

# The Arts

*inspiring the imagination, building the future*

The arts matter because they  
enrich all our lives,  
inspire imagination,  
power creativity and self fulfilment

The arts  
build confidence  
and inspire hope  
in communities

The arts  
lie at the heart  
of  
endeavours to create  
a new Northern Ireland and are sources of  
renewal and growth

Our plan  
provides the framework  
within which we will  
place the arts at the centre  
of the region's economic, social and cultural life

# onePreface

Eighteen months ago, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland took the opportunity provided by its statutory review of its outgoing five-year plan to begin a process of independent fundamental appraisal of its priorities, objectives, mission, systems and the context in which all these occur.

Extensive and unprecedented consultations accompanied that process of review. Public meetings around the region, small-scale group discussions with various sectors in and around the arts, one-to-one interviews with individuals and organisations and, for the first time, confidential submissions sought through a dedicated website, contributed to a rapid and clear set of results. Prof Anthony Everitt's and Annabel Jackson's report, *Opening Up The Arts*, published in May last year, evaluated the achievements of the Council in its five years from 1995. Crucially, this evolved into the beginnings of a thorough, future-orientated assessment of the needs of the arts sector in Northern Ireland and the role of the Arts Council itself in meeting those needs.



The subsequent intense deliberations of the new 15-member Arts Council, which had come into being in March 2000, built upon the perceptions of the outgoing Council and upon *Opening Up The Arts*, which had been commissioned by it, to fashion over a six month period a set of core principles by conviction, debate, argument and consensus. In August 2000, Phyllida Shaw undertook further public and sectoral consultation and presented to Council and on the website the first draft of an arts strategy for the Arts Council which was already shaping up as an arts strategy for Northern Ireland. Further intensive consultation took place at venues around Northern Ireland under the auspices of Joe McVey of Blueprint Consulting. His final report has fed into the much revised and much considered plan prepared by the Council's Director of Strategic Development, Nick Livingston, under the direction of Chief Executive, Roisin McDonough, which I now have the great pleasure of laying before the arts and cultural sectors, the government and the public.

Taking its cue from the requirements of our contemporary and transforming arts environment, and from the various democratic emphases outlined in the Agreement, the Programme for Government and the strategy of the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure, this document defines the parameters of a vision for both the arts and our society. The descriptions and ambitions it contains are not hyperbole or empty rhetoric. We mean what we say. Our one-year operational plan and our three-year corporate plan will set out expected outputs

and targets. The Arts Council has sought views, has listened to opinions, and, importantly, has believed what artists, arts organisations and those with an investment and interest in the arts have said about what the arts are, who they are for and where they take place. The arts are not diluted by the numbers of people who participate in them, who make them happen. On the contrary, the arts in all their forms are an inexhaustible resource the benefits of which reach into the workplace, the home, the street, the school and every place where people gather.

With the publication of this plan, the Arts Council is embarking on a journey of innovation, consolidation, inspiration and development. I believe the dialogue between the Council and the arts sector over the last 18 months has deepened into real partnership. The evidence for that belief is to be found in these pages.

It is the task of all of us, with the interests of our artistic, creative, unexpectedly-enriching communities at heart, to widen that partnership. It must include all of the people whose lives and experiences the arts uniquely celebrate and whose imaginations we, as a new society, can help nurture and make flourish.

I commend this plan to you all.

**BRIAN WALKER**  
*Chairman, July 2001*

# *two*The vision

The arts matter because they enrich all our lives. The arts also matter because they provide a more cohesive and inclusive view of society, deepen understanding of our purpose and are sources of renewal and growth. Everyone deserves the opportunity to develop their own creative talents and to benefit from those of others.

- where artists can thrive and win the respect that their talents deserve, both at home and abroad;
- where theatres, arts centres and art galleries flourish and become a natural focus for everyone.



The Arts Council believes that the arts lie at the heart of endeavours to create a new Northern Ireland, by

- generating employment opportunities;
- improving the quality of life for all citizens;
- supporting children and young people to realise their creative potential;
- contributing to the health and well being of the wider community;
- promoting tolerance and respect in the context of cultural pluralism.

Supporting the arts and helping them to make a difference to society is the Arts Council's core purpose. We are working to make arts happen and to place the arts at the heart of the region's cultural, social, economic and creative life.

