



Tom Copley
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

Monday 14 October 2013

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dear Tom".

Re: London's small theatres

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your recent report on small theatres.

We welcome the GLA's interest in and focus on small scale theatres. Arts Council England has long recognised the importance of these organisations to the overall theatre ecology, giving audiences in London a range of extraordinary experiences and providing a platform for emerging talent.

As your report notes, the very best of them – the Bush, The Gate, The Unicorn, the Tricycle - are already key members of our national portfolio, and we award project funding to many more.

Blue Elephant Theatre in Camberwell, for example, received £10,000 to support the development of a new show, and Chelsea Theatre received £49,950 for a programme of organisational development.

Everyone is having to work hard and creatively in straitened times to remain resilient and we are using our limited strategic funding to help where we can. For example our strategic capital programme is supporting Shoreditch Town Hall and the Half Moon Theatre, and our Creative Employment programme is enabling a consortium of 13 London theatres to offer 38 paid apprenticeships to young people.

In response to the specific recommendations which make mention of the Arts Council we would make the following comments.

Arts Council England, 14 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 3NQ www.artscouncil.org.uk

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- **Recommendation:** Actively encouraging small theatres to apply for capital funding, and considering reducing the minimum grant amount below £100,000.
- **Arts Council response:** Our Grants for the arts programme already allows for capital applications below £100,000. Applicants must receive prior permission from the Arts Council to apply, but this is not unreasonably withheld. Our strategic capital programmes are open application, however we have a finite amount to invest in each round, and we actively manage demand rather than encouraging applicants to expend a great deal of time on applications which we are unlikely to be able to fund.
- **Recommendation:** With Creative and Cultural Skills, encouraging small theatres to apply for Creative Employment funding in order to run joint apprenticeship schemes.
- **Arts Council response:** This is already happening and a first award has been made to the London Theatre consortium.
- **Recommendation:** Requiring national portfolio organisation venues to make performance space available for hire to small theatre groups seeking to expand successful shows.
- **Arts Council response:** We actively encourage all of our NPOs to work in collaboration with each other and the sector, and this is included in their funding agreement as one of our expectations of them as strategic organisations. However, we will not make open ended demands on any organisation which may adversely affect its business model or its brand. We actively encourage partnerships where there are clear mutual benefits and effect introductions where we think this might be the case, but artistic, operational and financial decisions remain a matter for individual Boards. These decisions may impact on Arts Council funding, but should not be led by it.
- **Recommendation:** Ensuring the process for project funding is timely and straightforward, and setting a target to equalise the application success rate across the country.
- **Arts Council response:** We have recently launched a refreshed and simplified Grants for the arts application process. The online form gives clear prompts as to what information is required. You will appreciate that where applicants are seeking large amounts of public money, part of our role is to ensure that the funds are spent appropriately and well. To this end the amount and depth of information required does increase with the level of grant

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requested. We have equalised the target for success rates across the country, and have altered our internal guidance to reflect this.

The Arts Council would be very happy to be involved in a co-ordinated development programme for small theatres, and is aware that much of what it already has to offer is not being effectively communicated to the small theatre sector.

One thing which would help us enormously is a refined definition of small theatre. In the London context, there are small theatres which operate very effectively in a West End setting attracting a wide audience, spaces outside the West End with a sub-regional appeal, and spaces which cater almost exclusively for a local audience. It is these latter two groups which the Arts Council has most difficulty communicating with, and which we feel would benefit most from a targeted campaign.

We understand that the small theatre sector is establishing a networking group, and the Arts Council would be happy to communicate through that network, to attend sessions to talk about our work, and to encourage representatives from selected NPOs to lead discussions on topics from producing to business planning.

I hope that this response is helpful to you.



Veronica Wadley
Chair, London Area Council
Arts Council England

cc: Ian O'Sullivan, Committee's Scrutiny Manager

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