

FLEXIBLE FUNDING ASSESSMENT

Applicant name:	Benchtours	
Application Reference number:	G2001001003	
Amount Requested (Year 1/Year 2)	£170,000	£175,100
Officer's recommendation		
<p>Summarise the key points of your assessment and draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the application taken together with any comments you have received from source evidence (portfolio of evidence/ internal / external consultation). Highlight any specific risks <i>Note: The amount of information you provide here should be sufficient for the decision maker to reach a decision. As with all previous commentary boxes please do not exceed 250 words</i></p>		
<p>Comments: bt's programme will continue to develop its mix of new work and new versions of 20th century classics and it will maintain an active, inclusive outreach programme. It has a demonstrable commitment to engaging audiences through its education and outreach work. It will present work in 16 local authorities, including remote rural areas. Its work is of good quality and it has strong relationships with promoters across Scotland. There is a demonstrable commitment to inclusive education and outreach work and audience development initiatives.</p> <p>The business plan clearly articulates bt's vision, detailing its key values with a programme of artistic activity detailing timelines bt has undertaken a comprehensive review of its strategic context and market and the business plan contains the resulting thorough SWOT analysis. This informed bt's objectives for the period of the plan (2008-11.) It contains plans for activity, management and marketing with key milestones indicated.</p> <p>The staffing structure is clear and there are job descriptions detailing management responsibilities. The enclosed core staff biographies demonstrate relevant experience. There are pay scales included and there is an equal opportunities policy that covers employment, bt's work and audiences and a policy on protection of children and vulnerable people.</p> <p>The budget seems reasonably costed, apart from the contingency level which is unacceptably low at c.3%. Crucially, the budgets contain realistic levels of support from trusts for its professional touring work. It is now managing the risk of undertaking its current community project by only undertaking this on a full cost recovery basis. This demonstrates improved financial planning on behalf of the Board and the company. It should be noted that bt is projecting a deficit for the end of 07/08, but a changed programme of activities and subsequent revised budget for 2009/09 mean bt is projecting a surplus which will cover this.</p> <p>bt's programme meets the fund criteria well. <i>Love of Seven Dolls</i> (and to some extent some its education/outreach work) meets the drama department priority of work for children and young people.</p> <p>I would recommend support with some increase, as the comparatively low level of flexible funding bt currently receives in conjunction with realistic projected income from trusts mean that without some additional support it could be difficult for bt to fully deliver its increased professional touring activities.</p>		
Officer's overall priority recommendation		HIGH
Lead Officer signature:		Date: 30 January 2008
Print name:	Jaine Lumsden	Revised: 20 March 2008

Stage 2: Heads of Departments prioritise applications with advice from Specialist Advisors

1. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the application identified by the Specialist Advisors? Please summarise their comments below. What were their ratings of the importance of the application in being supported?

Comments:

Attendees:

David Taylor, Co-Director of Arts

Specialist Advisors: Stewart Ennis, Tim Licata, David Leddy, Alex Patience, Sandy Maxwell, Stephen Slater, Stephen Stenning and Laura Tyrrell

Stewart Ennis has declared an interest in Bench Tours and left the room to enable the discussion of the application to take place.

The Panel identified the following strengths and weaknesses of Bench Tours:

The application appears to be organised and well written. Within the application the marketing support detailed is excellent.

Based on the Advisors' knowledge of the work, it was felt that the company's artistic programme to date had been good but could be better. The work was not yet fully achieved. Reference was made to work being presented that was underdeveloped and that sometimes appeared to be a part of a larger, unrealised, whole. Some work appeared to be a prequel to a larger show and was thus unsatisfactory. There was a view that the artistic process could be more rigorous, but it was recognised that Bench Tours had transformed as a company over the past 4 years. Evaluations had been mixed.

It was felt that Bench Tours is good accessible theatre and the 'resurrection' of good international plays was an asset and the touring activity is strong. It was felt that the company was able to transfer productions well from small venues (village halls) to larger (e.g. Eden Court).

However, it was thought that Bench Tours is not focused enough in terms of quality, that the quality of work was variable, and lacks a clearly identifiable style and profile. It was felt that the company's work was not highly distinctive.

Specialist Advisors overall rating: Medium

2. Summarise the role of the organisation within the infrastructure of the sector. Assess to what extent the organisation's vision will contribute to the department's and to Scottish Arts Council's aims: (to fulfil artists' potential, to increase participation, to place creativity at the heart of learning)

Comments:

Bench Tours (bt) is a well-established (1991) organisation. Its vision is to present challenging engaging work that will entertain audiences. It produces new work and contemporary classics and has a demonstrable track record of touring across Scotland, including to geographically remote areas. It also creates ambitious community projects, often with people with disabilities or learning problems.

