



Audiences NI Response to the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2020

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### **Introduction to Audiences NI (ANI)**

ANI is a registered charity that works with cultural organisations to strengthen their understanding of the audience for their work. We receive funding from ACNI and have an SLA in place with Belfast City Council. We also work across a number of the new super councils including Newry, Mourne & Down, Mid-Ulster and Ards & North Down. As part of our aim to increase sustainability we work across all areas of culture including heritage sector with NI Museums Council.

ANI provides detail on who cultural organisations are currently reaching, and who they are missing out on. Then we turn those facts into actions, providing insights and actions on how to keep current audience members and reach new ones. We provide information on harder to reach groups and ideas on how cultural participation can be increased.

ANI has 12 years' experience in building contacts and networks across cultural organisations and audiences. As the only audience development agency working in the cultural sector across Northern Ireland, we are keen to support the new Department of Communities in developing the cultural sector and demonstrating its impact across life in NI.

### **Overall approach**

ANI welcomes the government's ambition to develop a new Programme for Government focusing on outcomes and impact rather than outputs. In addition the recognition that both the 14 outcomes and the 42 indicators have an inter-dependency is also a very positive assertion. The cultural sector has often felt that the different government departments, operating in silos, has been a barrier to maximising and demonstrating the impact of the sector.

ANI also recognises that the Executive want to engage with partners across the various sector to put the final plans into place to achieve the outcomes. ANI would ask that the partners chosen reflect as broad a range as practically possible. In order to make a fresh start a reality, the Executive must be open to new and different thinking as well as those the Executive has previously worked with.

ANI recognises that collaboration is vital for future success and we are part of a consortium of arts development organisations including Arts & Business, Theatre NI, Dance Resource Base and Voluntary Arts Ireland. One of the topics this consortium is working on is impact and we are part of Inspiring Impact initiative. It is vital that the culture sector understands what is meant by impact and

sees this new outcome focused approach as an opportunity rather than another information collection burden that creates work but does not support the development of the sector in the long term.

## **Outcomes**

The reference to arts and culture across 5 of the outcomes, appears to reflect the recognition that arts and culture contributes to a number of areas of life across NI which must be welcomed.

It is also worth noting that when actions are being developed to achieve the other outcomes in the framework, that the arts and culture sector can, and already does, play a role in a number of these areas e.g. reconciliation and creation of shared space, working with young offenders within and without the prison system, facilitating survivors of abuse to talk about their experiences and looking at how mental health issues can be explored, treated and even prevented in society. There are many examples of this but there is a fear that fragmentation of what the arts and culture sector does will continue with this new Programme for Government and opportunities to do things better will be lost.

DCAL prior to the election, launched their consultation document on A Strategy for Culture & Arts. It is important that the 1700 + responses to this document are not ignored and that in the working through of a draft strategy the issues and solutions offered in the consultation are used to develop the outcomes where culture is mentioned.

An overarching strategy for arts and culture will also help to fully communicating the impact of the arts and cultural work in NI on life in NI.

## **Specific outcomes**

The arts and/or cultural sector is referenced in outcomes 5, 9, 10, 12 and 14.

In 5<sup>th</sup> outcome: *We are an innovative, creative society where people can fulfil their potential*, the language used to describe it could be seen as alienating to the arts sector and showing a lack of recognition of the value of arts for art's sake.

The terms innovation and R&D are often seen as relating to the tech industry only. ANI feels that these words need to become the language within the cultural sector too but the Executive will need to appreciate that innovation does not just mean new digital products but also means new ways of doing things. In order to attract and develop audiences the arts and culture sector has been innovating for years. The vibrant NI Creative Industries with worldwide successes such as Game of Thrones, directly links back to innovators like Mary O'Malley in 1951 who started the Lyric Theatre in her front room. Organisations like the Lyric and our independent theatre sector are providing the pipeline for the actors, writers and technicians who make Game of Thrones work in NI. The Executive needs to ensure these links are not lost and that type of innovation is supported.

In outcome 9 *We are a shared society that reflects diversity*, there is again a reference to arts and cultural organisations. This is an areas where the arts and cultural sector has made huge impact. This type of work requires times and resources. Building relationships within communities and between communities and artists needs to happen carefully and over time. Current funding mechanism do not take account of this need for time and space. The pressure to deliver outputs has

often been more important to funders than the quality and impact of the interaction. It is hoped that in the new PfG, the Executive will recognise the need to support longer cycles of funding and funding that allows arts and cultural organisations to trial approaches and develop key learnings without being seen as a failure. ANI has evaluated a number of projects working with specific communities and in each case participants say they would have liked a bit more time to really establish relationships between them and the artists.

Outcome 10: *We are a confident, welcoming and outward looking society, the Executive contribution is increasing our economic, social and cultural links with the wider world*, sums up real ambition from the Executive. However this aspiration can only be achieved if NI has a vibrant cultural ecosystem to connect with. Current structures, including but not limited to funding levels, are seeing a reduction and dilution of the arts and cultural sector. Many of our most creative and talented people have to move away to get work that pays a decent wage. This does not help create a good foundation for arts and cultural activity and will make us poor international partners.

In outcome 12: *We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest*, the recognition of arts and culture as contributing to quality of life is stated. However again this requires a joined up approach among all Executive Departments and with local government if this to truly become a reality. The aim to increase quality of life by supporting culture, arts and facilities for recreation is welcomed but again what this means should be co-designed with partners in the sector and underpinned by a strategy that looks at the resources and structures needed to make this work – not just capital developments but how to make facilities and spaces really impact on the lives of those that use them.

It is positive to see a specific outcome referencing children and young people – *We give our children and young people the best start in life*. The Executive want to support opportunities for play, recreation and creativity. However many of the cultural organisations ANI works with are struggling to work with the education sector as the budget cuts they have experienced has often meant that art and creativity are the first areas to be cut. Teachers and educators are under so much pressure to deliver results that time for developing creativity is being squeezed. This area needs work between the education and cultural sectors and support from the Executive to develop approaches that can give our young people the opportunities and skills development they need.

### **Indicators**

For the above outcomes the Executive have chosen *An increase in cultural participation* as one of the indicators.

This is a very broad measure and will only see changes over a long period of time. As with the outcomes, the indicators do not sit in isolation so it is important that one indicator is not used as the sole measure of the success of the arts and cultural sector.

There is also a danger that an indicator around cultural participation ignores the matter of quality. It is not good enough to say that children should experience theatre for example while at school. It is important that quality theatre is experienced if it is to have the impact of increasing knowledge,

confidence or self-esteem. Too often in the recent past the output approach has been the enemy of quality and in the long –term quality at all levels is what Government should aspire to deliver.

The new PfG also provides an opportunity to work with partners across the sector to count what needs to be counted and to look at how impact can be used to change the approach taken to creation of work and projects, the way in which projects are funded and the ultimate value of what the arts and culture sector creates.

The sector had feedback that the collection and collation of data is time consuming and often appears to have limited use. A session with partners including funders to look at what baseline data is needed and how it can be captured and used effectively would be something to consider in this process.

### **Conclusion**

ANI believes in the value of the arts to transform lives and we want to help facilitate a vibrant cultural ecosystem that contributes to well-being and creativity across NI. A coherent and co-designed strategy for the arts and cultural sector as part of the new Programme for Government will help achieve this and it is hoped that this framework will support this development in the near future.