

FLEXIBLE FUNDING ASSESSMENT

Applicant name:	Paragon Ensemble Limited	
Application Reference number:	G201001105	
Amount Requested (Year 1/Year 2)	£100,000	£100,000
Officer's recommendation		
<p>Summarise the key points of your assessment and draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the application taken together with any comments you have received from source evidence (portfolio of evidence/ internal / external consultation). Highlight any specific risks <i>Note: The amount of information you provide here should be sufficient for the decision maker to reach a decision. As with all previous commentary boxes please do not exceed 250 words</i></p>		
Comments:		
<p>Paragon appear to be following a more culturally diverse path and this application aims to draw together 5 different internationally themed projects and new commissions under one banner, 'Music Of The Spheres'. This now seems to be the key focus for the ensemble as opposed to purely artistically driven commissions and performances. However, the ensemble does have a track record in this field and have a track record of high quality performance, so it would be sad to see this activity go.</p>		
Strengths;		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality and practical implementation of equalities • Cohesive and ambitious programme of a cultural diverse theme involving high quality composers of repute and high quality ensemble • Continuing to be a key commissioner of new music in Scotland • Excellent and relevant approach to partnership working • Good track record of this kind of work with relevant staff in place to carry this out • Have come through a difficult period in terms of governance 		
Weaknesses;		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited marketing plans (including outdated website) • Lack of strategy for developing further links with venues, promoters and festivals to maximise performance opportunities • High funding expectations • Cultural diversity themes detracting from the number of purely artistically driven performances, for which the company are highly rated • Lack of reach out with central belt and hence limited audience engagement 		
<p>There are a few outlined weaknesses but the Music Of The Spheres programme is ambitious and involves many good partnerships. The performance standards within the ensemble are high and the approach to equalities and cultural diversity is good. There are, however, a developmental issues and the level of funding requested seems high. Had there been more scope for wider performances and perhaps a more modest budget with less reliance on Scottish Arts Council subsidies the application might have been stronger.</p>		
<p>In relation to the flexible funding criteria the application is limited in how well it fits, due to a lack of effective planning that would allow the ensemble to reach wider audiences and therefore an overall rating of medium is being recommended.</p>		

Officer's overall priority recommendation		MEDIUM
Lead Officer signature:		Date: 31.01.2008 Revised: 20.3.08
Print name:	Caroline Winn	

Stage 2: Heads of Departments prioritise applications with advice from Specialist Advisors

1. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the application identified by the Specialist Advisors? Please summarise their comments below. What were their ratings of the importance of the application in being supported?

The panel consisted of Murray Buchanan, Paul Bream, Jim Gaitens, Rachel Nelken and Susan Nickalls, with ratings received from Marie Fielding by email.

Comments:

- The panel identified a lack of direction and scattered approach to the application, with no coherent strategy. It appeared that Paragon Ensemble had moved away from being a performance ensemble, but had not yet found a new focus. The panel felt there was no sense of a commanding artistic vision.
- The panel noted that no marketing strategy was outlined in the application or business plan.
- The panel rated the organisation highly for the equal opportunities aspect of its programme, which showed a commitment to creating projects with under represented groups. However, regarding the amount of funding requested, 20 performances with audience numbers of 450 for the organisation's education strand did not appear to be high enough for something that is claimed to be a significant part of their activity. The panel felt, though, that the trajectory of this area of work may prove to be positive. The panel noted a reasonable geographic spread for this activity, but felt more detail may be necessary.
- The organisation's education/outreach programme was still small but had potential. The panel raised concerns over the education plan, as it was unclear from the plan to what extent the players were trained to carry out this work. The description of the work appeared to be more player than participant directed.

The panel rated the importance of the application in being supported as **Medium (to Low)**.

2. Summarise the role of the organisation within the infrastructure of the sector. Assess to what extent the organisation's vision will contribute to the department's and to Scottish Arts Council's aims: (to fulfil artists' potential, to increase participation, to place creativity at the heart of learning)

Comments:

Paragon is another organisation which struggled to cope with losing core funding and enter a more competitive funding arrangement alongside other competing small groups and ensembles, despite the music department clearly prioritising the chamber music sector and developing a forum to specifically address the needs of that sector. There were major problems for the organisation in accessing transition funding and a serious degree of consolidating activities and addressing governance, board and staffing issues resulted.

Whilst Paragon still address issues relating to equalities and equal opportunities in an exemplary manner, as evidenced in the comments from the Specialist Adviser's panel, the apparent move from performance-related activity to predominantly education/outreach related activities is worthy of comment and in some cases, concern. Paragon has always placed creativity at the heart of learning and as per their application would appear to develop more of an education focussed programme.