BT has received core then flexible fixed term funding since 2005/06. It has also received support for touring and community projects including a partners grant, commissions and company development. BT makes a significant contribution to the touring circuit and also engages with a range of audiences.

1. *Fit with FXO criteria:*

1.1 Excellent artistic vision and leadership; role within sector/support to artists

It is hard to argue that the artistic vision and leadership is excellent given the mixed nature of previous evaluations. The proposed programme is of interest but it is clear that the SAs had reservations about the company's ability to deliver its artistic aspirations.

1.2 Improving your engagement with the public

The proposed approach to public engagement is good with audience development plans relating to 14 and 15 year olds, and activity relating to an inclusive community group. The company's work also appears to transfer well between differing scales of venue.

1.3 Good practice in the governance and management

There is a low contingency figure indicated. Otherwise the plans seem viable and the governance provision appropriate.

1.4 Practical implementation of your equal opportunities policy; widening access

There are several strands to extending access.

1.5 Raising other income at least 25%

Indicated as achievable.

2. *Fit with Departmental priorities*

The proposals will involve work for children in part.

3. *Fit within Scottish Arts Council aims*

The quality of the work, however, is mixed as reflected in the written evaluations, under half of which are good to excellent. This is reflected in the SAs' comments which point to inconsistency in the quality of the work and under-realisation. The application would contribute to increasing participation through touring and through engaging with a range of people through their education and outreach programmes. The development of artists' potential is moderate.

3. Based on the lead officer's assessment and the subsequent meeting with Specialist advisors, please rate the application (High, medium, low) summarise your reasons for assessing the application as you have (drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation and highlighting any specific risks)

Comments

1.1 *Application rating: Medium*

a. *Comparison with Officer and Specialist advisor comments and recommendations*

The officer's report rates the application as High and the SAs as Medium.

1.2 *Reasons for assessing at this rating*

I believe that the officer's assessment does not fully take on board the mixed evaluations of previous work and the comments of the Specialist Advisors also show concerns about the company's ability to deliver on their artistic aspirations.

1.3 *Strengths of application*

The artistic proposals are interesting and the plans for outreach are strong.

1.4 *Weaknesses of applications*

The company's track record is mixed and the SAs had concerns about the outcomes of the

company's work.

1.5 Specific risks associated with the application

There is a risk associated with the proposed low level of contingency in the budget.

1.6 Development areas identified

Greater achievement of artistic aspirations- quality of artistic outcomes.

1.7 Recommended level of support

If supported : £145,000 pa

Overall the application meets SAC aims in terms of access and inclusiveness (touring and outreach). The relative lack of consistency and artistic achievement means that this application would be judged medium priority. Recommended amount : £145,000 pa

4. Please comment on the geographic reach of the programme

Comments:

This is one of the strengths of the applications with plans to tour to half the authorities in Scotland.

Head of Department's overall priority recommendation		Medium
Head of Department's signature:		Date: 15 February 2008 Revised: 26 March 2008
Print name:	David Taylor	

Stage 3: Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) make recommendations to Directors (Acting Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive and Co-Directors of Arts)		
1. Summarise the reasons why the final rating has been made.		
Comments: Some fit with FXO criteria but relatively weak in comparison to others, in the context of a highly competitive funding round. Not recommended for support.		
Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) priority recommendation		LOW MEDIUM
Chair of Meeting signature:		Date: 2 April 2008
Print name:	Iain Munro	

Stage 4: Directors make recommendations to Joint Board (strategic fit)		
Summarise discussions between directors highlighting any areas that the application meets and detail suggested level of support.		
Comments: Agree with Stage 3 recommendation. In the light of comments by Specialist Advisors and the Head of Dept and the artistic evaluations, we view the Stage 2 artistic comment as Low Medium rating.		
Directors recommendations to Joint Board		LOW MEDIUM
Acting Chief Executive signature:		Date: 10 April 2008
Print name:	Jim Tough	

Stage 5: Joint Board's decisions		
Record the Joint Board's recommendation. If the recommendation differs from Stage 4, please summarise the reasons why.		
Comments: The Joint Board accepts the Stage 4 recommendation.		
Joint Board Final Decision		REFUSE
Date: 24 April 2008	If approved for support, enter sum awarded	£

End of Assessment