



**Ambitions for the Arts:  
A Five Year Strategic Plan for the Arts  
in Northern Ireland 2013-2018**



ONLY  
VEHICLES  
MAINTENANCE

# Foreword by the Minister

DCAL is committed to harnessing culture, arts and leisure to promote equality and tackle poverty and social exclusion. DCAL and its arm's length bodies have made good progress transforming delivery so that as much public resource as possible is invested in these key priority areas in a way which will bring about lasting and meaningful change to as many people as possible, but in particular to those who are most disadvantaged.

The theme is reflected in this strategy. There is a particular emphasis on making culture, arts and leisure more accessible, promoting and supporting our cultural identity, lifelong learning, and excellence in service delivery. Exciting and innovative programmes and projects are set to come on-stream across the entire field of DCAL's operations. Importantly, a new strategic focus will be brought to our work in promoting equality, tackling poverty and social exclusion which will involve delivery, advocacy, partnership development, knowledge sharing and networking.

In order to successfully deliver our ambitious objectives work will continue behind the scenes to ensure that DCAL further develops partnerships, enhances its processes, and invests in its people.

*Carál Ní Chuilín, Minister of Culture, Arts & Leisure*

## Réamhrá

*Tá RCEF tiomanta do leas a bhaint as cultúr, ealaíona agus fóillíocht le comhionannas a chur chun cinn agus le dul i ngleic le bochtaineacht agus le heisiámh sóisialta. Le bliain anuas, tá dul chun cinn maith déanta ag RCEF agus ag a cuid comhlachtaí ar neamhthuileamaí maidir le soláthar a bhunathrú chun feabhais ionas go n-infheistítear an oiread acmhainne poiblí agus is féidir sna heochair-réimsí tosaíochta sin ar bhealach a bhainfidh amach athrú buan agus lánbhri don oiread daoine agus is féidir, go háirithe dóibh siúd is mó atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste.*

*Leanúint ar aghaidh ar an turas sin an téama a bheidh ann don bhliain atá romhainn. Beidh béim faoi leith ar chultúr, ealaíona agus fóillíocht a dhéanamh níos inrochtana. Ina theannta sin, tabharfar tacaíocht dár bhféiniúlacht chultúrtha, d'fhoghlaim ar feadh an tsaoil agus do shármhaitheas i soláthar seirbhíse agus cuirfear na nithe sin uile chun cinn. Tá cláir agus tionscadail spreagúla agus nuálacha le tosú trasna réimse iomlán oibríochtaí RCEF. Is tábhachtach go dtabharfar fócas úr straitéiseach dár gcuid oibre maidir le comhionannas a chur chun cinn, dul i ngleic le bochtaineacht agus le heisiámh sóisialta agus beidh soláthar, tacaíocht, forbairt chomhpháirtíochta, comhroinnt eolais agus líonrú mar chuid di.*

*Lenár gcuspóirí uaillmhianacha a bhaint amach go rathúil leanfar den obair ar chúl stáitse lena chinntiú go ndéanann RCEF breis forbartha ar chomhpháirtíochtaí, go bhfeabhsaíonn sí a cuid próiseas, agus go n-infheistíonn sí ina cuid daoine.*

*Carál Ní Chuilín, An tAire Cultúir, Ealaíon & Fóillíochta*



# Foreword by the Chair

The development of a strategic plan is an important moment in the life of an organisation. It is an opportunity to pause, to reflect on fundamental purpose, to consider the needs of the times and to set out a view of the future. A strategic plan is at once a statement of direction, a declaration of intent and a renewal of commitment. That is what the Arts Council of Northern Ireland seeks to do with this document - to set out key values and principles on which its activities over the next five years will be based.

We live in very challenging times. The economic crisis casts very long shadows. A daunting responsibility rests on all who receive scarce public funds. That is a responsibility that we fully accept and embrace, confident that investment in the arts can bring many benefits to all who live in this place.

Although the times may change, some truths do not. The arts are a sign of a society's maturity. They are a real source of innovation and creativity. They make a powerful statement about a place. They present a new perspective to those who look in from outside. From the dawn of time, self-expression has been the signature of the human being. The arts offer a channel for this generation to find its voice and to make its mark on the world.

Art is not created in a vacuum. It is created within and with reference to a community. Public investment is not undertaken in a vacuum. It is intended to enhance and to be of benefit to a community - the entire community. From these flow a number of principles that are of crucial importance and that will animate the approach of the Arts Council in the next five years.

The search for excellence is at the centre of every artist's life. It is essential to recognise its value and to support its achievement. Our principle is excellence in all and excellence for all. Helping artists to achieve the fullness of their potential, recognising and celebrating success, supporting the creation of work of a quality that will take its place on the international stage must all be priorities for a body charged by statute with the promotion of the arts.

Everybody has a cultural life. The opportunity to engage in or to enjoy the arts should be available to all because the potential to enjoy the arts and to develop, to whatever degree, a capacity for artistic expression is present in all. Everybody contributes to the public support of the arts and everybody should be able to benefit from

that investment. But we know that there is an underlying inequality in terms of those who do and those who do not engage with the arts. That is why access is of such importance.

