

FLEXIBLE FUNDING ASSESSMENT

Applicant name:	Puppet Lab, The	
Application Reference number:	G201001084	
Amount Requested (Year 1/Year 2)	£73,396	£92,150
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: Puppet Lab (PL) has historically been project funded by the Scottish Arts Council and is not a current flexibly funded organisation. Its vision is “... to inspire and educate people of all ages through contact with the arts. We aim to make puppetry accessible and examine ways to develop, expand and engage with our audiences.” In pursuit of this vision, four aims are identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop audiences • Deliver an artistic programme of the highest quality • Deliver educational support • Secure a stable future <p>A high quality programme of work is proposed, consisting of a large volume of work relative to the funding requested. The proposal is considered by this assessor, and by reviewer Angela Hogg, as representing good value for money. The programme is well balanced between developing existing work and creating new work. Supporting material provides strong evidence of the company’s track record, including the quality of its artistic work and education programme. In particular, the production Ghost received wide acclaim in the press, with 4 star reviews and recognition from across the world.</p> <p>Two previous artistic evaluations were referenced in this assessment - 50% rated the work as “excellent” and 50% as “competent” (but the latter rating is given with a caveat, as detailed in section 4 above).</p> <p>The bid for flexible funding meets the criteria very well with a demonstrative commitment to development particularly in relation to audiences. The application also addresses the drama department’s priorities for children and for site specific work.</p> <p>Key strengths are summarised as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The centrality of all aspects of public engagement - accessibility, audience development and education - to the organisation’s artistic vision • The organisation is considered to play “a key role within the development of the puppetry sector in Scotland” by reviewer, Angela Hogg and is rated a high priority for support by her • The quality of the proposed programme which is developmental and visionary • The track record of the applicant and supporting evidence in relation to the quality of its education work • Partnership and collaboration, nationally and internationally, are strong • A first class approach to equality is evident throughout the whole organisation • The role the organisation plays in providing training in the artform of puppetry through apprenticeships and workshops 		

- Evidence and track record relating to good management and successful delivery of projects
- Overall clarity of presentation of financial information and evidence of strong financial management

Key **weaknesses** are summarised as:

- A lack of definition with regard to in-kind contributions
- A lack of detail regarding the precise source of partnership funding
- A certain lack of cohesion to the business plan
- A lack of a strategic approach to marketing (although the applicant's commitment and strong desire to improving its knowledge base and building capacity in this area is well evidenced and an innovative use of new technology is proposed as part of its programme of work in 2009-11)

In terms of **risk**, this assessor is unable to identify any real discernible risk. Although, it is acknowledged that the production, Big Man Walking, (a celebration of the Year of Homecoming) is on a larger scale than previously undertaken by the company. This indicates there may be some level of risk involved but plans are at too early a stage to make a proper assessment of what these may be.

The application is of good overall quality and meets the criteria for flexible funding well, in addition to meeting specific priorities for drama. There are, however, some development areas as noted above. As such, in keeping with the guidance given relating to prioritisation of flexible funding bids, the overall rating is medium.

Officer's overall priority recommendation		MEDIUM
Lead Officer signature:		Date: 25 Jan 2008 Revised: 20 March 2008
Print name:	Gwen McLeod	

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:

The Specialist Advisors panel that considered this application included Kirsteen Macdonald, Susan Nickalls, Sita Ramamurthy, Louise Butler, Steve Slater, Alan Riach, Wendy Niblock and Sally Wilson. The panel commented:

The panel considered that the artistic vision of the **Puppet Lab** could have been more strongly articulated, as could the inspirational elements of the future programme. The application did not sufficiently demonstrate that the organisation was pushing forward its artistic practice and engagement with audiences. There were no references to other work taking place in Scotland (eg Manipulate Festival) and where the Puppet Lab was positioned in relation to other artists or organisations in the art form. There was little detail in the audience development strategy and approach, although the philosophy and desire to engage with the public was strongly expressed.

The panel rated this application as low priority for support.

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:

Puppet Lab is an arts company working in the field of puppetry. The Puppet Lab has been in receipt of Scottish Arts Council project funding for its work. The Drama Officer who commented on the application stated that the Puppet Lab plays "a key role within the development of the puppetry sector in Scotland"

1. *Fit with FXO criteria:*

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

Although The Puppet Lab is considered by officers to have a strong artistic track record, the application has not fully articulated a commitment to *artistic excellence in vision and leadership*.

