

A Review of Touring Theatre and Dance in Scotland:

Strand 3: Qualitative Research Into Touring Theatre and Dance in Scotland



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

Awarding funds from
THE NATIONAL LOTTERY®

Contents

Section 1: Contents 2

Section 2: Introduction 3

2:1 Background	3
2:2 The project	3
2:3 Research objectives	4
2:4 Methodology	5

Section 3: Research Findings in Brief 6

Section 4: Key Issues 12

4:1 An absence of shared purpose	12
4:2 An unpopular open project fund	13
4:3 The effectiveness of current subsidy is called into question	13
4:4 A sector operating at its limits	14
4:5 Audiences do not sit at the heart	14

Section 5: Recommendations 15

5:1 Establish shared purpose and priorities	15
5:2 Build a forward-thinking resilient sector	15
5:3 Review how touring is funded	15
5:4 Establish clear strategic priorities for the sector	15
5:5 Seek to build confidence and trust within the sector	16
5:6 Make tour booking and programming easier	16
5:7 Seek out new audiences	17

Section 6: Research Findings in Detail 18

6:1 Audiences are at the heart	18
6:2 Defining success	18
6:3 How successful are we?	21
6:4 Articulating 'the shift'	21
6:5 Tour booking – a producer perspective	34
6:6 Programming – a programmer perspective	38
6:7 Building audiences – a producer perspective	43
6:8 Building audiences – a programmer perspective	46
6:9 Towards success	49
6:10 Aspirations	59

Appendix: Research Participants 61

Introduction

2:1 Background

Creative Scotland is the public body that supports the arts, screen and creative industries across all parts of Scotland on behalf of everyone who lives, works or visits here.

A core ambition for Creative Scotland is that everyone can access and enjoy artistic and creative experiences. This is reflected in the key priority 'to strengthen presentation, touring and distribution of work, including through digital platforms and encouraging collaboration.'

Creative Scotland funds touring theatre and dance through both Open Project Funds and Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs). Supporting both producers (theatre and dance companies) and promoters such as venues and touring networks.

The Arts Strategy 2016-17 identified that 'Touring, exhibition and other means of distributing and sharing work is a concern for organisations as highlighted in the Sector Reviews. This is especially true for the performing arts (theatre, dance and music) where a growth in audiences remains a priority. This is key for increasing opportunities for access and delivering greater financial contribution to the viability of venues and producing companies. While working digitally can complement this, the live experience is still fundamental for many.'

2:2 The project

Creative Scotland attends the Touring Forum which is facilitated by the **Federation of Scottish Theatre (FST)**. This network voiced a number of concerns around the health of theatre and dance touring in Scotland of which perceived diminishing financial resources for both promoters and producers is paramount.

Discussions through the forum identified a need to better understand how the sector operates, how it has changed in recent years and gain a better understanding of the impact of Creative Scotland's funding in this area.

This report focuses on touring within Scotland, there is a broader context within which Scottish artists and productions also tour to international markets and networks, and a further commercial touring circuit which is not covered here. The emphasis of the review was not to find touring success stories from Scotland to celebrate, but to uncover key themes and issues affecting the sector.

Through in-depth consultation with a sub group of the FST's Touring Forum, Creative Scotland identified research questions which were developed into a research approach with four strands of enquiry (detailed below).

Strand	Research Methodology
1. What does the touring environment look like?	Quantitative analysis of the data currently held by Creative Scotland and partner agencies. Carried out in-house by Creative Scotland
2. What are the fees / funding arrangements?	Online questionnaire of venues / promoters using FST database. Carried out in-house by Creative Scotland
3. Do promoters and producers think touring in Scotland is successful?	Qualitative data analysis through managed focus groups and one to one interviews with key people. Conducted by Lisa Baxter
4. How does touring in Scotland now compare with other models	Desk research and feedback from focus groups - Conducted by Claire Dow

Quantitative work was carried out in-house by Creative Scotland staff. Qualitative Research and a Literature and Practice Review were carried out by external researchers, Lisa Baxter and Claire Dow respectively, who together pulled all the findings of the Review into this Final Report.

There are five reports in the review which can be accessed on the [Creative Scotland website](#):

Final Report: A Review of Touring Theatre and Dance in Scotland

Strand 1 **Data Analysis of Creative Scotland Funded Touring 2012 – 2016**

Strand 2 **Industry Survey of Producers and Promoters**

Strand 3 **Qualitative Research into Touring Theatre and Dance in Scotland**

Strand 4 **Literature and Practice Review**

2:3 Research objectives

This research covers Strand 3 of the above. It has been designed to explore the views and experiences of those working in touring theatre and dance in Scotland, and how it has changed in recent years, to gain a better understanding of the impact of Creative Scotland's funding in this area.

The following research objectives for Strand 3 were identified:

- What constitutes a successful programme?
- What constitutes a successful tour?
- How effective are the key relationships?
- What are the challenges for audience development?
- How has touring changed?
- What could change to make touring more effective?

The findings will inform the delivery of one of Creative Scotland's key priorities - to strengthen the presentation, touring and distribution of work.

2:4 Methodology

Four focus groups and three one-to-one interviews were convened in December 2016 with representatives from the dance and theatre touring sector – venues, promoters, producers and touring companies – as well as the Federation of Scottish Theatre and Creative Scotland.

During recruitment care was taken to ensure representation in relation to scale, geography, career stage, genre and diversity.

Three of the invitees who were not able to make the sessions in Edinburgh or Perth completed a questionnaire that closely followed the questions asked in the focus groups.

A full list of the research participants is available in the Appendix, page 49.

A total of 35 individuals participated in the research.

Research Findings in Brief

This section contains a summary of the main findings from the research, illustrated with a few key examples. The full findings, together with participant verbatim, can be found in Section 6.

- **Audiences are at the heart**

Audiences are at the heart of everyone's organisational aspirations.

- **Defining success**

The touring theatre and dance sector is largely perceived as 'hit and miss'. There is no clear sector-wide understanding of what a successful touring theatre and dance sector looks like. The following is a distillation of the key points made when asked to suggest success criteria for the sector:

- a) There would be a clear sector-wide understanding of what a successful touring theatre and dance sector looks like.
- b) Audiences across Scotland would have year-round access to a range of high quality work of different genres and at different scales.
- c) The touring theatre and dance sector would be relevant to audiences and seek to engage them beyond the stage.
- d) The touring theatre and dance sector would be efficient, sustainable and thriving.
- e) The touring theatre and dance sector would be powered by astute audience and marketplace data.

- **Articulating 'the shift'**

Participants identified a number of contextual shifts which they believe have impacted on the sector in Scotland over the past 10 to 15 years:

- a) Creative Scotland's funding priorities and the balance and distribution of touring. There is a perceived oversupply of small-scale edgier work, dance in particular, at the expense of middle-scale mainstream touring, which venues believe, there is unmet demand for. Many of these small companies are concentrated in the central belt and do not tour widely. Views were split about their public value and concerns were raised about the frontloading of investment in developing this new work whilst high quality proven work is rarely given a second life to reach more audiences.
- b) Creative Scotland's Open Project Fund is perceived to have negatively impacted on the touring ecosystem. Producers were critical of a perceived lack of strategic priorities around a very open, opaque and over-subscribed fund. In their view, Creative Scotland has an implicit priority based on volume, preferring to fund a high number of smaller applications over more costly ones. Producers feel under a huge amount of pressure to reduce the amount of funding they ask for, to levels which they consider unsustainable. They questioned whether Creative Scotland had a realistic understanding of, or are simply not acknowledging, the rising cost of touring and rates of pay. In response, some producers have submitted applications for less than they need upfront in order to increase their chances of obtaining the funding.

Producers believe the amount of cost-cutting they've been asked to commit to is excessive and is one of the reasons behind shorter tours. In addition low fees mean there are insufficient margins to support tour extensions. The rolling nature of the fund has disrupted the planning process between producers and programmers because of the dislocation of funding/programming deadlines and lack of certainty around whether funding will be awarded. As a project fund, touring has become focused on the short-term at the expense of long-term planning and relationship building.

A strong view was put forward by one participant that an over-reliance on funding inhibits an entrepreneurial mindset and creates an expectation that risk must be wholly supported through subsidy. In their view this leads to a distortion in the market-place where too much work is being supported that cannot attract audiences.

- c)** Declining guarantees and a shift to Box Office splits is undermining the sustainability of smaller-scale companies. Programmers are, through financial necessity, striking harder deals for work that is small-scale and/or risky. Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) were cited as the 'worst payers'. Described by producers as a rise in 'market forces', this shift is having a disproportionate effect on their ability to tour as they find themselves bearing the financial brunt of the risk. This, together with the rising costs of touring, creates challenges around the ambition, length and distribution of their tours.
- d)** The increasingly unfathomable money-go-round of subsidy. The way touring is currently funded is regarded, variously, as overly complex, seemingly unstrategic and opaque. Subsidy and cross-subsidy flow among and between parties with no systemic understanding of its movement or efficacy.
- e)** Local Authorities and Cultural Trusts are adopting an increasingly commercial approach to programming. The on-going Council budget cuts and shifting priorities of Cultural Trusts means producers are experiencing the sharp end of a more commercial mind-set and a resistance to riskier work which was described as an 'erosion of artistic integrity'.
- f)** National Theatre Scotland is operating independently of the touring sector. Funded directly by the government and fulfilling a separate set of criteria to touring, programmers in particular believe NTS is operating more in competition with them than working alongside them to build audiences as part of an integrated approach.
- g)** Insufficient training and progression routes resulting in a skills shortage. Producers discussed the lack of good quality training provision for technical staff. Opportunities for progression are limited due to the declining number of small-scale companies able to afford technicians. Another view put forward was that NTS is 'hoovering up' the talent and 'fast-tracking' them to the mid-scale, meaning many young professionals are not cutting their teeth on small-scale and rural touring. From an artist perspective, theatres may be cautious about releasing staff time and resource to support artist development whilst a reliance on project-funding does not provide the continuity of resource to invest in professional development.

- **Tour booking – a producer perspective**

- a) An oversupply of work shifts the balance of power to the programmers. There are two main touring windows in the year which creates a bottleneck of competing companies in a condensed period of time. The perceived over-supply of small scale companies means more work is being produced that can be programmed, shifting the balance of power to programmers who can now increasingly determine the terms.
- b) Meaningful dialogue with programmers is on the wane. Producers are frustrated that they don't have the capacity to invest the time and resource needed to develop informed relationships with programmers, reducing much of their contact to a sales pitch rather than a meeting of equals.
- c) The increased commercialisation of the touring relationship. Programmers are increasingly charging for services that used to be free which places additional financial burden on the producers.
- d) The rise of the one-night stand. Producers are frustrated at the rise of single night bookings, usually at the weekend. It creates hidden costs around empty days, limiting the duration and reach of the tours, and precluding the opportunity for word of mouth to build audiences.
- e) The precariousness of the verbal agreement. The practice of penciling-in tour dates is being used by some programmers, variously, as a delay tactic, a means to hedge their bets, and an avoidance strategy. This brings increased stress and uncertainty to the producers as well as a profound loss of trust.
- f) Presenter's limited knowledge stifles dance touring. Programmers are unwilling to programme more than one or two dance events a season/year because they believe there is no audience for it. This has been attributed, by producers, to poor understanding about the form and lack of knowledge around how to develop audiences for dance. The perceived impacts are that the capacity for dance touring has shrunk, the potential to grow audiences is unrealised, and dance programming in Scotland doesn't represent the breadth of dance that is being produced there.
- g) The revolving address book. There is currently no centrally managed resource to efficiently support tour booking in a complex and rapidly evolving sector. The imminent Tourbook website was suggested as a solution, though questions were raised about the authoritativeness and usefulness of a site which depended on people opting in and updating it themselves.

- **Programming: a programmer perspective**

- a) The challenges around scheduling. The rolling nature of the Open Project Fund, predicated on indicative tours and 'notes of interest', in reality produces a high degree of uncertainty around scheduling. In addition, the bottlenecks created by the Edinburgh Fringe and Christmas season are resulting in an uneven distribution of work which makes it difficult to maintain a consistent year-round programme of quality work.
- b) Programming blind. The increasing number of small companies supported through the Open Project Fund means programmers find it hard to keep abreast with the influx of new talent and often have to programme sight-unseen.
- c) Unable to strike a balance in an imbalanced sector. The dearth of middle-scale high quality mainstream work means venues are not earning sufficient box office income to subsidise riskier work.

- d) A surfeit of low quality dance. Programmers believe the proliferation of new, relatively inexperienced companies being supported by Creative Scotland has resulted in work that is not of a sufficiently high standard.
- e) The discomfort of negotiation. Programmers have experienced a considerable degree of discomfort around negotiating the deal. Some of this discomfort centres on feeling guilty about the necessity of negotiating fees which, sometimes, are lower than the perceived worth of the work. It also arises from the difficulty of negotiating when each party is operating from a limited understanding of each other's position, not having enough time to talk meaningfully about the work, and having to field un-informed sales pitches.
- f) The difficulty of delivering diverse programmes for rural communities. Distance, the cost of travel, poor communication, and the belief that some companies think rural touring lacks the status of larger venues in the central belt, were some of the difficulties attributed to attracting a varied programme to remote and rural areas.

- **Building audiences: a producer perspective**

- a) Smaller companies have low priority status. Some producers are finding it hard to engage venues in collaborative marketing and believe their work is being de-prioritised in favour of companies with the potential to deliver better return on marketing investment.
- b) The additional sting of the contra deal. Contra deals, where producers are expected to contribute financially towards the costs of venue marketing that used to be free, means they now have to cover both their own marketing costs and a proportion of the venue's.
- c) A lack of confidence in venue marketing support. Some producers have experience of supplied marketing collateral and on-line resource remaining unused.
- d) Audience development is a luxury rather than a necessity. Producers find that audience development is not on the programmer's agenda unless there is additional resource to support it.
- e) Operating from a shallow understanding of the work. Venue marketers are too stretched to take an informed interest around marketing every visiting company and operate from a shallow understanding of the work, particularly in relation to one-night visits of small-scale work.
- f) Disagreements around sharing audience contact data. Some producers would like to be able to develop relationships directly with audiences and are being met with strong resistance from programmers who are reluctant to hand over contact data.

- **Building audiences: a programmer perspective**

- a) Marketing high volume programmes with limited resource. High volume programmes reduce venue's capacity to provide the tailored marketing support across a diverse range of work, leading to marketing that can be generic. Tough decisions have to be made in relation to where spend is best allocated, meaning small-scale work can lose out. In addition, budget and staff reductions at civic venues, together with a perceived de-skilling of marketing practice, dilutes the quality of marketing support for touring work.

- b)** Programming as an audience development tool. Programmers shared examples of programming around national theme days and events, and creating their own festivals or distinct programming themes within a season, as a means to attract and develop new audiences. Some have committed relationships with specific companies in order to build audiences over time. This was more evident with RFO venues than civic venues and rural promoters.
- c)** The variability of marketing support provided by producers. Programmers find that there is an expectation from some producers that, once they have supplied the core marketing collateral, all the marketing will be done for them, which is not always possible. The quality and usefulness of the support different producers offer is determined by the degree of skill and resource they have. Copy can often be written from an artistic perspective which then has to be 'decoded' by the venue marketing departments into a language audiences can understand.
- d)** Operating from a shallow understanding of the audience and marketplace. Programmers admitted they have limited knowledge about their potential audiences and communities. Some also questioned the validity and effectiveness of the audience data they have.
- e)** Disagreements around data sharing. Programmers and their marketing departments are unwilling to hand over audience contact data for reasons of data protection and their own self interests.

