

JM talk for Greenock Open Forum V5

Briefly going to talk about where we are now, where I believe we want to be; and then I'm going to focus mostly on how might we get there.

Where we are now?

Last 6-9 months characterised by:

Loss of trust

Destabilisation of sector

Some good things too: wider geog spread of funding (+104% to highlands theatre co's)

many other people who did not previously receive funding brought in
successfully advocated for good settlement from Sc Gvnmnt

Now - Clear commitment to new values closer to those of sector

Time of change and opportunity to refocus / create a new relationship between the sector & CS;

Where do we want to be?

CS that is confident and able to argue the case for arts & culture to government, to Local Authorities

Peer to peer, respectful and trusting rel between CS and sector

Security and ability for artists to take risk / plan over longer term alongside flexibility for CS and artists to respond to the new

How are we going to get there?

Not about discarding everything CS did (cf good things) just as CS should not be about discarding everything SAC / Scottish Screen did

Not about values (values argument has been won and debate as moved on) – CS has changed / is changing

It's about how to turn VALUES into ACTION

I believe it's about 5 things:

1. CLARITY OF PURPOSE
2. FOCUSING CS' RESOURCES ON THAT CORE PURPOSE
3. SIMPLE BUT FLEXIBLE/REFLEXIVE FUNDING PROCESSES
4. PROPER SYSTEMS FOR INVOLVING SECTOR INFORMING BOTH POLICY AND FUNDING DECISIONS
5. RESTORING TRUST & CONFIDENCE (precondition and outcome of items 1-4)

CLARITY OF PURPOSE FOR CS

Breadth of CS remit

From the outset CS' remit has been unclear and in particular its role in rel to Creative Industries

The outstanding questions are:

- Is CS responsible for all or only some of the 13 CI's as defined by DCMS / Sc Gvmnt?

Advertising; Architecture; Arts and Antiques; Crafts; Design; Designer Fashion; Film; Interactive Leisure Software; Music, Performing Arts; Publishing; Software and Computer Services; TV and Radio

- What is the nature of that role? Is it as a funder/investor? Is it a strategic or coordinating role?
- How does CS' role relate to the respective roles of Scottish Enterprise/HIE, LA's, Business Gateway?

2 facts to bear in mind:

- CS received no additional budget from Scottish Government to cover this wider remit – such budgets as there are, I understand, are held by Scottish Enterprise/HIE & Local Authorities
- CS has had a significant reduction in staff from the former SAC/Scottish Screen who are supposed to deliver against this broader remit

Clarify – not opposed to concept of CS having a remit in relation to CIs, in fact there is clearly lots of crossover and indeed potential for collaboration between commercial CIs and subsidised arts sector. But CS's role needs to be both clearly articulated and either be properly resourced or suitably modest.

FOCUSING CS' RESOURCES ON CORE PURPOSE

Quite rightly CS has been opening out funding to wider range of artists and organisations including a wider geog spread – to be applauded. But it has not paid sufficient attention as to how it will manage the greater workload involved on a reduced staff team. As a result funding processes have been overly complex and long-winded and staff have been completely overworked leading to mistakes and delays.

This lack of attention has been evidenced by the fact that the current project funding strands (about to change!) were devised over a weekend and Andrew Dixon once famously described CS' role as a funder, as “the boring bit.....”

Really obvious? We need to remember that first and foremost CS is a funding body. Working out who to give money to and managing the process of decision making, monitoring the spend and reporting that back to government IS the core purpose. And it IS difficult to do well.

Over this next year we need to focus on getting this core element right and it should have proper resources allocated to it

This means there are some things CS SHOULD NOT DO or should do LESS OF:

- Less direct project delivery of its own – needs to look at ways of achieving its core goals THROUGH the organisations it funds
- More light touch relationship with funded orgs – resist the temptation to micromanage (will say more about this later as it touches on questions of mutual trust)
- Need to consider outsourcing and also signposting “We don’t do that but here’s someone who does)

SIMPLE BUT FLEXIBLE/REFLEXIVE FUNDING PROCESSES

This is the holy grail and probably the trickiest thing of all! Simplicity is important for 3 reasons –

- In order for CS to be truly accessible to artists/orgs especially those who are new to them, there need to be far fewer funding strands, much simpler signposting processes and less bureaucratic language
- Multiple schemes with very specific criteria encourages a kind of artistic dishonesty with people jumping through hoops or squeezing their ambitions to fit into prescriptive criteria
- Third reason is to make it simpler and quicker to manage for CS

Resist the temptation to create a funding scheme to cover every new gvmnt initiative or particular CS policy area.

