



community arts partnership

connecting creativity and community

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Consultation Response to:

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

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Community Arts Partnership

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Introduction

Community Arts Partnership was formed in 2011 and is the new trading name of New Belfast Community Arts Initiative (New Belfast), after its merger with Community Arts Forum (CAF).

Community Arts Partnership builds upon the strengths of New Belfast and CAF, two major organisations at the forefront of community arts in Northern Ireland. We take the lead in the **promotion, development and delivery of community arts practice**, in the belief that the arts can transform our society at a cultural, social and economic level. We support and collaborate with community groups, centres of learning, artists, arts centres and other organisations in Northern Ireland and beyond.

Our mission is

To take the lead in the promotion, development and delivery of community arts practice, to affect positive change.

Our vision is

To see the emergence of a just, inclusive, peaceful and creative society, where difference is welcomed and participation is valued.

We have a two-fold approach to arts development:

- firstly supporting access and participation by seeking to affect policy through advocacy and leadership and
- secondly, promoting authorship and ownership through the active engagement in projects and programmes.

We offer a platform for policy consultation and development, whilst at the same time, develop new creative opportunities for artists, communities and individuals through:

- Arts workshop programme
- Arts workshop services
- Advocacy
- Information
- Research
- Platforms for networking and sharing experiences
- Professional training
- Other initiatives to promote engagement

While in the past we focused work mainly on the delivery of an arts workshop programme in greater Belfast, we now design and implement projects across the region, and develop partnerships and networks at local, national and international level. Moreover, we provide information, research and professional training services for the whole community arts sector and assume a prominent role in advocating it.

Advocacy

Community Arts Partnership is committed to fulfil a prominent advocacy role in N Ireland for community arts. We promote the profile and the status of the sector, and aim to inform policy and resource allocation decisions within public institutions.

We will advocate for the sector through:

- contact with Government, councils, arts authorities, centres of learning, community groups, arts organisations and artists;
- fora for advocacy, learning and cultural development, including hosting the Minority Ethnic Arts Forum, and co-chairing the Arts Policy Forum;
- information and research about provision and positive impacts of community arts on society;
- attending and hosting events providing opportunities for networking and sharing experiences;
- public talks;
- acting as a central point of contact for the community arts sector

Information services

Community Arts Partnership gathers and disseminates information about / relevant to the community arts/arts sector with a focus on N Ireland. This information includes news, issues, initiatives and opportunities (e.g. funding, training, work, volunteering). The weekly CAW and the monthly CASH: Both have approaching 3,000 subscribers. Last year our web presence has over 250,000 unique visitors, over 5.9 m hits.

Research

Community Arts Partnership will provide and grow a research base for community arts in N Ireland. In collaboration with rural groups, we have a large scale research project, analysing community arts' role across the region. We have a research study looking at community arts interventions among older peoples groups and we are part of two international research projects: one, co-led with Blue Drum and Kaunas Bienal, called City (Re)searches and the other with Demos in Belgium looking at comparative community arts participative models across Europe. Both are Culture Europe funded programmes.

Platforms for networking and sharing experiences

We co-host the NICVA Arts Policy Forum, host the Minority Ethnic Arts Forum and manage the Programme for Intercultural Arts Support for the ACNI.

Partnership Working

We are committed to partnership working across all our services, as we believe in the synergy resulting from this approach. We will value existing partnerships and seek new local, regional and international collaborations in community arts. We have new working relationships with a host of organisations across many different arts and community sectors.

We have an SLA with Belfast City Council as strategic partners in the delivery of the Cultural Framework and are quoted as long term expert partners in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland Ambitions for the Arts consultation document.

Arts workshop programme

Our arts programme addresses Government's priorities and commitments (PfG) as, it promotes personal development and employability, especially of young people (development of life and work skills, including self-confidence and literacy). Community Arts Partnership believes it is a right, not a privilege, to participate in the cultural life of a community and enjoy the arts¹.

