

## **Federation of Scottish Theatre Written Submission to Inquiry into Budget Scrutiny 2023-24**

FST is the membership and development body for professional dance, theatre and opera in Scotland, bringing the sector together to speak with a collective voice, share resources and expertise and promote collaborative working. FST represents over 200 members. This encompasses professional organisations and individuals - from national performing companies to individual artists creating their own work, and the independent producers who support them. We count all of Scotland's professional producing companies as members as well as members who provide support to parts of the sector or work in different ways to create, develop and produce live performance for audiences across Scotland, in the UK and overseas.

(This submission is an update from submission made in September 2021 and subsequent evidence provided to the Committee. Much of this submission is still relevant to the current call for views so would recommend the Committee revisits the fuller document. FST also serves on the steering group of Culture Counts so our submission should be read in conjunction with theirs.)

We fully acknowledge that support from the various recovery and emergency funds was essential to immediate survival of the performing arts, helped prevent insolvency and avoided mass redundancies.

In the absence of workable, affordable insurance - and because funding provided was, by necessity, relief, emergency or cancellation funding - it still has not fully replaced lost income usually reinvested for the future. For organisations, this income enables essential work on creative and artistic planning, programming, development, commissioning and production; artistic, employee, audience and organisational development; or, maintenance of buildings or other assets. Whilst Creative Scotland have been as flexible and supportive as they could in the agreements issued, the current situation for organisations and individuals working in the performing arts remains extremely challenging and likely to worsen.

As we commented in 2021, the performing arts ecology is intrinsically linked and its freelance workforce is vital. The hardest hit, yet the most poorly and inconsistently supported throughout the pandemic, many highly skilled and experienced freelancers did not, throughout the pandemic, work in their chosen roles. Some were forced to leave the industry altogether, leaving significant skills gaps. New entrants to the industry had their careers stalled and lost years of gaining experience. While relief funding like the Performing Arts Venues Recovery fund was hugely helpful, its purpose was ambitious and could not possibly assist every freelancer in the performing arts whose livelihood was detrimentally affected. Creative Scotland responded to this in different ways and provided specific support for individuals. However, recovery for the freelance workforce overall is painful and protracted. This remains a real crisis.

Audiences are enthusiastically returning to the live performance, and participation in the performing arts remains robust and impactful, with the benefits felt by individuals and communities right across Scotland. However, it cannot be underestimated how long it will be before income and activity levels can be restored to anywhere close to pre-lockdown levels and ‘full’ recovery is possible. This is particularly the case under historic and current standstill funding levels and what has been further indicated through the Resource Spending Review in relation to reduced support for culture. In September 2021, estimates for recovery suggested between three to five years. The imminent cost crisis will undermine this further and cause devastation on a society-wide scale, affecting individuals and organisations at all levels.

One of our members who contacted us this week summarises the situation perfectly:

“we are holding a current Creative Scotland Recovery Fund grant for a strand of our work which may be hard to capitalise on, given that a recovery period was very short-lived and we find ourselves in a crisis that feels on par with the pandemic in terms of financial damage.”

In terms of funding priorities:

- Recognise the complexity of recovery in different sectors and the realistic timescale required, coupled with the devastating impact of the imminent financial crisis.
- Find ways, working with colleagues in Westminster, to mitigate the impact of the financial crisis. This will ensure the societal, cultural, personal and economic value the performing arts and other aspects of the cultural and creative sector bring to society is not lost. This is not least the legacy of the significant investment made by the Scottish Government in the sector’s recovery.

Strong political will and influencing across the spending areas is essential to inform future spending reviews and budgets. In our submission in September 2021, we commented that, by fully understanding the impact of culture, advocating for it and exercising excellent stewardship of public funds, it is possible that the Scottish Government could lead the way to a healthy, more equitable and sustainable future for the performing arts and wider cultural sector.

In that same submission, we reported that FST members had discussed whether a different performance indicator for culture, which reaches beyond the metrics of growth, would be more meaningful. This seems particularly important as we move towards a future which we all hope will prioritise fairness and wellbeing for people and nature; champion equitable access to create, participate and engage in performance activity; make more effective and sustainable use of our resources; and, nurture greater collaboration and partnership working.

As noted by Culture Counts in their submission to this call for views, networks such as The Arts in Education Recovery Group and [Arts Culture Health and Wellbeing Scotland](#) are key channels of information and collective thinking in this area.

Unfortunately, the financial situation for the performing arts in Scotland remains extremely challenging, particularly in the light of the Resource Spending Review's indications for funding for culture. As noted by Culture Counts, this is not the budget. FST would advocate for increased public support for an under-resourced sector which, for decades, has more than punched above its weight in the value and benefits it brings to society.

In terms of stimulating private funding, the Scottish Government's recent decision to decrease its investment in the Culture and Business Fund administered by Arts & Business Scotland was surprising and concerning. This fund has benefited many FST members and others across the cultural sector, enabling them to provide performing arts activity across Scotland, much of it embedded in communities, working with local businesses as well as through larger financial partnerships with sponsors. We hope that an alternative route can be found to encourage private investment into the cultural sector. Culture Counts' submission includes several ideas in this area.

What members suggested in September 2021, "a new unity of funders and support," would obviously chime with a 'whole system' approach. Those bodies with a remit for making or influencing policy, distributing funding and developing specific areas within the different sectors in Scotland, not culture alone, would share an understanding of the potential of culture and the creative industries and work more effectively together towards shared goals and outcomes. This includes cross-portfolio within the Scottish Government (which directly funds some parts of our sector but not others), Creative Scotland, COSLA, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, South of Scotland Enterprise and others.

In terms of barriers, the cultural policy and funding landscape is increasingly complex and difficult to navigate for our members who are already steering complex businesses, balancing funding and income generation from a range of different sources, even when relatively small. The ability to access more impactful support from Enterprise Agencies was discussed as something members would welcome the Scottish Government intervening in or advocating for.

Creative Scotland's submission to this Committee provides details of their future funding framework which is due to be implemented from March 2023 and includes multi-year, funding for organisations, and if not as explicitly for individuals. This is welcome and something FST and the wider sector have advocated for over many years.

Individual members of FST and groups like Freelancers Make Theatre Work made the point in 2021, and it still stands, that supporting freelancers through organisations is crucial, given the interdependence of the relationships between the two. However, it is not the only way and there are alternatives and tangible benefits to funding freelancers

directly, moving the emphasis crucially from 'hardship' to skills and jobs creation. Sustained and increased investment at both organisational and individual level is the only way to support a thriving ecosystem.

Also related to question 4 about private investment in the arts, we gave the example in 2021 of [Creatives Rebuild New York](#) and the powerful funding partnership of key foundations in the US.

FST, with Creative Scotland, are currently planning an event to explore the lessons from the pandemic in the 'pivot' to producing digital performance work and how this could be sustained. We expect to discuss aspects such as increasing accessibility, copyright and IP, monetising digital content and the need for skills development.

In the performing arts, much of the community-based work that happened during COVID was possible because of the strong foundation of creative learning and community work that was already being undertaken by skilled and experienced freelance and employed creative learning professionals. In many ways, this means that the strong response has already been mainstreamed within values-driven organisations and communities of skilled professionals. How this continues to be balanced with the financial imperatives in the light of reduced funding, increased costs and inflation is of deep concern to the sector.

Crucially, work undertaken by Creative Carbon Scotland on cultural adaptations in response to the climate emergency is also important to consider as the sector prepares for the economic crisis, responds to the impacts of the climate emergency and the rights-based approaches required for a much fairer society.