

FLEXIBLE FUNDING ASSESSMENT

Applicant name:	Scots Language Centre	
Application Reference number:	G201001056	
Amount Requested (Year 1/Year 2)	£85534	£87916
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>		
<p>Comments: Overall, this has been a difficult application to assess. Basic financial information is missing; there are no clear targets or data given regarding the Scots Language Centre's (SLC) past, present or future activities; board and management information is incomplete; and a large funding increase has been requested without a full explanation or quantification (with costings) of what it is for.</p> <p>The hard work of the SLC Director, staff, and Council is widely acknowledged and respected, particularly the work on the new website, which is greatly admired. SLC is respected too for its committed lobbying on behalf of raising the status of Scots. It should not be the job of the Scottish Arts Council to cease funding an organisation based on a poor application, but SLC was clearly advised of the importance of this funding renewal process, and it has not provided sufficient information and evidence to back itself up, nor a sufficiently persuasive argument to secure an increase in funding.</p> <p>It is a strategic priority of the Literature Department to <i>develop innovative practise to increase access to and promotion of the Scots language</i>. On the basis of this application, SLC <i>practise</i> and give access to the Scots language - it is not clear, however, that SLC <i>develop, innovate or promote</i>.</p> <p>In mitigation, a final and important point should be made. There is a significant strategic need, and opportunity, for conducting an audit of the four principal Scots language agencies supported by SAC – Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Scottish Language Dictionaries, Itchy Coo, and SLC, to identify areas of overlap and duplication and the potential for improved collaboration and co-operation, and possible reconfiguration. Such was the intention of the Scots Language 'Synergy Talks' facilitated by SAC in 2002, which were not ultimately conclusive owing to uncertainties concerning future support structures and government policy. The Government's recent announcement of an 'audit' of Scots now makes a further phase of these discussions appropriate. As part of that process, it might be possible to identify aspects of SLC's work – for example, its website, or e-diary of Scots activity – which might be funded on a project basis, and/or integrated into the remit of other organisations.</p> <p>Continued funding to SLC could be made conditional on co-operation with this process.</p>		
Officer's overall priority recommendation		LOW
Lead Officer signature:		Date: 14/1/08 Revised: 20/3/08
Print name:	Aly Barr	

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 Dr Tony Bianchi, former Literature Director, Arts Council of Wales; Claire Malcolm, Director, New Writing North (England); and Professor Alan Riach, .Department of Scottish Literature, University of Glasgow.

Comments:

On the whole this application was thought by the Advisors to be weak, with a consistent lack of precise quantification, clear data, measurement, targets, and poor financial information. The organisation's 'aim' to 'engage with the Scots language community' was thought to be strangely stated as an aspiration, rather than an achievement to be built upon in the spirit of continued audience development. Overall, these features were taken to be a reflection of the tension in the organisation between its role as both a physical centre, and as a virtual resource through its website.

The important qualification to the above is that SLC's bilingual website is thought to be the stronger aspect of the application, and highly important in its own right as a means of access to and appreciation of the Scots language. The website's planned inclusion of the 'blogosphere' is of considerable significance as an active catalyst of language use, rather than mere archival reclamation of an endangered or a minority language, and represents the further end of the Scots language continuum from the specialised, academic work of Scottish Language Dictionaries. The 'blogosphere' is highly successful in engaging younger users of such languages, as has recently been proven in Wales.

In general, it was thought that the organisation was of great importance, but that the strong evidence from the application is that the organisation's overall function has to find an alternative form of delivery.

The Scots Language Centre is recommended as a medium priority for support.

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:

It is important to record that the decision to accord the Scots Language Centre Flexible status at the time of the Strategic Review was for reasons of expediency, as possible changes to policy and structures of support for the Scots language were anticipated, and not because SLC was seen to have a less than nationally strategic and significant role.

SLC's application is considered overall to be weak. It is a strategic priority of the Literature Department to *develop innovative practise to increase access to and promotion of the Scots language*. On the basis of this application, SLC *practise* and give *access* to the Scots language - it is not clear from this application, however, that SLC *develop, innovate or promote*, with the exception of its website. A large increase in funding has been requested, with no clear articulation, or quantification, of what it is for, and the Advisors' conclusion that the application is poor in terms of clear data, targets, and financial information is consistent with the lead officer's assessment.