Community Arts Partnership develops and delivers a core arts workshop programme consisting of a wide range of inspirational participant-led workshops which are offered to community groups,

¹ Article 27 UN Declaration of Human Rights

and primary, post-primary and special school students in N Ireland, with a focus on those marginalised for a variety of circumstances - social, economic, cultural, personal.

Our arts programme brings together organisations and individuals on projects which:

- are developed and delivered at very high standards;
- are rooted in the local community and are responsive to local needs and interests;
- develop and empower individuals and communities;
- target delivery within disadvantaged communities, contributing to the social, economic and cultural regeneration of our society;
- contribute to social cohesion by providing a platform for cultural dialogue and understanding within and across communities, and addressing social issues, including racism, sectarianism and discrimination;
- promote participation in the arts to individuals and groups of different abilities, traditions, ethnicities, backgrounds, age and sexual orientation;
- expand opportunities to experience the arts by bringing the arts to community / public spaces;
- advance the role of local artists in the community as contributors to personal and community self-esteem and empowerment;
- support artists by providing employment and development opportunities;
- encourage partnership working and collaborations among and between arts, educational, voluntary and statutory organisations and aims to integrate and complement schools and community groups' activities, resources and services;
- have a region-wide dimension.

The programme consists of different main strands which encompass visual, performing and verbal arts, traditional and digital media, and fashion.

All workshops across different programme strands are facilitated by professional artists with expertise in a spectrum of disciplines and a wealth of experience in working with community groups and schools. Artists act as 'catalysts' throughout the projects to enable participants to express their full creative potential.

Our core workshop programme is highly in demand among community organisations and schools, which have prized our innovative and creative approaches to personal and community development, and the professionalism of its facilitators.

We have been able to offer a core workshop programme to community organisations and schools free of charge thanks to the support of public funders. In the past year our programme has engaged over 4,900 participants from at least 54 community organisations and 34 schools in workshop activity and we have assisted another 6,000 individuals and organisations through our information and advocacy services.

Response

The Weather Report

Northern Ireland society still faces a unique set of challenges over and above those experienced elsewhere in these islands. Despite the on-going inertia surrounding a coherent strategy to deal with the retrenchment of sectarian and inter-community tensions by our main political parties, those working on the ground recognise the significant and unique role that the arts have and continue to play. In an environment of contested cultures, supporting, developing and enhancing cultural exploration through the arts will have an increasingly significant role to play. As a census depicts the emergence of new cultural and demographic alignments, with greater levels of ethnographic diversity, so must the main cultural support mechanisms respond to accommodate progressive intercultural ambitions, between old and new communities.

The potential impact of economic austerity continues to loom large over the finances and ambition of the arts. For the most part, The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) has managed a budget that has not been as swingeingly cut as counterparts' budgets in England and Wales. Most organisations across all arts sectors may be dealing with single figure percentage cuts, but against the backdrop of a standstill economy, this continues to represent a real threat to the viability of most and diminishing resources in real terms.

These tough economic times also dictate that audiences' ability to spend is also increasingly under pressure. Whilst a determination by Chancellor Osborne signals that austerity (and therefore the curtailing of public expenditure) will continue until 2018, the knock-on effect in the local block grant will be increasingly felt. Should there be devolution of corporation tax setting powers, there may well be even further pressure put on Assembly budgets. As the smallest budget, spending by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is always seen as the most vulnerable. It is undoubtedly a nervous time for a great many in the arts.

Added to this, Northern Ireland is about to re-embark on the largest formal re-organisation of local government and services for generations. The culmination of RPA will see 11 councils emerge. The challenge for the Arts Council is to maintain and enhance the role of the arts and its local support throughout this process so that other budgetary and social concerns do not sideline and undermine the hard won advances by individuals, arts organisations and centres across the region.

There may be some budgetary clearer skies on other horizons, but they also represent challenges. Peace funding will continue to support Northern Ireland through another process and larger than anticipated ESF and ERDF funding may still be available locally. There is also a new EU Culture Fund shaping up at present. All these represent an opportunity to communities and organisations but also a challenge of administration, context and connections. These areas of funding have only supported a small subsection of art-based organisations in the past and will continue to represent only a finite opportunity in the future.