1.2 *Improving your engagement with the public:*

The Puppet Lab articulates a commitment to public engagement and aims to make puppetry accessible and examine ways to develop, expand and engage with audiences.

1.3 *Good practice in the governance and management:*

The company currently operates on a project basis, with a small core team and bringing appropriate expertise artistically and managerially on a project-by-project basis. The application contains limited information on board membership, composition and reporting procedures.

1.4 *Practical implementation of your equal opportunities policy; widening access:*

The Assessing Officer notes that The Puppet Lab submitted a very thorough equal opportunities policy which conveys a genuine commitment to this area and widening access is actively pursued through the company's activities.

1.5 *Raising other income at least 25%:*

The Puppet Lab has met the matched funding requirement.

2. *Fit with Departmental priorities:*

The Puppet Lab demonstrates a commitment to the *development of collaborative working and artistic practice which crosses artform boundaries*, in alignment with the Cross Art Form priority for Flexible funding. Additionally the application also addresses the Drama department's priorities for children and for site specific work.

3. *Fit within Scottish Arts Council aims:*

The Puppet Lab contributes across the Scottish Arts Council's aims, particularly through its work in formal and informal education, to Aim 3; '*placing the arts at the heart of learning*'.

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:*

I concur with the Assessing Officer and rate this application as **medium** priority for support.

The Assessing Officer and the Drama Officer who commented on this application considered this application to demonstrate artistic quality and that the proposed programme is developmental and visionary. They also recognised the significant role that the Puppet Lab has in the development of puppetry in Scotland through its training of emerging practitioners and an overall approach which places significant importance on accessibility.

However, the Specialist Advisors panel were not convinced about the artistic vision demonstrated in the application, nor that the organisation had sufficiently demonstrated that it would be pushing forward its artistic practice within the proposed programme of work, and rated the application as low priority for support.

1.2 Reasons for assessing at this rating:

While recognising that the concerns of the Specialist Advisors are significant, there is a strategic role that the Puppet Lab could play in the development of puppetry in Scotland and the application does meet the Drama priorities for flexible funding. This is reflected in my rating for this application.

1.3 Strengths of application:

- Strong commitment to public engagement and widening access to the arts
- track record in the quality of education work
- track record in successful management and delivery of projects

1.4 Weaknesses of applications

- artistic vision and development of artistic practice not fully demonstrated
- little reference to how the company envisage their role within the wider puppetry and performance sector
- approach to business planning and financial projections demonstrates some weaknesses
- strategic approach to marketing would benefit from being strengthened.

1.5 Specific risks associated with the application

The lack of detail in the application on the sources of partnership funding is identified as a risk. The Assessing Officer also notes that one of the proposed projects (Big Man Walking) is on a larger scale than previously undertaken by the company, although this is still at an early stage of development.

1.6 Development areas identified

Development areas include artistic and business planning and the development of a more strategic approach to marketing.

1.7 Recommended level of support

The level of support requested is appropriate to the proposed programme, and if supported through Flexible funding, I would recommend it at the level applied for in 2009/10 (£73,000).

4. Please comment on the geographic reach of the programme

Comments:

1.1 Where will the activity/programme take place?

The Puppet Lab is based in Edinburgh but its programme of work will take place throughout Scotland.

1.2 Where will the audience come from?

In the application, the Puppet Lab has stated that 65% of their audiences will come from Scotland and 35% from outwith. There maybe a misunderstanding here, but if the Puppet Lab is successful in achieving flexible funding, clarification would need to be sought to ensure that it complies with the Cross Border Touring Guidelines on arts council funded activity.

Head of Department's overall priority recommendation		MEDIUM
Head of Department's signature:		Date: 15 February 2008
Print name:	Anita Clark	Revised: 26 March 2008

Stage 3: Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) make recommendations to Directors (Acting Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive and Co-Directors of Arts)		
1. Summarise the reasons why the final rating has been made.		
Comments: 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)		
Record the Directors' recommendation and confirm the suggested level of support. If the recommendation differs from Stage 3, please summarise the reasons why.		
Comments: Agree with Stage 3 recommendation.		
Directors recommendations to Joint Board		Low Medium
Acting Chief Executive signature:	Jim Tough	Date:10 April 2008

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

End of Assessment