

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Red Note Ensemble Ltd

Successful RFO applicant 2015-18 and 2018 – 21

1) The process of applying for Regular Funding for the 2018-21 period and your experience of that application process.

The process for the current round of RFO funding was the most difficult and gruelling process for anything of this type that I have ever encountered in my working life. To set things in context, since 2009 Red Note Ensemble has been initially the recipient of project grants, then of Flexible Funding, then of “Projects forming Programmes” support, and then an RFO client of Creative Scotland since 2015 (our award in 2018 being our 2nd successful application to the scheme). In addition, as an individual musician and composer I have made successful applications to the Open Fund, successful applications to Made in Scotland, and have applied to many other funding streams over the years.

The RFO application for support 2018-21 was a 6-month campaign which resulted (in our case) in i) a 119-page business plan making and evidencing, with extensive research, the case for supporting our work (the word count for the business plan alone, excluding appendices, was approximately 20,000 words; bear in mind that a “Business Plan” for an RFO application is not a business plan in the normal sense – it is written bespoke to Creative Scotland’s criteria which are significantly divergent from normal business practice) ii) a 30-page application form, and iii) 15 further pieces of supporting evidence, some very substantial, including budgets, letters of support and evidence of the quality of our work. Writing, collating and arguing the case for our work in this application was primarily my task, supported at the proof-reading stage by Red Note’s Chair and others in our small organisation (Red Note has 2 full-time employees, of which I am one, plus 4 part-time employees). Writing the application was undertaken at the same time as managing and directing Red Note’s national and international performance programme of >30 events each year, including touring to France, Holland, Belgium, India and Australia in 2016/17.

Bearing in mind that final Masters dissertations are frequently of the order of 15,000 words, the level of work required for this RFO application was significantly more than that often required to gain a postgraduate degree. By any estimation, such a huge task for a small organisation will have an adverse effect one way or another; it will either have an impact on the level of actual, productive work that can be undertaken by the organisation, or it will have a toll on those given the task. In Red Note’s case, the combination of the application alongside the normal run of work had such a severe, exhausting and demoralising effect on me personally that at the time I vowed that I would never put myself through such a process again. It would not overstate the case at this point that I would still rather leave the organisation than have to prepare and submit another RFO application in a similar fashion in future.

2) The importance of Regular Funding to you or your organisation.

Regular Funding is essential to Red Note Ensemble. It is the only funding available at anything like the level required to support the work we do at the quality and level we work at; similarly, it is vitally important to have stable, guaranteed funding to match funding from other sources (for instance, from other Trusts and Foundations). It is also very important due to its unrestricted nature; it can be used to support all elements of our work, whether international touring, performing within shopping centres in Easterhouse, developing young composers' talents in schools, touring within the Highlands and Islands, or supporting the core staff and functions of the company.

What is also not well-recognised at present is that across the arts, the level of funding from other sources (trusts and foundations, sponsorship, individual philanthropy) is now in free-fall. Within Red Note's sector (contemporary music) the latter two – sponsorship and philanthropy - are only possible once a certain international visibility has been reached (there are only 4 or 5 such contemporary music performing groups world-wide in this category that are supported by sponsorship and / or philanthropy to any significant extent (Ensemble Modern and Musik Fabrik from Germany being two of them)). Within the former, there is only a limited number of trusts and foundations across the UK whose criteria we fit within. Due to the funding crisis at the Arts Council of England several years ago, the knock-on effect is that the substantial English trusts that support contemporary music have been stretched over recent years supporting those organisations whose ACE funding has been slashed; as a consequence (and, perversely, because Creative Scotland funding is seen by England-based trusts as being relatively stable and even generous) income from trusts and foundations across the board is becoming increasingly difficult to source (of £150,000 of applications in 2017/18 we secured £15,000 income; in previous years we would normally manage £80,000 - £90,000).

As an additional issue, there are vanishingly few substantial (i.e. > £2,000 per grant) grant-making bodies which support contemporary music in Scotland that are not already taken up with more conservative, classical-music interests. The funding which we do secure to support our work is for the more socially-based aspects of it; substantial, direct support for the production of art is almost only securable from Creative Scotland.

3) The challenge that Creative Scotland faces in allocating funding when applications for funding exceed the funds available.

Does Scotland want a planned cultural sector, or one that is unstable and changes according to different organisations' abilities to attract funding? Scotland is currently running a mish-mash of the two systems, one through the National Companies (and direct government funding) and one through Creative Scotland.

This causes very real tension as Scotland has, at the National Companies level, organisations that cannot fail (Scottish Opera, NTS, etc) which are managed very light-touch and are established, effectively, in perpetuity - and at the Creative Scotland level we have organisations that are not permitted to achieve the same stability, and live or die by their most recent funding application.

This is a very divided situation, with different criteria for success and survival – much tougher, it seems, for the smaller Creative Scotland-funded organisations than for the National Companies – being applied in the two cases. The clash between these two parallel systems was made never more apparent through the (repeated) Scottish Youth Theatre debacle. It is somewhat extraordinary – and, to honest, faintly galling as an RFO applicant - that an organisation that was judged unworthy of Creative Scotland support in both 2015 and 2018 is somehow judged to be worthy of direct Scottish Government support instead. There is a real danger that being directly funded by the government is seen as a reward for failure – reflecting badly on the existing National Companies as well - as clearly there are some wholly-essential organisations that are fragile flowers that cannot be exposed to the harsh winds and chance of the RFO process. What is the reasoning for this? Which arts organisations within Scotland cannot be seen to fail? Why do these organisations not need to fulfil the criteria for success that Creative Scotland-funded organisations do?

