

## **ASCA & LCA Meeting with Creative Scotland & Scottish Government Minutes**

### **Date:**

31 July 2020

### **Meeting Attendees:**

Heather Holmes - Scottish Government, Creative Industries, Screen and Media Policy  
Laura Mackenzie-Stuart - Creative Scotland, Head of Theatre  
Katy Koren – Scottish Rep, LCA & Steering Group Member, ASCA  
Brid Kirby – Chair, LCA  
Jay Lafferty – Comic, Producer & Steering Group Member, ASCA  
Bill Kirkwood – Comic, Promoter & Steering Group Member, ASCA

### **Agenda:**

1. Introductions
2. ACSA overview of key concerns for Scottish Comedy as outlined in open letter
3. LCA update of key concerns across Live Comedy
4. Creative Scotland & Scottish Government Funding packages update
5. ACSA & LCA explanation of issues facing the Comedy sector in Scotland
  - Venues Support Package
  - Self-employed/freelance artists, promoters & workers Support Package
  - Comedy recognition as an art form
6. Next steps and action points overview
7. AOB

### **Minutes:**

1. Introductions

All attendees introduced themselves.

2. ACSA overview of key concerns for Scottish Comedy as outlined in open letter

Katy gave the group an overview of the key concerns as outlined in the LCA & ASCA open letter.

- Venues Rescue Package – It's important to LCA & ASCA that comedy venues (100% of which face closure in the next 6 months) are not left out of any emergency fund that are being distributed by Scottish Government.
- Comedy's recognition as an art form – in order for our sector to have the opportunity to be funded in the future, ASCA & LCA are keen to build a better relationship with Creative Scotland and have comedy recognised across their communications of what art forms they fund.
- Support for freelance artists and workers from the comedy sector who currently have fallen through the crack of other funding opportunities.
- A clear road map to reopening. This was not discussed in detail in the meeting as it was outlined in the response to our letter and has been announced by Scottish Government.

- VAT exemption on tickets. This has been implemented at a reduced rate of 5% until January and was addressed in the response to our letter. This was not discussed any further in this meeting.

### 3. LCA update of key concerns across Live Comedy

Brid gave an overview of what the LCA are doing with DCMS and region wide lobbying across the sector.

- LCA was founded in May in the wake of Covid as there was no public body to lobby for our sector.
- Since forming they've made huge in roads with DCMS to lobby for the English comedy sector, now having weekly meetings with them. Incredibly valuable considering how quickly things are changing all the time.
- Brid sits on the Events and Entertainment working group on the Cultural Renewal Task Force.
- This has allowed the LCA to create new relationships with similar sectors such as the music and theatre sectors that did not exist before.
- Recently completed the Emergency Industry survey showing the effects of Covid on our sector.
- 70% of our sector are freelance and half of those have not been able to access any form of financial support. This means the LCA are still lobbying to extend the current scheme available up until we can open at full capacity but also need funds for those that haven't received anything.
- ACE & DCMS have now included comedy as a sub-genre of theatre by both organisations and comedy venues have explicitly been mentioned as being eligible for funds.
- This relationship has been fruitful and the LCA want to do more in Scotland to build a similar relationship.

### 4. Creative Scotland & Scottish Government Funding packages update

Heather Holmes from the Creative Industries at Scottish Government updated LCA & ASCA on the ever changing and evolving situation.

- Heather confirmed the Scottish Government has £97 million from the UK Treasury of which some has already been allocated such as the £2.2 million for grassroots music.
- The rest is up for consideration and they've had a lot of sectors coming forward with details of their needs for emergency funds.
- Heather said that Ms Hyslop has stated the importance of having infrastructures in place.
- Heather told the LCA & ASCA that there was a specific request from Simon Curthbert-Kerr from Scottish Government for us to provide specific information about our sector's needs.
- Heather requested that we collate information on all the Comedy Venues provide a monthly breakdown of their fixed costs along with information on when we realistically think they can reopen.
- This information should be monthly fixed costs. It would be helpful to have this from the date closed so that we could get a wider picture of costs. LCA suggested that costs should be to end of March 2021. Heather noted that this would be helpful. She stated that she did not know what the assessment period would be.
- Heather recognised that some venues will not be able to open with social distancing measures in place and asked for this information too on when venues could feasibly

open with 2m social distancing as well as 1m social distancing. They want a full picture of the impact of various considerations if at all possible.

Brid confirmed that DSMS are looking for figures for full financial year up until the end of March so suggested Scottish venues provide the same. Katy confirmed she was happy to collate this information from key venues across the Scottish Comedy Sector and would do so as soon as possible.

Brid asked if there was possibility of non-venue organisations such as production companies and gig promoters to feed into this or is it just venue information they require currently.

Heather continued.

- She's been confirmed what they need currently is information specific to performance venues for the time being but asked that we provide as wide a picture as possible alongside the venue's information.
- Heather suggested that we provide information on freelancer's impact alongside the venues information as other sectors have already done.
- Heather confirmed that Ms Hyslop is acutely aware of the serious effect on this group and Ms Hyslop and Scottish Government ministers are in constant contact to lobby for what else can be provided on top of the UK Government schemes.

Katy said that this was fantastic that Scottish Government has asked for this information of venues and the wider sector and Katy confirmed that the ASCA will collate this as a priority.

Jay asked if the figures provided for freelancers should include the Fringe as part of these discussions. Heather confirmed that she'll need the figures separately for year-round and for Fringe specific. Also, Jay asked for confirmation that freelancers not only included artists but also technical crew, designers, all the way through to performers.