So, if this weather report points to greater turbulence and a cooler outlook, it is up to the sector and the Arts Council as its lead organisation, to set about making its own weather and creating a climate that sees the obvious needs and potentials nurtured. Beyond a refuge from the storm, we need to challenge with ideals, inspiration and optimism.

Comment:

Overall, Ambitions for the Arts is a very positive document. Much has changed since the previous strategy and Northern Ireland is facing some major changes as a result of the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review and Review of Public Administration.

Aims

To place high-quality arts projects within the grasp of socially excluded groups

'we will develop the experience gleaned from such initiatives as Test Drive the Arts which reached into our most disadvantaged communities by offering free tickets to those who otherwise could not have afforded the cost of attending an event.'

Art Take Part is an excellent initiative that should also be identified. It is a collaboration between community groups and producers and organisations Voluntary Arts Ireland, Culture NI and Community Arts Partnership.

'We will devise a new programme, in conjunction with our health and social care partners, which will offer every new born an Arts Voucher that can be re-deemed for arts experiences, thus giving them the best possible start in life.'

Many that we have spoken to question the benefit of administering an Arts Voucher system for each newborn. The support for our next generation needs to be realised in the underpinning and development of the current infrastructure.

'Our long-term, expert partner involved in supporting community based arts projects is the Community Arts Partnership and we will continue to learn from best practice in this area.'

Community Arts Partnership is dedicated to developing not only the best support mechanisms for community arts to flourish locally but to learn and exchange such practice in international partnerships.

To support individual artists

'we will implement the recommendations arising from the Living & Working Conditions of Artists in Ireland, support artists' career development through the Artist Career Enhancement Scheme (ACES), encourage the commissioning of new work, develop dedicated programmes that place artists at the heart of local, regional and international showcases.'

Feedback from the greater arts sector commends the Arts Council for the emphasis on support for individuals – given the large amounts of freelance artists and facilitators within the sector. CAP receives a large amount of queries annually from individual artists around funding and it would be useful to investigate further the support available for individual artists in Northern Ireland. This would be two-fold around the current funding available and the advice and specialist support available.

Consultees suggest that it would be useful to individual artists if the SIAP was awarded on a rolling basis with micro grants or interest free loans for smaller sums of money. Artists find the application process daunting and the red tape puts many off applying for the amount of money involved. Some find it complicated and the timeframe between the opening and closing dates is often not enough time for artists to accumulate the information. This is quite a bit of work for amateur and emerging artists.

To core fund arts organisations

'We will sustain 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.'

'We will protect the health and well-being of key arts organisations improving their long-term creative and financial future.'

CAP and its consultees, welcomes an understanding to core fund arts organisations. This pronouncement carries with it the recognition that underpinning an infrastructure of well maintained arts organisations is central to any desire to put arts at the heart of a society.

To help arts organisations deliver benefits to our community

'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.'

True collaborative development has to be recognised within such an undertaking. For those working in community arts; correctly reaching out to communities and responding to their needs and challenges and situations takes time, sensitivity and partnership. New mechanisms for community-based collaboration should be investigated at the same time as looking to enhance opportunity through current provision.

The confusion of participation in collaborative partnership and audiences coming from wider community backgrounds needs to be articulated in clear guidance and strategies to advance both.

To support skills development

'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'

Technical skills, in areas of creativity, administration and strategy should be supported too. In areas pertaining to community arts, supporting the artist as an individual practitioner in a range of areas would be beneficial. Looking to pilot new and interesting interventions around support services for artists working in difficult situations or for artists renewing their skills set after years out of college would be a very timely support to the widest interests of the sector.