- **Towards success**

Participants made a number of recommendations around future priorities for the sector in Scotland:

- a)** Fresh, brave thinking is required. Participants want brave thinking to navigate the changes they believe the sector needs to undergo.
- b)** Work towards sector alignment around a shared vision. A shared vision, a re-commitment to the purpose and value of subsidised touring and clear success criteria that everyone can work to, criteria that aren't wholly predicated on income and audience numbers.
- c)** Establish strategic funding priorities and mechanisms everyone can subscribe to. Review the current funding mechanism and how subsidy moves through the system. Develop clear funding priorities and ring fenced funding for touring. Take steps to ensure diversity of programme at RFO venues. Seek ways to better support risk, obtain best value from proven successful work and invest in artistic and skills development.
- d)** Create a transparent funding mechanism that supports the best chance of a successful application.
- e)** Do less, better. Establish a more intelligent use of resource by funding fewer touring companies, with a re-focus on artistic quality, audience development and reach.
- f)** Greater industry dialogue and exchange. Introduce a sector-wide gathering (in addition to the Emporium and Early Dialogue Days), the focus of which will include strengthening shared purpose, fostering creative exchange and developing a more informed understanding of the whole touring ecosystem.
- g)** A centrally managed approach to showcasing work. Instigate seasonal showcases where multiple companies can share their work for programmers and allow them to see a critical mass of work in one go.

- h)** Support deeper, more sustained audience engagement. Creative Scotland suggested an increased focus around audience engagement (e.g. socially engaged, participatory, place specific) to establish more meaningful relationships between audience, artists and venues/promoters, deepen the impact of the work and build new audiences.
- i)** Working better together. Everyone believed there is need for improved communication, honesty and genuine exchange within the sector to foster more productive partnerships, mutual understanding and common purpose. Producers and programmers would work together around creative collaborations, shared investment and joint audience development and engagement activity. National touring companies would be funded to tour as part of the touring sector with the aim of building audiences for touring as a whole. Programmers work together to support touring through the creation of formal or informal consortia, as well as find ways to reduce touring costs.
- j)** Investment in marketing and audience development. Engage marketing staff in internal programming discussions and invite them to industry events and showcases about the work being produced. Invite marketing staff to see the work and to meet the artists. Invest in marketing and audience development training. Support innovative audience development initiatives that bring fresh thinking and practice to the sector. Establish regional and national audience benchmarks around ticket sales and income, by genre and scale, to inform budgets and target setting. Increase scrutiny of marketing and audience development in funding bids.
- k)** A centrally managed resource for tour booking. Create an authoritative and current resource that will streamline tour booking and aid communication between producers and presenters.

Key Issues

This research has brought to the surface a wealth of **contradictory** and intersecting viewpoints that paint an incredibly complex picture. This section is a summation of the most significant, over-arching issues raised. Many of them are encapsulated in the quote below:

"I think there is a loss of confidence at every stage in the system for multiple reasons: the changing audiences, the changing finance and the vastly greater range of work that is potentially available to tour. More and more artists are working as individuals or in small project-by-project based groups ... and what that means that there isn't a growth of confidence and knowledge that sits within the producing companies building up an understanding of touring and relationships with venues.

In the venues themselves, there's far more work coming through because the runs have got shorter and they feel under pressure. They don't feel they're building up a real understanding of the companies that are coming in and are therefore struggling to connect the right shows for the right audiences. I think all along they are just all retreating from a problem."

4:1 An absence of shared purpose

The touring dance and theatre sector in Scotland does not appear to have a clear vision, strategic priorities or explicit success criteria with which to unify and galvanise everyone around a deeply held shared purpose.

Shifts such as changes in the balance of power, together with the rise of market forces and a more commercial mindset, are undermining the essential 'why' of the sector and the centrality of the audience in its practice.

Conflicting priorities within the sector appear to be working against Creative Scotland's aims to invest in risk, support broad distribution of work, strive for diversity of programme and build committed audiences.

There has been, over a period of years, a reluctant movement towards survival and self-preservation at the expense of collaboration and shared interests, with clear hierarchies emerging in relation to scale, art form and distribution. This has given rise to a lack of honesty and openness in professional relationships which has been divisive and undermined trust.

No-one wants this. Everyone want to raise the bar.

4:2 An unpopular open project fund

There is both passion and heat within the touring sector. The passion is fueled by a commitment to make, programme and tour great work for audiences. The heat is generated by frustration towards the Open Project Fund, which is regarded as the source of many of the issues programmers and producers face.

- The perceived prioritisation of high volume output, combined with the perception that Creative Scotland does not operate from an informed understanding of the costs around touring, means funding is being spread very thinly. Some producers feel pushed into cutting budgets down to the wire, impacting on ambition, production values, employment, pay, the capacity to tour, health and well-being.
- The fund is believed to prioritise small-scale, riskier work over larger-scale more mainstream companies, distorting the balance of supply and demand in terms of genre, scale, distribution and reach. This, combined with the absence of a protocol to safeguard programme diversity at point of delivery, means touring may not be adequately meeting the actual needs and appetites of all of Scotland's audiences.
- As a rolling fund, what was previously a more efficient system of co-ordination between programmer and producer has been disrupted, dislocating planning timelines and introducing a high degree of uncertainty into the system.
- As a project fund, companies are less able to embark on long-term planning, partnership building, collaboration and progression.
- As an open fund, producers feel disadvantaged by the absence of clear touring priorities. Applications could be turned down as a result of who they happen to be up against in any given week. In addition, the perceived lack of transparency and dialogue around Creative Scotland's decision making process makes producers feel unsupported and unable to submit applications that afford them the best chance of success.

4:3 The effectiveness of current subsidy is called into question

Evolving deal making, multiple funding channels and the increased commercialisation of the relationship between producer and programmer obscures the picture of how subsidy is currently working.

The perceived front loading of Creative Scotland's investment into the creation of new and development work, some of which does not go on to tour, or tour extensively, is regarded by many as a poor use of funding.

The financial model of venues supporting a diverse programme by internally subsidising risk is in decline, and yet this remains the supposed premise for funding a diverse, balanced touring offer.

The subsequent rise in a more commercial approach to programming is regarded variously as pernicious, pragmatic and 'the future'.

Given the inevitability of reduced funding in the years to come, open debate is now necessary around the imminent financial realities of touring, and alternatives to a reliance on subsidy. Some of the key questions that were raised are:

- Who is paying for and/or subsidising what?
- How realistic is the model of internally subsidising risk in the current operating environment?

- Is the subsidy going into venues sufficiently supporting challenging work?
- Why are venues booking risky work if they are not prepared to invest in it themselves?
- Are they doing it because they want to, or they have to?
- Who bears the true cost of the risk?
- How else might risk be supported in a sector that is becoming increasingly market driven?
- Is there is an over-reliance on funding/subsidy?
- Is funding distorting the balance of touring by giving precedence to work the market cannot support?
- How can funders strike a balance between rewarding creativity and enabling an artistic idea to reach it's potential, and the imperative to tour and share work?

4:4 A sector operating at its limits

Reduced funding, lower fees and the expectation to do more for the same, or less, means the sector is operating at full stretch, and at a level many feel is unsustainable. More companies are being funded. Programmes are getting busier. Staff numbers are, in places, declining. There is no time for anything but the essential.

The impacts are various and detrimental to the vitality and sustainability of the sector. What is lost is the capacity to engage in meaningful dialogue, to deliver informed programming, to build durational productive partnerships and artistic collaborations, and design astute marketing and audience development initiatives to attract and grow loyal audiences.

4:5 Audiences do not sit at the heart

Whilst the overarching aspiration for everyone taking part in the research is to build audiences, in reality this is not translating into consistently high quality marketing and audience development practice within the sector.

- Venue marketing can be generic due, in part, to high volume programmes and lack of resource.
- The marketing of risky work, especially one-nighters, is de-prioritised in favour of more commercially viable events.
- This, together with the fact that audience development, unless specifically funded, appears to be rare, means some small and medium sized companies could find themselves financially exposed, whilst potential new audiences remain untapped.
- Programmers admit they operate from a limited understanding of their communities and potential audiences, which by inference suggests that is also the case with their marketing departments.
- Programmers have misgivings about the type of audience/market data being gathered and how it is used.
- Issues around audience contact data and who can access it appear unresolved.
- Producers, especially less experienced artists and companies, can often produce marketing collateral that is not fit for purpose.
- Not enough dialogue takes place between producers, programmers and marketing staff to inspire staff teams and develop a shared understanding around the work and audiences, an understanding which could inform more astute marketing and audience development.

Recommendations

5:1 Establish shared purpose and priorities

Steps need to be taken to galvanise everyone around a clear vision that places audiences firmly at the centre of their aspirations and practice. This might involve a period of consultation and dialogue where the sector:

- re-examines the essential ‘why’ of touring,
- articulates a clear vision for touring going forwards,
- underpinned by a clear impact-focused core purpose statement,
- and supported by clear criteria for success.

5:2 Build a forward-thinking resilient sector

Given the inevitability of continued reduced funding, rising costs, rapidly evolving cultural behaviour, shifts in the priorities and practices of civic venues, and the need to secure optimal carbon efficiency, there needs to be a comprehensive sector-wide review on how to build a more resilient touring ecosystem.

The answer may not lie in throwing more money at the problem. It certainly cannot be solved by a reactive, incremental approach. What is required is brave, disruptive thinking to re-imagine how touring theatre and dance can survive and thrive in an increasingly challenging environment.

5:3 Review how touring is funded

The Open Project Fund is perceived as not serving the interests and needs of the sector and serious questions are being raised about the effectiveness of the subsidy provided. This report recommends Creative Scotland instigates a comprehensive and detailed review of how touring is funded, including the following:

- Commission an in-depth economic review of the movement and impact of subsidy within the sector.
- Initiate a benchmarking exercise to establish clear, evidence-based expectations around the costs of touring, pay rates and anticipated audiences in relation to scale and genre.
- Explore the viability of alternative funding approaches around a refreshed set of strategic priorities (see below).

5:4 Establish clear strategic priorities for the sector

The sector needs to establish a clearer set of strategic priorities to achieve greater consensus, clarity and focus. Actions might include:

- Review how risk could be best supported within an evolving touring and economic landscape.
- Review priorities around the volume and balance of project-funded work to address issues around over-supply of particular types genres and scales.
- Consider creating a funding stream designed to support producers, and/or producer/programmer partnerships, over a fixed-term period to encourage longer-term planning, continuity of provision, strategic relationship building and sustained audience development.

- Explore the relative benefits of a ‘less is more’ approach to supporting the sector as a whole in order to concentrate strategic focus on artistic quality, audience development and reach.
- Strive for improved diversity, balance and continuity of touring across Scotland, and throughout the year.
- Seek ways to align national and project funded companies around the shared goal of developing audiences for Scottish work in a way that is mutually beneficial and advances the touring infrastructure.
- Address the imbalance between front-loaded investment and ‘sweating the assets’ to ensure proven high quality work is given an extended life to reach more audiences.
- Introduce protocols to safeguard RFO commitment to a balanced, diverse programmes of work.
- Ensure training and professional development opportunities adequately meet the needs of the sector.

5:5 Seek to build confidence and trust within the sector

Steps need to be taken to address some of the tensions that exist between producers and programmers. This can only be achieved if programmers feel more confident about programming risky work, if there is a greater degree of honesty and mutual understanding between programmers and producers, if productive dialogue and exchange is supported, and if there is more widespread understanding of how the sector operates as a whole. Some of the ways this might be achieved include:

- Seasonal showcases of new work that develop programmers’ knowledge of the creative marketplace and seeds constructive conversations between them and artists about the right product for their venues.
- Fund companies for longer to support relationship building, continuity of provision and audience building at strategic venues.
- Support regional or national events that seek to bring programmers, producers and marketers together to share practice, broker relationships, deepen understanding of how the sector works, and engage in meaningful and inspiring conversations around art and audiences.
- Develop specific initiatives to under-write the risk of strategic partnerships over a period of time whilst the programmers, marketers and producers collaborate on sustainable audience development.

5:6 Make tour booking and programming easier

Much of the stress that exists within the sector can be attributed to the difficulties and uncertainties around booking tours and shaping programmes. By alleviating some of these difficulties, valuable time will be released that could be spent on more constructive dialogue and industry exchange.

- Seek ways to address the miss-match of funding deadlines and planning cycles by streamlining the booking process, as much as is possible, and co-ordinating the funding announcements for producers and programmers.
- Develop a centrally managed resource (which could be Tourbook) that takes the grind out of the process and aids communication between producers and programmers.

- Encourage and support the formation of regional/national touring consortia which would collaborate on establishing efficient touring routes around specific kinds of work and/or scales.
- Develop transparent funding mechanisms that give producers the best chance of success, minimising the prevailing uncertainties that prevent programmers from confidently including work in their programmes.
- Consider working together as a sector to establish an accord around best, most ethical, practice.

5:7 Seek out new audiences

Much more could and needs to be done to engage audiences in touring theatre and dance. Some of it is as much about a cultural shift as finding additional and smarter ways to support and develop practice.

- Have greater emphasis on, and scrutiny around, collaborative marketing in funding guidelines.
- Trial innovative and sustainable marketing and audience development programmes for a range of touring genres and scales.
- Encourage and support audience engagement initiatives which would affect a shift in focus from reach to depth, from numbers to connectivity.
- Deepen knowledge (via soft and hard data) of the potential audiences for new work.
- Support events that encourage dialogue between the artists, programmers and marketers to develop shared understanding around new work, audiences and audience development.
- Develop more training for producers to inform the creation of audience-centric marketing collateral.
- Have a funding mechanism that creates longer lead times for programmers to develop imaginative programming approaches that will appeal to potential new audiences.
- Encourage the development of work that is locally or regionally situated, has the capacity to resonate with audiences and communities, and which may not necessarily tour extensively.

Findings in Detail

Because of the richness of the discussion and the passion and articulacy of the participants, and in a bid to bring their voices and perspectives to the fore, this section is largely comprised of verbatim under thematic headings. It's important to bear in mind that the findings below are based on the input from the participants and not a comprehensive audit of the touring sector.

6:1 Audiences are at the heart

Throughout the discussions it became abundantly clear that audiences lay at the heart of everyone's organisational aspirations. More audiences. More loyal audiences. New audiences. Niche audiences. Diverse audiences. Intergenerational audiences. Urban and rural audiences. They want their audiences to be inspired, entertained, uplifted and challenged. They want to fund work, create work and shape programmes that are high quality, diverse, appealing and relevant, spanning a breadth of genre and scale. They believe that audiences everywhere deserve the very best and have access to the work they have appetite for. They want to build relationships based on trust, where audiences will take a leap of faith and try new, perhaps challenging work. Touring is perceived as a vital cornerstone in achieving this.

"My aspiration is that touring is relevant for audiences of today and producers and creators continue to have that right at the forefront."