We want to make Northern Ireland a place

- where the arts give everyone a chance to express their own creativity and reach across community divisions;



The mission of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland is:

**The arts:  
inspiring the  
imagination,  
building the future**

# *three*What we do

The Arts Council has been a catalyst for the development of the arts, arts organisations and facilities offering advice and counsel for more than 50 years. However, recent years have seen massive expansion and change. Developments in media and new technologies are bringing about cultural transformation. How art is produced, presented and consumed is itself changing. In this connection, conventional notions of quality and excellence are being re-interpreted.

We provide valuable information services to the arts community and play an important part in encouraging support for the arts from others: district councils, the education sector, economic development agencies, private sponsors and charitable trusts. We commission and disseminate research, demonstrating the importance of evidence not only for policy creation but also for advocacy. We communicate the benefits that the arts bring to wider society.

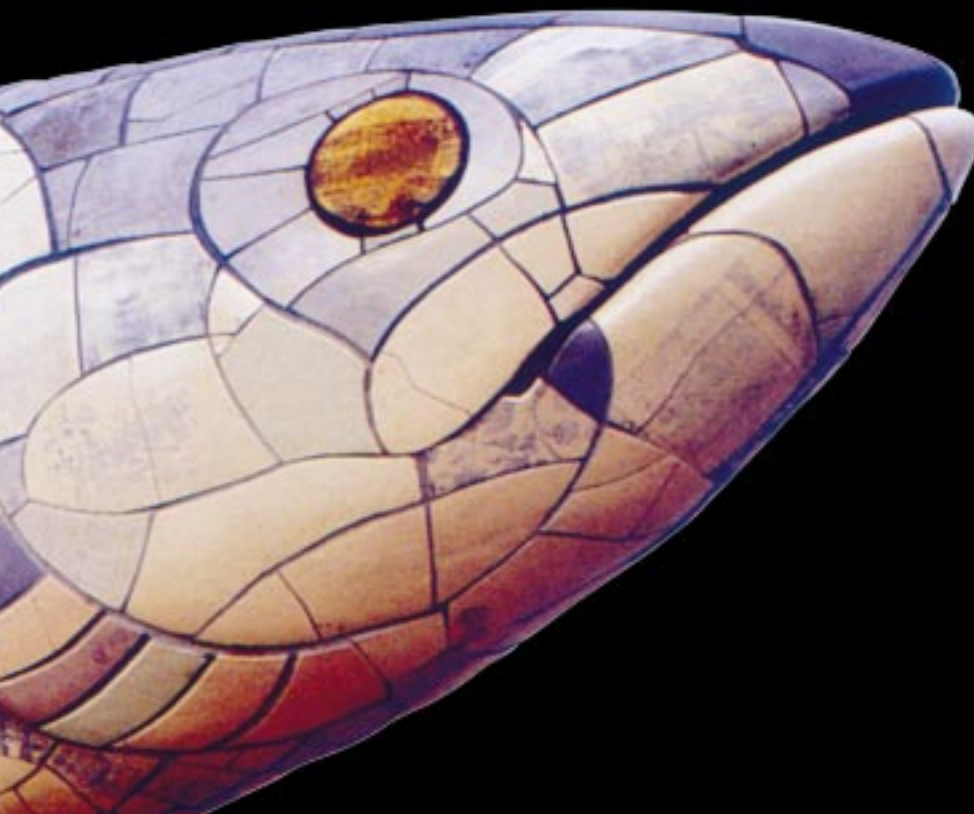


The Arts Council is also responsible for funding and developing contemporary arts in Northern Ireland, being the principal channel for government funding through its revenue and Lottery funds.

We support arts and arts activities wherever they may occur, be they in traditional venues and spaces such as galleries, theatres, studios and arts centres, as well as in youth clubs, community halls, hospitals, schools and workplaces. We make the arts accessible to different audiences in different contexts.

We also provide awards, bursaries, fellowships, travel and research grants to visual artists, craftspeople, writers, musicians, playwrights, dancers and arts administrators, amongst others.