Physical location, ease of attendance, the price of a ticket are important but they do not begin to exhaust the real issues involved in the principle of access. The fundamental issue is that the potential that the arts possess should not be enjoyed only by those who have the benefit of material resources, of educational advantage or of family tradition. The real challenge is to open our minds to the possibility of genuinely opening access to all. Much good work is being done but much more can and must be done. People's cultural choices cannot be forced on them or determined for them. The key is that everybody should have an equal opportunity to share in the same range of options, to shape their cultural choices by drawing on the widest range of possibilities. A related principle is that access to excellence is not the preserve of the few; it is the entitlement of all.

Equally, involvement with the arts is not fully achieved by enjoying the work of others. It is an important policy priority that, as far as possible, people be encouraged and facilitated in sharing in the joy and fulfilment of being part of the arts, in uncovering their own potential and talent, in developing that to its fullest and that we recognise that there is no conflict whatever between the search for excellence in the few who are so gifted and the development of potential in the many. This is a priority for all, not just for those who have a particular commitment to bringing the arts to life within local communities.

If we believe, as the Arts Council firmly does, that the arts play a positive role in society, then we must look to securing the greatest possible social benefit from our engagement with them. All public investment is intended to secure a social purpose. It is not a burden on those who receive public funds to be asked to demonstrate the social value it represents and achieves. Less still is it an intrusion into or an infringement of the artistic freedom that is at the heart of genuine creativity. The fundamental truth is that all public investment confers responsibility. An inescapable part of that responsibility is that those who receive public funds do everything possible to ensure that the bounty of those resources are enjoyed by and their benefits brought to those who, for whatever reasons, have not had the opportunity or the occasion to know them before now.



This is not the work of one year or the span of one strategic plan. It is the ceaseless work of a lifetime. But it must begin anew now. Some things achieve much of their objectives by their very presence. Some things call for greater and more sustained effort to see their full flowering. In addressing this painstaking work, we need to guard against too mechanistic a view of what constitutes progress or success. Einstein revealed a deep truth when he said that "not everything that counts can be counted". False dichotomies between activities and outcomes must be avoided. Frequently, perhaps especially in encouraging new engagement with the arts, the activity, the involvement, the exploration, the enjoyment, the enrichment is the outcome.

The arts attract and are sustained by the work of countless numbers across Northern Ireland. It is an area characterised by vibrancy, commitment and diversity. Thousands engage with the arts in a wholly voluntary way - choirs, drama groups, book clubs, churches. Communities are enriched by the involvement of people of all ages in locally-based arts. All these involvements create opportunities, develop awareness, promote interest, grow audiences, reveal talent and make a powerful contribution to this society.

Children and young people are blessed with great imaginative possibility. Their horizons know no boundaries. But, somehow, we contrive to divert the imaginative energy, lower the imaginative horizon. One of the striking features of our times is the change, of remarkable depth and rapidity, taking place through the emergence of digital and social media. Now, perhaps for the first time ever, the potential for creative self-expression is within the reach of almost everyone, especially in the younger generation. This poses a real challenge and offers enormous possibility.

We must reach beyond the phenomenon of the social media to recognise and harness the creative capacity that the new media represent. Whether through the facilities of their local libraries or their own devices, this new generation has the potential to overcome barriers to access and participation that have endured for generations. This is a real opportunity and a real challenge for a body such as the Arts Council and we will, as a priority, seek for imaginative and innovative ways to enable this potential to be realised so that the arts can be brought closer to young people and so that they can more fully realise their own abilities.



Much of what we set out to do will be done in partnership with others. With artists and arts organisations who are central to all that we seek to achieve. With the Minister and the Department, whose objectives and priorities can be considerably advanced by the focus on artists, access, participation and social benefit. With other cultural agencies with whom positive collaboration can yield rich dividends. With the education and health sectors where the arts can be enhanced and profoundly beneficial.

A statement of strategy is never the end of the journey. It is, rather, a new beginning. Built on these foundations will be detailed annual plans with clear indications of measurable progress. We will follow this five-year strategy with a clear statement of the impact of the arts in all realms of society.

The Olympics and Paralympics in London reflected a national and global celebration of elite athletes. We rightly rejoice in human excellence whether on the track, on the playing field or on the stage. There are people of enormous talent, exceptional creativity and remarkable achievement within the arts in Northern Ireland. But there are no elite earners. There are very few who do not support their art by seeking other paid employment. Publicly funded arts are profoundly democratic and egalitarian. They place within the reach of all the best that Northern Ireland can produce and they present Northern Ireland anew to the world. The public money makes possible what could not otherwise be achieved.

That underlines the weight of responsibility that falls upon us in the Arts Council and on all who receive public funds, especially on those who receive significant amounts, to ensure that the full benefits of those moneys are returned. Through this statement of strategy, the Arts Council commits itself to supporting artists and to leading a major effort to bring the arts to the people, to recognise and redress the unequal access that is a universal inheritance, to realise the full potential for individuals and communities to enjoy and engage in the arts and to explore the full range of possibility of the arts in all aspects of life.

*Bob Collins, Chairman of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland*

# Preface

We are living in extraordinary times. Society is changing, as are the issues it faces in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, demography and class. We are also entering a new age of innovation with people choosing how they consume, share, access and create artistic content, offering previously unimagined possibilities to connect.

