

## **The Work Room Submission to Inquiry into Budget Scrutiny 2024:25: Funding or Culture**

### **Key Questions:**

#### **7: Information about your organisation:**

The Work Room is an independent artist-led organisation committed to supporting a sustainable environment for independent dance artists in Scotland. Our mission is to empower artists to lead in their practice, enabling them to make high quality, intelligent, pioneering contemporary dance for diverse contexts at home and internationally. The Work Room recognises artists as catalysts within our wider culture - provoking, challenging and transforming our imaginations and our communities.

Our distinctive approach is as a membership organisation of 260 independent artists working in dance, movement and choreography in Scotland. We have an office and studio base in Glasgow but our members are across the country. Performances and projects that are researched, incubated and rehearsed through our residency programme go on to be performed at festivals, venues and with communities in Scotland, the UK and Internationally.

We aim to foster a community of artists; a powerful network of connections, experience and skills. These artists represent a multitude of artistic practices and are at different stages of their careers

The active involvement of artists within our activities and working groups feed a strong culture of grassroots leadership. The Work Room relishes our responsibility to be an active agent, advocating on behalf of independent artists, championing experimentation and working to ensure an expansive range of artists, dance styles and artistic practices are resourced and recognised.

Our programming objectives are:

- To support the development of choreographic research through a programme of supported and flexible residencies;
- To foster an active, independent dance community through the facilitation of networking and professional development opportunities;
- To develop the sustainability and international capacity of our artist members through advice and practical support;
- To be a powerful advocate for the independent dance sector

The Work Room is recognised nationally and internationally for its leadership role in the dance community through our membership of international networks and our role in producing the Dance From Scotland presence at Tanzmesse International

The Work Room receives regular funding from Creative Scotland.

**8: In our pre-budget report last year, the Committee described the operating environment of the culture sector as facing a “perfect storm” of long-term budget pressures, reduced income generation, and increased operating costs. How has this evolved over the last 12 months? What impact has the Budget for 2023-24 had on the culture sector?**

**Response:**

As the CEEAC Committee recognised last year, the current fragility of the cultural sector in Scotland stems from long-term and structural issues. Public funding for independent arts & cultural organisations through Creative Scotland has been stagnant for at least 10 years at the same time as local authority funding has eroded. As a Creative Scotland regularly funded organisation, 2023/24 is the sixth year in a funding round that commenced in 2018. From our inception in 2008 until 2020, The Work Room also received annual funding from Glasgow City Council. With the shift in GCC’s funding away from funding specifically for culture to an overarching Community Fund in 2020, no longer have this income stream.

The cultural sector & workforce entered the pandemic in a precarious place and despite emergency funding which provide a lifeline during Covid that kept many organisations operational and provided some income to freelancers; recovery, recuperation and the capacity to move forward with resilience has not been achieved.

The Work Room is small and nimble organisation that operates with low overheads and we channel our resources to freelance artists. Despite this, we are operating in 2023/24 with a ‘bare-bones’ budget and with less available for our programme than in recent years. In our current planning we are anticipating a deficit of around £5000 that will be covered from reserves.

The ‘perfect storm’ of challenges facing the cultural sector, impacts most acutely on the freelance workforce. Overall there is less work taking place and the demand for resources is massively outstripping what is available.

**9 Our report also concluded that that this crisis provides an opportunity to accelerate innovative solutions to the budgetary pressures within the sector. What progress has been made on this in the last 12 months? And at a time of limited resources, what other innovative approaches could the Scottish Government take forward to support the culture sector?**

**Response:**

The committee’s report from 2023/24 highlights possible **innovative solutions** across:

- Additional public & private investment
- Mainstreaming culture
- Multi-year funding

As a small, independent cultural organisation, we have not been aware of any new opportunities available for our work through the ideas proposed to lever additional public & private investment such as Percentage for Arts & Tourist Visitor Levy. While these should continue to be pursued, we would suggest that there also needs to be more immediate solutions.

Many of the freelance dance artists who are members of The Work Room are at the forefront of practicing an approach to '**mainstreaming culture**' – they are active in communities, supporting health and wellbeing and bringing to life creative approaches to learning with people of all ages. However, we do not see this actively reflected in how cultural activity is supported. The last 10 years has seen the eroding of financial support for this work through education and local authority budgets, which has led to more and more pressure on Creative Scotland as now more often the sole funder of arts and cultural activity in Scotland.

### **Multi-year funding**

As an organisation that is currently funded as an RFO through Creative Scotland, we welcome the confirmation of timescale for the future funding through the Multi-year funding process. The narrative around this from Creative Scotland, as they seek to manage expectations, is to emphasise that it will be a highly competitive fund. At this time of crisis in the arts & cultural sector, we would like to welcome a shift to encouraging collaboration, interdependence and decentralisation.

### **Innovative Solutions - collaboration**

While collaboration will not resolve the funding challenges in our sector, we consider it to be critical to moving forward. Partnership working is key to how The Work Room operates and enables us to have impact beyond our scale. We are actively involved in many national and international partnerships, supporting routes for freelance artists to deep their practice and broaden their networks and through this work opportunities.

We are about to embark on a new partnership with Higher Education funded through the Arts & Humanities Research Council's ***Dance Research Matters programme*** which will see us part of an 18 month research project through a ***Producing Dance Network***, led by Middlesex University and in collaboration with Higher Education institutions & key dance organisations across the UK.

**10: The Committee called for the forthcoming refreshed Culture Strategy Action Plan to provide a clear and strategic sense of how the Scottish Government is working to ensure a more sustainable future for the sector. How should the refreshed Culture Strategy Action Plan help to inform future budgetary decisions within the culture sector?**

## **Response:**

The Cultural Strategy Action plan has an ambitious vision and actions. We would welcome the refresh of this giving an honest appraisal of the current context for arts and culture in Scotland. As we noted in our submission to the Scottish Government's consultation on a International Cultural Strategy:

*International artistic and cultural exchange has the potential to develop understanding, empathy and relationships – the capacities that are so essential to cultivating the conditions for better societies, health and wellbeing. We fear that Scotland is projecting a veneer of cultural confidence but that this is crumbling and the precarity of building an effective, long-term career in the arts based in Scotland is becoming increasingly unviable*

*And*

*We are broadly supportive of the rationale set out for an International Culture Strategy. We would emphasise the importance of this going hand-in-hand with an effective strategy for culture in Scotland and the investment that is necessary to ensure that Scottish artists and companies are genuinely able to sit alongside international peers.*

For the Cultural Strategy to be effective it needs to be taken forward through effective relationships across policy, funding and practice. To move forward from the current crisis will require investment, understanding and deeper partnership working between the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland, local authorities, other public bodies and the arts and cultural sector