Conscious of the growing international significance and impact of the arts, we work with other partners to promote abroad the work of artists from Northern Ireland.



main picture : The Big Fish (public sculpture by John Kindness)

top right : Midnight Dance (animation from the Nerve Centre)

# *four*Five year arts plan

This plan sets out a clear statement of the Arts Council's priorities and objectives from 2001 to 2006. It enables us to take a longer view of what changes are most needed and how they can be achieved. It is evidence-based and has been assembled from an assessment of need. It is focused on impacts and forecasts the high-level changes (outcomes) we seek to make. It is informed by a vision that aims to place the arts as central and accessible to everyone. It is also underpinned by explicit values that have been developed in consultation with key stakeholders and staff.

At the next stage of the planning process, we will set out targets and performance measures in greater detail over a three-year period. A Corporate Plan (three years) provides the basis for linking strategic priorities to measurable outputs, and outputs to financial requirements. An Operational Plan (one year) is produced annually, proposing levels of service to be achieved. At each level, the planning process will demonstrate how, through a series of incremental advances, we will achieve our strategic intention.



## 2001~2006



top right : Titanic Town (a still from the film)

top centre : Performance by Julie McGowan

centre : Main Auditorium, Waterfront Hall

arts council tel 02890365200

# five The imperative for change

## A The Agreement

The Agreement of April 1998 established the new context in which we all operate. Of particular note has been the formation of 11 locally accountable departments and ministries. The Arts Council welcomes this development and the specific advent of a Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to which we are accountable.

## B Programme for Government

In February 2001, the Programme for Government (PFG) outlined a range of proposed strategic aims and priorities as well as early actions designed "to improve and modernise our society". Three main themes (cohesion, inclusion and justice) underpin the implementation of all policies and programmes. Emphasis is placed upon working together across departments and agencies in an integrated and cross-cutting manner.

The Programme for Government signals a positive commitment to the role of creativity in achieving its purpose. The Arts Council and our clients can make an important contribution in assisting the realisation of an "inclusive, prosperous, stable and fairer society firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust".

## C Integrating the Arts

The creation of an integrated cultural planning framework which engages all the relevant actors in partnership will develop greater strategic focus and coherence. It will also foster a climate in which regional priorities can be determined centrally whilst drawing on local experience and locally determined priorities.



The Arts Council will

- work to mainstream the arts by engaging with other bodies and agencies charged with delivery of the key strategic themes of the Programme for Government;
- meet community needs by participating in the co-ordination of cultural planning at local level;
- work with social partners to implement measurable plans to meet local needs.

## D Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL)

DCAL's *Corporate Strategy 2001-2004* specifies the contribution that it will make to the realisation of core objectives outlined in the PFG through a number of actions. Importantly, from our perspective, many of these touch directly on the arts and we recognise how important it is to align our plan with those of both the Northern Ireland Executive and DCAL.



main picture : Night and Day (a sculpture by Carolyn Mulholland)

Of particular importance is DCAL's *Unlocking Creativity*, which highlights the way creativity can develop our capacity for original ideas and action. A core purpose of the document is to demonstrate how creativity can be harnessed and developed in a visionary and strategic manner for the benefit of society as a whole.

Tackling barriers to participation in the arts and encouraging audience development are further ways the Arts Council can demonstrate its commitment to DCAL's social and cultural objectives.

#### **E Social Policy and Legislative Framework**

The Executive's New Targeting Social Need policy commits to "tackling community differentials in unemployment and the significant levels of deprivation, long term unemployment and benefit dependency". Through *New TSN*, it pledges to redirect resources and efforts towards people, groups and areas in greatest need. The Arts Council submitted a *New TSN Action Plan 2001-2004* to DCAL and this was approved. The policy will be reviewed annually.

#### **F Equality and Human Rights**

The Executive has recognised that the protection of human rights and the promotion of equality are important cornerstones of the new society it is trying to build. They are also central to improving community relations and building community capacity in areas of greatest need. The Arts Council submitted a draft Equality Scheme to the Equality Commission for consideration. This scheme, approved in June 2001, shows how we intend to meet our obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, with respect to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations. As with our obligations under *New TSN*, we will make every effort to embed the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations in all of our policies and programmes. This will have implications for staff training and this plan takes account of those requirements.

#### **G Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

We recognise the unique contribution that the arts make to the development of a more tolerant and inclusive society. Arts activity both expresses and confronts the diversity of contemporary society and thus offers the possibility of cultural articulation, affirmation, challenge and celebration. The Arts Council will foster the expression of cultural pluralism, and hence build dialogue and mutual understanding, through interchanges within and between communities and their cultures.



