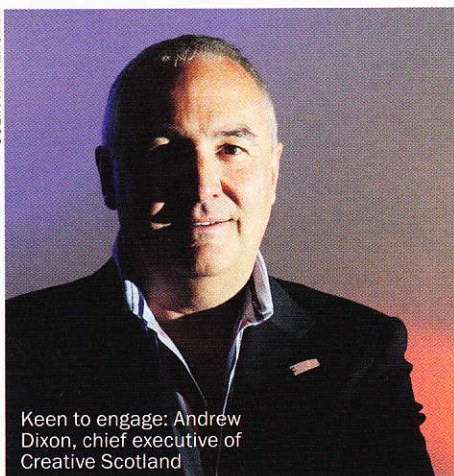


Creative Scotland to address structure, language and openness

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Keen to engage: Andrew Dixon, chief executive of Creative Scotland

Sir Sandy Crombie, chairman of Creative Scotland, published an update on the funding body's situation after a board meeting held on 22 October. Its staffing structure, corporate language, and openness to Scotland's artistic community were discussed, as Sir Sandy admitted the board had been 'surprised by the strength of feeling expressed over recent months'.

The board appears to have major concerns that Creative Scotland has been cut off from its artists, and that it had not been made aware of the scale of the problems between artists and management.

'There should be no lack of opportunity, no real or perceived barriers, for people to provide feedback and input ideas and suggestions; and no lack of opportunity for us to absorb these,' he said. 'Recent events have made us accept that we need to have a more open and trusting relationship with the artists and companies producing so much excellent work.'

Sir Sandy made the promise to provide the update on 12 October, after the organisation had been subject to criticism from artists and politicians – and its chief executive, Andrew Dixon, had felt compelled to assert he would not resign.

A highly critical open letter appeared

in the *Scotsman* on 9 October signed by 100 of Scotland's most prestigious artists, subsequently picking up many more signatories, and this appeared to prompt Sir Sandy, a former chief executive of Standard Life, to take more visible control of the situation.

A review of Creative Scotland's internal decision-making structure is to take place: 'We will look again at our structure to ensure appropriate prominence is given to art form specialism [and] ensure specialist knowledge is used effectively in our decision-making processes.'

The organisation had also been criticised for its use of 'business-speak and obfuscating jargon' and Sir Sandy has set a deadline of March 2013 'to review and rewrite our materials to increase clarity, simplicity and understanding'. He said Creative Scotland 'very much welcome[s] the offer of assistance from representatives of the sectors and potential applicants' in this task.

'All of us involved at Creative Scotland are determined to do our jobs in an optimum way to allow those involved in the arts and cultural sector to perform at their creative best. Sometimes it is uncomfortable to hear what people say, but it is always helpful.'

Creative Scotland chief executive Andrew Dixon has accepted that the Scottish arts funding body has had significant issues in its relationship with the arts community, but is keen to engage artists in building new trust and making a strong case to the Scottish government for the arts in Scotland.

Speaking at an artists' open space meeting on 26 October organised by Edinburgh-based writer and director Jen McGregor at CS's Edinburgh offices, he recognised that CS's language had often appeared too business-orientated in tone, and that funding applications had sometimes been needlessly complex.

The crisis meeting, which gathered

together a cross-section of arts practitioners from across Scotland, was also attended by several CS staff, including directors of creative development Venu Dhupa and Iain Munro. They heard that some artists had grown afraid of CS, and felt that they were a nuisance to the organisation. Participants complained that the opaqueness of CS's language had led to some arts organisations missing funding application deadlines. There were requests for board meetings to be held in public, and for the details of the funding decision-making process to be more transparent. There were also calls for a change of management at CS, and for the parts of the organisation that were not working to be cut out and replaced, but the meeting stopped short of demanding the wholesale abolition of the organisation.

Mr Dixon, who spent several hours addressing artists' concerns during the day-long meeting, admitted that CS was missing something in not involving artists in the funding decision-making process, and said he was willing to explore this. He accepted that CS had to address the issue that its language was perceived as business- rather than arts-orientated, and admitted that it was he himself who banned the word 'funding' from CS literature, replacing it with the problematic word 'investment'.

He was keen to stress that part of CS's role was to act as an interpreter between the arts community and the Scottish government, and accepted that although it had done well in speaking to government, as demonstrated by CS's buoyant funding, it had done less well in engaging with artists. He explained that he needed artists' help in rethinking its language, even going so far as to ask which five key questions artists would like to see on their funding application forms.

Details of the issues discussed can be found at <http://artistsopenspace.wordpress.com>