Katy asked Laura from Creative Scotland for an update from their emergency funds planning.

Laura confirmed how Creative Scotland currently plans to distribute funds.

- Laura explained there was two pots of funds that Creative Scotland distribute from the Scottish Government.
- The first being their own discretionary fund that is mostly used for regular funding and then there is work they do with Scottish Government with new funds needed for the specific policy areas.
- A lot of the discretionary funding that Creative Scotland receives (about 85%) is already committed to multi-year funding agreements.
- The other source of funds to Creative Scotland is National Lottery but that comes with specific conditions already.
- The Performing Arts Venues Funds that was recently announced was created alongside Scottish Government on the understanding that this was not to be the only funds that were going to be made available.
- Laura mentioned that the main issues we've raised are shared across many sectors and Scottish Government and Creative Scotland are working hard together to distribute fairly.
- Laura explained that there was detailed discussion of who the £5 million for non-RFO funds would go to. It was agreed that it would be aimed at charitable organisations and local authority venues including those that Creative Scotland don't normally fund.
- This was with the knowledge that there are still live conversations about other venues that have benefited from PERF and other funds.

- Laura mentioned that a small number of comedians have applied to the Bridging Bursaries and the Open Fund and can continue to do so.
- Laura confirmed another conversation needs to be had about how comedy can access funding in the future.

Katy confirmed that not many comedians have been successful with the Open Fund as it's project based and the Bridging Bursaries and whether there was the possibility of more funds becoming available.

- Laura confirmed that those conversations are going on with Scottish Government at the moment.
- If more money doesn't not come from Scottish Government, it will be difficult as the lottery funding cannot be used in that way which is why the Open Fund focuses on creative practice.

Brid explained that the main reason why one of our main asks became recognising comedy as an art form across funding bodies across all regions is because traditionally comedy hasn't had access to funds. And what we want to do is to break down the understanding of how the comedy sector operates financially.

There is a misconception across the UK as a whole that comedy is a commercially viable entity when actually at grassroots level its' not at all. It's an industry of people that have made it work and so many that have fallen through the cracks of the self-employment support is because they've had to have second jobs to support their involvement in the comedy sector. So, the sector does need funding at grassroots level as it's not commercially viable at this level.

So, the LCA & ASCA want reassurance that the £97 million we are keen to ensure that the eligibility for any new funds cannot be that they've already receive public funds before or that they are a charitable entity as many in the comedy sector are not.

- Laura confirmed that it has never been a parameter for these funds. The bridging bursary was mostly awarded to people that were not publicly funded.
- Laura said that it was a positive step to have the Associations set up so that there is a route in to build a relationship with Creative Scotland and Scottish Government.
- And confirmed that this was important for ongoing support for their sector that public funding can engagement who can then engage back to the sector and this has led in the past to devolved funding opportunities for very specific sectors.

Katy recognised that we needed to set up as an Associations and she commented that going forward, the association would build a strongly relationship with Creative Scotland to understand what types of projects may receive funding and how the ASCA & LCA can help our sector apply for those funds.

Jay asked Laura about their recognition of comedy more specifically, thanking Creative Scotland for the tweet that went out but wanted to check that their communications were clear. Jay highlighted a letter that a comedian received that highlighted that there was no comedy department and that Creative Scotland wouldn't recognise comedy as an art form unless DCMS did so under their remit. Jay explained that that now has happened, and did it affect Creative Scotland's position. Jay also explained that there were very few examples of comedy or stand up being successful with funding. Jay asked that we were all on the same page that comedy is recognised, and we can continue these discussions,

- Laura confirmed that they have no relationship with DCMS, it does not impact on Creative Scotland's planning, but Scottish Government's does as that's the main source of their funding.
- Laura confirmed that Creative Scotland are moving away from naming art forms that they are funding. They do recognise creative practice and the purpose of that practice.

Katy and Jay confirmed that the person who sent the letter and the importance of ensuring their communication is reflective of what Laura confirmed in the meeting. Laura confirmed that she wants to continue this conversation to ensure

Laura explained that a comedian or someone from the comedy sector applying for a gap in their income is not something Creative Scotland can ever fund.

Jay emphasised the point that there are no real examples of projects which the sector felt should be funded have been successful.

- Laura suggested that we bring them some case studies of projects that we feel should be funded for her to advise us.
- Laura suggested that the association could be used to help the sector identify the quality work that Creative Scotland should know about.

Jay, Katy & Brid confirmed they will collate case studies showing the impact that public funding could have on projects that have happen that could have grown the project, employing more people and its impact.

- Laura emphasised that measuring the impact of a project is key.
- Creative Scotland are very dependent on detailed application forms as they are not experts across all sectors and suggested that the association can help with this too.

Katy confirmed that if the association's relationship develops with Creative Scotland and understanding of what projects could be funded in the future, we can provide that kind of support to our sector – helping with application forms and also giving advice of what is more likely to be funded.

Billy confirmed he was happy with the open and honest communication at the meeting and continuing with it.

Katy gave an overview of action points and suggested another meeting in 3 weeks' time.

**Meeting Action Points:**

- Katy to collate the venues monthly fixed costs data from across Scotland for Monday to send to Heather.
- Jay & Billy to look into ways of collating information on freelancer's support needed for the sector.
- Katy, Billy & Jay to build up some case studies of projects for discussion at next meeting.

**Meeting End.**