CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE SOCIETY

Engaging with the European Union

At a time when freedom of expression, human rights and diversity are under threat across the globe, we believe that culture, and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, has a crucial role to play in bringing people together from across the political spectrum, challenging outdated narratives and exploring ground-breaking ideas and innovations. This could produce the greatest benefits in Europe through openness, collaboration, mutual understanding and ongoing commitments to shared values and learning. Culture is, and should remain, an important way for engaging in Europe. This produces the greatest benefits when supported through strong engagement with individuals and organisations in the culture sector and a dedicated budget to ensure that what is supported leads to: longer term partnerships and collaborations; the development of a two-way integrated approach; showcasing of innovative, experimental and excellent cultural work from Scotland.

The Hubs could best support by reinforcing activities and events that represent Scotland as a forward-thinking, contemporary, generous nation committed to innovation and with something unique to offer in Europe. The Fringe Society has developed a good relationship with the Brussels, Dublin and London Hubs and we are keen to explore ways that we can similarly work with Paris and Berlin Hubs. The Society has the ability to develop bespoke activity to suit the country involved, whilst ensuring we are delivering against our own business plan. We are delivering Fringe info sessions and networking events in Dublin and London, aimed at artists wishing to come to the Fringe and supporting arts industry who want to come to Edinburgh to see and buy work. This facilitates and supports the circular economy of the Fringe, bringing artists and industry to Edinburgh where work can be seen and toured back to those countries.

We received funding from the Brussels Hub to deliver a ‘Made In Scotland Festival’ in Brussels in June 2019. This involved the Society project managing the fund, delivering a programme by employing two producers to: select 7 pieces of work from the Made in Scotland back catalogue and employ those companies to travel to Brussels; identify and secure suitable venues in Brussels; develop a website which aligned to our box office; organise workshop sessions for arts industry; and identify and invite suitable professionals from Scotland and Belgium, Flanders, Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark to participate.

Whilst we are still evaluating the outcomes of this project, initial feedback has been phenomenal in that:

- Scotland’s reputation as an open, welcoming, contemporary and connected country keen for ongoing cultural and economic exchange with mainland Europe was enhanced through presentation of this work.
- Previously unengaged key producers and institutions are now engaged with the Fringe and are planning to travel to Scotland in August to see and buy work;
- productions shown in Brussels have received interest from attending promoters for onward touring.
understanding and knowledge of what the Fringe is, and does, has been greatly increased
most shows were at full capacity with audiences experiencing new and interesting work, highlighting the high quality of work shown at the Fringe and Scotland’s role to support and promote inclusivity, diversity, disability and equality in the arts.
we met with leaders of key European art institutions to maximise the opportunity to build further relationships.

This type of investment can deliver strong tangible outcomes and is a model that deserves serious consideration by the Scottish Government for future funding.

The Fringe Society is a world leader in many ways including developing new technologies to respond to our changing environment, such as box office innovations to sell tickets for over 300 venues, big data solutions to selection paralysis and traffic congestion, tap-to-tip capability for street performers; models of best practice on accessibility; and, we are also looking to strengthen our performing arts market, which attracts over 1,400 industry professionals, and provides crucial support for visiting arts industry from other European countries. A recent sample of 63 producers polled after the 2018 Fringe, showed that, between them, they had booked 388 shows by the point of poling in February 2019, leading to an estimated 3 years of work for those artists. As such, the Fringe Society seeks to be a key strategic partner with the Scottish Government to enhance Edinburgh and Scotland’s reputation and for Scottish Government to recognise and promote the strengths of the Fringe to other European nations and those across the world.

Engagement with the rest of the world

Countries that are attractive in a holistic way – known for their cultural heritage, contemporary cultural offering, welcome, friendliness, generosity, quality of life, freedom of expression – tend to be the countries that others want to do business with. Scotland is known for its rich cultural output, its creative industries, its music, art and festivals. This could be recognised more as a calling card to open doors to relationship building with other countries.

The Fringe engages with other countries via attendance at significant industry events, such as ISPA in New York and CINARS in Canada; we are invited to provide keynote addresses across the world including in recent years Russia, China and Brazil; and, we promote the Fringe at other festivals such Avignon and Adelaide. We also provide live ‘Fringecasts’ where artists can tune in from across the world to participate in information sessions about the Fringe; we have had participants from every continent (and over 50 countries in total) at these sessions. There is an opportunity for Scottish Government to work more closely with the Fringe to support and enhance our international engagement. Partnership receptions have been hosted in New York and Montreal with the Scottish Government, and opportunities such as these are mutually beneficial to both parties and can be easily modelled elsewhere in the world, places that are currently not viewed as a priority country for Scottish Government, but are important for an international festival such as the Fringe that welcomes 63 nations to our stages, with a total of 157 countries represented through artists, industry, media and audiences.

Culture enables a mutual relationship to be built and nurtured, and it is important that overseas offices work in partnership with the culture sector, similar to the response above, to ensure ideas and work are not just parachuted in, but are truly carried out in the spirit of
enhancing and deepening cultural relationships with the sector here in Scotland and the partner nations. Scottish Government overseas offices can help identify cultural partners in that country which we might be able to work with and collectively we can develop a cohesive programme of activity.