

FLEXIBLE FUNDING ASSESSMENT

Applicant name:	Suspect Culture	
Application Reference number:	G201001009	
Amount Requested (Year 1/Year 2)	£183,486	£188,991
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: Suspect Culture aims to explore performance in different contexts while keeping theatre at the heart of its programme. In its business plan it states a commitment to continuously improving the quality of its work, to improving the reach of its theatre programme and to delivering its work across a range of media to a much greater audience. SC's business plan demonstrates a clear vision of how it proposes to develop its work and its Interpretation Programme shows a commitment to audience engagement and development (although it is unclear what interpretation activities will be undertaken for the programme.) It demonstrates clear management structures and thorough financial management systems. Its continuing interest in a cross-disciplinary approach is genuinely interesting (though it should be noted its proposed project with a visual artist, involving film will not be supported by flexible funding) but there are some issues regarding the likely quality of the end products, based on its track record.</p> <p>SC operates a co-production model for all of its productions, which means it is reliant on securing significant partnership income to enable delivery. SC is aware of the inherent risks of this model and it has plans to manage the risk. The budgets are reasonably costed, apart from an unacceptably low contingency level. SC has a successful track record of securing significant partnership funding for its projects. However the possible partnerships for its core 2009/10 project are unconfirmed and there is no detail of what stage negotiations are at. There are no details of potential partners for its core 2010/11 project. The reliance on securing significant partnership income to enable delivery of the core programme taken in conjunction with the FCO's opinion that sponsorship/trust funding may not be achieved means there is a risk that it may not be delivered as planned.</p> <p>The core planned programme does not meet the drama department's priorities. (Some additional activity meets the priority of outdoor performance (site specific), but this will not be supported by flexible funding and is reliant on securing 100% partnership income.) SC has engaged with the SAC Quality Framework and the application meets most of the fund criteria well. SC has a strong artistic vision, effective governance, a commitment to engagement via its Interpretation Programme and has developed its financial planning and management. However I would not prioritise SC for support because of concerns about the likely quality of its work (based on track record), the financial viability of delivering its programme because of significant unsecured partnership income and a lack of information provided on potential funders and (compared to some other organisations) a relatively low geographic reach.</p>		
Officer's overall priority recommendation		MEDIUM
Lead Officer signature:		Date: 1 February 2008
Print name:	Jaine Lumsden	Revised: 20 March 2008

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?

Comments:

Attendees:

David Taylor, Co-Director of Arts

Specialist Advisors: Stewart Ennis, Tim Licata, David Leddy, Alex Patience, Sandy Maxwell, Stephen Slater, Stephen Stenning and Laura Tyrrell

The Panel identified the following strengths and weakness of: Suspect Culture

The vision is strong but not flexible enough to sustain the company. It was felt that the work of the company had been variable in quality. The company was in danger of becoming repetitive. Some thought that there was a gap between what the company promised and what it achieved on stage. Some of the work lacks the intellectual depth and rigour that it aspires to. Graham Eatough was valued as an artist but the SAs thought that the vehicle of Suspect Culture was perhaps no longer the best for his work.

It was acknowledged that the proposal to engage guest directors would be a positive move and might refresh the programme however this collaborative method of bringing a number of different artists to work together may not be working to best effect. The collaborative/collegiate approach could result in a confused outcome. The application did not appear to recognise any need to change the way the company develops work.

SAs thought that Graham Eatough's collaboration with Graham Fagen had been interesting and this could be an area for further exploration.

Public engagement & marketing: SAs thought that there was a lack of good marketing ideas in this area.

Some SAs thought that there had been good interpretive activity for *Futurology* others felt that it had assumed that the audience would not understand the production and this, they felt, suggested a weakness of the production.

Specialist Advisors overall rating: 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:

Suspect Culture (SC) is a Glasgow-based contemporary arts organisation that works primarily in theatre but also in visual art and film. Its aims are to create work through collaboration with artists involving extensive development periods. It has a commitment to exploring performance in a variety of contexts with artists from different disciplines. It has a pool of international associate artists with whom it works and aims to exchange different international cultural influences which will affect the content of its work.

SC has been in receipt of revenue funding (fixed term funding, core funding, and flexible funding) since 1999. It runs Strange Behaviour symposium events, which bring together arts practitioners

with professionals from a non-arts background.

1. Fit with FXO criteria:

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

The company clearly supports artists in collaboration and it is reasonable to assign a leadership role to the company in that it is willing to experiment with different disciplines and approaches to its work. On the basis of past practice the company can offer international exposure to Scottish artists and therefore help them fulfil their potential.

1.2 Improving your engagement with the public

It has a commitment to creating interpretive materials and events, to enhance its audiences' experience of its work and this is welcomed by the Head of Visual Art.

1.3 Good practice in the governance and management

The company appears to be well run. Some doubts were raised regarding its ability to achieve its fundraising targets, however the company has been successful in achieving co-production arrangements in the past. This might be slightly inhibited by the poor critical response to the production *Futurology*.

1.4 Practical implementation of your equal opportunities policy; widening access

This criterion is well met. The applicant has a number of practical proposals to increase access including audio described e-flyers. Also the applicant is developing a co-production with Graeae, an inclusive theatre company; SC wants to increase access to its Interpretation Programme, by using accessible multi-media such as audio-described e-flyers. SC is a member of Audio Description Scotland and has offered audio described and signed performances in the past. It has a stated commitment to incorporating accessible performances as part of its programme.

1.5 Raising other income at least 25%

Met.

2. Fit with Departmental priorities

No particular fit with Drama priorities.

3. Fit within Scottish Arts Council aims

Predicted attendances are reasonable given the nature of the work proposed and there are plans for interpretive activities (increasing participation) but I do not think that the application meets this aim well. The plans to provide opportunities for artists to develop (fulfil potential) are stronger and therefore the application meets this aim well.

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

1.1 Application rating 1.2 Reasons for assessing at this rating

There is agreement between the assessing officer and the SAs that the likely artistic outcomes of this proposal are not guaranteed. There is a view that the outcomes have not fully matched the aspirations in the past. In light of the doubts over past and future artistic quality I would rate this as a low priority for support.

1.3 Strengths of application

The application indicates an intention to work in a cross disciplinary ways and to improve processes for developing and evaluating the work. The programme elements themselves sound attractive and innovative.

1.4 Weaknesses of applications

The assessing officer points to risk areas in relation to partnership funding and hence concerns about financial viability. The levels of public engagement with the work are modest: c 3,000 year one and c 5000 year 2. There are doubts about the company's ability to deliver against its aspirations.

1.5 Specific risks associated with the application

Failure to secure co-production and partnership funding could limit the capacity to deliver the programme.

1.6 Development areas identified

Low geographic reach.

1.7 Recommended level of support

Not recommended.

4. Please comment on the geographic reach of the programme

Comments:

Geographic spread within Scotland is limited, with only Glasgow, Edinburgh, Stirling and Highland local authorities being involved. This makes the applicant's activity confined to cities (assuming the Highland entry relates to Inverness). This does not compare particularly favourably with other similar applicants.

Head of Department's overall priority recommendation

LOW

Head of Department's signature:

Print name:

David Taylor

Date: 15 February 2008
Revised: 26 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: Weak overall fit with FXO criteria in the context of a highly competitive funding round. Not recommended for support.		
Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) priority recommendation		LOW
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
Acting Chief Executive signature:		Date: 10 April 2008
Print name:	Jim Tough	

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