

FLEXIBLE FUNDING ASSESSMENT

Applicant name:	Theatre Workshop	
Application Reference number:	G201001031	
Amount Requested (Year 1/Year 2)	£390,000	£390,000
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>		
<p>Comments: Theatre Workshop has a strong tradition of producing inclusive community and professional theatre at its base in Edinburgh. Since 2000 the organisation has focused in particular on inclusive practice with disabled and minority ethnic actors, participants and audiences.</p> <p>At its recent strategic review with SAC it was agreed that TW would develop a touring remit which would improve their engagement with the wider theatre sector and position them as a recognised leader in quality artistic practice within the mainstream theatre sector while impacting positively on the wider sector in terms of inclusive theatre. This also promotes increased opportunities for disabled actors to be seen and employed by other directors and theatre companies. Angela Hogg has queried TW's uptake on this process to date.</p> <p>Following the strategic review, it was decided that SAC would support the touring and Degenerate strands of the programme but not the community or film strands. The budgets in Business Plan for 2009 – 11 both show income and expenditure figures which include the film and community strands. This has the effect of showing the SAC funding as a lower proportion of their costs than if these 2 strands were not included.</p> <p>The application is for an uplift of £15,000 from £375,000 to £390,000 annually. The information in the budget is not sufficiently detailed to provide assurance that the budget is realistic for the proposals. Added to that is the lack of clarity of productions during the 2-year period.</p> <p>Clarity is required on the productions proposed for 09/10 and 10/11 as there are differences between the application, Business Plan and the Drama Department's understanding of what falls within this period.</p> <p>The proposal does not have a strong fit with the Drama Departments priority areas.</p> <p>Reviews of TW's work since 2005 have been mixed, ranging from Excellent to Very Poor with just over 50% of the reviews rating the work as Good.</p> <p>TW has a good track record of working with participants in their community plays and their production of Mad People's history will include community participants. However the figures of those participating seem unrealistically high over the 2 years.</p> <p>The Board of Management and the Management team have a good range of skills and expertise to support the work of the organisation. Development of the Film strand is likely to put an additional pressure on the TW staff. Equal Opportunities are core to all aspects of the organisation's work.</p>		

TW have a good track record of strong relationships with actors, participants and audiences from the disabled and minority communities which they are committed to further developing. On the other hand there is little information about partnerships with other arts organisations, venues or local authorities.

Officer's overall priority recommendation

MEDIUM

Lead Officer signature:

Date:4.2.08
Revised 30.2.08

Print name:

Kate Craik

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 weaknesses of: Theatre Workshop

Application and Business Plan –it was noted that TW was in the transition phase of moving away from a building based organisation to a producing company.

Some felt that the artistic plans were not particularly engaging. It was noted that the artistic plans were issue-based. SAs did not feel that an inclusive company had to restrict itself to work that was issue-based, as this might not engage a general audience. It was felt that often the tone of the work might be overly strident and therefore fail to engage a mainstream audience.

SAs thought it important that TW communicated its aims and objectives to all participants and that any community participants were treated with respect and their contribution was valued. There was some experience within the SAs that indicated that this was not always achieved.

Beyond the Sunset, presented at Gilmorehill had been a powerful and artistically strong piece which had involved the author.

SAs felt that the applicant had over-stated the uniqueness of its role within inclusive arts in Scotland, which may demonstrate a lack of acknowledgement of other artists and companies working in this area. The application did not give a strong sense of an outward-looking organisation.

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:

Since its inception in 1965 Theatre Workshop has been a community based producing organisation, working with local and professional participants and actors from its base in Edinburgh's Stockbridge. In 1995, Robert Rae the current Director took up post and his focus has been on creating a fully inclusive company, supporting people from marginalised groups to participate fully in the work of the organisation. Since 2000, Theatre Workshop has cast disabled and non-disabled actors in all its productions.

