

FLEXIBLE FUNDING ASSESSMENT

Applicant name:	Mull Theatre	
Application Reference number:	G201001002	
Amount Requested (Year 1/Year 2)	£320,000	£350,000
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>		
Comments:		
<p>MT's programme will deliver both accessible and challenging theatre which is likely to be of high quality (on its track record.) It has a demonstrable track record and commitment to providing arts activities across a wide geographic spread including remote rural areas with little or no other provision. MT also has a demonstrable commitment to engaging audiences, including diverse communities and children and young people, via its education and participation programme. It has plans to increase these activities and also the type and amount of support for artists it offers.</p> <p>MT is undergoing a period of transition which will affect the way it operates and provide opportunities to develop areas of its activities. It has secured funding for a new production facility which will open this year.</p> <p>The business plan clearly articulates MT's artistic vision and plans to develop the company, taking into account the opportunities that Druimfinn will offer. The artistic programme is clear and details alternative production choices, dependent on critical feedback and demand. The planned model of developing and presenting its work will allow MT to react to opportunities for exploiting opportunities. Although MT has a detailed system of financial management there is no detail provided on financial reporting to the Board. There is partial information provided on staff responsibilities, although from officer knowledge MT has a good track record of project delivery and management. It is of concern that (on information available, audited accounts to March 2006) MT has an accumulated unrestricted deficit of £12,404, however there is a surplus of £51,204 in 2007 management accounts.</p> <p>MT is asking for an increase of 38% and then 9% on its 2007/08 flexible funding. (£88,218 then £102,218 increase.) This includes salaries for one and a half new posts. It also plans to increase its education and participation activities and the range and type of support it offers to artists.</p> <p>MT's application meets the fund criteria well. (Its education and participation programme meets the SAC drama department priority area of work for children and young people to some extent.)</p> <p>I would recommend support for MT but do not think the requested increase can be justified in the context of an over-subscribed budget. If MT is awarded a smaller amount than requested I recommend that it concentrates on commissioning, development, production and touring work (which it states is the main activity for which it is seeking flexible funding.)</p>		

Officer's overall priority recommendation		HIGH
Lead Officer signature:		Date: 30 January 2008 Revised: 20 March 2008
Print name:	Jaine Lumsden	

Stage 2: Heads of Departments prioritise applications with advice from Specialist Advisors	
<p>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?</p>	
<p>Comments: Attendees: David Taylor, Co-Director of Arts Specialist Advisors: Stewart, Tim Licata, David Leddy, Alex Patience, Sandy Maxwell, Stephen Slater, Stephen Stenning and Laura Tyrrell</p> <p>The Panel identified the following strengths and weakness of: Mull Theatre</p> <p>Although the application could have been clearer, the company seemed to know what it was good at and to pursue that line. There is little information about the work itself, making it difficult to judge the reasons behind the choice of programme content.</p> <p>While the output of the company was not cutting edge, but consistent and solid, from the SAs knowledge there was demand for this kind of work. It served a particular demographic which looked for mainstream theatre, catering to an established audience. Mull Theatre was thought to be good at taking classics out to a touring circuit across the Highlands and Islands.</p> <p>It was noted that the company plans to have education and outreach person. The proposal to establish a 'graduate company' was thought to offer a very positive introduction to a professional career. It would allow a young actor to immerse themselves in the work of the company and work on a range of repertoire.</p> <p>There were pros and cons regarding the initiation of the production centre - there was a danger that it would distract the company from the production and touring of work. But it would provide a solid base for the creation of the work.</p> <p>Specialist Advisors overall rating: High</p>	
<p>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)</p>	
<p>Comments:</p> <p>1. <i>Fit with FXO criteria:</i></p> <p>1.1 <i>Excellent artistic vision and leadership; role within sector/support to artists</i> The applicant has a clear leadership role within the theatre sector in the Highlands and Islands, being the most successful company in that area. It provides support to artists through employment and commissioning new</p>	

work. It also has plans for a “graduate company” offering opportunities for new drama graduates to gain professional experience.

1.2 Improving your engagement with the public

The applicant has a good track record of reaching remote communities with a good range of work including new work classics and revivals. It has an education and outreach programme to complement its production work. Audience levels are good at 6,000 plus per annum, considering the small populations in the communities that the company visits.

1.3 Good practice in the governance and management

The company appears to be well run and finances are in a reasonable condition.

1.4 Practical implementation of your equal opportunities policy; widening access

The company plans a production that will focus on new immigrant communities in the area and explore issues of cultural identity. The company also provide signed and audio-described performances and plans to pilot a portable audio-description booth in collaboration with Hi-Arts.

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

Mull Theatre is a key part of the provision of touring theatre in the Highlands and Islands as well bringing work into the main population centres. It is currently funded as a producing and touring company and it is not envisaged that this should change with the advent of the production centre. Any on-going funding and agreements relating to the funding should be predicated on the understanding the management and costs relating to the production centre should not prejudice the company’s ability to tour widely. Ongoing funding would not be intended to support the development of a venue.

The company has a good track record of engaging audiences and hence increasing participation in ‘hard to reach’ parts of the country. (increasing participation very well met) It has also supported a number of artists including playwrights. The proposal for a ‘graduate company’ is also likely to provide good development opportunities for artists at the beginning of their careers. (Enabling artists to fulfil their potential).

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 is very supportive of the application; the Specialist Advisors acknowledged the role that the company plays and could continue to play within the ‘ecology’ of theatre in Scotland. Both the SAs and the assessing officer have rated the application as high.

1.2 Reasons for assessing at this rating

I concur with the Assessing Officer and the Specialist Advisors. In light of the company’s consistent artistic ratings from evaluations (good or excellent), its reach in terms of audiences, and the potential to support early-career artists, I would rate this as a high priority.

1.3 Strengths of application

Good range of work well produced and presented in areas of the country which receive little professional drama. The application contains interesting proposals for supporting artists - including the "graduate company".

1.4 Weaknesses of applications

There are no major weaknesses.

1.5 Specific risks associated with the application

The key risk is that the new production facility costs more to run than envisaged and thus has a negative impact on the company's touring activity.

1.6 Development areas identified

None

1.7 Recommended level of support

£250,000 per annum.

4. Please comment on the geographic reach of the programme

Plans include playing in 14 local authority areas including Shetland, Western Isles, Orkney and other island areas. The geographical spread is therefore good.

Comments:

The proposed geographic spread, particularly north of the Central Belt and in the Northern Isles is good and will meet the need for wide geographic coverage.

Head of Department's overall priority recommendation

HIGH

Head of Department's signature:

Print name:

David Taylor

Date: 15 Feb 2008

Revised: 25 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: Strong overall fit with FXO criteria. The amount reflects the competitive funding context. Support of £240,000 annually is proposed.		
Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) priority recommendation		High
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. Support of £240,000 annually is proposed.		
Directors recommendations to Joint Board		High
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		APPROVE
Date: 24 April 2008	If approved for support, enter sum awarded	£240,000

End of Assessment