To encourage voluntary activities in the arts

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

Volunteer Activity is to be commended and indeed many organisations would be unable to operate without the valuable contribution from volunteers, it is therefore a welcome achievement to have a toolkit in order for managers to utilise and improve the process for all involved. It is worth noting that there will be more pressure on benefit recipients to be available for work under the new Universal Credit Scheme (due in Northern Ireland April 2014) Volunteers will in effect have to provide 35 hours of job-seeking activity and this may have an impact on volunteers' hours at arts venues, festivals etc.

Funding and resources

- Groups wanting to run an arts programme often report difficulties accessing funding if they aren't used to making funding applications.
- Council grants are variable and many have been scaled back.
- Better support is needed from Councils as those assessing the grants are not necessarily from arts backgrounds.
- Larger arts centres are great resources for towns and cities however there is a tendency in rural areas for other small collectives, groups and organisations ending up with fewer financial resources.
- Grass roots groups need to enhance this imbalance by facilitating workshops and consultancy and changing the dynamic with the local Council.
- The Rural sector wants to see details on how this is going to happen including bullet points on increasing arts resources with a pledge to continue to support organisations.

A significant issue amongst the sector is the support and funding for emerging groups: there is a perceived lack of pathway for new organisations to get funding and a need for funding progressions with appropriate levels and scales. Consultees have noted that further clarity and feedback around annual funding and multi annual funding schemes should be made available.

Training in skills development throughout the sector in terms of basic governance, for example, finance and running your business needs to be affordable. Consultees have identified gaps in provision and whilst there are numerous fora and funding sessions provided by a range of organisations, it would be worth auditing the resources available and identifying further unmet need.

Financial resources remain as ever the most significant issue for the progression of organisations and how they continue in an already competitive funding situation. The sector is already conscious of how short-term and reactive funding from local and central government. Perhaps it is the right time to do some investigation around the current funding situation and identify ways to assess the effectiveness of arrangements.

The current Small grants programme would benefit from having a micro grant available for expenditure under the £500 lower limit as the system currently prevents some groups from applying.

A resource relating to professional development specialists could be made accessible to arts organisations and identified via the whole sector through the agency of the Arts Council. These specialists could be engaged on a sessional basis free of charge to receiving organisations. A good example was the Rural Community Network rural enablers' programme: feedback showed that the most valued aspect of the service was where experienced officers actually talked through an idea's viability.

There will be a challenge for some organisations on attracting sponsorship especially those in community arts and social engagement that aren't subject to selling tickets. It is increasingly a challenge if you want to champion emerging talent and difficult to get sponsorship and audience.

The figure of £4.50 to every £1 is unattainable.

Any strategy needs to be properly and transparently costed. The benefits of the sector are consistently contested by political leaders around quality, benefit and vibrancy of the arts so these issues need to be reflected in any strategy.

Consultees have also noted that ‘a joined up approach to equip organisations and individuals to survive would help including a good signposting system. Many people aren’t aware of which organisations can provide advice and in what areas. Arts organisations aren’t expecting the Arts Council to advise them on everything but it would be good practice for a uniform approach to signposting to be in place.

Arts officers are invaluable to organisations but they don’t have the resources to help with areas outside their expertise.

Theme 1: Champion the Arts

This area of championing of the arts cannot be over-stated. No other organisation has the reach, the capacity, the access to data, the central role or the relationship with local and the department. Indeed, we would ask that the Arts Council grows its role and relationship beyond one department of government and assists the sector to have better conversations with a range of government departments and local authorities.

Arts Mark

We would contend, as a reflection of the consultations, that such a scheme would not find favour with community arts activists or indeed, many user groups. Using the formal apparatus of the ETI in informal educational and/or community settings, may serve to narrow the practice, creating a two tier system of participation where one is outcome-based and the other is participant governed. Assessment of the informal sector by the formal educational sector is not appropriate. For children, already beset with an overly performance-related assessment system, the need to establish a love of the arts, without fear of failure or assertions of inadequacy, is key to the development of audience and participants in the future.

