



File Ref: Cultural Commission
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ABERDEEN
CITY COUNCIL

**NEIGHBOURHOOD
SERVICES
(CENTRAL)**

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James Boyle
Chair
Cultural Commission
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20 DEC 2004

Dear Mr Boyle

ARTS DEVELOPMENT a response to the Cultural Commission

Arts Development are a team within Neighbourhood Services (Central) at Aberdeen City Council. We provide a participatory arts service through a programme of workshops at WhiteSpace, a city centre workshop space, and via a comprehensive range of specialist arts activities in communities. The team works with local agencies, forums, voluntary groups and other city council services to deliver all regeneration, social inclusion and community development issues identified in the City's Community Plan and Aberdeen Futures. As a service provided through a local authority it is unique in its remit to engage with the residents of Aberdeen in democratic processes. The team also works with national agencies and bodies to provide a range of training opportunities on the use of the arts as a tool for engaging local people of all ages in locality planning.

Engaging some of the most marginalised citizens of Aberdeen in cultural activity is naturally at the top of our agenda. Our written response to your commission is therefore cognisant of our responsibility to ensure that all of Aberdeen's citizens have access to the best quality local and national arts opportunities possible.

We believe there are a number of ways the work of the Cultural Commission can facilitate this, and here respond to themes and questions from Phase 2 which relate to the service we provide.

Rights, Entitlements and Responsibility

Cultural activity should be embedded within Community Planning, both as a means of delivering on areas of social policy, and as an end in itself. This means targeting and prioritising areas where access and participation is limited, and focusing budget spend on arts services that have a proven track record of delivering effectively on regenerative objectives. Cultural entitlements are meaningless unless a concerted effort is made to

actively engage with marginalised communities and it is within the legislative framework of Community Planning that this process can be most actively addressed.

Along with the responsibility for cultural rights, entitlements and responsibilities, which sit alongside the role local authorities have for policy making, should come increased funding for delivering on cultural activity and Community Planning, for staff on the ground.

These cultural entitlements should extend to cover very basic issues which prevent the arts happening – for example, the difficulty of finding local evening venues to hold events and workshops because of the cost of or lack of janitorial cover, and the lack of public transport.

Funding for National Companies

Aberdeen is often unable to access the resources and expertise of national companies due to its geographical location. We wish to see a mechanism whereby grants are allocated on the basis of an agreed outreach activity programme which actively seeks to share provision equally throughout the country, and particularly in outlying areas of the central belt, where the infrastructure can provide a link to make sure uptake of activity.

Initiative Based Funding

Arts money linked to government initiatives such as social inclusion, health etc should be filtered through the relevant local arrangement for the theme, who would work closely with locally based SAC officers with a clear understanding of the practitioners who are effective in this field. National standards of participation, quality and value for money should be developed to evidence the effectiveness of project funding.

Artists Training

Artist's fitness for the workplace and recruiting and retaining artists who want to work in communities is vital in terms of providing quality cultural experiences. Further educational establishments need to be more pro-active in engaging with employers to devise course content which enables young artists to make the transition into employment. We feel that further educational establishments are so concerned about funding that the amount of students participating on courses outweighs the standard of educational input. Often payment for arts tutors and staff in some establishments is so bad that the agencies cannot attract quality staff.

Currently it is our experience that young graduates have little or no local knowledge of where to look for work, the basics of community engagement, or how to prepare for and present for interview with a portfolio. As probably the main employer of arts graduates we need to ensure we are able to retain good artists by encouraging the balance between well supported paid employment and their own creative practice; this in turn contributes to the creative infrastructure of a city where cultural vibrancy is not the result of one initiative, but a cocktail of innovative schemes. Perhaps a balance also needs to be found between local community's rights to have access to high quality participatory arts and cultural experience, and the responsibility of the artist and educators working in these settings to be prepared to provide what communities demand

Yours Sincerely



Lesley Thomson

Community Arts Manager