At the recent strategic review, it was agreed with TW that SAC would support their touring and Degenerate strands but not the film or community aspects of their work. Thus it is currently funded to help realise the potential of disabled artists and to allow access to that work across the country.

1. Fit with FXO criteria:

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

The company has provided leadership in terms of breaking down barriers to disabled artists appearing on the professional stage in Scotland. By touring its work it has brought the work and the philosophy upon which it is based to a wider public. As noted in the officer's assessment the applicant has not developed extensive links with other elements within the theatre sector. This can be seen as a limiting factor in relation to its artistic leadership. The Specialist Advisors had reservations about the artistic vision.

1.2 Improving your engagement with the public

The applicant has indicated plans that are intended to increase engagement with the public in the course of its touring. There have been some doubts raised about the ability of the company to achieve quite such high levels of attendance.

1.3 Good practice in the governance and management

The company has an appropriate structure however the level of administration costs in relation to the production outputs is high, thus necessitating a high reliance on SAC support. There is no evident reason why the administration costs should be so high when compared with companies operating on a similar production and touring model.

1.4 Practical implementation of your equal opportunities policy; widening access

Widening access is at the core of the applicants work and vision. The choice of groups and sectors of society with whom it plans to work demonstrates this fully.

1.5 Raising other income at least 25%

Met.

2. Fit with Departmental priorities

The application does not fit particularly with the Drama priorities.

3. Fit within Scottish Arts Council aims

The Degenerate festival allows access to the work of disabled artists from the UK and beyond. The organisation's vision to support disabled artists relates to the criterion for supporting artists. (Fulfil artists' potential).

The applicant is committed to and delivers on engaging with groups that may be marginalised within society. The Specialist Advisors raised doubts about how well the applicant was able to increase engagement from a wide section of the public and the plans have been read as 'inward-looking'. (Increase participation).

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

The assessing officer gave the application a medium rating and the Specialist Advisors a low rating.

1.2 Reasons for assessing at this rating

The Specialist Advisors expressed concerns about the artistic vision in that it was not best placed to engage a wide mainstream audience, by virtue of what might be described as its polemical nature. The assessing officer also remarked on the lack of commitment to engaging with the rest of the theatre sector and this was seen as a weakness.

Given the concerns that the organisation does not appear to be committed to engaging with the wider sector and general audiences, and the relatively high level of funding sought given the planned outputs, I would rate this application as Medium.

1.3 Strengths of application

The applicant has set out clearly its vision to engage with marginalised groups and to create and tour work of quality. The artistic track record, according to evaluations, is good. It also offers a platform for disabled artists through the bi-annual Degenerate Festival which allows access for the general public to the work of disabled artists.

1.4 Weaknesses of applications

The level of production (one tour per year and the Degenerate Festival every other year) is not high given the level of funding requested. The applicant has not indicated how it would engage more with the rest of the theatre sector and there fore how the benefits of its approach to working with disabled artists would feed out into the wider sector.

1.5 Specific risks associated with the application

No specific risks.

1.6 Development areas identified

Partnerships and collaboration with other parts of the theatre sector.

1.7 Recommended level of support

The level of grant sought from SAC is high in relation to the planned number of productions even taking into account additional costs relating to inclusion. In addition the bi-annual Degenerate festival creates an imbalance in the annual funding level and this would be best treated as a recurring project application.

If funded I think that the level of support needs to be considered carefully to ensure that value for money is achieved. **The recommended level of funding is £200,000 per annum** with respect to production and touring only. Any funding for Degenerate should be applied for separately.

4. Please comment on the geographic reach of the programme

Comments:

The geographical impact is stated as being 'throughout Scotland' but no details are given. Forty two venues are proposed to be visited over two years, so a good spread is likely if this is achieved.

Head of Department's overall priority recommendation

MEDIUM

Head of Department's signature:

Print name:

David Taylor

Date: 15 Feb 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: 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. Noted acting CEO's declaration of interest.		
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