Other consultees have commented: Arts Mark for schools could potentially drive quality and participation. The capacity of any Arts Mark needs to be robust and the remit needs to look at all ages. These particular aspects of the strategy represent a big ambition. There will be issues with how this links in with The Education and Training Inspectorate, CCS and other affiliated education organisations. This ambition is potentially exciting and going in the right direction.

A dedicated gallery for Northern Ireland

Whilst we understand that there has been a long held conviction that such a space would be of benefit, a priority for the sector should be capital projects that support the greatest possible need and community participation. In 2006, the then New Belfast Community Arts Initiative undertook a comprehensive economic appraisal which sought to develop a dedicated community arts centre in the heart of Belfast’s Cathedral Quarter. The need was well established within that appraisal and at the time, it was felt that capital would be provided for such an undertaking. Since then, The Lyric, The Crescent and the most significantly in this context, the MAC has received huge levels of public capital subvention and indeed significantly enhanced levels of revue funding. We still however do not have a dedicated space for community to access. We have no point of progression for community arts practice, save for some collaboration with certain venues. However, if this was felt to be a “no brainer” in 2006, it should be all the more obvious a potential ambition today, especially given that the current re-examination of the Community Arts Review does point to the significant need for such a supporting space.

Aside from the need to find funds to support community arts progression and the desire to drive up the very realisable ambitions of that sector, the capital requirement of a dedicated gallery for

Northern Ireland would be immense. It is one thing to support the building and equipping of a space but for such a proposition to work, very significant (perhaps prohibitive) levels of investment would be required to purchase art from private collections in order to support a national curation of this kind. Such a budget might in itself and its ambition distort the market for indigenous art work as well. If one then dilutes the localism of such a national gallery with international touring, then the sought-after centrality or uniqueness of such a proposition is mirrored in the provision that already exists across the region.

If there is a determination for such a collection (and it must be noted that from a community arts sector there have been no conversations on this subject) then there are a range of cultural challenges that lie with the development of anything around notions of nationhood. Perhaps, rather than being a shared history or reflection, it might become a newly contested space with very difficult cultural balances difficult to agree. There are proposals from other organisations currently looking at collaborative capital projects that could also perhaps begin a national gallery collection in a range of spaces that could therefore augment the connectivity of our current gallery provision across Northern Ireland, bring into the a multi-centred national gallery our museums and folk history/archaeological spaces as well.

Honours System

CAP believes that the Honours provision is not a priority ambition at present. We would hope that such a proposal would not only look at championing elites but also recognise that there are artists in participatory or community practice that deserve the highest recognition of their craft, determination and achievements . If this were not the case, there would be a widespread resistance to further elevation of personalities perceived as coming from a cultural elite.

There are concerns amongst consultees around the language of exclusion, which could create a stumbling block and risk for less experienced artists.

RPA:

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland as a regional organisation needs to safeguard other regional organisations and in so doing, allow for community-based activity to take place beyond a specific council area. As an example, CAP can continue to work across all council areas not dependent on local funding arrangements. Given that there is deep uncertainty around the next CSR and the Review of Public Administration, it should be seen as an opportunity to be proactive and provide a better engagement with councils.

The challenge for the Arts Council is to lobby for a minimum statutory obligation to support the arts within the RPA. The two memoranda of understanding with Belfast and L'Derry need to be broadened to prevent any further increase in disparity between metropolitan and rural areas.

The Arts Council needs to challenge their narrative i.e. we have had robust data and research that hasn't won the argument for more support. The Arts Council needs to find a new stronger platform on which to represent to national Government i.e. the Northern Ireland Executive, Assembly and Local Councils.

There needs to be a reaffirmation around the role the arts can play in this post conflict situation given recent difficulties and entrenchment within community relations. This is still a society that needs to find better ways to communicate internally and challenge misconceptions. The power of the arts to assist with this is still to be fully realised.

The current UK government has austerity measures in place until 2018. Arts Council England and local authorities in GB are already losing resources. The Republic of Ireland continues to produce and champion culture but perhaps this is an opportunity to learn from their mistakes. The challenge locally is to promote arts practice and community engagement whilst also seeing the highest levels of achievement transmitted internationally.