4) The challenges that Creative Scotland faces in supporting individual artists and organisations from different areas of the arts.

Laying aside the obvious problems of comparing like with non-like (i.e. making decisions on funding between artforms, and different practices within artforms), there is a supplementary issue around the awarding of funding, which is: to what degree is the artistic activity fundable from other sources? This would seem to be essential information for a funding body to have detailed, reliable access to. If we take the view that Creative Scotland only exists because of “market failure” in the arts (defining “the market” very broadly as all funding sources other than Creative Scotland – philanthropists, box office, promoters, local authorities, sponsors and trusts and foundations amongst them) then it needs to know how much the market is failing by in each case and provide support proportionately.

This is particularly important to Red Note because, as outlined above, contemporary music within Scotland has never been substantially fundable from sponsorship or philanthropic sources, it is finding that securing funding from other trusts and foundations is becoming increasingly difficult, and is reliant first of all upon support from Creative Scotland, and secondly upon engagement fees. Engagement fees, furthermore, are only achievable in any substantial form through international touring, meaning that the work has to be made for that purpose in terms of scale, aesthetic, and cost (which can be at odds with what is required for work to be successful or fundable within Scotland).

Other areas of the arts have different options and possibilities with regards to funding; for instance, “standard repertoire” classical music attracts well-publicised and significant sums from Scottish-based philanthropists and trust funds due to its more mainstream nature. The visual arts have, arguably, the strongest suit with regard to philanthropy, with artworks being bought by individuals. Different forms of theatre attract different levels of box office income; at the more populist end, pantomimes tend to be largely self-funding (and often help to support the work of a theatre year-round) even within the subsidised sector, and heavy investment in large-scale spectacular productions occasionally leads to West End financial success – however, of course, small-scale contemporary touring theatre, or dance, simply cannot make enough box office income to cover costs.

Within Creative Scotland, in discussion with officers, they are frequently the last to know of changes in the funding scene or to be informed of the nuances between different areas of their artform with regards to their fundability at any given time; and there appears to be insufficient awareness in general of Creative Scotland's place within the "funding mix" on a detailed, artform-by-artform, subsector-by-subsector level. All of this would seem to be absolutely essential to making informed decisions about whether or not Creative Scotland should support any given application - that, and what Scotland "wants to see".

5) The extent to which you consider Regular Funding supports the arts and creative organisations throughout Scotland.

If by this, do you mean, "does Regular Funding as administered by Creative Scotland create a supportive network across Scotland for other arts activities (not necessarily funded through the RFO network)?" then the answer is No.

There seems to be very little understanding – or, at best, if there is understanding, very little action taken in light of that understanding – as to how the ecology of the arts works; in particular, how larger organisations that are present for long periods of time (10 years+) in particular places provide facilities, people, skills and audiences that enable smaller organisations to grow and flourish around them. RFO funding is not generally on as sufficient scale (except perhaps in the case of the larger theatres) nor guaranteed for long enough (max 3 years) to enable this slow growth of a varied, active ecology to take place around the supported organisations. The organisations of the scale required – which are mainly the National Companies, to be fair – are all central-belt located; an organisation such as APA in Aberdeen could potentially serve such a function but the funding it receives is distributed too thinly across artforms and venues for this to happen. Aberdeen is a classic example of the ecology issue; just enough funding to support work coming in from elsewhere (and then leave), but not enough to create the ecology that holds the artists, audiences and accumulated skills in place long enough to create the interconnected network that embeds the arts within that community, such as we see in Edinburgh or Glasgow.

In more rural areas, the problem is far worse and, to be honest, Creative Scotland's support for RFOs can only be tokenistic in this situation. Creative Scotland's methodology – which is to passively receive applications from artistic entrepreneurs but very rarely to "plant", plan, or make anything on its own initiative – results in a bad feedback loop in areas where there is little activity. Little activity in a given area means that few artists and artistic entrepreneurs will move there, as they will not find the networks of support (the ecology) they need to flourish; as a consequence, fewer applications to Creative Scotland result, as there are fewer skilled and committed people to make them; and so less activity happens, in an ongoing downward cycle.

6) The impact of awards for Regular Funding on other funding streams.

At Red Note, we are particularly grateful for RFO status as it supports, at least in part, the spectrum of our activity – from performing at the Bruges Concertgebouw to creating new music with children in Ferguslie Park. However, one of its major difficulties is that its fixed-sum nature – we cannot, for instance, apply to the Open Fund to support an international tour that becomes a reality in year 2 or 3 of the

funding cycle – means that we struggle to be as responsive to opportunities as organisations that can a) survive on the smaller sums available to Open Fund applicants and b) have the advantage of being able to make multiple applications in response to demand and opportunity.

We would particularly welcome the opportunity to be able to apply – such as Irish organisations can - to an equivalent body to Culture Ireland (the Scottish version would be “Culture Scotland”, presumably) which supports international touring on an application-by-application basis independently of Creative Scotland. This would mean that one major issue that we have – being able to respond to international opportunities without diverting money from our fixed-sum RFO grant – would be alleviated.