These are also times of austerity. The uncertainties facing the economy will have long-running and unpredictable consequences. For the arts sector, these conditions affect consumer behaviour, audience spend, corporate sponsorship, as well as limiting access to private finance. Arts organisations continue to adjust their business models, seeking opportunities in new markets but reminding us they provide a very necessary spark of creativity in our lives.

We will champion the creativity and courage of artists and arts organisations, who while they struggle to manage on stretched budgets, often demonstrate a capacity for innovation and resourcefulness. As we face seemingly intractable economic challenges, there is a new reality: one in which we may have to manage with less but be no less ambitious in our thinking.



We do not know how long this crisis will last and how deep it will become. But when it is over, those who will have invested in creativity and innovation will find themselves ahead of the pack.

Ján Figel, EU Commissioner for Education,  
Training, Culture and Multilingualism.

# Something worth remembering – looking back over the last five years

As the outgoing five year strategy *Creative Connections* draws to a close, we reflect over a period in which, despite the world facing one of the deepest recessions of all time, the Arts scaled new heights through a series of major developments and international events. Most importantly during this period the Arts became more relevant and accessible to more people as public funding brought great art within the reach of everyone.



## **The Arts enrich the cultural fabric of our towns and cities**

Thanks to both DCAL and Lottery investment, everyone has access to a dedicated arts facility within a 20 mile radius of where they live. The MAC, Lyric Theatre, Grand Opera House and the Crescent Arts Centre and An Culturann in Belfast, the Playhouse, Culturann Uí Chanain and the Waterside Theatre in Derry, have been key projects enriching the cultural fabric of our major cities.

## **The Arts reach deep into communities touching people's lives**

During the last three years 74% of Arts Council funding (£40.7m.) has gone directly into the most deprived areas. This is a track record of which we are proud. It has brought people together, helped tackle economic, social and racial divides as well as engaging the most marginalised and vulnerable members of our community in arts activity, promoting a sense of health and well-being along with building social capital and skills in our young people.

Over 192 community projects tackling sectarianism and racism have been successfully delivered through our Re-Imaging Communities Programme aimed at placing artists in the heart of neighbourhoods to add value to the work of our other partners in regeneration.

## **The Arts create jobs**

With funding support from DCAL, £45 million has been invested through the Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF) to support a portfolio of creative businesses to bring their local goods and services to international marketplaces, creating jobs and helping rebuild our economy. Stimulating the growth and development of our creative sector will optimize our economic potential and increase our competitiveness.

## **People are getting involved in the arts, thanks to investment**

77% of adults reported attending an arts event in 2013, and this rose to 88% for young people.

30% of adults reported participating in arts event in 2013, representing a 4% increase since 2009.

## **The Arts do us proud abroad and help change the image of Northern Ireland**

Our artists have never been found wanting when they represent us on an international stage, be that at the Smithsonian Folk-life Festival in Washington DC, the Venice Biennale, Beijing Music Festival or at the Irish Theatre Festival in New York. Wherever they go, they stand shoulder to shoulder with the best from other countries.

2012 was a year of which to be particularly proud of our artists and arts organisations as we celebrated the Cultural Olympiad and hosted the MTV European Music awards. In 2013 Derry/Londonderry made history as it became the UK's inaugural City of Culture.

All of this testifies to the power of the arts to broaden and enrich our lives, to look at the world differently, to transform the familiar and to get others to see us differently. Their role in education and learning, their value to the economy; their importance to the health and vitality of communities, how they are changing our image at home and abroad, how they are helping us to celebrate diversity whilst bringing us together - all of this helps create a healthier, more equal and balanced society.

# Looking forward – a new five year plan

## Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to provide a framework for future development, working from a significant evidence base that helps us better understand the needs of artists, the sector and those who attend and participate in the arts and those who, as yet, do not.

Our approach in developing it is to build upon what has already been achieved but also to identify what still needs to be done. In doing so we will work with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that its forthcoming Arts Strategy fits with our own ambitions and aligns with central government's goals outlined in the Programme for Government (2012 to 2015), in particular, to: Create Opportunities, Tackle Disadvantage and Improve Health and Well-being; Protect Our People, the Environment and Create Safer Communities; and Build a Strong and Shared Community. The imperative of tackling the causes of poverty is reflected in the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure's own policy direction. In 2013, the Minister outlined seven strategic priorities aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion and together with the themes agreed by the NI Executive will bring long-standing benefits for communities across Northern Ireland, unlocking the potential of culture and the arts.

The Arts Council is striving to deepen the value of arts to individuals and wider society, target resources to meet social and community challenges, deliver improved access, reach new audiences and enhance community engagement. In doing so, we will work with other members of the DCAL family to maximise the benefits of our rich, collective cultural resources, especially libraries, museums, archives and film. The opportunities presented by UK City of Culture 2013 provide a platform for the arts to contribute to the Legacy Framework, thus ensuring that the benefits of City of Culture do not end with the completion of the year-long programme of events.

Our goal, however, remains constant: to place the work of our artists and arts organisations at the heart of our social, economic and creative life, advocating their worth in a way that connects with audiences, policymakers, investors and the wider society, particularly those suffering from the consequences of poverty and social exclusion.



Our mission is to place the Arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life.

More than any other activity, the Arts have the power to broaden and enrich our lives, to look at the world differently, to transform the familiar, to deepen at every contact.