"Lots of people together as an audience and that momentum of word of mouth you get and interest for experimental work as well as your average show."

"My key aspiration is finding audiences for new and challenging work that will stretch them and take them to other places rather than playing the safe card all the time which is just preaching to the converted."

"It's about really anticipating what audiences might be encouraged to want and building interest and in a way that feels that there is a connection with the people it's being presented to."

6:2 Defining success

The underpinning question behind the research was 'Is touring dance and theatre in Scotland successful?' In order to answer this question fully, we first needed to establish what 'success' meant from the perspective of all the research participants. This is a distillation of the points they made.

- **There would be a clear sector-wide understanding of what a successful touring theatre and dance sector looks like**

Specific success criteria are in place which align funders, programmers and producers around a shared vision or purpose.

"A shared vision between producers and programmers and funders and stakeholders ... and within that vision about what success looks like."

- **Audiences across scotland would have year-round access to a range of high quality work of different genres and at different scales**

Touring serves the whole of Scotland. Audiences are offered a 'varied diet' of high quality work, including a high degree created in Scotland, from the mainstream to the risky and challenging, at different scales, irrespective of whether they live in the central belt or in the Highlands. Quality is supported through appropriate resource and informed by depth of thought and artistic rigour. There is an in-depth understanding of the performance contexts, informed by mindfulness of the intended audiences and working towards the highest production values possible in every venue, from a theatre to a village hall.

"The thought, the time, the care, the investment in the product itself is of a high quality."

"There's a range of touring work covering an appropriate amount of the country and playing to an appropriate number of people."

"What you certainly want – proportionate to the scale of touring – are reasonably good production values. They should be equally good whether touring to a village hall or city venue. The audience should experience a production as close as possible to what was originally intended, given that sometimes, compromises have to be made."

"An understanding of the context in which that work is being presented so that it is really being considered at every level and with appropriate skill."

"Thinking about what your audiences will want to see ... in terms of stories that are being told and responses to the geography of the place the work is being presented."

"To make a programme of work and to be able to include some riskier and innovative, more experimental work, especially in some of those areas that are more far flung."

"Evidence of rigour behind the work that is being created so that audiences are getting the best theatre that is available at that scale at that time rather than the cheapest."

- **The touring theatre and dance sector would be relevant to audiences and seek to engage them beyond the stage**

Programmers understand their audiences and communities deeply and are programming to meet their needs and deliver stretch. Producers are mindful of the places they are touring to and engage more deeply with audiences whilst on tour. More work is relevant to the contemporary issues of the day and/or to the specificity of place and social context. There is a greater degree of direct interaction between artists and audiences. There is commitment from, and resource for, programmers and producers to work collaboratively around meaningful audience engagement initiatives which are now central to creating appetite, building relationships, encouraging loyalty and enhancing the audience experience of the work.

"The quality of the engagement is meaningful. It won't mean that in all cases the work is expected to go to a wide geography ... but where they do go there is a depth of engagement with the places that they go to ... This might mean companies touring less widely but connecting more deeply with people in the places they go to."

"There is a commitment and resource given to audience development and engagement by both producers and programmers."

“Success for me is about engaging with audiences, not really about the numbers but about engagement. A successful gig is one where the audience want to talk to the company afterwards, to make contact, and we try to make that possible wherever we tour to.”

- **The touring theatre and dance sector would be efficient, sustainable and thriving**

Ensuring efficient and carbon efficient touring is a shared consideration between programmers and producers. Producers are funded on longer cycles to support growth, progression, development of practice and relationship building with programmers. Programmers and producers engage in long-term relationships around shared objectives, where continuity of provision supports audience building. There is parity in the perceived balance of risk. Producers of work at different scales and in different genres operate on a level playing field, valued for the skill, distinctiveness and diversity of audiences they bring.

“Consistency of product and ... different types of product available within and across a number of years.”

“For me it’s about being sustainable as well as successful, making sure that there is a legacy and on-going life for the work and the company.”

“The environmental and carbon footprint is raised further up the agenda and each side has a responsibility to minimise that somehow ... and some kind of system that acknowledges the impact touring has on carbon footprints.”

- **The touring theatre and dance sector would be powered by astute audience and marketplace data**

Programmes are artistically ambitious and informed by rich audience data and a deep knowledge of the surrounding communities. Producers and programmers work collaboratively using audience data to identify audience potential around specific pieces of work. Both are able to confidently and realistically set shared audience and income targets based on astute benchmarking meaning they are both equally invested in, and operating from, a shared understanding of risk.

“Something about a greater in-depth sense of the marketplace so audiences can be folded right back into the early points of creation. I think the artist’s right to express themselves around the way they interpret the world has to be protected, but I think it could be enhanced on lots of occasions if we all understood the marketplace better and shared our understanding of that.”

“Trying to reach out and find what product audiences are looking for and finding what will get them in, then once they’re in they’ll come back and see something again.”

6:3 How successful are we?

Participants believe the touring dance and theatre sector is 'hit and miss' and not as successful as it could be in relation to the success criteria they had previously outlined.

"I've heard it said that touring is broken and it's just not working, and it's certainly not working for artists getting properly paid either."

"It's so varied and challenging at the moment. I think there is a lot of good work that does get toured."

"It's hit and miss. The highs are extraordinary and the lows make you despair. It's really extreme."

"Touring is so patchy that a company might not return to a place for two – three years, not because they don't want to, but because of the way things are programmed and funded."

"The potential for successful touring and dance theatre is there, but currently there just simply isn't enough connectivity between venues, funding bodies and audiences."

The remainder of this report will focus on all the issues and challenges participants have been facing that led them to this conclusion, together with their suggestions on how to ensure touring is more successful in the future.

6:4 Articulating 'the shift'

Participants were asked to identify the contextual shifts that have impacted on the touring dance and theatre sector, and what those impacts are. The discussion revealed a high degree of consensus around the themes that follow.

- **Creative Scotland's funding priorities and their impact on the balance and distribution of touring**

An over-supply of new small-scale work: There is perception amongst programmers in particular that Creative Scotland prioritises challenging small-scale work over high quality mainstream work, creating a significant imbalance in supply and demand.

"Creative Scotland likes to fund experimental work. They're not wanting to necessarily fund mainstream work."

"I think there is an awful lot of small scale funky live art stuff being made and not enough mainstream work that will attract a more mainstream audience."

"The shows that are being created are not meeting the needs of some specific audiences. Those audiences outside of the cities that want those big production values."

"I think there is something around the economy of the funding model at the minute. There's been a deliberate approach by Creative Scotland to celebrate the number of awards made and to make people [artists] feel really included. Inevitably there's a lot of smaller grant awards, so the content that is coming through is often one and two handers – which can of course be brilliant – but I think audiences are also looking for production values: six, seven, eight on the stage, big sets and it's not there."

“There is ... a material issue with what the funding body of Scotland is focusing its grant money on versus what will engage a wider audience for theatre in Scotland. There absolutely must be an understanding that art is for all, and the only way we successfully reinvigorate our theatre scene is to engage audiences of all backgrounds, taste and geographic location and that we can’t, in our sector, have some high-art snobby approach to the differing kinds of theatre that resonate with audiences.”

A scarcity of classic drama at the middle and large scale: Programmers believe their audiences have real appetite for high quality mainstream work at these scales and find it difficult to meet the perceived demand. This work is strategically important in bringing a volume of ticket and ancillary income into the business, income that contributes to financial resilience and re-investment in high quality programming. Additionally, the scarcity of suitable work means these venues are falling short of their audience potential making it harder to justify public value and investment.

“Regularly, for the more popular titles we tour – I hear venue managers say ‘Thank goodness you give us shows we can sell to our audiences’. That comment comes up far too regularly given the abundance of excellent artists and organisations in Scotland.”

“You just don’t get the classic texts that would bring an audience in for drama who will not go near challenging work or dance.”

“There’s less money in the building because they’re not buying drinks, they’re not buying coffee.”

“You’re ending up taking work that maybe isn’t of the standard you would like to really have.”

“It’s more difficult to justify your venue and what you’re doing because you get small audiences, and then you’re less likely to get funded yourself so it’s a vicious circle.”

“I am all for the provision of good work for audiences and theatres of all scales – but we forget the large scale to our peril, as it takes Scotland off the national map and prevents any sort of meaningful commercial sector progressing and populating the theatres with product.”

An over-supply of dance: The proliferation of touring dance was flagged as a particular problem. Artistically, programmers questioned why they were expected to programme work their audiences don’t want. Financially, they believe supporting dance is unsustainable because of the disparity between the high fees dance companies demand and the low Box Office income the work brings in.

“It’s very hard because sometimes you might be looking at a fifteen-hundred-pound loss over one show and you just can’t do that.”

“Dance companies in particular want guarantees but we just can’t. Whereas before we might have taken a risk on them we just can’t afford to anymore.”

“I don’t think many would say this but there isn’t really a market for dance in the UK ... certainly, in Scotland, there is no serious contemporary dance audience.”

“Do we need to say that there is no audience? Why do I have to flog my guts out over three years to try and develop a dance audience that isn’t there?”

From the funder perspective, the concern is that some regularly funded organisations (RFOs) seem more inclined to reduce the dance programme than invest in it, especially if their funding is less than they asked for. The situation is exacerbated by poor knowledge of the form which is limiting their capacity for insightful programming and audience development. Creative Scotland regard dance as a burgeoning sector and have observed that is attracting a lot of interest internationally whilst the national market remains relatively weak.

“RFOs have said in their applications that they are committed to a diverse programme but actually we haven’t had the opportunity to really interrogate that by art form and so we have a challenge at the moment in that if we don’t give them as much funding as they ask for dance is the first thing to go, without having a consensus within Creative Scotland about what the needs are for each of the different art form sectors.”

“None of the venues have in-house knowledge about programming dance and how to develop audiences for it and they aren’t making an understanding of this element of their programme a priority.”

Concentration of smaller scale, emergent and experimental work in the central belt: Whilst this was identified as a concern, views were split as to the cause. Are venues outside of the central belt reluctant to take this work because of the perceived risk? Are these artists and companies less willing to tour beyond the central belt? Is this because rural touring is perceived as low status? Or the work considered more relevant to urban audiences [Glasgow and Edinburgh]? Or is it the amount of time, effort and investment involved to book and tour the work compared to the low financial return small audiences bring?

“Low audiences may be off-putting to some companies ... they might prefer to play the central belt and more status venues that have an established audience and can deliver an income through split.”

“I do actually think there’s quite a lot of the venues who ... are squeezing out more abstract or contemporary work because there isn’t a huge demand for it outside of Glasgow and Edinburgh. This is where the risk can happen and be supported because that is where there are more people who are willing to experiment. Once you move north or south of there, that’s where it’s getting harder and harder.”

“I’m not aware of the artists that are driven to touring the way that they used to twenty years ago ... I don’t think touring beyond the central belt is sexy for younger artists. Is it that they don’t have the passion?”

“There is a lot more work being made, but it doesn’t go very far and most of the dates are in the main cities.”

Are some artists making work for themselves rather than audiences? Following on from the above, different views were put forward around the motivations of these artists to make work. At one end of the spectrum was the view that these artists operate from an absolute desire to create work that is audience-centric. At the other end, the view that they are more intent on developing and making the work than sharing it with audiences (another reason put forward for the perceived reluctance to tour). Supporters of challenging work believe it has more potential to connect with audiences than the venues or the public give it credit for and more support/training could be provided to develop audiences for it.

“I think perhaps there is a misconception about experimental work; that it is difficult and challenging, and that those artists are not interested in people and in reaching an audience beyond their own bubble. I just want to shatter that absolutely. I’ve yet to meet an artist who makes innovative work who isn’t deeply interested in people and the work is all about people.”

“This work is serving an ever decreasing number of people and it is becoming exclusive. I don’t think it’s in the nature of the work to be exclusive, I think a lot of that work has the capacity to be enjoyed by a general audience.”

“It’s more about innovation and experiment than it is around serving a mass audience across the whole of Scotland.”

“There has been a movement, over the last ten - fifteen years, of much more personally created work that has been devised, or interdisciplinary work with other artists that they don’t normally work with, which for them is pretty exciting. Although they may have an audience in mind, they don’t have a clue how to get them.”

“A lot of the work made is of a tiny scale and the ambition to move up a scale doesn’t always seem to be there ... economics has a lot to do with it, but also the nature of the work. That thing about not being audience-driven.”

Frontloading of investment: Comments were made around the degree of public value extracted from public investment in the work. Funders talked about their investment in supporting development work not always culminating in a tour. Producers voiced concerns around the lack of opportunity for high quality proven work to be given a second life and reach more audiences.

“There is a danger that we end up funding a lot of development work ... and come the end of that, it has almost been satisfying enough for some artists and turning it into a full show and taking it on the road is the least fun bit.”

“As a public funder we do have a responsibility to the audience and at the moment it feels as if the funding is going towards the making of the work and not the capacity to see interesting work.”

“One of the things we feel is that the weight of investment is all in the creation and once its created and up no-one gets to see it again. The balance of finances for a tour are always at the beginning ... That’s an awful lot of frontloading and not a lot of return.”

- **Creative Scotland’s Open Project Fund Has Disrupted the Touring Ecosystem.**

Funding for touring has shifted from a discrete fund operating to specific deadlines to the Open Project Fund, a rolling programme of awards within which there is no specific provision for touring. No information is available about who else is submitting in the same week or how much they are asking for.

No clear strategic priorities in relation to funding recipients: Producers were critical of a perceived lack of strategic priorities around a very open and over-subscribed fund. In their view, Creative Scotland has an implicit priority based on volume, funding more small-scale work than ambitious, larger-scale and costly applications.

"I really worry that Creative Scotland still has a stated goal to fund as many people as possible."

"For me, success for Creative Scotland means more, more, more, more, more."

"It's more arm's length. The arm has become longer than it used to be. We used to have an understanding of strategic priorities and it's not like that anymore."

"There is way too much of an ask on too small a pot with absolutely no ring fencing happening within that pot so I don't think Creative Scotland are putting their money where their mouth is in terms of priorities and strategic priorities."

"If Creative Scotland make big strategy statement I would like a greater understanding of what that actually means ... I don't know what the current strategy means because on the ground decisions are contradictory to what the strategy states ... [for example] Creative Scotland want to see that artists and the artistic community are paid proper fees, but we're being asked to cut budgets and pay people less and that doesn't join up."

No clear guidelines in relation to specific art forms: Funders talked about the absence of clear internal protocols designed to ensure programme diversity across art forms.

"RFOs have said in their applications that they are committed to a diverse programme but actually we haven't had the opportunity to really interrogate that by art form. We have a challenge at the moment in that if we don't give them as much as they asked for, dance is the first thing to go. We have no consensus within Creative Scotland about what the needs are for each of the different art form sectors."

Applications are often a stab in the dark: Producers criticised an application process where they don't know who they are 'up against' in any given week. In their experience, there are fewer formative conversations with Creative Scotland around the content of the application and less advice is given around when best to submit an application and for how much. This makes it extremely difficult for producers to write, cost and submit applications in a way that gives them the best possible chance of success. If their application fails, they have to re-apply which can cause considerable disruption in relation to tour booking.

