and benchmarks within that make it impossible for up-and-coming talent to apply.

It can feel like a constant battle to get funding – more like a war in my case – and can be especially difficult for those without established reputations. Artists are sensitive people, and some will not have the fortitude to argue with the Creative Scotland staff who oftentimes will act as more of an obstacle than an ally.

It would appear that winning funding is frequently about who you know rather than what. Some funding allocations also seem to have been based on the involvement of high profile cast members rather than on the quality or merit of a project, meaning there is less funding available for more deserving projects. Creative Scotland has, whenever I have brought these issues up, fervently dismissed them, but it is plain to see. On a Scotland Tonight interview, Robert Carlyle, for whom Creative Scotland dished out £500,000, described the funding application for his film “The Legend of Barney Thomson” as “easy” and labelled Creative Scotland “helpful”. These are not the terms most film-makers in the country would use. This only perfectly illustrates Creative Scotland’s catering to those of a certain level or stature, despite their constant denial of doing so.

A major problem is Creative Scotland’s lack of vision. Marketing and promotion of Scottish talent and output needs to be on a far bigger scale – they need to be more ambitious in how it raises the profile of the Scottish creative sector on a global scale. Filmmakers should be encouraged and aim to entertain worldwide audiences, not just Scottish audiences. Creative Scotland seems resigned to the fact that other countries are ahead of us. They are apathetic, yet it is their job to provide the financial means to change it.

The Scottish film industry is not at the standard or level of those in the USA or England, and no amount of denial from Creative Scotland will alter this. But with the funds and talents available, there is no reason why Scotland can’t follow these other countries. The ongoing delay in setting up film studio facilities is partly what is seriously harming Scotland’s ability to attract filmmakers.

We equally should not be scared of wanting to attract artists and creators from outside Scotland, who can contribute to and develop the sector in the country. This can, and has already proved to be, a positive thing for Scotland. The
unjustified obsession with hiring only Scottish talent is only going to continue causing deterioration.

There is no reason for all the talent involved in Scottish films to be of Scottish nationality. Successful films from America and England have always utilized worldwide talent. During a meeting with Creative Scotland, I was criticized for hiring animators for my company from countries like America and Ireland – this was arrogant predominantly, given these extraordinarily talented people have worked on some of the biggest animated motion pictures to be released in the last 20-30 years, but large animation studios have always hired talent, be it animators, sound technicians, musicians or actors, from all over the globe. If it better the product, what is the harm? If all the talent hired is Scottish, and the film suffers and is not the best it could have been as a result, that is the real problem.

Children and audiences do not care for politics, or behind-the-scenes debates. What they see, the quality of the motion pictures they will ultimately pay to view, is what matters to them. Too much compromising is spoiling artists’ productivity and is what will kill the excellence and beauty of our output.

Creative Scotland needs to be far more supportive, encouraging and understanding of the needs of individual artists. The people making the decisions in this body and the people making films or other creative works are not like-minded, or built to express themselves in the same ways.

It is however also extremely concerning to hear that Creative Scotland has apparently denied funding to organisations or individuals that show “too much promise”. Creative Scotland, it would seem, would like to keep the status quo which would therefore suggest they do not wish, despite their mission statement, to move the country’s creative sector ahead in the correct way.

When Creative Scotland funds a dance program based on the works of Alfred Hitchcock and a trip to Tonga to study Polynesian dancing, at the concerning expenditure of £58,000, or invests a similar amount to enter ten selected bands to American music festival South by Southwest who were said to be picked not for their ability but purely because their managers were within Creative Scotland’s inner circle – something that apparently happened less than a week after a meeting I had with them in which they attempted to claim that they had no money – it is very clear why there is a substantial lack of trust and confidence in the staff and the funding decisions made by Creative Scotland. What have these funding allocations, and others, delivered in terms of benefits to the creative sector and economic value? The distribution of funding by Creative Scotland unequivocally requires far greater scrutiny and monitoring.
Thus while everyone recognises that there is not an unlimited amount of cash, and Creative Scotland cannot fund everything, there is a very clear failure – and nepotism – in the strategy of funding allocation.

The people in this organisation are keen to receive internal industry support rather than look to please the audiences it should be catering for. Their real interests lie where they should not. Watching the transformation and joy of an audience viewing your film or creation of art is the real success, not showing your work to simply peers in the same line of work, at premieres or festivals, and getting claps on the back from these associates.

Creative Scotland, at this time, seem to be content with not doing enough. There is an utter failure or refusal to acknowledge we could and should be doing far better. Creative Scotland has had years to fix their problems, be it a film studio or otherwise, and they have not.

When the well-known criticism letter signed by 100 people in the creative sector, resulting in Creative Scotland’s chief executive Sir Sandy Crombie’s resignation, the organisation offered a formal apology over its responsibility for the breakdown of relationships between the body and many of those in the creative industries. Never once have they apologised to me and my associates, for ruining every chance they have had of a positive relationship with us in our brief history. The point being that despite their seemingly constant empty promises, they have not changed and remain cavalier.