Recognising the importance of linguistic heritage in Irish and Ulster Scots, the Arts Council supports their role in articulating our diverse arts and cultural life through the range of language arts events and activities.

In our role as the lead agency for the development of the contemporary arts we have created strategies shaping and defining our approach to key areas of work such as: creating international platforms, promoting excellence and making sure the arts are accessible across society. We manage funding programmes that are flexible and

responsive, harness the transformative power of the arts and deliver benefits at local and community level: enhancing social cohesion, strengthening peace and building partnerships.

This five year plan affirms our vision to place the Arts at the heart of society, to champion their cause and express their value in a way that connects with practitioners, audiences, policymakers, investors and wider society.

# Our ambitions

In this section we set out our ambitions over the period 2013-2018

## To make excellent art accessible to all

Individual artists are the cradle of our creativity as a society. Their ability to innovate, to challenge preconceptions, to broaden and enrich our lives, to create work of international acclaim, to transform the familiar, is fundamentally rooted in a search for excellence. As an Arts Council, our role is to invest in artistic excellence and ensure that work of quality is presented to the widest possible audience.

This is allied to a firm conviction that since all subscribe to public investment in the arts, all should benefit. Achievement of such a goal remains both a continuing challenge and ambition for the Arts Council. We want to ensure everyone has access to excellent art, recognising that there are evident inequalities in the extent to which arts are available to all, especially amongst those who feel marginalised, isolated and voiceless as many people do who have not benefitted from the 'peace dividend'.

We also know that we are living in extraordinary times, entering a new age of technological innovation with many people, especially the young, choosing how they consume, share, access and create artistic content, often on the move, and with previously unimagined possibilities. New approaches to creative content generated for digital platforms move us beyond conventional practice and increasingly redefine how we engage with each other in a digital age.

Whilst technology undoubtedly offers the power to connect, access to that potential is not evenly distributed. There are significant numbers of people who are digitally excluded, and their access to artistic consumption, creation and distribution requires a dedicated focus.



### **To support individual artists create work of excellence**

Supporting professional artists and helping them make a difference in society is vital. In providing support to artists, we want to make Northern Ireland a place where they can thrive and achieve the respect their talents deserve. The extraordinary quality and range of work produced by our artists goes beyond what might be expected of a small region with a population of 1.8 million people. Our artists have brought us distinction and we value and celebrate their achievements. Showcasing their work internationally and demonstrating its world-class standing remains a commitment over the life of this plan. We will do this by creating additional platforms for their work to be appreciated beyond these borders and by encouraging their collaboration with others on a global stage. This is equally the case for the work of our outstanding arts organisations whose work merits international exposure.

In pursuing the goal of investing in artistic excellence, we will continue to support artists' career development through our grant and residency programmes, including the Artist Career Enhancement Scheme (ACES) and expand the range of international opportunities for artists to present their work in the emerging global economies. We will encourage the development of new work through our own programmes such as Building Peace Through The Arts - Re-Imaging Communities Programme, the Arts and Older People Programme, as well as business development support through the Creative Industries Innovation Fund. We will also encourage others in the public and private sectors to commission artists' work for schools, hospitals, the public realm and major capital projects.

### **To core fund arts organisations**

Sustaining our commitment to core-fund arts organisations that demonstrate the impact their work is having in engaging new and more diverse audiences, especially those from our most disadvantaged communities, is a priority. A strong arts infrastructure provides the strategic platform to deliver strengthened public and community engagement. The building blocks of that infrastructure comprise: arts organisations of quality, strength and connectedness; resourceful artists of vision, engaging with audiences, learners and citizens.

However, it's not solely about local audiences. The work of our arts organisations deserves to be shared internationally, beyond these immediate shores. Partnering with the British Council through the Cultural Diplomacy Group and with Culture Ireland, we will create further opportunities for international exposure and collaboration, especially amongst the emerging economies.

It will be a priority to protect the health and well-being of key arts organisations, improving their long-term creative and financial future. This will involve supporting them through direct funding but also helping them develop a mix of different sources of income and bring new approaches to their work through partnerships with others and by promoting an entrepreneurial spirit in the sector.

### **To help arts organisations deliver benefits to our community**

As a funder we will seek to increase the impact of public investment in the arts. We recognise the need to have effective funding programmes in place but we also require those who we fund to be innovative and resourceful - to share, to collaborate, to take advantage of economies of scale, to encourage larger organisations to work with smaller ones, to maximise the investment and showcase what they do.

As a sector we need to articulate what has been achieved through public investment in the arts, capturing its value and expressing that through advocacy.

We will work with arts organisations to show how their work reaches all sections of society. We recognise that the major arts organisations are a central plank to the delivery of this strategy. We will continue to invest in them as 'centres of excellence' and will require them to proactively engage with communities beyond their traditional catchment. In practice this means dedicated interventions to enhance community engagement, out-reach programmes and collaborative projects that work beyond conventional arts spaces and activities that reach new audiences in fields such as disability, intercultural diversity, older people, marginalised children and youth.

We will require all funded organisations to place a strong focus on community engagement through new delivery agreements.

We have invested in key projects of significant scale. Facilities such as the Lyric and the MAC now generate major opportunities for artists and practitioners. While we will protect the investment already made, we expect them to utilise the new asset-base for the wider benefit of the citizen, building new audiences for the arts, strengthening the cultural offer and increasing diversity.