The potential of the arts to promote tolerance, contribute to citizenship and embed peace is limited only by our imagination.

Conflict between the two major communities has tended to inhibit the flourishing of a vibrant and growing cultural pluralism whose artistic and creative needs have not been adequately understood. During the lifetime of this plan, we will commission scoping research into the arts practice of ethnic minority communities to inform our future policy and practice. We will work with others to develop strategies aimed at addressing infrastructural deficiencies and unequal opportunities, recognising there are different cultural interpretations of the arts which remain unexplored in Northern Ireland.

"People value their different identities and their cultural and linguistic diversity" (Programme for Government). Language has a special place in the Agreement and is significant particularly in relation to the new cross-border body and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

## five The imperative for change continued

The Arts Council will develop a language arts policy for Irish, Ulster Scots and ethnic minority languages, in conjunction with Foras na Gaeilge, Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch, Ultach Trust, DCAL and others and will commission research in year one in support of that policy.

### H Relationships with other Arts Councils

The Arts Councils of these islands have a long history of co-operation.

We have been working closely with our colleagues in the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon since the 1970s. The two Councils provide joint funding to a range of arts organisations and programmes and have collaborated on such projects as the auditoria infrastructure review and on the development of an arts website.

In light of the fact that the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon is shortly to produce its third Arts Plan, an unprecedented opportunity presents itself for the two Arts Councils to agree a concordat for areas of mutual strategic partnership.

Similarly, we have a history of joint action with our colleagues in the Arts Councils of Scotland, Wales and England which affords us a more comprehensive understanding of the broader policy and cultural environment in which the arts are located. This enables us to lobby for the arts in the UK as well as pursue such matters as Cultural Banking, taxation and joint touring initiatives.

In conjunction with the British Council, and other colleagues, we have been and will continue to collaborate on the international promotion of artists from Northern Ireland and in extending our respective world-wide contacts for artists and arts organisations.

We are committed to strengthening our relationships with all these strategic partners throughout the duration of this five-year plan.

### I Information and Communications Technology

As the traditional distinctions between many art forms blur due to developments in new technologies, all Arts Councils face the complex task of determining or even redefining what is their core business. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the new ways art is produced, presented and consumed. New genres have been developed which have considerable potential (e.g. installation and multi-media art) and cross art form practices are increasingly prevalent.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is not alone in moving from a comparatively narrow interpretation of what constitutes 'the arts' to a wider appreciation of the spectrum of activity it covers. This recognises the increasingly important areas of practice such as community and voluntary arts, traditional arts, the nascent creative industries and mass, popular culture.

### J Children and Young People

Northern Ireland has the third youngest population of the regions of the European Union. Of all the factors we have to take into account in planning, this is the most significant. Engaging and retaining the interest of young people in the arts is one of the major challenges facing us.

Participation not only helps raise educational standards, but also boosts a child's self-confidence and self-esteem. Young people's employability can be enhanced through skills development and their lives enriched as they contribute to social and economic regeneration in their communities.



main picture : Temple 1 (ceramic by Neisha Allen)

bottom right : Stones in his Pockets (stageplay by Marie Jones)

# six Opening up the arts

Any arts plan has to be built upon a solid foundation of learned experience informed by past successes and failures which have been tested. In February 2000, the Arts Council commissioned a comprehensive, independent review of its previous strategy (*To The Millennium*). This was carried out by Professor Anthony Everitt and Annabel Jackson Associates who published their report in May that year.

At the heart of the proposals was the idea of a co-ordinated strategy for development which would be most likely to succeed if it concentrated on a few strategic priorities.



*Opening Up The Arts* listed a number of main recommendations:

- a need for the Council to be more open;
- a need for closer partnerships with district councils;
- fewer and clearer priorities;
- the integration of voted fund and lottery streams;
- an increased commitment to planning and review.



main picture : Belfast Carnival

top right : Photo by Belfast Exposed

bottom left : Rosie McGurran (detail)

arts council email [publicaffairs@artscouncil-ni.org](mailto:publicaffairs@artscouncil-ni.org)

*participation not only helps raise educational standards, but also boosts a child's self-confidence and self-esteem*

# *seven* Priorities for the next five

The emphasis on the arts as a discrete sphere of activity is yielding to a broader conception of culture that locates it within a social and economic setting. The Arts Council is responding to the shift from arts policy to cultural policy. The primary task facing us is to establish ambitious but achievable priorities for the arts.

