

FLEXIBLE FUNDING ASSESSMENT

Applicant name:	Queens Hall (Edinburgh) Limited, The	
Application Reference number:	G201001080	
Amount Requested (Year 1/Year 2)	£65,000	£66,950
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>		
Comments:		
<p>Strengths</p> <p>The Queen's Hall is an established venue, key to a wide range of music provision in Edinburgh across all musical genres. It is significant in picking up tours from England in particular, as well as the Scottish Arts Council Tune Up tours (see Ian Smith's comments). Quality of programming and presentation is consistently high and the venue is a member of The Audience Business in Edinburgh.</p> <p>The proposed expansion of own promotions and developments demonstrates a commitment to developing provision further through supporting new/emerging artistic ventures and development of audience knowledge and taste simultaneously. The proposed programme of expanding own promotions is clear and logical, and likely to be achievable. This in line with strong collaborations with other commercial promoters and a joint programming strategy with the Usher Hall is critical.</p> <p>The hall has a strong staff team and board, with a clear risk assessment for all aspects of activity and responsibility. The hall has a fairly strong Equal Opportunities Policy, although some developments have been recommended in this assessment.</p> <p>The increased funding requested from the Scottish Arts Council is clearly reflected in additional artistic activity and development, and is not an unreasonable uplift. Income is projected from a range of sources and the proposed budgets seem viable in line with the plans.</p> <p>Weaknesses</p> <p>Elements of the proposal need further detail, including time-tabling of increased promotions, strategy for attracting ambitious numbers of increased audiences, as well as the agreed joint programming strategy with the Usher Hall – this is key to ensure that the increased own promotions and special projects do not clash with Usher Hall plans.</p> <p>The hall has no plans for increasing public engagement through education projects – a vague proposal is made to fundraise and create projects.</p> <p>The greatest weakness of the application is the risky financial state of the hall with deficits carried forward and large overdraft (see guidance from Financial Compliance Officer). It will continue to rely on support from the City of Edinburgh Council in particular.</p> <p>Overall I would rate this as a medium priority, based on the areas of development recommended, the further detail that would support a fuller assessment of artistic plans, and concerns for the financial status of the organisation.</p>		

Officer's overall priority recommendation		MEDIUM
Lead Officer signature:		Date: 28 January 2008 Revised: 20 March 2008
Print name:	Tamsin Mendelsohn	

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?

The panel consisted of Murray Buchanan, Paul Bream, Jim Gaitens, Rachel Nelken and Susan Nickalls, with ratings received from Marie Fielding by email.

Comments:

- The panel noted that the artistic vision of the Queen's Hall appeared to be ambitious without overstressing the organisation. They appreciated the eclectic programming, which seemed to be attempting to grow audiences. Attempts to expand the programme and range of genres and to introduce new artists were evident.
- The panel identified that the Queen's Hall is the only provision in Edinburgh doing this type of programming.
- The panel noted the organisation's engagement with local promoter's collectives.
- The panel identified shortcomings in terms of audiences, with no evidence to show that the organisation is benefitting from its Audience Business membership. The panel questioned the mention of the Queen's Hall's new ticketing system as evidence of audience development.
- The panel noted the reintroduction of the Queen's Hall's outreach programme, but asked whether this was more the role of other organisations.

The panel rated the importance of the application in being supported as **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:

The Queen's Hall (QH) is primarily a venue for live music and the support from the music department is towards their programming activities. The QH is entering the final year (2008/09) of a three year agreement between the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) and SAC whereby CEC contributes £100K and the music department £50K. As a venue, the QH is of extremely high strategic importance to the music department, especially since the closure of the Usher Hall for the final stage of refurbishment. The QH is also a major facility within our key promoters, venues and festivals portfolio and one of the principle beneficiaries of the TuneUp programme.

Whilst the QH wishes to develop an educational profile, it acts mostly as a facilitator for other organisations, such as the SCO. It is currently one of the most important venues in Scotland's capital city, especially with the changing scenario affecting the Usher Hall, as already stated.