### **To build partnerships**

The ambition of placing the arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life can only be achieved through working with a broad range of partners across all sectors, public, private and voluntary.

Based on a broad platform, we will open up horizons through new partnerships, in key areas such as cultural tourism, education and learning, health and wellbeing, inclusion and community building and the economy. It is through such partnerships that we will create a stronger, healthier creative sector and foster opportunities for artists, arts organisations and the communities which they serve.

Apart from current partnership arrangements which help deliver the Re-Imaging Communities Programme, the Creative Industries Innovation Fund, the Arts and Older People Programme, and the Inter-cultural Arts Programme, we have strong practical working relationships with the British Council to forge international connections through culture, and with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to strengthen our cultural tourism product. In the course of this plan, we will develop new partnerships in education and others in health and well-being to anchor further our work in the hardest-to-reach communities. We will bring to fruition programmes in after school arts with our partners in education and the community and with the Public Health Agency.

The Arts Councils of these islands have a long history of co-operation. We reaffirm our commitment to work with the Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon, to share a common strategic commitment to support artists and arts organisations jointly through key projects such as the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, the all-island Chair of Poetry, Children's Laureate and an island-wide touring initiative.

We will also foster strong east/west relations with the other Arts Councils of the UK, delivering benefits in key areas such as Cross Border Touring, exchange of ideas, values and practices.

### **To support skills development**

Working with a range of providers, we will support learning and development for arts organisations and develop leadership programmes to give senior executives the knowledge and skills to respond to an ever-changing environment. Through the interventions of the Arts Council - and our strategic delivery partner Arts & Business Northern Ireland (A&B NI) - we will support arts organisations to deliver their core business activities through tough times.

Recognising the role of non-executive board members of arts organisations, we will help deliver an expanded programme of tailored support using their skills and business networks to enhance training and specialist advice for the arts sector. Business leaders bring distinctive qualities for the benefit of the cultural sector: specialist knowledge, business acumen, energy and a passion for the arts and we will support them in their role on cultural boards as they help prepare cultural leaders for the future.

With the Creative and Cultural Skills Council we will make a long-term contribution to recruitment in the sector, delivering Creative Apprenticeships and encouraging take up of paid internships. We believe in fair access to careers in the creative and cultural industries, especially for our most talented people living in disadvantaged communities. Providing accessible routes into the sector is important if we are to avoid losing a generation of creative talent.

### **To encourage voluntary activities in the arts**

Throughout Northern Ireland there is a very significant level of engagement in voluntary arts: from amateur music groups, choirs and a youth orchestra, to video production; from drama groups to salsa dancing and ballroom; from floral art to craft-making. It is a hive of creative activity through which people participate in local arts and crafts groups in their own communities. The voluntary arts are important to the vitality of local communities. They encourage a culture of life-long learning and provide significant personal benefits.

We will support volunteering in the arts and will raise the profile of volunteering by sponsoring an awards scheme. This will recognise those who choose to put their time, energy, skill and creativity into helping arts and cultural organisations which have established outstanding volunteering programmes.

# The Themes

To achieve our ambitions for the arts we have set out a clear statement of priorities under three strategic themes that reflect the changed context and the need for strong public engagement.

- Champion the Arts
- Promote Access
- Build a Sustainable Sector

## Theme One: Champion the Arts

We encounter the arts in every aspect of our lives. They have the power to transform lives, connect people and are essential to a thriving community. They contribute to creating a sense of place and help fuel social and economic growth. The arts create jobs, promote tourism, foster innovation, nurture community development and help build peace in our fractured society. Through them we can develop skills, build interpersonal ties, change attitudes to learning and foster educational development. These aspects of the arts are worth celebrating; however, there also needs to be sober reflection about the place of publicly funded art and its responsibility to give a clear account of its value to the society that funds it, what is achieved and why it matters.

The Arts Council is a strong, independent and authoritative champion of the arts in Northern Ireland – a source of specialist expertise in and about the arts. By working with the arts sector we can make a compelling case together and advocate the value of arts, through think pieces, articles, newsletters and briefings with political parties.

Using quantitative research, programme evaluation, case study and personal testimony, we will gather strategic insights that can be used and acted upon by us and by others.



### Recognising our Artists

A society that does not sufficiently value its artists is a poorer society. We believe it is timely to introduce an 'acknowledgment system' of awards to recognise the outstanding achievements of our artists and practitioners and have, with our partners in the International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies (IFACCA) undertaken an international survey to ascertain the most appropriate model. During the course of this plan we hope to persuade others of the merits of this cause.

*Target: Scope an 'acknowledgment system' for our most distinguished artists by 2016*

### **The Troubles Archive**

We continue to live in a divided society fractured by multiple fault-lines. Our artists have been observing and responding to our divisions for many decades. This is a rich source of material which should be publicly available.

The Arts Council has been compiling a compendium of artistic activity that took place during thirty plus years of violence in the belief that it allows us to give recognition to the contribution the arts make to our understanding of the legacy of the past. The archive is an important cultural resource containing many key artistic works and one which helps us to understand more clearly the connection between the arts and the events which shaped them.