Similarly make it as clear as you possibly can that while you expect all applications to meet SOME of your strategic criteria, you don’t expect ANY of them to meet ALL or even the MAJORITY!

Consequently the criteria by which you evaluate the success of each project will change depending on the strategic purpose for funding them in the first place. So you might fund one artist company purely because of the way in which they are developing a particular artform (and you have minimal interest in how big or wide an audience it reaches) and you might fund another not because it breaks new ground artistically, but because it reaches a wide audience or an ‘underserved’ demographic.

This would allow you to be flexible and avoid a one-size fits all approach whilst still operating a limited range of funding schemes.

PROPER SYSTEMS FOR INVOLVING SECTOR INFORMING BOTH STRATEGIC AND FUNDING DECISIONS

This is also tricky! BUT VERY important. Vital to have an adult-adult peer rel between CS and the sector.

Need to find structures and processes that allow the sector to contribute ideas positively but not involve us in every decision – we have other things to be doing and CS have skilled paid staff for this!

Policy / Strategy:

CS are exploring a kind of policy forum to involve the views of artists/orgs in their planning.

By its nature this is proposed to be quite small - how do we avoid this group in its own turn becoming a cabal? Those who have the time and the money to be involved while the rest of us are too busy getting on with our work? How can we ensure that the people on that group are in touch with the rest of us?

Important to continue to have wider forums like today and I would also propose a cross industry forum made up of umbrella/membership bodies across the arts and creative industries who can consult their respective memberships and feed into the smaller policy forum.....

Funding decisions:

Funding decisions have a strong subjective element notwithstanding the existence of criteria. And this is necessarily so, particularly on the question of quality. Quality is one of the most important criteria against which to decide whether to fund a particular artist or not and yet it's one that funding bodies really struggle with.

As quality is essentially a subjective matter you need to have a diversity of informed voices feeding into decisions around the quality of work.

But what should it look like? Artform committees? Paid assessors? How do we ensure good people can afford the time to input into the processes? How do we ensure they remain fresh and questioning and that there is a turnover of people? How do we do this in a way which does not massively increase the admin burden of CS and further slow down decision making processes?

TRUST, CONFIDENCE & REPSONSIBILITY/ACCOUNTABILITY (ON BOTH SIDES)!

Finish briefly by talking about trust. Over the last 12 months many of us lost trust in CS. And I believe many of the actions of the former regime were borne out of a lack of trust for us / the sector.

For a new adult-adult relationship to work we have to restore trust on both sides. I believe that following the changes announced by CS board in Dec, CS is genuinely trying to engage with and address the issues many of us raised. We the sector need to give them a chance to earn back our trust – and try to hold in check any temptation to be cynical or assume bad faith. This means we need to engage in events like this as positively and constructively as we can.

It also means we need to be realistic about the practical implications of what we ask CS to do. If WE are to be trusted as partners alongside CS we have to engage with the difficulties and challenges of what they are trying to do

So to finish I want to put to you an incomplete series of challenges:

How does CS:

- Advocate for and maximise government investment but retain independence and remain artist focused?
- Balance the needs of both audiences and attenders and those of the individual artists?
- Contribute to a flexible system of support and development that acknowledges the difference between CIs and subsidised arts practice but also allows for overlap and collaboration between the two?
- Widen access to funding but still maintain meaningful and direct relations with the people it funds?
- Create funding programmes which are simple and easy to access and also responsive to the wide range of artistic and business practice in the sector?
- Implement a light touch process for decision making and evaluation which is also thorough, robust and transparent?

These are difficult questions to answer but we all have a responsibility for finding the answers, the compromises that are the best we can achieve. We have an opportunity to co-create the CS we want to see, let's engage with that challenge with a sensible mix of optimism and realism.