Consultees further noted: Championing should represent a larger aspect than is currently positioned in the strategy. The Resilience of the sector needs to be coupled with vibrancy; we want to see the Arts Council really celebrate the sector. Organisations are willing and able to feed into this by sharing and showcasing their experiences.

With regard to advocating and promoting the value of the arts, the relationship between Policy makers and arms length bodies provides the fourth dimension of Government advocacy work. It is not simply a case of promoting a good initiative, the sector does more beyond this in terms of health, community relations and equality so it will be important when the implementation of the Cohesion Sharing and Integration programme is made, that the sector has a significant role.

Theme 2: Promote access

Tackling barriers

As a representative organisation of the community arts sector, we would encourage a more segmented approach to the separate areas of participation and audience development.

Participation, among all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and in all circumstances, is the key driver to creating artists of the future and a society that appreciates, attends, embraces and consumes art and creativity.

The challenge for this society is to examine and support ways of driving that participation, in communities that have shown a reluctance to see themselves as culturally active beyond the political and take ownership of cultural activity beyond a certain ambition or have had their ambition challenged through physical or intellectual obstacles related to sexuality, gender, ability, ethnography or other life choices.

Rural issues could be tied in with a community arts strategy, putting arts in the grasp of people, with potential solutions on how this could be made more tangible and detailing what the demands are. The objective of arts centres within 20 miles reach of the population is not necessarily the whole issue. For rural communities TSN and MDM's actually reflect difficulties of developing any arts projects in a rural setting. The memo of understanding for L'Derry and Belfast should be rolled out in all the new council areas post RPA. When the Arts Council invests in regional projects they are more likely to be situated within metropolitan areas. Distance, time and therefore cost should be factored into potential audience attendance for rural communities when looking at capital developments and locations.

Target: Work with Audiences NI to develop a framework to map arts attendance and identify audience 'cold spots'

It must be remembered that Northern Ireland has one of the lowest on-line penetrations in UK. Our rural communities, our elderly and our economically disadvantaged do not have the level of access required to make such an online reading of audience without assumptions. Perhaps a range of new initiatives, locally based, might be consulted upon to increase opportunities to access theatre and performance.

Arts and Education

Please see our earlier comment on the voucher scheme.

We feel that limiting the engagement in the development of such a programme for schools to only policy-makers, authorities and inspectors leaves no room for the creativity sought. Artists and practitioners from a range of disciplines must be allowed to contribute to any development of alternative creative educations.

Audiences

The theme of audiences would perhaps be more appropriately positioned in a separate section as this may add more weight to promoting access to arts. Initiatives like test drive the arts are commendable but it would be interesting to see statistics on whether people return to events. Organisations have to pay for that free ticket so it would be useful for them to see if there is likely to be returning audience. Ticket prices affect participation and the economic climate means that arts spend is discretionary over household expenditure. Families are participating in more free activities due to costs.

Promoting access is complex and providing quantitative and qualitative data can not always fully reflect the logistics involved, particularly in socially engaged art. The question remains how do organisations tease this out without having to provide additional evaluation. There is already a heavy burden for organisations to complete numerous reporting mechanisms and the necessity to examine access issues could lead to more evaluation - can it be more streamlined? It would however be useful to take cognisance of other strategies delivering social change. A Concordia to reduce bureaucracy and a preliminary scoping system may help. Organisations are finding a drop in attendance since recession and people don't tend to reserve seats. One rural arts centre reported that they are getting more last minute ticket sales as audience only know that day if they can afford to attend. Young people will be less likely to access the arts if they were not exposed to activities as children.

Increased funded projects

With regard to the Equality Impact Assessment, this is the most important theme within the Strategy. We are pleased that the strategy has committed to older people, people with disabilities, children and young people, ethnic minorities, rural areas and deprived areas. To ensure that the arts continue to be accessible and inclusive, it is necessary to reach out to those who would not normally engage with the arts. Ensuring diversity and equality is also vital for organisations who are simultaneously striving for the highest quality experience that their audience or participant engages in. Many arts organisations create a social benefit, including working directly with communities and working with participants from Section 75 Groups. Practical participation: needs to be more explicit – it's there but not articulated in targets very well.