1. Fit with FXO criteria: Fully.

1.1 Excellent artistic vision and leadership; role within sector/support to artists: The QH is one of the department's and Scotland's key venues supporting artists from the UK and world-wide.

1.2 Improving your engagement with the public: The QH is seeking to expand its "own promotion" portfolio and during the closure of the Usher Hall, this represents significant activity.

1.3 Good practice in the governance and management: The QH is managed through a Trust.

1.4 Practical implementation of your equal opportunities policy; widening access: Good equal opportunities policy that is being reviewed.

1.5 Raising other income at least 25%: Yes.

2. Fit with Departmental priorities: In the provision of high quality live performance, the QH absolutely meets our departmental priority and as an active participant in TuneUp supports a wide range of styles and genres.

3. Fit within Scottish Arts Council aims: In particular aims one and two.

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:

The QH is seeking an increase in funding to £65K and £66,950 respectively, which is not unreasonable after three years of standstill support. The most significant element for the future development of the QH was not however outlined in their application and that is a closer synergy, if not joint programming management between the QH and the Usher Hall. Whilst acknowledging that the CEC owns the Usher Hall whereas the QH is administered by a separate Trust, the SAC have held meetings between the two venues and the CEC to ensure that when the Usher Hall reopens, such a strategy is in place. The only collaboration evidenced in the application is with the Edinburgh Playhouse, which is commercially owned.

The QH has strong partnerships with the key commercial promoters, both in Scotland and throughout the UK. The other key partnership, almost akin to a residency is that with the SCO, which currently expires in May 2009. This partnership will be detrimentally affected if Edinburgh ever gets to build a new mid-scale concert venue, which would become the SCO's home base, but that process is unlikely to bear fruit within the terms of this application process.

The QH is a notoriously uncomfortable place for audiences and unless major refurbishment takes place, that will not change. This is most evident, as are the lack of facilities, when the hall is used acoustically and has a capacity audience. The cabaret seating favoured by jazz, folk and acoustic music promoters works well. Despite these reservations and not only because of the scenario affecting the Usher Hall, the QH remains of high strategic value to the music department, to the City and to the SAC, not least for the vital role it plays during the EIF.

It is an established venue that is key to touring in Scotland, especially for TuneUp and is an Edinburgh base for many professional ensembles. The expansion of own promotions is important as is the relationship between the QH and Usher Hall. The state of the fabric and comfort levels of the hall are a concern, but not specific to this application, which when taking everything into consideration is a strong medium application.

1.1 Application rating: Medium

A strong medium assessment from all three, which is what was expected from the QH.

1.2 Reasons for assessing at this rating: The key role the QH plays in the department and for the SAC cross art-form and EIF.

1.3 Strengths of application: The only quality mid-scale venue in Edinburgh.

1.4 Weaknesses of applications: lack of competition and the need for joint programming with the Usher Hall, when it re-opens.

1.5 Specific risks associated with the application: A change of priorities from CEC.

1.6 Development areas identified: Stronger and more strategic development of “own programming” work.

1.7 Recommended level of support: £60,000 for both years.

4. Please comment on the geographic reach of the programme

Comments: Not strictly relevant to a venue, but traffic to the QH comes from all around the world.

1.1 Where will the activity/programme take place? QH/Edinburgh.

1.2 Where will the audience come from? Wide ranging + international.

Head of Department's overall priority recommendation		MEDIUM
Head of Department's signature:		Date: 13 February 2008 Revised 23 March 2008
Print name:	Ian Smith	

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: Good overall fit with FXO criteria to merit strong medium priority but relatively lower in comparison to other applications because of the issues identified in the assessment. In a very competitive funding environment with limited funds available, it is not possible to support all strong medium rated applications. Therefore, not recommended for support.		
Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) priority recommendation		Strong 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		Strong 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	