"It's really difficult to know what ... you are going up against in the week that you are going in. You could be applying to tour and asking for around £50K and going up against three people who are asking to develop smaller projects for £15K. ... and it looks a lot better for them [Creative Scotland] to fund more. It's hugely competitive now."

"I was told that a lot of application for £80K or more were discarded regardless of the quality of the project because of the cost."

"We are scored ... and the judgement on an application is a judgement at a point in time and then the conversation doesn't really continue unless you pursue it to within an inch of your life, and people don't have the resource to do that."

"There is increased stress within the system ... and a lot of it comes from a funding system that isn't quite working and a dialogue that isn't quite there."

Taking costs down to the wire: Producers questioned whether Creative Scotland has a realistic understanding of, or are simply not acknowledging, the market rate for staff fees and the rising cost of touring. They have experience of Creative Scotland asking them to cut crew sizes, pay lower fees to artists and increase estimated Box Office income. A number of producers talked about how they feel under a huge amount of pressure to reduce costs to unsustainable levels or have asked for less than they need upfront, in order to increase their chances of obtaining the funding. This puts added strain on these companies who then find themselves under-resourced and 'operating on a shoe string'. Some have had to make artistic and technical compromises. Some do most of the leg-work themselves on tour, working long hours as a 'jack-of-all-trades'. The amount they can pay themselves, given the number of hours they put in, is far below what they believe is fair and the whole experience leaves them feeling stressed, exhausted and under-valued.

"We're all asking for less money now."

"There needs to be a level of understanding around how to support art in a way that is sustainable ... because the message we're getting is 'Do the same or do more for less'."

"We're just not asking for the right amount of money needed to deliver the work and often, when we have asked for the money we need, Creative Scotland has come back and asked if we could do it for less."

"Recently there was an application where I was told, ridiculously, that a touring show didn't need a stage manager or producer and they would only fund the artist, but an artist cannot do everything on his own ... that's a level of insanity."

"That's when we ending up dropping the number of technicians and cutting down the size of the sets, and we crewed the tour ourselves."

"You end up doing five or six jobs yourselves because you're having to ask for less money in order to get the show on, and your passion for putting the show on exceeds your own health sometimes. It may impact on the quality and it certainly impacts on the quality of the audience experience."

"We haven't got the money to get an extra tech in. On one of the tours we did I was crewing it as well as trying to produce it at the same time ... I was up at six getting things sorted and getting to the venue, helping with the get in, then doing the get out at the end, and because we had to pay for our own accommodation we would drive to a friend's house thirty miles away and drive back the next day, and it's just not sustainable ... and we just made ourselves ill doing that. But you want to do it and get the work out there."

"You often end up paying professionals less than they should be paid. Not illegally less, but it devalues them."

"There is even less in the budget to pay your own people."

"Exhaustion, that is the biggest challenge. How much you need to do. Physical exhaustion. Just having so few resources and just having the two of us doing a lot of work with no support ... on a really tight budget."

"This year, the cost of a nine seat people carrier almost doubled, accommodation in the Western Isles – take an arm and a leg please why don't you – because it's just so expensive. We had been budgeting £49 a head B&B and we were up in the £80s. Once that budget is spent it's going to take everybody to muck in to make it happen."

“It makes your job much less enjoyable, much harder and it comes back to that feeling of being devalued.”

“There’s a balance between aspiration ... and just burning ourselves out to get to something impossible.”

The rise of the short tour: Reduced funding and fees, together with rising touring costs and a perceived over-supply of small-scale work, were mentioned as reasons behind the perceived rise in shorter tours. Producers are earning less and find themselves increasingly subsidising tours from within their own budgets. There are no margins to fund the extension of tours to reach new areas because the longer the tour the greater the loss. Whilst Creative Scotland asserted their commitment to supporting the wide distribution of work, both they and the research participants think the reality falls short of the ambition. Some programmers were conscious that more could be done between them to support tour extensions.

“We encourage people to tour more widely, not because it’s going to earn those companies more money, but we hope that they’re going to raise their profile with more audiences and we have a commitment to encouraging artists of all sorts to make themselves available to the population of Scotland.”

“If you tot up the amount of time that touring work was available to be seen I think it would be a worryingly low number.”

There are lots of small scale companies and solo artists who have been supported and many of them are not resourced enough to tour extensively.”

“I don’t think people ... can afford to tour outside the central belt because they have to pay for travel and accommodation, per diems.”

“There are a lot more small-scale companies out there and they’re all doing very short tours, and one could barely call them tours in some cases, so many productions get three or four venues, then maybe a night or a couple of nights at each venue.”

“There is ... not enough work being done between venues to maximise the length ... and profile of a show by sharing it with more audiences. I’ve seen too many ‘tours’ that visit only Glasgow and Edinburgh, and there is a massive issue with funded work reaching such limited audiences that really there is no chance to fully build legacy around them. It’s all too snatch and grab, and short-termism.”

A prevalence of short shows: Producers talked about volume short shows being offered to them (described as one hour or less). This was partly attributed to artists making work for the Fringe who go on to tour without developing it further. Whilst they agreed that the duration of show was not an indicator of quality, and that in urban areas these shows probably fitted well into shifting lifestyles, duration may impact on the audience perception of value relative to ticket price. Some producers have reduced their prices accordingly which, together with no interval bar income, limits the income generating capacity of the show.

“You can come out of a theatre having seen a play that is sixty minutes long and think ‘Oh my God, that’s one of the best things I have ever seen.’”

“In terms of urban touring, an hour fits. You have audiences whose lifestyles have shifted and they’re not used to sitting for longer than an hour.”

“There is a conflict when shorter shows are not reflected in the ticket process and people are paying £15 for just one hour.”

“We have reduced our prices for shorter shows.”

Rural promoters found these shows hard to sell because of the lack of social and cultural return compared to the distance travelled. Audiences ask themselves ‘Is it worth the drive?’ and the answer is often ‘no’. Some promoters are seeking to value-add around the event so audiences can ‘make a night of it’ which incurs extra cost.

“There’s an impact on us rurally because once that show is over people have nowhere else to go.”

“Often these shows are an hour long. The audience comes in at half-past seven and they’re on their way home at half past eight. Can we make that nine o’ clock or half past nine by having a pot luck supper where the community bring their food? How can we work to create these other social aspects that make it a whole night?”

The shift in funding timelines introduces additional stress into the system: The introduction of a rolling fund means the awarding of touring grants is asynchronous to the broad programming seasons. This creates significant problems for programmers who find themselves shaping seasons with no assurances that the work will be available. Producers are selling work that may not be funded or funded in time for inclusion in the season brochures. Also, different stages of the tour may be confirmed at different times, making it impossible to design a resource-efficient route.

“We’re finding that we’re wanting to programme in companies who don’t know when their funding is going to be coming through and sometimes they won’t know until past the brochure deadline and we’re really struggling with that. Or we really want to make it work and they don’t get the funding and so it falls out and we have to find other work.”

“They’re putting in deep work and complex budgeting for something that might not happen.”

“You are working with companies who don’t know whether they’re getting the money in.”

“The companies have been banging up against Creative Scotland funding deadlines where, with the Open Fund, they’ve often been rejecting a bid and inviting them to re-apply and the whole timeframe shifts and we’ve not been able to put some things in the brochure because they don’t know if they’ve got their funding ... sometimes we take the show even though it’s not in the brochure, but the chances of getting an audience are minute.”

“Larger venues want to program further and further ahead (at the last FST Emporium the Artistic Directors of MacRobert and the Tron said they wanted to program eighteen months ahead), smaller venues won’t book shows longer away than six months. When planning a tour under these circumstances it’s very hard to balance this – we are about to start a tour where the last dates were confirmed eight weeks before the start.”

“When you have to book a tour in stages it’s almost impossible to do sensible stages in terms of travel. So we end up travelling up and down the country rather than doing dates in geographic area clumps. This is time-consuming, costly and environmentally unsound.”

Project funding cannot support long term planning & continuity: Programmers and producers questioned the sustainability of continued project-by-project funding which has resulted in short-termism and a practical mind-set focused on getting the next tour booked or filling a programme slot. No provision is made for long-term planning, progression, relationship building or durational collaboration, where audiences can be built through continuity of programming.

“It’s more difficult to build relationships with ... companies because they don’t know from one season to the next whether they are going to exist. It’s also difficult for our audiences because audiences build loyalty to companies as well as venues.”

“The lack of long term planning means that no relationships are being made to build audiences for the work. Without these relationships there is no trust and without trust how can you expect a venue to take risk.”

“I think the biggest capacity issue is the capacity for companies, artists, venues and programmers to discuss and plan ahead and work in any kind of strategic way. Everything feels very last minute and ad hoc so when you come to thinking about things like audience development its barely happening in most cases because people are not thinking about a particular visit by a particular company being part of a longer term plan. It’s literally ‘I’ve got to fill that slot because I’ve got a gap in that week’, rather than ‘If I put that company into that slot how will that impact on my audiences two years down the road and what will I do to build an audience for a particular genre or work and reach an audience that I’m not reaching.’ I don’t think that’s happening. Everyone is working on a really short quick fix basis.”

“You could have an amazingly successful show ... but for me if there’s not a future life for the company ... then what was the benefit of that big success?”

“What we’ve not been able to do is maintain profile at previous theatres ... being able to go back and connect with that audience and develop that relationship.”

The creation of a dependency culture: A strong view was put forward by one participant that there is an over-reliance on funding which gives rise to two key issues. From a venue perspective there is a lack of entrepreneurialism which, if embraced, could reduce their need for funding. From a producer perspective, there is an expectation that risk must be wholly supported through subsidy. This leads to a distortion in the market-place where too much work is being supported that cannot attract audiences.

“We then have a sector massively reliant on funding, and the funding body – and suddenly art doesn’t sustain itself and audiences become secondary to funding ticking of boxes ... and there is a massive lack of understanding of the commercial sector, and how to work within private investment confines. There is also little will (I feel) from organisations who are currently regularly funded to diversify their income streams by reaching out to private investment, sponsorship and membership buy-in’s – because again, commercial becomes a dirty word and somehow challenges the artistic integrity of a building. I don’t see that argument, and I don’t understand how the leaders of buildings – which are majority funded by tax payer’s money – aren’t trying to further the reach of work and lessen the burden on public purse strings, so that public money can go into proper seed investment and start-up enterprises – rather than a rolling reliance on funding.”

“There is again, a bit of an infiltration of thought which is that the producer must work on a basis of no risk in Scotland and ... an underfunded public body must somehow shore up against losses for independent producers to survive. In my understanding the producer takes risk. The producer calculates commerce vs. artistic opportunity. That relationship doesn’t seem to exist in enough organisations, so it limits the reach of work – and relationships, and therefore funding.”

- **Declining guarantees and a shift to box office splits is undermining the sustainability of smaller-scale companies**

Programmers talked about how they can no longer afford to take the same degree of risk. Decreases in public funding (actual or in real terms), together with an expectation from Creative Scotland that the funds go further and work harder, means they have to strike harder deals with companies.

Producers questioned the perceived rise of 'market forces' in a subsidised sector that is supposed to support art that cannot survive in a commercial environment. In their view, smaller fees and the move to splits are having a disproportionate effect on their financial position and capacity to tour. They were extremely unhappy that programmers, rather than supporting and investing in the work, are increasingly pushing the risk onto them. In their view this is 'a vote of no confidence'. They believe the anticipated small audiences from a smaller scale, perhaps edgier piece of work, is used as a reason to not to invest in marketing and audience development because of the low expected return.

"The cost of opening a venue for the night and getting a low attendance is quite small relatively speaking. The cost of putting a small company on the road is quite high relative to their turnover, so the risk to the company of a poor audience turnout - even though they get a bigger percentage of the box office - is higher proportionally for them than it is for the venue."

"If they're booking shows with as little financial risk as possible it means that they're not invested at all. I've been involved in deals where venues offer 50/50 splits and then do nothing because it's not a risk for them ...and shows have had to be cancelled because three tickets have been sold ... that's irresponsible and does everyone a disservice because it drives the deals down."

"It's really difficult for us to get a decent fee and it has been for a while. So if the environment is that everyone is offering you a split ... and no-one is actually willing to put their money where their mouth is, it says to me that we're not in a very successful touring environment. Everyone's hedging their bets."

"I think RFO's would justify this by saying their funding hasn't gone up in six years which in real terms is a reduction, which is true, and that their business model has already relied on a level of funding from Local Authorities which has gone down too, while at the same time their statutory reporting has increased so they feel that a greater proportion of what they are funded to do is going on things that aren't about the work, whereas an independent venue-promoter is actually, to an extent, simply concentrating on work-in, audience-in, cash-in."

"The ability to pay is also about the venue's confidence about getting an audience, in understanding the work, in being able to raise a level of excitement around the work that is coming."

"It does everyone a disservice when they're booking loads of work for small fees or splits because they're not confident in it rather than making some really clear artistic choices about how the work will suit their audiences and having a real curatorial eye."

"I think programmers are taking less risks and they're taking less risks because audiences are less willing to be taken on a journey, or programmers are less willing to take them on a journey and support that journey."

"Lots of venues are reducing their fees (which don't cover costs anyway) or asking for box office splits. This is a way of outsourcing the risk onto the artist - who usually has less of a financial buffer than a venue has. Since performance fees don't cover the costs of shows, it's always necessary to make a funding application on top, this makes the whole process rather unwieldy and very time-consuming."

In practical terms, this shift means producers are becoming increasingly reliant on audience numbers for their income and on the venue's efforts to find that audience. The uncertainty around anticipated tour income affects their ability to plan and budget confidently and accurately. For work that commands smaller audiences, fees are in decline. This, together with the rising costs of touring, creates challenges in relation to the ambition, scale, length and distribution of the tours.

"If you can't guarantee what money you've got coming in you can't spend it, it's as simple as that. And if you don't know how much money you have to spend you can't employ someone to do a job. You can't put that money into the set ... and also, you can't afford to spend your £78 a night to be in a hotel in the Highlands. You'll spend £20 a night for a week's accommodation in Glasgow."

"The deals that you're getting for touring companies now are much worse than they were ten to fifteen years ago."

"The uncertainty of not having the fee means your budget is shot to pieces."

"If Creative Scotland are willing to give you money to tour then I don't understand why the venues don't have the faith to pay for them."

"I don't think venues put any value on what the actual cost of a touring night is ... it's not relevant to them at all."

Both producers and funders talked about their experience of RFOs being the 'worst 'payers', handing smaller fees and splits to project-funded companies in particular, companies they are being funded to support.

"If venues know that companies are being funded through Creative Scotland they will factor this into fees, so the very fact that touring company is being funded is driving fees down."

"It's quite shocking sometimes that when we get budgets from companies who break down their fees, naming the individual venues, the ones that are regularly funded by us are the worst payers and the ones that are really relying on selling a show to the audience to cover its costs are offering the highest fees."