Voluntary Arts

Target: Encourage 22% of funded arts organisations to adopt the Arts & Volunteering Toolkit by 2018

There was a shared confusion as to how this percentage should be a target. There are aspects of the Arts and Volunteering Toolkit that are very relevant for a great deal of organisations but there should be no demand for a minimum level of adoption.

Apprentice Scheme

Community Arts Partnership would welcome the development of creative apprenticeships. Many in our ranks can remember such provisions as the Making Belfast Work programmes and Action on Community Employment (ACE) in the early nineties that produced excellent opportunities for recruitment and development of talented young people. Again, a range of consultees should be permitted to support and inform this area of development.

Consultees commented: The apprentice scheme is to be commended but there are unanswered questions on how this will impact organisations. Presumably DEL (or the restructured agency that delivers the services of DEL) will be responsible for overseeing the infrastructure and funding levels of the scheme. Questions remain around how this will work, so it would be useful to see where other Government Departments will link in e.g. Institutes of Further Education. Where existing programmes in the UK feed in, specifically to the Arts Council idea of piloting apprenticeship schemes should be identified. There are local examples of organisations e.g. Armstrong Learning working with 25-50 year olds, GAP with DEL and other providers of skills development and arts.

Consultees commented: Apprenticeship schemes can be too formulaic and that this is a danger – some thought could be given to growing out of existing youth programmes in particular the animation industry. This may help plug the creative youth partnership gap.

Local Government

In listening to consultees, it is clear that memos of understanding only relating to our two main urban areas is not far reaching enough to underpin the raft of potential changes and inconsistencies across Councils, whether old or emerging. To this end, we would rather that a range of new determinations were arrived at:

- A statutory obligation for arts support and funding is lobbied for across all new council areas
- That an arts development plan is undertaken for each new and or emerging council area
- That a new, more widely supported forum is established between organisations, councils and the Arts Council to consolidate arts provision at local level
- That the responsibility for the funding and deployment of community arts does not migrate wholly to local councils but that there remains in place a means for regional operations to complement local resources and groupings.
- That new funding programmes, co-sponsored by ACNI, can be rolled out to an accessible and uniform standard of application, in order to offer equality of opportunity to communities to access the arts, negating perceptions of a “postcode lottery”.

All sectors, not least the arts sector will be undergoing transformation and change in April 2015 when the new 11 Council model is implemented. Whilst this process is a huge undertaking for all, this will also be an opportunity for the Arts Council and the wider arts sector to prototype a new arts campaign process, during the shadow council period. To promote a robust arrangement by 2015, the Arts Council must ensure that adequate representation of arts and cultural positions is represented.

Theme 3: Create a resilient sector

Target: Deliver 10 programmes to address ‘cold spots’ in audience attendance in Northern Ireland by 2018

Target: Grow the drawdown in EU funds by 20% by 2018

These two targets do not in themselves affect resilience. In fact, many consultees would agree that a once resilient sector can only endure difficulties for so long. One cannot create resilience. It is a state of mind that can endure hardship and struggle. Many will see that over the last five years, resourcing has been at standstill, thus in real terms, diminishing. Easing that scenario demands adequate levels of funding to be achieved, risks to be taken and injecting new impetus and support by allowing areas of demand to grow and flourish. Equipping the sector with skills has been supported very adequately over the last strategy. Organisations have indeed professionalised. There is now an opportunity for those organisations to be updated. Equipment budgets, to make organisations capable of responding to the new technological abilities of the most up to date sectors, would enable more efficient working. If the sector is to creatively and managerially respond to technological advances, a whole new investment is required.