Over the next five years, we will strive to win greater recognition of the contribution the arts make to our cultural, social and economic well-being. By broadcasting the unique contribution of the arts, we will promote the case for the arts as well as work with other agencies through strategic partnerships to ensure that the arts occupy a prominent position in the economy, in education, in the community and in people's lives.

To achieve this, we will give priority to artists, arts organisations, arts initiatives and partnerships which:

- A **increase opportunities for creative participation in the arts;**
- B **develop new audiences for the arts and build on existing ones;**
- C **extend opportunities for artists to develop their work and practice;**
- D **strengthen the capacity of arts organisations to deliver quality experiences of the arts.**

We must unlock the potential that exists in artists and arts organisations so that the arts can achieve a prominent role in boosting individual self-confidence and creativity, in contributing to a lively society and in developing a vigorous economy. By placing emphasis on developing all of the components - creative participation, audiences, artists and arts organisations - we seek to reinforce the impact of each priority.

## *Why we have chosen these four strategic priorities*

### **INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS**

The impact of participation in the arts on the lives of individuals and communities is profound. Community development organisations recognise that arts-based activity, especially with the young, produces a range of positive benefits. Taking part in arts activities can foster self-confidence and self-esteem. It enhances people's employability through skills development, it enriches lives and contributes to social and community regeneration.

### **DEVELOP NEW AUDIENCES FOR THE ARTS**

We acknowledge the wide variety of barriers to attendance and participation, such as cost of tickets, feeling an 'outsider' and lack of information. Less frequent attenders are a key area of concern, especially children and young people. With our strategic partners, we will develop strategies to create opportunities for participation and address gaps in the audience. We will also establish measured baselines to describe and track trends.



# years

## EXTEND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTISTS TO DEVELOP THEIR WORK AND PRACTICE

The Arts Council's systems of support for the artist confer endorsement and contribute to those conditions in society by which artists are valued. Those conditions underpin the reasons why they choose to live and work in Northern Ireland. By assisting the makers and creators of art, we will contribute to the conditions in which artists can gain employment in the cultural sector and also enable them to contribute to the competitiveness of our creative economy.

*The Creative Imperative*, a study commissioned by the two Arts Councils in Ireland, into resource systems for individual artists, demonstrated that awards and bursaries are successful in achieving two key purposes - making art and building professional development. By strengthening support mechanisms for artists to develop and produce their work in a variety of social contexts, the Arts Council seeks to achieve its other priorities of increasing participation and developing new audiences for the arts.

By increasing the platform of opportunities for artists (and expanding the range to include crafts and multi-media), we recognise the centrality of the interaction between the artist and society.

But our resources alone are insufficient. Wider matters such as tax reforms, social security regulations and intellectual property rights are likely to be more significant in the longer term. Along with other cultural agencies, we will continue to advocate the benefits of legislative change.

## STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF ARTS ORGANISATIONS TO DELIVER QUALITY EXPERIENCES OF THE ARTS

Many arts organisations have been concerned with short-term survival rather than long-term issues, have become project-oriented rather than development-led, funding-driven rather than strategically-focused and pre-occupied by outputs rather than outcomes.

We will work to strengthen arts organisations by

- giving greater financial security to key organisations;
- facilitating training in business and management skills;
- sharpening a focus on the market;
- developing capacity.



To support this goal, we will chart the changes by developing indicators which will serve as a health check for the sector as a whole. We will capture critical information about sources of funding, trends in box office and other sources of earned income, the value of net revenue expenditure and activity levels. This will supplement information gathered through monitoring of clients and the commissioning of external research.



top right : Sharon Shannon (photo by Lesley Doyle)

bottom right : Urbs (digital art by Eamon O'Kane)

arts council website [artscouncil-ni.org/](http://artscouncil-ni.org/)

# eightValues

We are committed to values which inform all our policies and programmes and which are closely monitored.

## Highest standards

We aim for the highest standards in our own work and expect the highest standards of those organisations, individuals and initiatives in which we invest funds. We will make every effort to ensure that best practice is disseminated in order to maximise benefit and to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have access to excellence of arts practice and provision.