• **The increasingly unfathomable money-go-round of subsidy**

All participants agreed that the way touring is currently funded isn't working. Diverse reasons were offered from a variety of perspectives. The current funding system is regarded as overly complex, seemingly un-strategic and opaque. Subsidy and cross-subsidy flow amongst and between numerous parties, referred to by one participant as 'money laundering', with no systemic understanding of its movement or efficacy. Venues funded to take touring work are not satisfactorily programming or investing in it because they don't believe it's the right work for their audiences. Companies that are being subsidised to tour are increasingly bearing the brunt of the risk, squeezed from both sides, funders and venues, and operating in increased precarity. Audiences are losing out because they are not getting access to the diverse programmes the funding is there to support. What was clear to all was that this position is unsustainable and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

“What we’re not seeing is risks being taken in programming, and public subsidy is increasingly being used by venues for more a commercial scale of programme and to shore up core revenues rather than specifically having the purpose of putting economic value into a system that doesn’t by its nature value art.”

“The purpose of public funding is to create collective value around things which are not what a market-driven system puts value into ... and it’s not going to be the work that immediately attracts people to it.”

“We’re kind of funding the wrong people. If we’re subsidising programmers who are not programming or supporting challenging new work, we’re creating a disparity in the system.”

“It feels like we’re all subsidising each other in a big circle at the moment. Creative Scotland is subsidising the venues. The venues are subsidising the touring. We’re subsidising the touring through our funding. But nothing is going quite as far as it should do. We need a more equitable or sustainable balance.”

“You’ve got RFO companies that are subsidised by Creative Scotland. You’ve got venues that are subsidised by Creative Scotland. We’re being subsidised to make the work. They’re being subsidised to take the work ... and then ten people come, in worst case scenario. This is madness that this is what is needing to happen to make theatre for the stages in Scotland.”

- **Local authorities and cultural trusts are adopting an increasingly commercial approach to programming**

Participants described how the on-going budget cuts in Local Authorities and Cultural Trusts together with what they perceive as the diminishing status of culture within some of them, which was described as ‘erosion of artistic integrity’, have adversely affected the touring network. Producers are experiencing the sharp end of a more commercially driven approach to programming, with fewer civic venues willing or able to take smaller-scale, edgier work. Programmers of civic venues find themselves having to make more commercial programming decisions more by necessity rather than choice.

“They no longer value culture so that’s the first budget to go which has a knock on effect on us.”

“Increasingly the people above the programmer are saying they can’t book a show unless it breaks even or makes a profit.”

“There isn’t this concept that you lose on one show and you gain on another, and you have a balanced season of shows where you balance both artistically and creatively what’s on offer and financially how it all stacks up.”

“On Fife are really struggling at the moment to programme anything and they’re losing that control person by person ... it used to be a place that was quite generous with programming and reach and it’s just dramatically declining.”

“A lot of councils have gone into trusts and they’ve had a lot of pressure put on them commercially, so for them a two night run of a theatre piece that might not be a hit is a challenge and they’re frightened of that sometimes.”

- **National Theatre of Scotland is operating independently of the touring sector**

Whilst programmers admired the work of National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) they thought more needed to be done to align it more closely with the touring network. Producers thought direct government funding means NTS is operating to a different set of criteria which sets them apart, with a disproportionate amount of money allocated to them at the expense of smaller companies who want to tour. Some programmers regard NTS as operating in competition with them when they would much rather be working with them to build audiences as part of a more integrated approach.

“I think there’s an issue with the way they distribute their work. They don’t do it widely enough, because they’re creating work for particular circumstances and particular contexts, which isn’t necessarily a traditional theatre space with the touring circuit in mind. I don’t think that’s a problem as part of a mix. My feeling is they’ve gone too far and I desperately want the National Theatre of Scotland to have a presence in our city and ... there doesn’t seem to be a desire to work in partnership with venues.”

“I think they operate in a different way which means you can’t consider them as operating as part of the touring network.”

“I can’t help feeling that if National Theatre Scotland fully engaged in the touring network it would be an asset because they bring a lot of expertise, they bring a lot of resource, and whenever we have worked with them its felt like a really worthwhile experience.”

- **Insufficient training and progression routes resulting in a skills shortage**

There is a lack of good quality training provision for technical staff and the opportunities for progression are limited due to the declining number of small-scale companies able to afford technicians. Another view put forward was that NTS is ‘hoovering up’ the talent and ‘fast-tracking’ them to the mid-scale, meaning many young professionals are not cutting their teeth on small scale and rural touring.

From an artistic perspective, producers believed theatres may be cautious about releasing staff and stage time to support the development of emergent artists and companies looking to progress. Reliance on project funding also means artists do not have the continuity of resource to invest in professional development.

“There is the NTS factor that it has hoovered people up a bit, in a good way in that it provides lots of jobs ... but I wonder sometimes if the training is a little bit pointed towards middle scale and above.”

“There is just not a critical mass of knowledge and skill.”

“There’s a shortage of good trained technical staff in Scotland and a shortage of good quality training in that discipline in Scotland.”

“There is very little sharing of skills and knowledge or collaboration.”

“John Tiffany ... said rural touring was the most important part of his learning ... Touring to those communities and getting to understand audiences was where he cut his teeth. I think there is a de-valuing of rural touring and there has been an eroding of that value over the years, in part I suspect because of the funding situation.”

“They’re having to work project to project, they don’t have the salary to allow them the time for professional development or to pay and go on courses.”

6:5 Tour booking – the producer perspective

When talking about the process and challenges of tour booking the following themes emerged:

- **An oversupply of work shifts the balance of power to the programmers**

There are two main touring windows per year which creates a bottleneck of companies all competing for slots in a condensed period of time.

“In Scotland touring seems to happen twice a year and that’s all we can do ... it seems to be dictated by the Christmas Panto and Edinburgh Fringe. Because those two things are there nothing can be toured ... so you’ve got a lot of fish swimming through a very small channel.”

“There’s a bottleneck of product. Even though we all plan and all know when the annual schedules are, there’s still this bottleneck ... which can dilute the artistic conversations.”

“Even if you plan two years ahead there still seems to be a scrabble for slots.”

The increased number of smaller scale companies being funded means there is more work available than can be programmed within the two main windows of opportunity. Producers believe this has created a fundamental shift in the balance of power. Venues can increasingly determine terms in what is perceived as a buyer’s market, undermining the producer’s capacity to negotiate and altering what they believe should be an equal partnership between the two. In their experience, programmers are becoming increasingly difficult to get hold of, habitually ignoring emails and telephone messages which makes the process of tour booking extremely resource intensive.

“The venues are offered way more product than they can ever hope to programme in one season.”

“I feel like we don’t have any power ... the venues demand the terms and we just say ‘Yes’ because we want the work to be seen.”

“When you’re waiting [to hear back from the programmer] you have no power. You are absolutely in the weakest position and there is very little you can do about it.”

“It’s a buyer’s market and there’s a power dynamic that is very troubling and there’s a lot of venues that just don’t bother to get back to you.”

“To book one date you probably have to send about twenty emails and then you’ll probably just get a ‘no’, which is fine because then I can stop bothering you.”

“More pressure is being put on the artist to do the work of marketing and to offer workshops for free, so the artists are shoring up the creative learning programmes for venues at the same time as receiving lower fees.”

- **Meaningful dialogue with programmers is on the wane**

Following on from the above, producers are frustrated that they are less able to engage in meaningful conversations with programmers. One reason given was the lack of capacity, as small companies, to invest the time and money required to meet and cultivate relationships with programmers.

“Most of us are quite small companies and it’s about having that resource to maintain that relationship, to spend time with them especially if they are not wanting to come to you.”

“It would be great to move beyond the sales pitch and have a conversation with programmers, mingle with them more.”

“I even felt like a stalker once. It would be nice to meet and say ‘Hello’, but they never respond.”

“In terms of the kinds of discussions artists are trying to have with venues, they’re finding closed doors, and not just closed doors but iron bolted doors.”

When they are in discussion around tour booking, many producers find that the conversations gravitate towards fees and the income generating potential of the work. Finance take precedence over developing a shared understanding of the work or trying to understand each other’s priorities. Producers find that too often, programmers are simply trying to fill a slot or tick a box against their funding agreement. In their view this is an abnegation of a programmer’s responsibility to actively seek and be professionally interested in new work. Rather than a conversation between equals, producers find themselves behaving like sales people delivering a pitch, attempting to score selling points without truly understanding the needs of the venue (and sometimes not knowing what the finished product is going to be like). Added value extras such as audience development support and workshops are now thrown in, usually at cost to them, in order to secure a booking.

“It’s like a first date where you love the person more. I was thinking about the one night stand element of touring and the internal dialogue you have when you’re in that situation where one of you is trying to impress the other, and you’re saying the things you need to say that you think they want to hear because you like them a little bit more and you want something out of them that maybe they don’t want to give.”

“I phone up saying ‘This show is bloody brilliant’ but also thinking ‘I don’t really know what this show is going to be yet and it might be completely different by the time it’s made’.”

“It feels like they are trying to fill in the slots in the most cost effective way and that’s what’s leading, the financial realities.”

“What does our work actually mean to them with regards to their audiences? ... I don’t think we are having those open conversations to be very honest about our relationships.”

“I never get the sense that they want to hear what our priorities are, it’s not their problem.”

Some went so far as to say that some programmers are not able to engage in meaningful dialogue because they operate from a limited understanding of their audiences and communities and/or a weakly defined artistic imperative.

“It doesn’t always feel to me as if ... [some] venues are making the choice of work based on a clear sense of how they want to exist for their audience in their town ... and what their role is in that community in terms of delivering quality artistic product.”

“I may be doing venues a great disservice but I don’t get that sense from people that I’m talking to that they’re entirely clear about what they’re doing and why.”

• The increased commercialisation of the touring relationship

Producers talked of venues increasingly charging for services that, in the past, were free. Technical support is being introduced as a finite allocation. If more support is required than is being offered, that time is charged at a higher rate than the producers would pay their own technicians. Marketing contras are being demanded for core marketing support that used to be offered for free. Venues are less inclined to share or cover the cost of travel and accommodation. This gives rise to a transactional culture and places additional financial burden on the producers.

“Some of the venues are trying to commercialise the relationship too much.”

“There are finite allocations of technical time for pre-rig and get-ins at the venue technical rate which is far more than you would pay your own technicians.”

“A light broke and the company was billed for fixing the light.”

“As these costs build externally, that you weren’t expecting, the money in your pot goes down and makes the whole thing less and less possible.”

“People trying to add surcharges which strains the relationship with the venue and undermines trust.”

“We talk about a contractual relationship and if we talk about it being more about a collaborative relationship then you could be having a conversation about your responsibilities and expectations and values that might be more meaningful for everybody.”

• The rise of the one-night stand

Producers expressed frustration at the rise of single night bookings which, in their view, is indicative of lack of faith from programmers. Usually consigned to a Thursday, Friday or Saturday night, there are often gaps in the touring week which come at a cost to producers who are still paying cast and crew, a cost that can limit the duration and reach of the tour. In addition, one night stands limit the potential for audience building as word of mouth has nowhere to go (especially important in rural communities where word spreads quickly) and there is no time to engage with audiences beyond the stage.

“Venues only want to programme Thursday, Friday Saturday so you’ve got a company that you’re having to pay a weekly fee to ... who are only working two days a week, and you’ve also got to keep paying that because you want the entire tour to happen as you’ve said in your funding applications.”

“If you’re always doing one nighters you cannot build up momentum.”

“The lack of faith in programming a production for more than one night is ruining it [touring] and ... it’s really sad that the venues don’t have that faith.”

“Rise of the one-night stand means we are unable to cover costs which means the work is very heavily subsidised ... and it minimises what else you can offer such as workshops.”

“We all need more generosity. We all need more time to build up those relationships so that it’s not just a one-night stand and a spirit of generosity which I think is sadly quite lacking in the arts at the moment.”

• **The precariousness of the verbal agreement**

Tour booking relies on a system of verbal agreements between producer and programmer where nominal tour dates are ‘penciled in’ subject to contractual confirmation once funding has been secured. Producers rely heavily on the integrity of these verbal agreements as the foundation of their tours. Some have called this integrity into question based on their experience of programmers using pencils as a delay tactic to avoid saying ‘No’ upfront, a means to hedge their bets by assigning more than one pencil against the same slot just in case a company does not secure its funding, or to avoid more detailed conversations around the work and audience development.

Once a producer has secured funding they expect the verbal agreement to be honoured, which is not always the case. Reneging on a verbal agreement brings additional costs and stress to the company in lost income, paying staff for ‘empty days’, company resources invested in plugging the gap and the additional costs associated with travel and accommodation for last minute gap-fillers. All this undermines their ability to deliver on funding agreements and can result in a profound loss of trust.

“If those pencils fall through you might have very little time to replace a pencil, then you are in real shit.”

“[Not confirming a pencil] means I have less income. I’m not hitting my target I said in my funding in relation to number of performances and I’m going to have to invest more money and time in getting another booking.”

“It also means you can’t be having those conversations about developing an audience because you’ve only got a pencil.”

Penciling-in notwithstanding, producers find the whole system of tour booking intrinsically uncertain, needlessly stressful and time consuming. Confirmations are very last minute and a whole tour could hang in the balance.

“You are typically trying to pencil in a tour before you know you have the money to do it from Creative Scotland and Creative Scotland won’t give you the money unless you can show interest from the venues, and the venues don’t particularly want to book your tour because you may not get the funding.”

• **Presenter’s limited knowledge stifles dance touring**

Dance producers talked about the challenge of booking tours when many programmers are unwilling to book more than one or two dance events a season/year. In their view, many programmers operate from a general rather than detailed knowledge of dance and are unaware of the diversity of work that is being created. They seem reluctant to travel to see dance or support the risk of booking it. The impacts are that the capacity for dance touring has shrunk, the potential to grow audiences for dance is unrealised and programming doesn’t represent the breadth of dance that is being produced in Scotland.

“Venues programme dance because they have to rather than believing it’s going to be exciting.”

“The perception is that ... you can only have one piece of dance at any one time because otherwise you’ll dissipate the audiences.”

“Dance companies complain a lot about venues saying they’ve done their bit when they’ve programmed one or two pieces of dance in a season. Venues think this is as much as they can sustain. But there are other kinds of genres in dance over and above ballet and contemporary which may attract other audiences.”

“The understanding of dance and the different kinds of dance genres there are is pretty limited amongst programmers, and their programmers not dance specialists.”

“None of the venues are going to see dance and they don’t have in-house knowledge about programming dance or how to develop audiences for it and they aren’t making an understanding of this element of their programme a priority.”

“Programming dance once a year isn’t going to keep up conversations with or develop audiences.”

• **The revolving address book**

Operating in a rapidly changing environment, without a central database of venues and programmers to work from, and precipitated staff changes, makes tour booking unnecessarily labour intensive. Each company is continually updating their internal lists of contacts, trying to identify the right promoters and venues for the work, and the right person in venues to talk to. Wheels are being re-invented everywhere. Whilst producers accepted that this might seem trivial in the grand scheme of things, in a company that relies on a team of one or two to manage everything and is already extremely stretched, this situation adds extra unwanted burden. The imminent Tourbook website – a one-stop on-line facility for Tourbooks and programmers - was suggested as a solution. Questions were raised about the authoritativeness and usefulness of a site which depended on people opting in and updating it themselves.

“Everyone around the table is working on their own list and its reinventing the wheel every single time.”

“From what I understand, [Tourbook] is a bit like Airbnb [where uploading and updating is dependent on the supplier], so Local Authorities have to want to put all their information up there and keep it up to date. What we need is someone working really hard on our behalf to ... keep it up to date.”

