

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society was founded by artists to nurture and uphold the Fringe's values of inclusivity, experimentation and imagination. The founding principle at the heart of the Fringe is to be an open access festival that accommodates anyone with a desire to perform and a venue willing to host them. No single individual or committee determines who can or cannot perform at the Fringe; the Fringe Society does not run any venues or programme any performers.

The Fringe Society has three core objectives:

- Provide support, advice and encouragement to all participants.

The Fringe Society supports and encourages anyone who wants to take part – all the amazing artists, producers, venues, arts industry professionals and members of the media. From choosing a venue to creating a successful marketing campaign, the Fringe Society is on hand all year round with one-to-one tailored advice, events, facilities and online resources.

- Assist audiences to navigate what's on offer

The Fringe Society provides ticketing through a centralised box office, offering tickets to every show on the Fringe, and a wealth of information via the official Fringe programme, website and mobile app. We continuously improve and expand our services to ensure the best possible experience for Fringe audiences, and reach out via our community, learning and access initiatives to ensure that everyone who wants to attend the Fringe is able to.

- Celebrate the Fringe and what it stands for all over the world.

The Fringe Society markets the Fringe in its entirety – locally, nationally and internationally – to participants, the public, media and arts industry to retain its position as the world's leading arts festival. As well as delivering a high-profile annual marketing and media campaign, the Society works closely with media outlets all over the world to maximise publicity for the Fringe.

Planned budget increases

The planned increase of £25Mn in 2025/26 is currently light on details, and there has been no communication to the sector on the priorities for this investment; it also remains unclear if the full £25Mn will be made available or if this is already partially ringfenced for spend incurred by Creative Scotland in 2023/24 after the 10% cut to their budget was restored.

£25Mn is not going to begin to address the serious financial issues facing the sector, which is suffering from layers of reduced investment over many years. A serious consideration of how the £100Mn is invested in a shorter time frame to accelerate

recovery and grow the capacity for seeking further investment must be a priority, as Scotland stands to lose considerable talent and knowledge to other countries or other sectors. £100Mn invested thoughtfully should return a significant value to the creative and wider economy of Scotland but is equally easily wasted in filling gaps and patching holes, rather than a strategic investment in the future of Scotland's creative ecology and economy.

As an organisation not included in Creative Scotland's RFO portfolio we have concerns that this investment will be heavily ringfenced to address the gap in funding there, and that Creative Scotland will prioritise existing funded organisations to the detriment of the wider sector ecology and those organisations who do not fit the narrow parameters of the RFO programme. We support the idea that RFO portfolio organisations cannot thrive with standstill funding but would like to see a seriously considered response for those organisations who live hand to mouth in a highly competitive funding landscape in Scotland, despite significant return socially, economically and culturally, year on year – the Fringe is a stand-out example of this but is not alone in falling through the cracks of the current, disjointed funding approach in Scotland.

Planned budget increases for 2025-26 should focus on providing investment that supports the long term resilience and recovery of the sector and should ensure it extends beyond the remit of Creative Scotland to include Creative Industries, Heritage, Film, etc. The Sector is increasingly unviable for freelancers and small organisations who are less able afford the time and capacity to engage in highly competitive funding or pitching activity, often designed to keep people out, rather than include them – a simpler process for applying and securing funds must be introduced urgently. There is a need to reconsider the perception of creative work as subsidy when it is often investment that supports artists and offers a strong return long term to the economy. Investment should consider the impact of regular major events and how these are underpinned to be more sustainable and offer a greater return on investment through employment, skills, access and participation.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is the greatest performing arts festival in the world and offers artists from over 60 countries (including 900+ from Scotland) the chance to showcase their stories to audiences, media, industry and peers from around the globe. With ticket sales greater than a World Cup (2.4Mn in 2023), the Fringe is unique in that it offers a broad range of opportunities for all artists, from emerging artists looking to try new ideas to acclaimed award winning performers securing onward touring and future collaboration – all being seen by local, national, UK and international audiences. The Fringe provides over 3,000 jobs each year and returns an estimated £250Mn+ to the Scottish economy annually. The contribution to the long-term sustainability of the cultural sector in Scotland is consistent and the positive impact on the reputation of Scotland globally is clearly evidenced in the media, industry, audiences and officials who visit each and every year. We welcome the proposed festival framework outlined by ScotGov in early August and await the details on how funding and support will be invested to support

existing and substantive positive outcomes for the creative ecology and economy that the Fringe provides.

