



Review of Touring Theatre & Dance Working Groups 2017: draft recommendations to Creative Scotland

Background

The FST Touring Forum met in April 2017 following publication of Creative Scotland's Review of Touring Theatre & Dance and agreed to create two working groups: one on Audience Development chaired by Alice McGrath (Red Bridge Arts) and one on Code of Practice chaired by Liam Sinclair (Byre Theatre). Following a good response from members, two working groups were set up and each met once in July and once in September. To keep groups at a manageable size and with appropriate balance of membership, an external reference group was created and this paper has also been shared with members of that group for their input. Creative Scotland has asked for input to their review of Open Funding by mid-October.

This paper and the accompanying diagram set out the emerging recommendations of the working groups. The paper identifies, as a starter for ten, some pros and cons around the recommendations and the Touring Forum is invited to consider and add to these where appropriate. In the meeting, those present will be invited to test the recommendations against short, medium and long-term outcomes.

Recommendation: a shared, sector-led vision and strategy for touring dance and theatre

The overarching recommendation is that the sector, facilitated by FST, should take leadership in developing a shared, sector-led vision strategy for touring dance and theatre. The strategy would:

- **Be outcome-driven;**
- **Influence funding;**
- **Instigate research on audiences;**
- **Explore and agree good practice;**
- **Actively share experiences.**

We recommend that a task-group be responsible for developing and monitoring the strategy. That group should, like the working groups, involve membership from different parts of the sector including venues, producers, artists, marketing staff, and so on.

Create a Touring Strategy Group

- **To develop a shared vision for touring theatre and dance focusing on the outcomes we would want to see in an improved scenario**

Pros: articulate the benefits that a strategic approach would bring (e.g. reduction in single night engagements, better responses to communication)

Cons: what if requirements/wants of different groups conflict? Who decides?

- **Develop a touring strategy that helps Creative Scotland with funding priorities and cycles for touring work**

Pros: Funding decisions made in better time; decisions more in tune with sector priorities; specific support for remounts

Cons: Unlikely to be any 'new money' from CS for this so it would come out of Open Funding; potential for risk-aversion would have to be managed.

- **A new 'pledge' or good practice toolkit for all participants, articulating positive intentions and focusing on more and better communication, sharing of information, research and analysis, and seeking to put audience development at the heart**

Pros: recognizes that people are at the heart of theatre-making; 'sets the intention' for all participants; makes it easier for new entrants to understand what they can expect

Cons: could be sidelined in the reality of daily pressures; how will the intentionality filter through bigger organisations so all staff engage?; who will check that it's influencing practice, and how?

- **Instigate new models including a network for Local Authority programmers**

Pros: provides support for the local authority sector; provides a clear pathway for artists/companies to engage with LA venues

Cons: may require financial support in an already stretched environment; does the rapid turnover and/or variety of roles undertaken within LAs mean this is do-able?

Fund and support a balanced programme of touring work

- **A new consortium approach to touring mid-scale venues, aimed at supporting the development of more mid-scale work and a more collaborative approach between venues, promoters, producers and artists**

Pros: potential to leverage in funding from other sources e.g. trusts/foundations (c.f. House in England); could support longer and hence more sustainable tours; creates a 'core' consortium and tour and allows others (including existing touring networks) to engage, i.e. inclusive rather than exclusive; allow more efficient use of resource so that more work outside the consortia can be supported

Cons: risk of homogenization, i.e. riskier work may not be selected; artists may not want to develop mid-scale work/work appropriate for those venues; consortium could have too much influence on artistic direction

- **Strategic approach to funding, supporting the development of a balanced portfolio of work including new and remounts, higher and lower risk; explicit focus on increasing box-office income**

Pros: sector determines its own approach to strategy; avoids current scenario where majority of touring offer is new work, hence harder to sell;

Cons: ring-fencing could promote complacency or ‘buggins’s turn’ approach within particular artforms; some companies/artists may not want to remount work

Conduct Audience Research

- **Share analysis and learning that already exists, to help identify gaps in intelligence**

Pros: ensure we don’t reinvent the wheel; get more and better use of what’s out there; collectively identify the right questions to ask

Cons: can be time-consuming; might need additional resource; different companies, venues and shows might want to ask different questions so finding meaningful intelligence that’s useful to many might be hard

- **Better understanding of audience motivations**

Pros: understanding motivation will help to increase and diversify audiences; motivations (rather than just characteristics) may be easier to put ‘at the heart’ of work as they align more clearly with artist/company/venue aims and values

Cons: diversity of sector, work, localities may mean generic data of this kind is not possible and bespoke will be (very) expensive;

- **Identify and collaborate with research partners**

Pros: potential to harness capacity of students to undertake research as part of their learning; potential to work collaboratively to help shape research agendas

Cons: academic agendas don’t always align with those of industry; timescales might not align; need to avoid ‘unpaid intern’ type approach and ensure there is real learning experience involved for any students, which can be time-consuming

Develop a shared, sector-led vision and strategy for touring in Scotland