“You can have work programmed nine months in advance, that person leaves and you go back with a marketing information and the booking isn’t in the diary.”

6:6 Programming – the programmer perspective

• **The challenges around scheduling**

The introduction of the Open Project Fund and the bottlenecks created by the Edinburgh Fringe and Christmas season are creating significant scheduling challenges.

‘Feast and famine’: programmers discussed how the uneven distribution of available work makes it difficult to maintain a consistent year-round programme of quality work to encourage habit-forming and higher frequency attendance. Some expressed frustration at having to turn down good work they want to support because audiences would be spread too thinly which is not economically viable.

“There is no balance of product across the year. It all happens between certain months of the year and there’s nothing in January, very little in February, and summer is a disaster when it comes to touring.”

“There is an issue about distribution because people ... don’t want to come three times in five weeks.”

“I think there’s a challenge within touring that it can be feast or famine sometimes. You could be curating a season and almost be having to choose a slot between three really great things that you want.”

“There’s a lot of very good stuff around and it comes in gluts and you’re turning people down. You look at things and you think ‘I want that, I want that and I want that’ ... but I can’t have them all.”

“There’s always an influx of experimental work in March. It could be subject matter that is a bit more challenging or work that is reaching new or maybe niche audiences. It’s all really exciting and we want to take a lot of it but ... if that was balanced across a few more months then maybe we could take more work.”

“There are optimum times to tour work and most companies want to tour work at that time, but from an audience and venue point of view there are lagunas where there’s not much available and there’s an opportunity there for people to present work outside of the obvious seasons.”

Working with uncertainty: Creative Scotland requires producers to put together an indicative tour schedule, with supporting ‘notes of interest’ from the programmers, when applying to the Open Project Fund. Whilst it is intended to bring a degree of certainty to the funder, participants believe it offers none as they are not binding, much like the ‘pencil’ system mentioned earlier. Programmers find themselves working in a high degree of uncertainty, often requested by companies to hold a slot until the funding decision has been announced. If the funding falls through or a company is invited to re-apply this can totally disrupt a planned programme, especially if this happens more than once in a given season.

“To be honest we could spend our whole time writing those letters [notes of interest] and I just don’t do it now. The whole thing falls apart because you can’t trust a date. You’ve got a date in the diary and you’ve no idea whether this is going to come to fruition or not.”

• Programming blind

Programmers welcomed the emergence of new talent and were frustrated at having to ‘programme blind’ because they don’t have time to keep abreast of the shifting creative landscape and influx of new creative talent on the scene. The increasing number of small, project-funded companies (many of whom are in the central belt) individually sharing their work makes it expensive and time-consuming for programmers (especially those outside the central belt) to travel to see them. In addition, reliance on project funding means this talent may not have the continuous presence required to build strong programming relationships over time.

“As every year goes by there’s another set of companies, which is brilliant, but it’s very easy to lose track of who they are.”

“Programmers are programming work sight-unseen via an email and I know you can’t see everything, but the more you actually know about and understand the company and have a relationship beforehand the better you are going to be able to work with them around marketing and audience development.”

- **Unable to strike a balance in an imbalanced sector**

As mentioned earlier, programmers are finding it increasingly difficult to strike an artistic and financial balance between middle scale mainstream work and work which is smaller in scale. In their view the dearth of high quality, popular work at the mid-scale means they are not securing the income required to invest in more challenging work. The degree of internal subsidy required simply doesn’t stack up.

“Sometimes you want to take a real risk to take in something that is really amazing and we’re really struggling for an audience.”

“The cost of touring is going up and obviously that has an impact on the deals with the shows and the fees and sometimes it’s too big a risk to take because you know that you’re not going to get the audience to cover the deal and I think that can be really hard and I’m finding that really difficult at the moment.”

“Particularly with the smaller scale, we have a budget to work within and therefore you’ve got a set amount of dates in the year that you can programme and once they’re gone they’re gone. As a venue programmer you want to have a balanced artistic programme across the year.”

- **A surfeit of low quality dance**

Programmers believed the proliferation of new, relatively inexperienced companies being supported by Creative Scotland has resulted in work that is not of a sufficiently high standard.

“The elephant in the room is that a lot of the work is not that good and it’s a real challenge. I think that’s got to be put out there because we all know it, and if we’re going to build an audience then it needs to be the best stuff.”

- **The discomfort of negotiation**

When exploring the relational dynamics between producers and programmers at booking stage, it became apparent that programmers can experience a considerable amount of discomfort around the fee negotiations for a variety of reasons.

An absence of straight talking: There was discussion around whether there was a tacit ‘going rate’ at different scales which no-one overtly talked about, resulting in unnecessary game-playing.

“Why aren’t we just asking what the cost is rather than having to negotiate.”

“There is sort of a market rate, and we’re not really upfront about it as a sector.”

“If there was a market rate that was more than tacit, that would help most people plan.”

Feeling guilty: Some programmers talked about how the disparity between what they could pay and the genuine high value they placed on the work made them feel guilty. The issue of fair pay was raised by a number of programmers who realised that necessary hard bargaining meant some artists were low paid.

“Where this discomfort may come from is that tension between what you feel the piece is worth and what you’re willing or able to pay for it ... so for me it’s about ‘This is what I know I can afford to pay’.”

“I don’t want to be pushing them down on price because I’m very aware of fair pay, and I think that’s where the lack of clarity comes. We want to support fair pay but at the same time we are squeezed at the other end because we want to get value for money for our promoters.”

“We get a fee for working every day and I don’t know why an artist should be paid any different and that’s where I start to feel uncomfortable about negotiating because I understand that they require a decent fee.”

“The fair pay issue is a relevant one because as a sector we want to support artists to make work ... and we all play a role in that.”

Limited understanding of each other’s position: Some programmers talked about the difficulty of negotiating when both parties have too little time to invest in relationship building resulting in a limited understanding of each other’s financial position and priorities.

“As a venue I don’t know what’s going on with their funding and I don’t know what their circumstances are. All I can act on is whether we want the show, how much it will cost and whether we have any chance of balancing the books.”

“We are very much focused on how the work will relate to audiences and artists don’t necessarily think that way always.”

“It’s our job to talk to them and manage their expectations about audiences, but then I suppose they would say that artistically that’s not what they’re about.”

“A company comes in and assumes we have a fully staffed venue and they can come in at eight in the morning or have pre-rigs, but we may not have the staff to satisfy the technical demands of a show ... we have gone down from three technicians to two. The impact will be whether we can bring in as many shows because we don’t have the staff in the venue to support them.”

“I sense this ‘them and us mentality’ which I think is a recipe for disaster because we are essentially divided rather than working together to get the best outcome.”

“A company once came back to me and said ‘Why did you book the show when you knew there wasn’t going to be an audience?’, and that really hit home. That’s just me being aspirational ... but actually, let’s not put artists through that.”

“There is a balancing of different realities and I think that that’s the challenge.”

“Success should be jointly owned by the visiting company and the venue on the night. Companies may feel let down with an audience of fifty whereas the venue could be delighted. Sharing what success looks like will help with expectations.”

Hard to say ‘No’: Some programmers find it hard to turn down companies, especially ones they have a relationship with. They appreciate how much the company has invested in the work and, rather than biting the bullet, choose to postpone the inevitable which, they admit, is lacking in honesty and ultimately unhelpful.

“There are times definitely where I really like the artist but I am struggling to say ‘I can’t see how this will work’ and I kind of chicken out. I might say ‘Well, let’s put it into the mix, there’s quite a few shows like this’, when actually what you’re saying in your head is ‘Well actually, this is going into the no pile already’, but you’re maybe not always being that transparent.”

“Sometimes it’s difficult to say ‘No’ and so you find another thousand ways to say it, or to stall.”

Limited time for meaningful conversations: the demands of high volume programmes, the pressures around scheduling and the volume of new companies ‘landing in their inbox’ means programmers don’t have as much time as they would like to engage in meaningful and developmental conversations with producers.

“Some of it is because the situation is often quite pressurised around timing and there’s something about those trickier conversations that need space, time and care and we don’t have that all the time.”

“If timescales were less pressurised then we wouldn’t be having these conversations so up against deadline ... so the conversations could be more longer-term, more iterative, and you could actually say ‘This is not quite right’ at a point that allows them to consider whether they are willing to adapt that because if they hear that from a number of people they might say ‘Well actually, we need to go back to the drawing board on this.’”

“At the extreme end this could lead to a loss of trust. Somehow they don’t have a fully true perception of what it is they’re making ... or why it’s not being booked.”

“Product can come in and out of a venue in one night with very little discussion other than a quick chat at the booking stage. The relationship with the work therefore hasn’t been built up whilst the story / show is evolving and this can be challenging in gaining audience and sales.”

Dealing with the empty sales pitch: Programmers find that many companies make well-intentioned assertions about suitability of their work for the venue which may be wide of the mark, and can over-state their ability to support marketing once on the road. They want more companies to research their programming and audience priorities before making the call in order to prevent them wasting each other’s time.

“We get lots of companies saying ‘It’s really ideal for your programme’ which makes me think ‘Well, how much do you actually know about our programme?’”

“Companies don’t understand what we’re looking for. We certainly have a very clear artistic vision and certainly, at the small scale, we’ve got a venue identity that the programme is inextricably linked to, so it has to fit in with our objectives as well.”

• **Delivering diverse programmes for rural communities**

Rural promoters discussed the logistical challenges of attracting a varied programme of work to remote areas. Distance, the cost of travel, poor communications and a reliance on committed but often unskilled volunteers all come into play. There is also the difficulty of securing new, risky work because of a) a belief from some companies that rural touring isn’t ‘cool’ and lacks the status of larger venues in the central belt, and b) rural promoters can take a lot of convincing to programme this type of work.

“One of the frustrations I have is that I strive for a diverse programme, but coming back to the communities themselves, if they are only programming two or three pieces each in their rural venues they want something that appeals to the whole community and sometimes it’s very difficult to get a more diverse piece in there.”

“We are the main theatre up in the Highlands and the challenge is getting companies or tours up to us in terms of finance and routing.”

“Our biggest challenge is that we have sixty-five promoters across the region ... and their key thing is about communication, the infrastructure is really poor in places, there’s next to no phone signal or broadband.”

Rural programmers talked about the need to review what ‘success’ meant in this context. In their view, if a challenging show attracts a handful of people who had a fantastic time that should be regarded a success, especially because a small audience might represent a high proportion of the local population.

“But when we do [present challenging work] and it’s well received and people talk about it, we might just have thirteen people there, but that’s thirteen people having a great experience.”

6:7 Building audiences – a producer perspective

Most of the producers taking part in the research work in small to medium size project-funded companies. They have limited in-house resource and/or expertise to support tailored marketing and audience development at each venue. The bulk of their marketing budget is spent on producing a suite of collateral for the programmer to use. Once on the road, the demands of touring mean they are largely reliant on the venues to bring the audiences in. What follows are the challenges and issues they have experienced.

- **Smaller companies have low priority status**

As small to mid-scale companies with limited income generating potential, producers find it hard to engage venues in collaborative marketing. Some producers believed their work had been de-prioritised in favour of companies with the potential to deliver a better return on marketing investment.

“Venues can sometimes invest marketing resource in something they think is going to bring in a bigger financial reward.”

“The most rewarding relationship we had with a venue, we sat down and brainstormed together ... and it didn’t actually take that long, but that’s been stripped out because they have no time.”

“We’re asked for a certain amount of copy, a certain number of flyers, a certain number of posters, and we never know where they end up.”

“Touring companies report that venues are not working as robustly with them as they might, particularly with one nighters where marketers feel disengaged from their own programme and they don’t have the capacity to go out and build connections on behalf of five different shows in one week ... It feels like companies are just passing through.”

“You are at the mercy of marketing departments and venues that are already stretched. If you were a one-nighter why would they make any effort?”

- **The additional sting of the contra deal**

Producers talked about the increasing use of marketing contras. These are minimum service agreements which cover a basic level of marketing that used to be free. Any additional marketing activity is charged back (fully or proportionally) to the producer. In effect, producers are now covering both their own marketing costs and a proportion of the venue’s.

“Certain venues are very clear about what their boundaries are. ‘This is what we will do. The bare minimum. If you want anything else, it will cost you money.’”

- **A lack of confidence in venue marketing support**

Producers find some venues aren’t as committed as they are to finding and building audiences. One participant described the shock they felt when they realised a venue’s income target was markedly lower than theirs. In their view, this meant the venue was operating within a different degree of perceived risk which didn’t reflect what the company needed to achieve. This could significantly impact on the degree of marketing support the show receives.

“If their targets are lower than yours you know how much effort they’re putting in.”

Participants discussed numerous incidences which undermined their confidence in some venues to adequately market their work. Examples included finding unopened boxes of flyers at the venue, Drop Box files that contained images and marketing support packs left untouched, recharges for marketing activity that hadn’t taken place, and failures to put their event on the venue website.

“If you’re a small company and you have very limited or no in-house marketing you are very reliant on a venue to do the work that you think they’re going to do and it doesn’t always happen.”

- **Audience development is a luxury rather than a necessity**

Producers find that audience development (reaching out to attract new and diverse audiences) isn’t on the marketing agenda unless there is additional resource for it. Some questioned whether marketing departments were adequately skilled or connected with their communities to embark on targeted audience development activity.

“We’re not getting any advice from the venues on how we could be reaching more of their audiences and communities, and they’re not doing it either.”

“I don’t think there is an understanding in some places of the difference between marketing and audience development. Sometimes they think they are doing audience development through their brochures, posters and flyers, not seeking to develop new audiences. This is probably about being office-bound and not going out and seeing people.”

- **Operating from a shallow understanding of the work**

Producers also believe that marketers are simply too stretched to take an informed interest in understanding how each piece of visiting work might connect with audiences, especially one-nighters.

“Maybe one of the difficulties is that venues are only programming shows one night at a time so therefore the marketing team and box office have to learn about too many shows and it’s impossible.”

In addition, producers believe marketing departments don’t share the same degree of passion for the work, and for audiences, as themselves and there is lack of empathy for how it feels to perform to small houses. Marketing is just a job and they get paid whether the audience comes or not.

“For us it’s a real passion and a vocation that is bigger than the financial reward whereas perhaps, at some venues, they are on salaries so if they don’t get big houses it doesn’t affect them. If we don’t get the big houses it affects us because it affects the potential for risk, it can affect our audience development.”

“If you care about my work then you will put the effort in ... but you don’t really care because you are filling a slot in your programme and your targets are fairly low.”

“I think they should sit in a show when there is no audience because it’s just a really horrible experience for everybody and if you haven’t felt that pain you can’t understand it.”

- **Disagreements around sharing audience contact data**

There were mixed views around the sharing of audience contact data. Some thought venues were better placed and resourced to manage the relationship with audiences. Others believed that being able to access audience data is vital in cultivating relationships directly with them. The experience of those participants who had requested data is that the venues were extremely reluctant to hand it over, citing Data Protection as the reason.

“Because you are not 100% sure that the venues are going to be rigorous in their own marketing, you often ask for the data to do it yourselves ... but they put up lots of obstacles to data sharing.”