Culture Strategy Action Plan

The Action Plan is largely missing the level of detail required to understand what and how the sector will be more sustainable as a result of the proposed action, and there are no material plans for the investment required to activate the outcomes desired. The plan promises to scope, explore, review, develop but direct and measurable action is lacking – and there is no clear sense of cost, time and affordability to assess if the proposed plans will provide a more sustainable future. As is often the case, the Action Plan is a wide reaching strategy that attempts to address many issues, but in doing so does not answer the urgent questions from the sector; what investment is available and when, how will this be prioritised and distributed and who is best placed to ensure this reflects the needs of the whole sector; for example, there is no strategy in place for Creative Industries and Cultural Economy, meaning these key parts of the sector are overlooked or (unsuccessfully) shoehorned into the existing agencies frameworks.

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Progress on innovative funding solutions

To the best of our knowledge there have been no innovative funding solutions from any of the agencies of the Scottish Government that have impacted the performing arts sector. Innovative funding solutions often aim to be innovative in their outcomes, not their implementation, which comes at a cost to the core resources of artists and organisations. Innovation should focus instead on how funds can be better distributed with reduced overhead and lost cost, which must also include the cost of application by organisations and artists – if the process prioritises paperwork and audit trail over the efficient distribution of funds then there is always going to be significant wastage – a radical rethink of what ‘innovative funding solutions’ really means is overdue.

In 2023 the Fringe Society secured £100K in donations to deliver the Keep it Fringe Fund, which provided £2K bursaries to 50 artists through a simple application, eligibility and reporting process – the focus of the fund was to support artists to accelerate their professional ambitions and maximise the opportunities the Fringe presents. Funds were

spent on PR, production, childcare, access, living costs, artist pay and accommodation depending on the needs of performers.

In 2024 the Fringe Society secured £1Mn for a further two years of the programme through UK Government funds, which will distribute 180 £2,500 bursaries to artists in 2024 and 2025. The programme remains artist focused and easy to apply for and will drive significant professional development across the two years, and beyond. This is delivered through a modern and easy to use funding platform; serious consideration should be given to the range and complexity of systems managed by funding bodies that add more frustration, bureaucracy and cost to the process and make the working lives of the sector more challenging.

Creative Scotland's Multi—Year Funding Programme

While we recognise that the environment for funders is challenging and the balance of funds available and funds required will never align, the process for implementing Multi-Year funding has created greater uncertainty, insecurity and anxiety within the sector, and will continue to do so in the coming months and years. A level of needless bureaucratic complexity meant those organisations who do not have fundraising teams are at a significant disadvantage despite being most in need of secure, long term funding and support. With key organisations awaiting a decision in October 2024 there is a trickle down impact where committing to work, to collaboration, to funding and support is all on hold until some certainty is returned, and there are deep concerns that the already challenging market of donors, trusts, sponsors and patrons will be flooded with requests from the significant number of organisations who will be turned down in October who will find themselves seeking emergency funding due to poor expectation management throughout the process.

Fair work

The Fringe collectively has made progress on Fair Work priorities; from increased pay, clearer articulation of volunteering opportunities and paid roles, contracting, age pay equity, support for staff, staff consultation, and greater flexibility in working hours. The Fringe Society is an accredited Real Living Wage employer not in receipt of any core public funding and is committed to its pledge, but with an average 10% increase annually post covid the cost of implementing this is growing exponentially and there is no funding or support to match this rate of increase. Priorities for further progress should ensure the sector understands and benchmarks its progress on Fair Work, both successes and challenges, to ensure the dialogue and action plan going forward reflects the needs of workers (including freelance and contract workers) and employers.