We will make this digital resource accessible to audiences everywhere through a dedicated online gallery.

*Target: Launch of website 2014*

### **Learning Together**

The arts form part of the rich, collective cultural resource within the wider DCAL family and have the power to connect with the work of libraries, film, museums and the public archive as well as language and sport. Maximising the benefits that accrue from working together will be even more essential in a resource constrained environment.

To that end, we will work with Libraries NI in implementing key initiatives, across Northern Ireland, aimed at encouraging children and young people at risk from poor literacy outcomes to read the books of our best local children's authors outside the school day. We will also work with our partners in DCAL's Learning Forum to support the development of a successor to the schools-based Creative Youth Partnership Programme, a legacy from our former strategy, *Creative Connections*.

*Target: Extend One City One Book initiative to include children and towns across Northern Ireland*

*Target: Develop new dedicated arts programme for disadvantaged children and young people within and beyond the curriculum*

### **A dedicated gallery for Northern Ireland**

Culture and arts are increasingly acknowledged as significant catalysts in urban regeneration with the development of art museums and galleries acting as major economic anchors. They provide a powerful iconic symbol and make inner cities attractive and cultured places for business and tourism, bringing economic benefits. Despite this, Northern Ireland lacks a comparable major gallery dedicated to the visual arts. A new space is needed to show the indigenous collections of Irish and Northern Irish art, held in trust on behalf of our citizens. These collections in public ownership, including the former collection of the Arts Council, represent a rich, unexploited resource deserving of a new dedicated gallery that will establish our credentials as a global centre for the visual arts.

*Target: Undertake an economic appraisal for a Dedicated Gallery for Northern Ireland*

## Theme Two: Promote Access

During the life of this plan we will encourage more people and communities to become engaged and more deeply involved in the arts. Tackling barriers to engagement in the arts and encouraging development and diversification of audiences are key ways in which the Arts Council will demonstrate its commitment to DCAL's expressed vision to target poverty and social exclusion.

We will increase the proportion of arts activities delivered to the top 20% of the most deprived Super Output Areas; increase the proportion of arts activities delivered in rural areas; increase the number of funded projects aimed at older people and deliver more projects relevant to ethnic minorities.

To deliver this ambition we will help funded organisations understand, retain, grow and diversify their audiences.

We will encourage more touring companies to undertake audience development work. We will fund projects that have the potential to build strong connections between communities.

*Target: Identify audience 'cold spots', track trends in attendance from areas of deprivation and expand the 'Test Drive' initiative providing tickets to people living in the most deprived areas.*



### **Building Peace through the Arts**

Community arts are often the conduit through which individuals and groups encounter the arts for the first time. We will support organisations involved in supporting community based arts projects, such as our long-term, expert partner, the Community Arts Partnership and we will continue to learn from best practice in this area.

We will also continue to build on the success of the 'Re-imagining Communities Programme' which has connected artists with local communities imagining a different future for themselves as a result of the 'peace process' through developing new artworks to replace paramilitary murals. For many involved in this process, it is their first experience of participating in a creative arts-led venture and one which engenders considerable local civic pride in its achievement.

The new 'Building Peace Through The Arts - Re-imagining Communities Programme' will continue with the help of new partners and will extend its reach to include the border counties, thus making art accessible to even more people and communities affected by the conflict.

*Target: Support the delivery of 90 new public artworks through the new Building Peace Programme by 2016*

### **Arts & Older People**

We will develop the Arts and Older People Programme 2013-2016, supporting its strategic themes as a means of promoting social inclusion and recognising the barriers which prevent older people from participating in a wide range of activities. We will use the arts as a creative vehicle to explore and highlight social justice issues through artist-led interventions. The themes of the programme are: working with older people to combat feelings of isolation and loneliness; create a more peaceful, fair and inclusive community that does not discriminate on grounds of age and ethnicity; improve the quality of life of older people living in disadvantaged, marginalized and deprived areas; create activities for older people that promote positive mental health and wellbeing and strengthen the voice of older people.

We will develop a programme of exhibitions, performances and showcase events; support artists' networking and training for those working with older people and support professional and social care staff participating in the programme.

*Target: Increase the number of funded projects aimed at older people from 50 to 100 by 2016*

### **Intercultural Arts**

The Intercultural Arts Strategy recognises the changing face of society and its increasing cultural diversity. The strategy sets out how we will foster the expression of cultural pluralism, build dialogue and promote understanding through interchanges within and between communities and their cultures, as well as supporting minority ethnic artists to develop their practices. We will showcase practical approaches to promoting diversity and inclusion in a changing society, through our dedicated funding stream.

*Target: Increase the number of funded projects targeted at ethnic minority artists and groups from 20 to 65 by 2016*

## Disability

People with a disability are much less likely to attend arts events than those without; participation levels are also lower. Given that one in five people in Northern Ireland has some form of disability, we will pioneer interventions to enable more people with a disability to engage in the arts. This will build upon work already undertaken, such as the Disability Charter Mark, which recognises how organisations are changing to ensure that the arts are accessible to everyone. We will require our funded organisations to demonstrate the practical measures they pursue to engage with disabled people as members of the audience or as participants in their work.

