

NEWS RELEASE

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ONLINE TICKET SHOP COULD PROVIDE BOOST FOR HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS AUDIENCES

Purchasing tickets for events in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland may soon be just a mouse click away. An ambitious initiative is underway that could enable audiences to book tickets to cultural events such as theatre performances, cinema showings and gigs over the Internet and through a central phone line.

The project has the working title of 'Highlands and Islands Ticket Shop', and is being led by *HI~Arts*, the arts development agency for the Highlands and Islands, with the support of *Highlands & Islands Enterprise* and the *Scottish Arts Council*.

Supporters of the project believe that a one-stop online and telephone booking resource would complement the current ticketing practices of arts organisations by enabling promoters, festivals and venues to sell many more tickets in advance of events. The online shop would also be able to process credit and debit card transactions – a service which many arts organisations have been unable to offer their customers in the past.

The online shop would enable arts organisations to collect more information about their audiences, which makes it a powerful tool for promoting cultural events and increasing participation in the arts. In particular, it would allow the many tourist visitors to the Highlands and Islands to make cultural plans and book tickets for events prior to their visit.

Project management consultants, *Catalyst Arts*, have been appointed to develop a feasibility study for this ticketing initiative, and to offer advice on the technical and operational development of the project. Consultants from *Catalyst* will be liaising closely with *HI~Arts* and the cultural sector in the Highlands and Islands over the next few months to develop an *p.T.O.* appropriate ticketing service that will benefit regional arts organisations and audiences alike.

Catalyst Arts have wide-ranging experience in ticketing and management across the arts and they recently helped Tate in London to develop new ticketing and fundraising systems. The two directors previously worked respectively in audience development and for a ticketing system supplier and between them have helped a diverse range of arts organisations across the UK.

Consultation on the development of the ticketing project has begun with the arts sector of the Highlands and Islands, and over two-hundred arts organisations have already been asked for their opinion on the project. People are also being encouraged to have their say on the project using the *HI~Arts* website discussion forum at www.hi-arts.co.uk/forum.htm.

David Smillie, Head of Culture at Highlands & Islands Enterprise, said: "HIE believes that our Arts infrastructure should to be as good as we can make it. Part of the process of improving it will be the establishment of centralised on-line and telephone ticketing. This would be good for tourists and locals alike, and we would hope to work with Events Scotland to maximise benefits from any new facility. *Catalyst Arts*, who will do the groundwork, believe that this project would put the Highlands and Islands at the forefront of collaborative ticketing development."

Ros Lamont, Audience Development Manager at the Scottish Arts Council, said:

"Buying tickets for arts events online is an increasingly popular facility across the UK, and the Scottish Arts Council is keen to support Scottish organisations' ambitions to offer this service. We see the Highlands and Islands ticket shop project as a potentially significant new facility for the region, and as an important model for similar initiatives elsewhere in Scotland. We welcome the recruitment of *Catalyst Arts*' expertise and enthusiasm to the project management team."

For more information, contact Marcus Wilson, Audience Development Coordinator, HI~Arts on 01463 717 091, or email marcus@hi-arts.co.uk.