While most recognise there have been no real adjustments with Creative Scotland, some within the body, it would seem in my experience, would argue that there are success stories, yet another clear indication that they are happy to do far too little. To provide a clear example of why my arguments about the rank of our animation industry gains more support than theirs – frequently in my meetings they will bring up the film “Monkeys Love Experiments” – have you heard of it? Most people haven’t. Unless you’re actively involved in the creative sector, you’re unlikely to have. Have you heard of “The Lion King”? I rest my case. No offence intended to the creators of “Monkeys”.

Creative Scotland needs to communicate far more effectively, and truthfully, with both the creative sector and the public. Its press statements, normally in retort to a well-deserved public criticism, are often bland political-speak – and often outright lies – lacking in enthusiasm for the arts, or making any actual difference.

Only earlier this year, Creative Scotland was slammed in the press when they were reputed to be the direct cause of losing out on a blockbuster film by Black Camel Pictures, which was consequently moved to Wales. Creative Scotland attempted to avoid blame for the situation by providing the idiotic response that the move was caused not Creative Scotland’s offer of funding but by a financial
plan change – the direct result of which was Creative Scotland offering only half of the funds required by the filmmakers.

We have not built a film or animation industry to the level of other countries in the world and the lack of any enthusiasm to boost Scotland to that standard is both surprising and bigoted. The dismissive attitudes displayed towards this by an organisation that claims to be progressing Scotland’s creative sector is a total abomination.

There is a fear, which was pressed upon me by worried friends and associates when I began to publicly criticise the organisation, that you could be blacklisted by speaking out against Creative Scotland, and never receive any funding. My worry is that for this reason, people working professionally in the creative industries may be afraid to come forward and say what they really think about Creative Scotland. To those people, I would say we need to take more control, come together to make sure that they are truly there to serve us as a public body, and make a better industry for us to work in. They are there to serve us, not the other way around.

On that note, Creative Scotland should have far more of a role in encouraging a sense of community spirit across the creative sector in Scotland – the approach taken by Creative Scotland seems to prioritise the success of the individual rather than seeking to promote Scottish culture and artists as a whole, thus encouraging selfishness and unnecessary competitiveness among beginning filmmakers and others in the creative sector trying to get ahead. This view has been shared by others, and I’ve heard reports of this greedy attitude and lack of societal support within the places such as the fashion sector of the country.

Creative Scotland should also be developing more of a role in relation to education, by allocating far more funding and time towards supporting young up-and-coming generations. This could include going to schools and colleges to show pupils and students the opportunities offered by the creative sector, promoting the sector as a potential career and developing pathways, as well as preparing students learning their craft for the realities of the creative sector, as well as the current serious failings within. Work should be done with students to ensure that once they graduate they are prepared and have the necessary skills and knowledge to find employment in the creative sector. Creative Scotland could be working alongside Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Enterprise in this context to grow the creative industries, which they have so far failed to do sufficiently.

Creative Scotland should be making far more effort to involve themselves in the teaching of these students to ensure the best possible quality of our country’s output in future generations. Quite apart from the fact that filmmakers, both up-and-coming and seasoned, need to be encouraged not to simply copy what has been successful already, as we need far more diversity in the tone and style of
Scottish films, rather than merely depressing and dark films with almost no uplifting qualities, in order to have far more range and appeal to the masses.

By owning my own business, I have had the ample opportunity to spend time in the business and enterprise world as well as the creative field. While the entrepreneur realm is full of positive people ready to grasp opportunities and take chances, the creative sector is full of people who feel run down and miserable that they over-lorded by an organisation who frequently give the impression they could not care less about them.

Despite our country’s creative sector being dominated by the cynicism and dishonesty of those with the financial means to support it, I still have hopes of a Scotland that can have a thriving creative sector that will be admired throughout the world. There is talent in Scotland – it needs to be nurtured and developed, and Creative Scotland should be having a far bigger hand in this.

Creative Scotland may try to discard everything here, and say they’re already doing everything I’ve said. They may try to deny and counter things with their routine political-speak baloney. I challenge them to do so. It would only illustrate to the public, and my peers in the creative sector, that everything I have written about these people is right. They are not addressing their failings properly despite several calls to, they refuse to acknowledge the extent of their problems, and they will not do what is required of them to rescue our creative sector.

A more positive organization for all artists in Scotland, governed by other people more interested in actually achieving the necessary modifications, would be of large benefit and appeal to both the creative industry workers and the public, the money of whom is being spent. Therefore it is my professional opinion that immediate and revolutionary progressive action is required, and in the personal interest of seeing the Scottish creative sector flourish correctly, I believe and strongly advise that the only course of action to repair harm and prevent further damage would be to discard and scrap Creative Scotland entirely, and build up a completely new system with new people.

Mark Flood
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