*Target: Commencing 2014/15 we will implement the new 5-year Disability Action Plan to enrich the lives of people with disabilities aimed at increasing the number of disabled people engaged in the arts*

## Children and Young People

Evidence shows that the role the arts and creativity play in our educational system is fundamental to a competitive economy and that creativity is integral to achieving success in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). But the arts are also every child's entitlement and we want every young person to have the opportunity to experience them; to fuel their curiosity; to heighten their sense of creative discovery.

We will build on the legacy of Creative Youth Partnerships and develop a new programme, recognising that how young people are engaging with the arts is changing. Over the next five years we will work closely with DCAL in building our engagement with the Department of Education and the Education and Training Inspectorate to offer wide-ranging, adventurous and quality arts-based programmes for both mainstream and special education with a focus on disadvantage.

The Arts Council recognises the vital role that early exposure, both in school and out-of-school, plays in our lives. We will maximise opportunities for early engagement be it through children's festivals, workshop programmes, skills development, commissioning and touring to ensure a rich menu of creative experiences.

Many of our young people are trying to cope with the legacy of the past and the effects of poverty on their lives without adequate support and limited opportunities. Working with the Public Health Agency (PHA) we will develop a pilot initiative, using arts based approaches, to promote mental health and well-being amongst those who are most in need; evaluate its success and implement a full programme.

*Target: Pilot a mental health and well-being initiative by 2014/15 with PHA*

## Apprenticeships

Recognising that many of our young people encounter difficulties entering the workforce, we want to encourage them to see the arts as an attractive career option and, hence, we will also work with the Creative and Cultural Sector Skills Council to develop a creative apprenticeship pilot scheme aimed at young people wishing to fulfil their creative ambitions over the life of this strategy. This will necessitate working in partnership with the Department of Employment and Learning as well as Further Education accredited skills providers.

*Target: Establish a Creative Apprenticeship Pilot in Northern Ireland by 2014/15 targeted at 50 talented young people in areas of disadvantage rising to 100 young people over three years*

## Local Government

Local Government is changing in Northern Ireland with the rationalisation of twenty-six districts and their replacement with eleven, aimed at ensuring a stronger citizen focus, and greater responsiveness to the needs, aspirations and concerns of local communities. A new statutory community planning process with a complementary power of well-being will be introduced.

Local authorities are one of our long standing partners, supporting arts development and provision. However, better networking and partnerships are necessary. Local authority funding for the arts is also being squeezed and there is a need to jointly promote the importance of investment in the arts to society and their value as a creative tool in responding to local needs.

We will look at new ways in which the relationship can be strengthened such as working more closely with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association and through engagement with the new local authorities establish new mechanisms to strengthen partnership working.

*Target: Support the 11 new Council Areas to develop dedicated Arts Strategies*

*Target: Maximise the legacy of the City of Culture*

# Theme Three: Build a Sustainable Sector

Building a sustainable sector in times of austerity is the greatest challenge we face. We take the view that arts and culture is a frontline service, because it shapes everything we do together and our sense of ourselves as a society.

Arts organisations have told us how difficult they believe the next three to five years are going to be. They spoke of structural instability, highlighting a lack of capacity to delivery visionary work of excellence. Many are experiencing shorter project cycles, reduced project activity and job insecurity. Cuts in public funding combined with pressures on box office have resulted in Boards of arts organisations across the arts sector facing some tough choices. We recognise this is likely to be the pattern for the foreseeable future, and, indeed, the Arts Council will also have to make difficult decisions about its resource allocation.

As an Arts Council we know we need to protect our historic investment and the richness and diversity it represents as best we can. In light of the changing funding climate our emphasis will be on promoting greater collaboration between organisations to increase efficiency and innovation and strengthening business models to diversify their income streams.



Working with partners we will

- deliver business development support; strengthen the skills base within the sector through training, coaching and workshops; offer a range of practical supports and help cultural organisations lever sponsorship and funding from Europe.
- provide regular cross-sectoral networking and collaboration events to seize new opportunities presented by the growth of the creative industries.
- strengthen governance.
- improve mechanisms for income-generation and encourage funded organisations to be entrepreneurial and exploit opportunities.
- build capacity in key areas such as audience engagement that utilises digital platforms and web-based technologies as a driver for business.

## **The Creative Industries**

Increasingly artists and arts organisations are endeavouring to turn their 'products and services' into a business offering which will help them to earn a living or re-invest as part of a social enterprise effort in their organisation. Regardless of the particular 'business model' deployed by individual artists and arts organisations, the creative industries are increasingly seen as part of a modern, knowledge-based economy, generating wealth and jobs through the development, production or exploitation of intellectual property.

Working with our partners: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Invest NI, DCAL and NI Screen, we have shown how the Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF) has contributed to the growth of Northern Ireland's cultural capital by supporting creativity and creative talent in business activities. The Fund has driven risk-taking and innovation and helped position the sector for a future economic upturn. An independent evaluation highlighted that CIIF has played a role in building capacity for export and external sales, 'internationalising' the outlook of participant companies - providing training and skills development supporting innovation and promoting business development.

There have been tough years through the recession but the creative industries in Northern Ireland have held their own.

- Gross Value Added for the Creative Industries was £329 million in 2009, equivalent to 1.9% of Northern Ireland's total GVA.
- The estimated number of business units in the Creative Industries sector was 1,375 in 2011. This represented 2% of all business units in Northern Ireland.
- The number of people in creative employment in 2009 was estimated at 21,000; this represented 2.8% of total work force.