## Creativity

In our work as a development agency and as a funder of the arts, we will support arts activity that facilitates and promotes individual creativity both by professional artists and by citizens of all ages and throughout their lives.

## Accountability and responsiveness

We will be open, accountable and financially efficient and prudent, reflecting the highest standards of public sector management. We will develop accessible and responsive relationships with the arts sector and others.

## Good grant making

We will be open, fair and accountable in our contact with applicants, and provide clear and relevant information, guidance and feedback. We will monitor and evaluate funded projects in order to maximise the impact of our programmes and encourage best practice.



## Transparency and Openness

We will provide timely and balanced information across all our programmes and policies. These will be made available in a variety of formats and we will use the tools of the information age to assist us, by providing more convenient access and more imaginative solutions to our communication needs.



main picture : The Market Place Theatre and Arts Centre, Armagh

top right : Mojo Mickybo (play by Owen McCafferty). (photo by Sean Watters)

# *nine* Strategic objectives

**one** Increase opportunities for artists working to the highest standards and in innovative ways

#### KEY TASKS

- Increase employment opportunities through such means as commissions and residencies
- Increase the number of awards and bursaries through a pilot programme in year one and successively over the lifetime of the plan
- Provide more 'platforms' to showcase artists' work at home and abroad
- Increase the opportunities to travel through a travel awards initiative
- Provide financial support for professional development and training

**two** Strengthen the arts infrastructure

#### KEY TASKS

- Create a new framework to determine which organisations are best placed to deliver our priorities
- Develop a new evaluative methodology, including performance indicators, in conjunction with the arts sector
- Expand skills development programmes for arts managers
- Develop key partnerships to anchor local provision
- Advocate to government three-year funding cycles for the arts
- Develop a comprehensive range of financial instruments in addition to public subsidy to support the arts including sponsorship and other models of private sector investment

**three** Engage with community arts to increase opportunities for creative participation, to develop new audiences and to expand the range of contexts in which artists work

#### KEY TASKS

- Stabilise key community arts organisations
- Increase the quality of experience of participants
- Promote models of good practice to practitioners
- Quantify the benefits to individuals and communities
- Promote synergies across artform practices
- Provide more opportunities for artists to work at community level and in communities of interest.
- Anchor the work of community arts organisations in the context of integrated cultural development plans across all local authorities
- Contribute to good community relations

**four** Engage with voluntary arts to increase opportunities for creative participation, to develop new audiences and expand the range of contexts in which artists work

#### KEY TASKS

- Support volunteer-led arts and crafts organisations through appropriate resource organisations
- Increase opportunities for volunteer-led arts groups to employ professional artists
- Provide more opportunities for voluntary and professional artists to work at community level and in communities of interest
- Increase the quality of experience of participants
- Anchor the work of local voluntary arts groups in the context of local integrated cultural development plans
- Contribute to good community relations



bottom right : Camera Obscura image by Peter Richards

inspiring the imagination, building the future

## nine Strategic objectives continued

**five** Increase the quality of access for disabled people to the arts

### KEY TASKS

- Provide more mainstream venue and exhibition opportunities for disabled artists
- Increase the numbers of disabled people as performers and creators of art and as audience participants
- Ensure universal accessibility in new venues
- Promote high standards of accessibility in existing and refurbished venues
- Develop disability equality training for key funded organisations



right : I'll dig with this (sculpture by Raymond Watson)

bottom left : Music Workshop (Best Cellars Music Collective). (photo by Lesley Doyle)

**six** Enhance children and young people's access to creative expression through the arts, in contexts of their own choosing, and increase opportunities for participation as they grow and develop

### KEY TASKS

*In conjunction with other partners*

- Increase the number of primary and secondary school students working with artists on creative projects in school
- Develop the range and quality of Early Years arts provision
- Increase the number of youth workers using the arts
- Increase employment for artists in the education and youth sectors
- Increase the number of artists with appropriate training to work in education
- Increase the creative participation in and attendance at the arts by 16-24 year olds

**seven** Increase audiences for the arts

### KEY TASKS

- Establish measured baselines to track trends and monitor progress
- Work in partnership to remove barriers that prevent people from taking part in the arts, especially children and young people, those with disabilities, people from ethnic minority groups and those who are socially excluded
- Implement innovative programmes of support designed to develop new audiences