“It’s very frustrating as a touring company that you cannot get access to the people who came to see your show ... because it means you are not able to have an on-going dialogue with audiences directly.”

6:8 Building audiences – a programmer perspective

- **Marketing high volume programmes with limited resources**

Insufficient capacity: All of the programmers said there is not enough time and resource available to provide the level of tailored marketing support required to give detailed attention to a full and diverse programme of work. The result is a largely ‘generic’ approach to marketing and extremely limited audience development activity.

“Venue marketing departments are spread so thin they can’t get into the detail of what the piece is about and who it’s for, and I feel our marketing becomes very generic. We do the same things each time without really being able to get under the skin of what the work is and who the audience is and how to get to them. That’s the biggest challenge for me.”

“Our marketing team is finding it hard to find the time for work that needs additional support.”

High volume programmes: Participants admit that the sheer volume of marketing work prevents marketing teams from developing a deeper understanding of the work, especially if that work is new or challenging. Whilst some venues hold staff season briefings, the volume of information they need to process raised questions around their efficacy in informing, engaging and inspiring marketing teams.

“Our marketing departments need to be enthused about the work which is difficult because they are spread so thin and for them to be enthused about something ... you need to give them a bigger budget and get them to see the work.”

“At the end of the day they’re selling something that they don’t really understand and that’s really hard.”

“... venue marketing departments have lost passion for the product over the years probably due to the financial constraints we are all working within. As a result, it can feel that the ‘love’ is disappearing and it’s now just a job.”

Tough decision making: Some venues hold regular sales meetings to pinpoint where best to allocate their resources in order to optimise income. This sometimes results in the re-allocation of spend to those shows that will deliver a higher return on investment, which are rarely the small-scale, one-night events. One participant revealed that resource constraints meant prioritising in-house produced work over visiting companies.

“At some point we have to say ‘Stop working on that show because we’re not going to get any more people.’”

“I feel conflicted, stretched and tension in relation to the different priorities we are trying to reconcile. Because we are a producing company there is a tension between visiting work and how you make sure you look after your own work, and the natural inclination internally is to, for all sorts of reasons, get behind our own work and that can sometimes mean that we don’t always strike the balance in terms of resource.”

De-skilling: Marketing staff in Local Authorities and Cultural Trusts are being given much broader portfolios to manage (e.g. sport, parks, libraries). Not only does this result in a dilution of the marketing support for touring work, but there has been a loss of specialist knowledge when it comes to marketing diverse cultural programmes.

- **Programming as an audience development tool**

Programmers shared examples of programming around national theme days and events (e.g. Black History Month), and creating their own festivals or distinct programming themes within a season (sometimes with associated engagement programmes), as a means to attract and develop new audiences. Key to this is having adequate lead-in times to support planning. Some have committed relationships with specific companies in order to build audiences. This was more evident with RFO venues than civic venues and rural promoters. One rural promoter is seeking funding for a three-year audience development programme which involves artists engaging more directly with communities to stimulate interest and connection with the work.

“That is our audience development where we are actually unlocking audiences through programming and engagement.”

“But the big thing for me is that I’ve started a particular approach to programming which we call ‘conversation starters’ to get away from the monotony of ‘Here’s a show, here’s another show’.”

“It is essential to have a good lead in time to allow the venue to link the programmed work in to other events in the venue’s calendar such as local festivals, wider regional cultural programme, schools and community calendars or national events such as Luminate, SMAFF and International Women’s Day that can have more targeted audience development.”

- **The variability of marketing support provided by producers**

Programmers discussed the variable quality of marketing support they are provided with. Large-scale companies seem much better resourced and can afford to engage in collaborative marketing with shared investment in the campaigns. Smaller scale companies, especially inexperienced ones or those with no marketing staff, struggle to offer more than the basic marketing collateral and expect the venues to deliver the bulk of the marketing for them. The quality of the supplied marketing information for new and challenging work, including contemporary dance, was called into question. Programmers thought much of the copy is written from an artistic rather than an audience perspective and marketing teams find themselves having to ‘decode the language into something the audience [or volunteer promoters] will understand’ which has led to some difficult conversations with artists and companies.

“Working at a large scale is much more of a shared experience. They are very much more interested in the detail of who and how we are attracting audiences and it’s a shared plan and a shared budget and its very collaborative ... whereas at the small scale, for reasons of resource ... they’ll give us some print and we get on with it.”

“The company needs to understand that there is only so much a venue can do. I think there is an assumption sometimes that ... we will just take it on and do everything so they don't take it on themselves.”

“There are some small-scale companies who have got dedicated marketing resource and I think you can tell the difference and it's really distinctive.”

“Quite often the material you have is not helpful in terms of promoting the work to the audience. Quite often it's artistically conceived and it's what the director of the show wants the audience to know rather than what they need to hear to buy a ticket.”

“The biog that the companies write needs to be really selling the piece more than some do because the volunteer is responsible for selling that show to the community. They are the marketing department and if they believe in the production then that's a much easier sell.”

“There can be an issue with quality of information, particularly from a marketing point of view ... the way the director of a show describes a show is not necessarily the way in which an audience will relate to it, or a venue marketing team can understand.”

“The way we communicate with audiences can be really foggy and we speak a kind of internal language that most audiences find very difficult to decode ... they want to know what it's actually about and what the experience will be.”

- **Operating from a shallow understanding of the audience and the marketplace**

When asked how well they knew their audiences and communities the response from programmers was mixed. Most admitted that they probably knew their current attenders best and have a good understanding of what programming works well for them. They appeared less confident in relation to their knowledge of potential audiences and communities.

“I know what product will sell but you don't want to stay safe. You want to take risks as well and bring in a different audience.”

“I guess I know what works, but the challenge is finding new attenders.”

When asked whether they collected audience data in order to inform marketing most said yes, but questions were raised about how useful the data was, how well it was being used, and whether they were collecting the right data in the first place.

“We're good at collecting data. We're pretty good at analysing data ... but we're really rubbish at actually using that and creating strategies that are understandable, that work and that actually bring people in.”

“We have a lot of information but do we have the right information ... does it actually have the value that we think it does. We have to think differently about what we're doing and how we are connecting with our audiences.”

- **Disagreements around data sharing**

Audience contact data was referred to as ‘the elephant in the room’. Visiting companies and artists are requesting access to the audience contact details and venues are not willing to hand it over. Some programmers deferred to compliance with the Data Protection Act. Others said their marketing departments were extremely protective of the data and reluctant to share it.

“We do what we can within the law. My colleagues are all very anxious about it ... we don’t often share the data but we do work hard to target previous audiences but I think we are pretty mean with it [data] because we have to be.”

“I think there is a real issue with marketing departments. There is this entrenched position that the data is what it’s all about and knowing your audience ... is what gives you power, and sharing it doesn’t come easily.”

“We are all very protective of our data and actually that’s a major challenge about how we break through that.”

6:9 Towards success

- **Fresh, brave thinking required**

Participants are aware that funding for the arts is likely to decrease in the coming years and believe fresh, brave thinking is required to navigate the change.

“We need to get out of that box of thinking that Creative Scotland and Local Authority funding is going to be there, because I don’t think it’s going to be there in ten years’ time.”

“The funding is being salami sliced and salami sliced and we just can’t keep going like that. We all know there is a big shift coming.”

“We should champion a commercial sector in Scotland, as it brings artists, opportunities and a diverse sector. Currently there isn’t one. Large scale touring and venues needs to be supported too. It can’t always be the community halls.”

- **Sector alignment around a shared vision**

Everyone concurred that there needs to be a shared vision, a re-commitment to the purpose and value of subsidised touring and clear success criteria that everyone can work to, criteria that aren’t wholly predicated on income and audience numbers.

“A sense of shared direction and working towards a more common language and common purpose.”

“Agree your direction of travel [together] and the steps you are going to take.”

“Having a statement of what success looks like from Creative Scotland and the sector as a whole would be really useful because then we’d know what we’re trying to do. At the moment it feels like touring ... has become a habit. I think a lot of people are doing it without thinking clearly enough about why.”

- **Strategic funding priorities and mechanisms everyone can subscribe to**

Review the money-go-round: The general consensus is that the Open Project Fund is not serving the interests of Creative Scotland, the producers, the programmers or the audience in relation to touring. Producers in particular feel they are bearing the brunt of the cost and the risk and would like a review of how the money/subsidy moves through the system in order to identify who benefits and who pays.

“To look at the most conducive funding mechanism and look at whether Open Project Funding is helping or hindering that process.”

“We have to stop and see how much subsidy goes into touring and see if there is a better way of delivering it that can serve audiences and venues and companies better.”

“Touring never should have gone up against everything else.”

“It’s looking at how the funding is distributed. Do we invest more money into the companies so that when I programme I don’t have to pay the company because what’s happening now is ‘I book you and you have a little bit of money from Creative Scotland and I give you a little bit of money from Creative Scotland back and it’s the same pot’, we’re just money laundering with the money just going round and round. Is there a smarter way of using funds?”

“A really solid piece of [economic] research around subsidised touring work and then policy developed from that. For example, there may be a policy that arises that says that small scale touring work going into venues will have a guarantee of £x in order for that professional company to be able to pay their teams £x and there’s a minimum agreed fee for a specific scale that we all know and buy into.”

Clear and differentiated funding priorities around supply: Suggestions flowed from all sides on how funding might be more effectively allocated: internal agreements between lead officers at Creative Scotland for each art form together with a more prescriptive funding criteria to support diverse programming, clear separate priorities for each art form that everyone can work to, ring-fenced funding for touring, associated priorities around balance of scale, art form, career stage and audiences, longer-term funding for producers, funding for repeat visits to venues to build audiences, and investing in a touring infrastructure that recognises the geographical spread of the population.

“Creative Scotland needs a separate touring fund so we can ask for a realistic amount to tour.”

“If Creative Scotland says touring is a priority then it should be made a priority.”

“Playing devil’s advocate, I think there could be a position to have ring-fenced funding so that there’s funding guaranteed for particular art forms, particular audience groups. Twenty percent of our funding used to go to new writing which is why Scotland developed a fantastic reputation for writers and new writing product, that doesn’t exist anymore.”

“There needs to be a system of differentiation around the strategic priorities for dance, theatre, touring in Scotland and not about what will cost more and what will cost less.”

“Something about having a structure of funding where you are creating product that sits within certain categories so there is a certain amount of availability of that each year. I don’t think this is what people actually want but I think there could be a balance.”

"I think one of the things Creative Scotland could do almost overnight is say 'We're going to fund less £20 - £30K posts and in any one funded year we will fund two or three at the £150K mark', which they've got the ability to do, to inject mid-scale touring quality with a real shot in the arm and to sustain that."

"A strategic rebalancing and encouraging infrastructure elsewhere [beyond the central belt] and support initiatives and organisations outside of that central belt because people there have not have access to the work."

"Creative Scotland needs to take a two-tier approach ... be clearer about funding something primarily because they are going to be staples [defined as traditional and modern classics] and they sufficiently resource and place an obligation on those artists and companies they see as providing that staple backbone of touring work, to spread it far and wide. Then, take a more nuanced approach to artist-led work which is less likely to have broad appeal and less likely to sustain a ten-week tour. At the moment they are trying to do the same thing with everyone they fund."

"Projects needs to be long-term funded, probably three years because we won't change or develop audiences with one tour or one year of touring."

"Some sort of support for repeated touring to the same areas, so that companies can build up an audience rather than performing once and disappearing."

Clear funding priorities for RFOs: Creative Scotland suggested establishing internal agreements between lead officers around goals for each art form to inform a more centrally managed, strategic approach to ensuring the diversity of RFO programmes.

"Our funding agreement with RFOs [venues] are agreed by various lead officers and there hasn't been any discussion or consensus so far about what we want for each art form within that."

"To develop guidance for our next lot of RFOs around our expectations around each art form within the funding agreements."

"Try to develop a statement of intent or policy or concordat ... that programmers funded by Creative Scotland can subscribe to about the breadth of programming."

Funding mechanisms that support risk: Risk could be underwritten over a fixed period of time to provide venues with the continuity of programme required to build audiences for more challenging work.

"Perhaps some kind of incentive fund to underwrite risk would be good. This would be more about encouraging venues to show a larger range of work. Where we see gaps in terms of types of work going to types of venues, then the incentive fund would underwrite the cost and support it for maybe a year or two years, and also linked to a good audience development strategy, so ultimately the venue would become less reliant on that subsidy because it will become more sure to get the audience."

"The reason venues are doing bad deals and not programming certain pieces of work is that they can't afford to take that risk. If that risk is underwritten, at least for a period of time, with a view to being weaned off that subsidy through sensible audience development and longer term planning ... that's how I would invest the money."

Alternative measures of success around risk: Some producers want the introduction of more qualitative indicators around success which accepts 'failure' as a necessary element of risk taking and expands the dominant focus on metrics of money and sales to include art and audiences. For emergent artists in particular, this would build their confidence to take risks and ensure genuine talent is nurtured, a view shared by Creative Scotland.

"It's about having the confidence to take a risk without being judged if it doesn't go according to plan. I think reporting to funders takes my confidence away."

"We absolutely understand the imperative of artistic excellence being able to thrive, and the upward draught that follows a few key individuals or organisations who are producing incredible and challenging work is a vital component."

Optimising public investment: some participants want to ensure great work has wide reach through tour extensions and re-mounts of successful work.

"Identify the real gems and make sure they are reaching as many people as possible and as many people as possible can benefit from that investment."

"There needs to be legacy planning around productions, and the relationships that follow." Professional development support for emergent artists and companies: given the profusion of small and emergent companies being funded, training and support is needed to equip them with the necessary skills to navigate and thrive within the sector.

"Support given to younger artists/producers to help them understand the complexities of touring work outside the central belt and how they can work in partnership with the venues to achieve the best exposure of their work."

- **A transparent system that supports the best chance of success**

Producers in particular want clarity and transparency around Creative Scotland's funding priorities and how decisions are made. In their view this will support a fairer and more honest process, build trust and give them the best chance of success.

"A clear, efficient, transparent and fair process in place, either nationally or at least regionally ... that is absolutely clear about how touring works in Scotland because at the moment it's not very efficient."

"Make clear what the opportunities around touring, how it works, how people make the decisions."

"Creative Scotland needs to take our word that, if we're putting in an application for £60K, that's what it costs rather than trying to take it down because all that happens then is that 'OK, I know what their game is, they're going to try and talk me down, I'll ask for more than I need in order to get what I definitely need' and it would be good if they could trust your judgement."

- **Do less, better**

There was consensus that everyone was trying to do too much. Participants want a more intelligent use of resource, spread less thinly, across fewer companies, with a re-focusing on artistic quality, audience development and reach.

“Can we ever get to a position in the arts where we do less, better? I think part of our problem is that we’re all trying to do too much and venues are very much in that situation where they are trying to please an awful lot of audiences.”

“We would probably have to look at funding less work but making sure that the work that is made is better resourced so that the artistic idea is reaching its full potential, the audience experience is there, and the frequency of work is there for the venues to be able to develop those audience relationships.”

“I think the way to grow audiences is to do less, better. The growth of audiences won’t come from just chucking out more work in an ill-considered way. It will come from a more coherent planned approach to developing audiences, reaching the whole of the country.”