*Target: Fund 50 projects each year through the Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF) to 2015*

## **Artform Strategies**

The arts are, of course, not simply instrumental spheres of 'business activity'. They have their own intrinsic worth. During the lifetime of this strategy we will continue the process of commissioning artform reviews to strengthen our understanding of the particular needs of each artform area. Specifically we will complete the Community Arts Review, undertake a Literature review, conduct an audit of the Traditional Music sector and commission the development of strategy for street arts, circus and carnival.

Of course this does not vitiate the need for continued dialogue and investment in the needs of previously reviewed artform areas undertaken during the life of the last 5 year plan.

### **Joint initiative with An Chomhairle Ealaíon**

Our shared interest in building audiences for the arts on this island has led to the development of further joint initiatives aimed at ensuring we can share the best of each other's artistic achievements. Through a new all Ireland joint touring scheme arts organisations across all genres will be able to tour to venues north and south.

*Target: Launch North/South Touring Scheme in 2014*

# An Organisation Ready for the Future

Achieving our mission to place the arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life requires a business model that is aligned to our strategy. This task is given added impetus by the fact that we are undergoing a period of rapid change - striving to do more with less and meeting the new and expanding expectations of artists, arts organisations, stakeholders and our funders in Government. However, we have chosen to view this as a moment of opportunity - a chance to look critically and objectively at what we do.

With the help of the Department of Finance & Personnel's Information, Strategy and Innovation Division, we completed an organisational review with the purpose of renewing our structures and processes making sure that the services we provide are relevant and useful in a fast-changing world and attuned to how the arts today are created, presented and enjoyed.

We also looked closely at how we utilise digital media and marketing to engage more effectively with key audiences. Harnessing the power of social media and building better networks for knowledge exchange, creation and capture - is one of number of changes that are transforming the way we work.

- We will roll out a Digital Engagement Strategy to build vibrant online networks, deliver content to the public and reinforce relationships.
- We will maintain our commitment to improve our performance, ensuring we have the focus, innovation and adaptability to face a changing future.
- We will invest in our people and their learning development, listen to our customers, learn from the client satisfaction survey, develop strong links with our clients, make sure our grant programmes and processes work effectively and create a cultural partnership with our stakeholders.
- We are strengthening our systems, implementing a new ICT strategy and investing in the tools we use to gather information through the RFO Survey.



- We recognise that the relationship with our clients should be clearly structured and easily understood. To help this process we have drawn up a Service Charter which sets out what our clients can expect from us and what we can expect of them.
- We will regularly consult with the arts sector and make sure that our programmes and processes are effective.
- We recognise the importance of continuous improvement and aligning purpose, people, and values: we are focused on effectiveness and continually seek to deliver our service efficiently reporting to DCAL on a regular basis on our savings delivery plan.

In summary, improving our business processes is important to us and we will ensure that we will:

- Become a more client focused organisation
- Develop our structures and processes to achieve our business objectives
- Develop our people in line with our business strategy
- Deliver our values with integrity
- Sustain strong governance and accountability within the Arts Council

# Ambitions for the Arts (2013–2018)

## Theme One: Champion the Arts

Work with partners to promote the value of the arts in helping deliver Programme for Government objectives

Scope an 'acknowledgment system' for our most distinguished artists by 2016

Launch Troubles Archive as digital resource in 2014

Extend One City One Book initiative to focus on children across NI in partnership with Librairies NI

Develop a successor to Creative Youth Partnerships for children and young people living in disadvantaged areas

Undertake an economic appraisal for a Dedicated Gallery for Northern Ireland by 2014/15

## Theme Two: Promote Access

Devise dedicated interventions to increase the proportion of arts activities delivered in the top 20% of most deprived Super Output Areas in Northern Ireland

Fund the delivery of at least 90 new public artworks through the Building Peace Through the Arts - Re-Imaging Communities Programme by 2017

Develop a pilot mental health and well-being programme with the PHA aimed at young people most at risk during 2014/15

Increase the number of funded projects aimed at older people from 50 to 100 by 2016

Increase the number of funded projects aimed at minority ethnic artists and groups from 20 to 65 by 2016

Establish a Creative Apprenticeship Pilot in Northern Ireland by 2014/15 targeted at 50 talented young people in areas of disadvantage rising to 100 young people over three years

Implement the new 5-year Disability Action Plan aimed at increasing the number of disabled people engaged in the arts

Strengthen the long term impact of the City of Culture in partnership with Derry City Council and DCAL

Support the 11 new Local Councils to develop dedicated Arts Strategies

## Theme Three: Build a Sustainable Sector

Grow the drawdown of EU funds by 20% to build the capacity of the arts sector in NI

Increase the number of successful arts funding applications to Trusts and Foundations

Fund 50 projects each year under the Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF) to 2015

Undertake a comprehensive review of the Literature sector in Northern Ireland during 2014/15

Conduct an audit of Traditional Music during 2014/15

Commission a strategy for circus, street art and carnival during 2014/15

Implement recommendations from Community Arts action plan

Deliver a shared touring programme with An Chomhairle Ealaíon

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Page 19: Ross Wilson's 'The Yardmen' Re-imaging sculpture

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