In regard to its website, however, the aims of SLC deserve to be safeguarded, as essential to the ecology of SAC provision for writing in Scots and development of the language. The application, and the Advisors' analysis, seems to confirm the Department's own view that SLC should seriously consider moving completely from being a physical centre to a virtual resource, and in so doing working in closer partnership with the other Scots language agencies. This was the substance of the Department's advice to the organisation following the Strategic Review.

1. Fit with FXO criteria:

1.1 Excellent artistic vision and leadership; role within sector/support to artists:

Has fulfilled its stated aims thus far, but does not clearly demonstrate a strong or coherent vision for the future.

1.2 Improving your engagement with the public:

SLC runs an excellent bi-lingual website which is accessible, authoritative, refreshingly light, and which has strong future potential. It remains physically accessible to the public through its base in the A. K. Bell Library, Perth.

1.3 Good practice in the governance and management:

The organisation has competent governance and management, although it faces some major changes with the replacement of its financial expert.

1.4 Practical implementation of your equal opportunities policy; widening access:

Equal Opportunities are fundamental to, and inherent in, SLC's remit and aims to address linguistic inequality and discrimination. Access is widened through its strong online presence, although this is difficult to assess accurately as detailed figures and related data have not been supplied.

1.5 Raising other income at least 25%:

Matched funding requirement met.

3. Fit with Departmental priorities:

Partially fits criteria to *develop innovative practice to increase access to and promotion of the Scots language* (see Officer's Assessment above).

4. Fit within Scottish Arts Council aims:

Meets aims 2 and 3.

5. 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

SLC has requested a large increase in funding, but with no clear articulation, or quantification, of what it is for, and the Advisors' conclusion that the application is poor in terms of clear data, targets, and financial information is consistent with the lead officer's assessment.

The application's somewhat paradoxical shortcomings emphasise the need, and opportunity, for conducting an audit of the four principal Scots language agencies supported by SAC – Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Scottish Language Dictionaries, Itchy Coo, and SLC, to identify areas of overlap and duplication and the potential for improved collaboration and co-operation, and possible reconfiguration. Such was the intention of the Scots Language 'synergy talks' facilitated by SAC in 2002, which were not ultimately conclusive owing to uncertainties concerning future support structures and government policy. The Government's recent announcement of an 'audit' of Scots

now makes a further phase of these discussions necessary.

As part of that process, it may be possible to identify the strongest aspects of SLC's work – for example, its website, or e-diary of Scots activity – which might be funded on a project basis, and/or integrated into the remit of other organisations such as Itchy Coo.

It is therefore further recommended that a decision on this application be **deferred** until these discussions, and the Government audit, have taken place.

1.1 Application rating:

The Lead Officer's rating is low, but I concur with the Specialist Advisors' rating of medium.

1.2 Reasons for assessing at this rating:

Medium is intended to reflect the fact that while there are weaknesses in the application, the role of the organisation is strategically and nationally important, and its website is of high quality, value, and potential.

1.3 Strengths of application:

The online aspects (both completed and planned) are considered to be the strongest aspects of the application.

1.4 Weaknesses of applications:

Lack of detail, data, evidence, and quantification in many aspects, including the reasoning behind requesting a substantial funding uplift, and poor financial information; relationship between role as both physical and virtual centre not yet clarified.

1.5 Specific risks associated with the application:

The main risk is that the physical side of the organisation ceases to function in a viable manner, or commands the majority of the funding whilst the strong and innovative online element becomes the weaker partner.

1.6 Development areas identified:

Overall function of organisation has to find an alternative form of delivery; the online aspects show excellent growth potential.

1.7 Recommended level of support:

No increase in funding recommended.

6. Please comment on the geographic reach of the programme

Comments:

1.1 Where will the activity/programme take place?:

The organisation's work and programme is accessible Scotland-wide and internationally via its website, and its physical centre is in the A. K. Bell Library, Perth.

1.2 Where will the audience come from?:

Throughout Scotland and globally.

Head of Department's overall priority recommendation

MEDIUM

Head of Department's signature:

Print name:

Dr Gavin Wallace

Date: 15 Feb 2008

Revised: 25 March 2008

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 and comments. Propose discussions at a senior level between Scottish Government and SAC.		
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