“Yes to growing audiences but no to growing the sector. We’re funding too many companies and we can’t sustain the number of artists and companies that are currently being supported.”

“Funding a relatively small number of companies who are producing a high quality of work across a range of genres and styles, but with an absolute cast iron requirement to reach so many local authority areas per annum ... rather than trying to treat everybody the same and trying to get everyone to tour widely when of course, they won’t. “

“Everyone is trying to stretch what little resources they have far too far and in a way, we should try and do less, better. Funding fewer companies to be better resourced, to plan better and to tour more effectively. And for venues to programme less.”

• **Greater industry dialogue and exchange**

Participants would like more opportunities to gather as a sector, in a similar vein to the Early Dialogue Day and Emporium events organised by the Federation of Scottish Theatres. This additional event would be different in that it would encourage two-way conversations to strengthen shared purpose, foster creative exchange, develop a more informed understanding of the whole touring ecosystem, surface the diversity of practice within the sector, seed relationships and engage everyone in more meaningful conversations around aesthetics, art, programme and audiences.

“The issue I feel is the dialogue at consortiums, including FST quickly transcends into a Creative Scotland bashing – rather than constructive partnership and collaboration discussions on how we can all work together to further touring work in Scotland.”

“Programmers are not used to having aesthetic arts conversations or audience conversations with artists or companies – and vice versa.”

“Platforms to facilitate conversations about audience engagement and the artistic purpose of touring. Then we might be able to have those deeper conversations that give us a clearer sense of why we do what we do.”

“The more you actually know about and understand the company and have a relationship beforehand the better you are going to be able to work with them around marketing and audience development.”

“It’s a first step in a greater understanding of the whole picture for everyone ... I think it needs to be a bit more two-way in terms of venues communicating their approach as well as artists and companies ... and I think there needs to be a next stage version of it as well in a more focused forum.”

“I wonder if there’s another day that could be about developing connections and strategy. It’s not booking a show or feeding thoughts into something so embryonic, but it’s about ‘What’s the big picture here and how can we maximise the talents and abilities of the people and talents that are in the room’.”

- **A centrally managed approach to showcasing work**

In order to address the lack of time programmers have to travel to the numerous sharing events individually hosted by producers, a more coordinated approach was suggested, such as a regular ‘seasonal showcase’ that allowed programmers to see a critical mass of work in one go.

“A seasonal showcase where, as part of the funding agreement around development funds, companies will commit to one of the seasonal showcases. That would mean a day each three – six months built into venue programmer diaries who could then see ten – twelve different pieces of work and they could be filmed and made available online.”

- **Support deeper, more sustained audience engagement**

Creative Scotland suggested an increased focus around audience engagement to foster more meaningful relationships between audience, artists and venues/promoters, deepen the impact of the work and build new audiences. Dance was mentioned as an example where participatory and socially engaged practice is effectively nurturing meaningful engagement. Suggestions included supporting producers to create work for specific places and contexts, programmers to initiate durational engagement programmes in their communities and hosting artists to create work for or with communities that has the potential to resonate more deeply with them.

“In dance people are working differently and using more participatory approaches working with specific communities to inform a new piece of work. This means spending longer time in specific communities or doing residencies in three or four different places and developing the work as it goes, and you get that depth of engagement with people right from the start. It’s not just a one night only. That community has had a chance to be involved in the making of the work ... which can fundamentally change people’s experience of dance and make them more likely to see other work.”

“It seems that a lot of other art forms are way behind dance. There is a perception that if you do a lot of teaching, participatory or socially engaged work, somehow you are not considered to be the best quality performers or artist. There’s a perception that the pinnacle of your career would be performing in top companies. That has changed massively in dance. There’s an acknowledgement that the best work that is produced is often the work that has been co-created with a range of other people who might not usually be involved in dance.”

“The quality of the engagement is meaningful ... This might mean companies touring less widely but connecting more deeply with people in places they go to.”

“Thinking about what your audiences will want to see ... in terms of stories that are being told and responses to the geography of the place the work is being presented ... but it’s also about really anticipating what audiences might be encouraged to want and building interest and in a way that feels that there is a connection with the people it’s being presented to.”

- **We Can Work Better Together**

Make space and time to nurture mutual understanding: Everyone wants improved communication, honesty and genuine exchange within the sector to foster more productive partnerships, mutual understanding and common purpose.

“Communication and understanding between the companies and the venues, what the priorities are and developing a shared interest in what we both want to get out of it so it feels like a partnership.”

“I’d like to learn about what the venues are looking for and what they want from us because it should be partnership. It’s not going to work if it’s not a partnership.”

“Just meeting programmers where you can have a chat and take away that whole element where I’m having to sell.”

“There needs to be more commitment from venues and programmers to respond to artist enquiries – just email them back or pick up the phone or have a coffee with them.”

“Being absolutely truthful about what your priorities are.”

“I think honesty about the piece is really important. Don’t tell me that everyone is going to love it when you know you’re making it for this exact demographic. The work doesn’t have to appeal to everybody in order to go in the programme but I have to know.”

“There needs to be honesty from us to say ‘You’re not going to get more than forty people.’”

“Work in partnership with the company from pre-funding application submission through the research and development stage and into production and tour. This ensures both the company and venue are clear as to how the partnership will develop.”

“There is a lot of touring work and ... we get lots of unsolicited emails from Scottish and UK companies. Sometimes this approach works, but in the main, venues build relationships with a selection of companies because the venue knows their product, how the company works and on that basis has some idea of how to engage the audience.”

More creative collaborations: There were suggestions around supporting creative collaborations between producers and programmers: a) funds for co-commissioning, co-producing and artists-in-residence, and b) building capacity for venues to support producers in developing and premiering their work. The perceived benefits of these are that they would build stronger relationships based on mutual value creation, nurture a genuine sense of shared ownership and investment, and provide opportunities to collaborate around audience development and engagement.

“When it does work is when you have a production week at a venues and you premier at that venue, and then the venue has some sense of ownership and people in the building can come and see the dress rehearsal.”

“Touring need not necessarily be limited to a package that goes around the whole of Scotland. It might actually be presenters having artists-in-residence for a period of time and then including some engagement and performances so there is more of a bi-lateral relationship between an artist and an organisation.”

“A focus on relationships and a commitment to everyone who works in touring on valuing those relationships need to be refreshed.”

“There is under-utilised opportunity to rehearse and develop work in venues during quieter times.”

National companies are funded to tour: National companies would be funded to tour as part of the touring sector, working with programmers on the shared priority of building audiences for touring as a whole.

“National companies (all of them) should be touring to all kinds of venues; isn't this a government priority, do the nationals have to tour?”

A collective approach to supporting touring: Programmers suggested a number of ways in which they could support touring: the creation of formal and/or informal touring consortia around specific foci: shared programming priorities, scheduling frameworks, regional venue clusters to support tour extension and resource efficiency. The perceived benefits are numerous: improved economies of scale, touring pathways, access and progression routes, alignment around shared priorities and the restoring of a more equitable balance of power between producers and programmers.

“There must be a way for venues to take a collective approach and work together, without becoming group programming or programming by committee, where we share deadlines around brochures ... we could have a deadline for the sector.”

“There is an opportunity to think about the touring model in a different way and think more strategically across the country which we don't do at the moment ... so we could make a commitment as a consortium to help facilitate the touring or co-presenting. I think even the word 'touring' might be questionable. We could approach it from a very different way so that we are not sitting passively, we are more dynamic in our engagement.”

“This would create a frame around co-operation and mutual interest and there's something around the concept of parity of esteem. There is a perception of hierarchy in the arts between venues and companies, but actually it's about the right fit of a project for the right touring network or the right scale of venue or the right audience ... and they're all of equal value.”

“There needs to be a broad range of access routes that suits work at different scales and different types.”

“If you made a network of venues, you could create a group, put a call-out for artists you're looking for on particular dates. That's how you could facilitate a discussion on a much bigger scale.”

Work together to bring the cost down: producers would like to see more programmers helping them reduce touring costs by agreeing special rates with local accommodation and food providers.

- **Investment in marketing and audience development**

Find ways to engage and inspire marketing departments: producers are keen to work more closely with marketing departments and believe developing their understanding of the work is key. Suggestions included a) involving marketing staff in programming conversations, b) make time to meet, c) invest time and effort in allowing marketing staff to see the work or meet the artists, and d) create an Emporium-like event that includes marketing staff in the conversation around art and audiences.

“Getting them excited about it will make them want to push it more.”

“I would like to go and visit the venues and speak to their Box Office team and say ‘Hi, this is my show and this is why you should sell it, please come and see my rehearsal and do you want to meet the actors’. I want our work to be closer to the venue.”

“More open communications about marketing and what they are doing. How are they in touch with their audiences? How do they get the information out there? Do they tailor their information depending on whether its dance or theatre ... or are they just sending a brochure to absolutely everyone in the hope that it just lands in the right place?”

“If we can work more closely together to establish a set of common purposes.”

“Our work is quite hard to explain unless you’ve seen it, so we’ve found that it’s important to do repeat shows in the same venues and that then the word gets out. Once the staff in a venue have seen the work they know what they’re talking about. The ideal would be to have much more extensive communication about marketing, language, and how to identify audiences, but everyone is so stretched for time.”

“... the Edinburgh Festival Fringe could be the ideal opportunity to bring marketers and companies together. Made in Scotland would be perfect as it celebrates theatre, dance and music. Perhaps a day at the Fringe could be organised for marketing managers as they are the ones who should instill passion amongst their team.”

Professional development: Programmers and producers believed more needed to be done to upskill staff and support innovative practice to raise the standard and improve the effectiveness of marketing and audience development within the touring sector.

“It feels like there’s a need for some upskilling in relation to data, marketing and audience development in our sector, otherwise ... we’re just going to be talking in a vacuum to ourselves.”

Invest more in audience development: Producers would like venues to improve their local knowledge, increase their community connectivity and then work with them in trialing innovative and sustainable approaches to audience development that brings fresh thinking and practice into the sector. One programmer suggested they share the cost of workshops and audience development events to encourage partnership working.

“I think the approach to audience development has been very much focused on traditional PR and marketing traditions which is actually antithetical to art ... Some of the newer innovations in audience development are around communication and exchange, one-on-one relationships with groups and building up relationships over time ... building the trust is where the potential is.”

“Some of the best examples of arts marketing occur when people are able to come out of the day-to-day and do a really engaged project where they’ve got money and time to focus on that ... and really think about their audiences so I think it’s more about having opportunities to test and have some examples of really good practice that can be shared across the sector.”

“We’ve invested lots of money in making all this great work but maybe we haven’t invested the time and energy in bringing audiences along with us to consume what we are creating.”

“Companies do budget and plan for supporting workshops or developmental events, often including this in the fee. Essentially both the company and venue need to be responsible for this to grow audience numbers.”

Audience benchmarking: Producers would like to see national and venue-specific benchmarks around audience sizes and ticket income by genre and scale in order to a) establish more appropriate expectations around audiences, b) budget more accurately, c) write stronger funding applications and d) provide a more informed basis upon which to set mutually agreed targets with funders and programmers.

“If we knew what other companies were achieving we’d know what a realistic benchmark might be so you wouldn’t feel bad reaching 60% of capacity.”

Increased scrutiny of the marketing and audience development in funding bids: a shift in focus from ‘style’ to ‘results’ in order to leverage best audience return on investment.

“If I was to suggest one thing it would be for funding bodies to interrogate the marketing and audience development schemes within funding bids. Not asking questions like ‘How will you change the landscape of marketing?’, more ‘How will you guarantee us that we will get value for money, and Scots will come and see this funded show?’. Fair question ... We need to be thinking long term.”

• A centrally managed resource for tour booking

In order to streamline the tour booking process, producers and programmers want a central information and communication resource that is authoritative, accurate, well managed and current. As well as capacities and technical requirements, producers want the resource to include up-to-date programmer and venue staff contact details, programming priorities and availability, planning cycles and brochure deadlines. Programmers would want to use the resource as a means of browsing available work and identifying work which aligns with their priorities and availabilities. It could also provide a platform where producers and programmers can communicate with each other and work together developing a resource efficient tour schedule. For this resource to work, it would need to be centrally managed, authoritative and current.

“You can put everything someone needs to know on there and it stops you having to replicate that information all the time, and it will respond to users’ needs.”

6:10 Aspirations

Research participants were invited to select an image which, for them, represented their aspirations. Here is a small selection of those chosen.

“Everyone is individual but they’re all pointing in the same direction. It represents for me that everyone can retain their identity and their own vision ... but have structure that allows it all to work together.”



“We’re all in this beautiful boat. The water is calm. We’re all rowing together and it’s all fantastic, companies, buildings and audiences together, with a real sense of purpose and pleasure.”



“My aspiration is that we all come together in a scrum. Companies, the volunteer promoters and the community, and just gelling trying to get a good score at the end of the day ... In a scrum there’s energy, there’s pushing, there’s pulling, there’s trying to get hold of something you want dearly, which is the ball. The ball represents our aim to bring companies and community together, not only to watch theatre or film, but also as a social gathering so they tend to know each other which is probably different to a mainstream audience who just sit in rows whilst here [rural venues] it can be a much more collaborative experience.”



“I’m always ways struck by the way penguins behave. They have such strong individual bonds in terms of how they rear their young, the dedication they put into it, and then they have this really strong group dynamic, and they keep each other warm. My aspiration is can we make more of the individual and collective talent we have in the sector? I don’t think we are doing that enough in terms of sharing things that are working or not working for the common good.”



"I would love this to be the queue of people coming to engage with theatre all over Scotland"



"These hands of young and old is about hoping to get in a diverse audience, crossing all age boundaries and bringing everyone together."



Appendix: Research Participants

Venues and Programmers

Mari Binnie	Glasgow Life
Liam Sinclair	Byre Theatre
Vicktoria Begg	Dundee Rep
Peter Renwick	Dumfries and Galloway Arts Festival
Linda Crookes	Traverse
Evan Henderson	Arts in Fife
Ben Torrie	Aberdeen Performing Arts
Roz Bell	Eden Court
Christine Martin	Paisely Arts Centre
Jan Harrison	Birnam Arts
Jo Mclean	The Touring Network
Emyr Bell	North East Arts Touring
Julie Ellen	Macrobert Arts Centre
Jackie Shearer	Beacon Arts Centre

Producers

Belinda McElhinney	Barrow Ballet
Susan Hay	Marc Brew
Catrina Tyre	Cat Tyre
Alice McGrath	Red Bridge Arts
Janet Coulson	Firebrand
Michael Emans	Rapture
Eileen O'Reilly	National Theatre of Scotland
David Hutcheson	Sell A Door
Joan Cleville	Joan Cleville Dance
Robert Softley Gale	Birds of Paradise
Rebecca Davies	Stellar Quines
Ewan Downie	Company of Wolves
Aiyana D'Arcangelo	Scottish Dance Theatre
Louise Gilmour-Wills	Catherine Wheels
Verity Leight	Magnetic North
Ewan Downie	Company of Wolves

Federation of Scottish Theatre

Jon Morgan	Former Director
------------	-----------------

Creative Scotland

Laura Mackenzie-Stuart	Head of Theatre
Lorna Duguid	Multi-Artform Manager
Laura Cameron-Lewis	Head of Dance
Lulu Johnston	Dance Officer