



**Budget Consultation
Room S1, New Building
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
BANGOR
BT19 7NA**

29 December 2014

An open letter from the Chief Executive of the Arts Council to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister

Dear First Minister and deputy First Minister

As Chief Executive of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, I must put on record my grave concerns about the devastating impact that the spending cuts proposed in the NI Budget 2015-16 would have on the future of arts provision in Northern Ireland.

The arts have already endured six budget cuts in the last three years. The proposed cut of 11.2% (£1.38m) would set spending on the arts back to a level last seen in 2005-06. Such savings would do little to relieve wider budget pressures but would tip an already precarious balance and cause disproportionate and potentially irreparable damage to this small but vital sector. Companies would be forced to close and much of the good work of the last decade would be undone, with organisations forced to retract important outreach and educational activities, thereby restricting access to the very people and communities we and the Executive want to reach out to.

The Executive currently invests just 13p per person per week in direct funding for the arts. The comparative figure through devolved government in Wales is 32p. Our annual budget represents just 0.1% (1/1000th) of the Executive's overall budget for Northern Ireland. In context, it would sustain Health and Social Services for less than one day. Or it would sustain Education for 2½ days or Justice for 4 days. Rather than competing, the arts actually do much

to support these vital services, with over half of the work undertaken by Arts Council-funded organisations taking place in healthcare and educational environments and with community organisations.

A small investment in the arts yields big returns for everyone. The arts work exceptionally hard for our economy and society. They have, on a minimal budget, developed as one of the major players in social development, bringing people and communities together; they are at the forefront of promoting reconciliation and building a strong and shared community; they actively support the work of a wide range of government departments; they feed the economic and job-creating strength of the creative industries and cultural tourism, helping to turn 0.1% of public investment into 4% of GVA; they distinguish us and lift our image as a forward-looking place that's ready to compete and do business. More than ever before, the arts are enriching everyone's lives.

The public has shown widespread support for the appeal to the Executive to impose no more cuts to the arts. Following an initial submission made on 18th December with preliminary results, the Arts Council wishes to revise the preliminary figure with the additional support received over the past 11 days. Therefore, in the Arts Council's submission to the 2015-16 budget consultation, we include a total to date of **13,443** petitions of public support for 'no more cuts to the arts'. This includes:

- A list of **4,208** signatures to the online petition supporting 'no more cuts for the arts'
- A preliminary count of **9,235** signed petition postcards from venues and arts centres across Northern Ireland, supporting 'no more cuts to the arts'
- Social media reached **7 million** people and resulted in **30,000+** social interactions
- This submission *does not* include a count of submissions made directly to the budget consultation address

During previous consultation exercises, the Executive has demonstrated its appreciation of the value of the arts as a major asset to Northern Ireland and has responded to the public's support by significantly improving the final outcome for the sector. The Arts Council urges the Executive to again respond positively and to allow the arts to continue to deliver very real social and economic benefits to Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely

Roisin McDonough
Chief Executive

cc. Finance Minister, Simon Hamilton MLA
Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Carál Ní Chuilín