The general ecology of the arts needs to be supported. Highlighting only 10 cold spots, vis a vis audiences, reduces a general need to support participation and audience development. There should be no exclusive, geographically targeted programmes for audiences only. Budgets to support the widest participation should be based on social need not attendance.

Consultees commented: Any revised RPA model needs data of where the money is being spent and if particular communities are benefiting e.g. rural dwellers. There is no statement of why rural activities are different i.e. No recognition that distance is an issue and therefore an obstacle. Twenty miles is a significant distance to the nearest arts event.

There is a need for the Arts Council to advocate as a watchdog for how the RPA is rolled out. Some Councils deliver better Community Development support and resources so there is a disparity and a need for consistent understanding. Cold spots are not just a rural issue and can be found in urban areas too.

Increase the successful applications to trusts and foundations and grow sponsorship

For organisations working with client groups at the margins the ability to attract sponsorship and raise revenue is severely curtailed. Insisting on any minimum funding leverage target will only exclude the majority of community arts projects and therefore the great majority of socio and economically disadvantaged in Northern Ireland.

Clearer pathways to developmental funds should be identified and resourced so that new and emerging talent and organisations can be assisted early in their careers.

EU Funding

EU Funding: whilst it is commendable to be looking for EU funding, replacing treasury funding with project funds is only a short-term solution. Only a few organisations with adequate capacity will be able not only to make application but to subsequently administrate complex EU funding arrangements. However there are still opportunities that should be supported by Arts Council.

Consultees further commented: European funding is complicated and difficult and organisations are put off by bureaucracy and don't attempt to access it in many cases.

Creative industries

The Creative Industries represent a potentially highly profitable and internationally recognised area of expansion for the arts in Northern Ireland. The highly technical and entrepreneurial demands of working in this sub-sector does require proactive support however it must be recognised that the creative industries recruits from many arts and community based organisations and from a host of other professions. Greater risk taking, innovation and collaboration could be supported through CIIF funding interventions.

It would be useful to have more resources in social entrepreneurship schemes as many government funded schemes are more tailored to social enterprises. Provision to arts organisations and venues would be well utilised.

More clarity is needed around the CIIF application process. Some aspects of Creative Industries support have already been agreed and CIIF is featured elsewhere in strategies. Digital media is not specifically mentioned in this strategy (while it was in the previous strategy). Community filmmaking and the moving image remains a significant medium.

Community Arts Review

Target: Implement recommendations from review and strategy

Further recognition of the intrinsic worth of original creative activity taking place locally or across communities of interest should be supported. Where the single art form organisations are seen as providing intrinsic worth, the language has reverted here to only the secondary aspect of applied community arts activity. Community arts facilitate creative solutions that can be arrived at collectively or impact collectively. Community-based professional arts interventions can deliver a range of collaborative outcomes that can underpin the suggested strategies where organisations

struggle to widen their audiences and their participation. New models of collaboration should be developed and responsibility to consult community arts professionals should be promoted where single art form organisations are embarking on 'outreach' programmes. However a rising tide lifts all boats.

An Organisation Ready for the Future

The strategy notes that with the assistance of DFP that the Arts Council completed an organisational review. Later in the document the Arts Council talks of listening to customers, learning from client satisfaction surveys and seeking to create a culture [sic] partnership with stakeholders.

It is noted that no organisation was consulted on the redeployment of assistant arts development officers and that relationships, developed over many years and through many funding processes have therefore been changed. The sector would welcome greater engagement especially in areas that directly affect their ongoing relationship with the Arts Council. The ambitions that the Arts Council holds for its own organisation should also be an ambition that ACNI holds for its stakeholder organisations as well. Strengthening organisations by investing in the tools they use to gather information, supporting ICT, investing in learning development, helping to develop vibrant online networks should be shared across the sector not just within the Arts Council.

Strengthening the sector's ability to provide excellent data and affective services will assist the Arts Council in its role as lead agency.

We commend the Arts Council's insistence on greater levels of communication with the sector and look forward to exploring new structures and processes that can deliver better outcomes with stronger accountability that reflects the values of the arts sector.