1. Fit with FXO criteria: In part.

1.1 Excellent artistic vision and leadership; role within sector/support to artists: In terms of community involvement and equal opportunities, Paragon has always been a leader in their field, but seem to be moving away from performance-centred activity of contemporary work.

1.2 Improving your engagement with the public: Less performances are balanced by more education and outreach activity, so less engagement with the public results.

1.3 Good practice in the governance and management: Paragon seems to be in a more secure position now relating to board and governance, but have had problems in this area in the past resulting in a significant decrease in performance-based activities.

1.4 Practical implementation of your equal opportunities policy; widening access: As already stated in the commentary, Paragon's commitment to equal opportunities is high.

1.5 Raising other income at least 25%: Just under at 24% but difficult to assess on the information provided.

2. Fit with Departmental priorities: Paragon is actively engaging with the Chamber Music Forum and in education outreach activities.

3. Fit within Scottish Arts Council aims: Probably strongest on the second aim.

3. Based on the lead officer's assessment and the subsequent meeting with Specialist advisors, please rate the application (High, medium, low) summarise your reasons for assessing the application as you have (drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation and highlighting any specific risks)

Comments:

The major programme programmed by Paragon for 2009-11 seems to centre around their Music of the Sphere projects which also involve dance and literature in celebrating the cultural identities of the five continents. This is certainly an ambitious project which intends to engage with artists from diverse cultures, including a commission for Eddie McGuire. This would appear to replace or even displace any of the "core" repertoire on which Paragon built a solid reputation and indicates a new development for the organisation. I would agree with the assessing officer that the geographical reach for the proposed project may be limited as there is little detail to that effect. There is also a significant partnership element to that programme which is not fully evidenced at this stage.

Concern is expressed by both the Specialist Adviser's panel and the assessing officer on the lack of a clear marketing strategy that would also impact positively on audience development. The funding request is high at £100K for both years, which is the level that the organisation received when core funded. However, in this application there would need to be significant input from partnership funding and an equally significant level of funding would be required from local authorities with whom Paragon wishes to engage. Due to the cross art-form nature of the proposed programme and the high emphasis on education and outreach work, the Specialist Advisor's panel questioned whether all

of Paragon's requested funding should emanate from the music department. Paragon is however one of the key strategic members of the Chamber Music Forum, which we welcome.

I support the assessing officer's recommendations and am concerned on where Paragon might be in the future if the performance element is not maintained as this, with the music direction of Gary Walker, was one of their key strengths.

1.1 Application rating: Medium

In carefully considering both the assessing officer's comments and the Specialist Advisor's Panel recommendations, I can rate this application only at medium, bearing in mind the rating of the SA panel at medium/low.

1.2 Reasons for assessing at this rating: Paragon is still strong on community involvement and inter-cultural dialogue. They also have a strong record in commissioning new work. I am unsure of their future direction, however.

1.3 Strengths of application: Inter-cultural and cross art-form dialogue with a strong commitment to new work and equality of opportunity.

1.4 Weaknesses of applications: Limited marketing plan and clear strategy for the future outside the Music of the Spheres project. Also Paragon is working predominantly in the central belt.

1.5 Specific risks associated with the application: A high ask for funding and a limited strategic development plan.

1.6 Development areas identified: More engagement through performance-related activities.

1.7 Recommended level of support: £40,000 both years.

4. Please comment on the geographic reach of the programme

Comments:

1.1 Where will the activity/programme take place? Predominantly the central belt of Scotland.

1.2 Where will the audience come from? Difficult to fully assess from the application.

Head of Department's overall priority recommendation

MEDIUM

Head of Department's signature:

**Date: 13 February 2008
Revised 23 March 2008**

Print name:

Ian Smith

Stage 3: Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) make recommendations to Directors (Acting Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive and Co-Directors of Arts)		
1. Summarise the reasons why the final rating has been made.		
Comments: Some fit with FXO criteria but relatively weak in comparison to others, in the context of a highly competitive funding round. Not recommended for support.		
Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) priority recommendation		Low Medium
Chair of Meeting signature:		Date: 2 April 2008
Print name:	Iain Munro	

Stage 4: Directors make recommendations to Joint Board (strategic fit)		
Record the Directors' recommendation and confirm the suggested level of support. If the recommendation differs from Stage 3, please summarise the reasons why.		
Comments: Agree with Stage 3 recommendation.		
Directors recommendations to Joint Board		Low Medium
Acting Chief Executive signature:	Jim Tough	Date: 10 April 2008

Stage 5: Joint Board's decisions		
Record the Joint Board's recommendation. If the recommendation differs from Stage 4, please summarise the reasons why.		
Comments: The Joint Board accepts the Stage 4 recommendation.		
Joint Board Final Decision		REFUSE
Date: 24 April 2008	If approved for support, enter sum awarded	

End of Assessment