

# Arts Council of Northern Ireland response to the Programme for Government (PfG) consultation

## ***About Arts Council of Northern Ireland***

The Arts Council's vision is to 'place arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life'. We work to achieve this by championing, developing and investing in arts and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives, enabling new artistic developments, realising talent, and championing culture in public policy. As the development agency for the arts, we support and invest in high quality arts practice and emerging artists delivering a range of activities including drama, music, reading, dance, visual art, carnival and crafts.

## ***The Arts Council's relationship with Government***

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has a strong track record of working with Government and its institutions to advance shared agendas and maximise resources. The following list summarises key ways in which the Arts Council works with government and its Departments:

- Partnering the Education Authority and Strategic Investment Board (tasked with delivery of the Executive's Urban Villages Initiative) to pilot a Creative Schools Scheme;
- Supporting Local Authorities in the delivery of Community Development Plans;
- Partnering the Public Health Agency in the design and delivery of a wellbeing programme, targeted at the most vulnerable young people in Northern Ireland;
- Strengthening the creative economy by delivering 200 targeted programmes encouraging innovation through export in partnership with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), Invest NI,
- In collaboration with a consortium including the NI Executive (formally OFMdfM), Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), Department of Social Development (DSD), the Arts Council of Northern Ireland delivered the peace and reconciliation programme, Building Peace through the Arts

## **Outcome Based Accountability**

As well as having strong intrinsic value, the arts and culture has a wider, more measurable impact on our economy, health, wellbeing and education. Participation in the arts can help build cohesive communities, make communities feel safer and reduce social exclusion and isolation. The economy is bolstered by visitors engaging in arts and culture and creative interventions can have a positive impact on specific health conditions such as dementia, Parkinson's and depression.

At the outset we need to commend the Executive for this new approach which focuses on an outcomes-based accountability model designed to deliver improved wellbeing for citizens. There are 14 strategic outcomes in the framework supported by 42 Indicators providing clear statements for change. Each Indicator is accompanied by a measure to show how we are performing in relation to the outcome and holds Government to account for effective delivery.

A key feature of the outcomes-based accountability model is how it uses a data-driven, decision-making process to help communities and organisations get beyond talking about problems to taking action to solve them. This brings with it a responsibility to de-layer delivery structures and offers a simple, common sense framework that everyone can understand. It creates a new ethos of co-

design in the development of delivery plans and imposes a rigour upon, particularly for Government departments, in developing delivery structures and processes. Reviewing the 36 discrete delivery plans it is evident that not all exhibit these principles and in some cases a golden opportunity has been missed.

The approach set out in PfG recognises the importance of collaborative working between govt. departments, local government, the private sector, ALBs, the voluntary and community sectors. We need to stress that the international work (40 US states, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway and elsewhere in the UK) on Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA), provides a turning point for policy development which, if it is followed rigorously, could achieve generational change in Northern Ireland. In essence, it provides a framework for turning data into action: an approach that can be applied to improve services, impact on individual's lives and our communities.

In our earlier submission, the Arts Council welcomed this new way of thinking with its emphasis on improving outcomes for citizens, placing wellbeing at the heart of the draft Programme for Government, embracing the principles of partnership working and co-design. There remain areas of persistent inequality in Northern Ireland where concerted effort is required across government to positively influence the reform agenda and where partnerships with local actors, creative agents and the third sector that can help animate change. 79% of the funding invested by the Arts Council goes to the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland, helping to deliver social change, economic prosperity and build a strong and a shared community. In our earlier submission we gave tangible examples of how engagement with the arts impacts on our health and wellbeing and we highlighted the need to reinvest in the development of artists and the arts sector. None of these suggestions appear to be reflected in the revised draft.

The scale and ambition of the Programme for Government not only requires commitment from the Executive to lead and appropriately align individual Delivery Plans, it also calls for a change of culture in the public sector that encourages and enables those working in the arts to play their part too. It is profoundly disappointing that references to the role of arts and creativity are, with few exceptions, confined to Outcome 5 and, furthermore, that their impact is impoverished to the extent that change is measured using Indicator 27 which we consider relegates the arts to a leisure pursuit (ref. CHS measure of Engagement in culture, arts and leisure by adults in Northern Ireland).

Despite this conflation, there are, nonetheless, welcome references to the positive impact of cultural engagement on general wellbeing; benefits in learning and education; and creating a prosperous society rich in creativity but despite this there are no corresponding commitments in the delivery plans relating to other outcome areas. This is a troubling omission. As a consequence, the draft Programme for Government understates the transformative power of the arts: how it can contribute to a range of delivery plans and help 'turn the curve' on their respective Indicators.

In this submission we will highlight two things:

1. That the arts and culture contributes to a much broader range of outcomes, not just Outcome 5;
2. The inherent weakness of using Indicator 27 as the primary supporting indicator

1. The contribution of the Arts to other Outcomes

Despite the underlying principles of partnership working articulated at the outset of PfG, the arts is too narrowly defined, confining the potential for the arts to engage with and add value to other

Programme for Government goals. It is of real concern that so much effort has been placed on developing an outcome focused framework with opportunities to feed into several outcomes for arts only to have a single target focus. This very much goes against the PfG intention to create a more dynamic policy implementation process.

Arts and culture cuts across other delivery areas, contributing to many Programme for Government Outcomes. Reliable empirical evidence demonstrates that participation in arts and culture contributes to individual wellbeing, self-esteem, confidence, new skills, improved mental and physical health and better education attainment. At a community level, cultural participation can contribute to community cohesion, pride and confidence, reduce social exclusion and enhance sense of place and make communities feel stronger and safer.

The Scottish Government recognises culture as a cross-cutting tool, drawing multiple strands between it and a range of National Outcomes within the National Performance Framework. We would encourage the NI Executive to be similarly ambitious by reflecting on the empirical evidence that demonstrates the much broader range of impacts art and culture has on Northern Ireland’s social and economic life. In addition to Outcome 5, Indicator 27 needs to be linked to **Outcome 4, Outcome 8, Outcome 9 and Outcome 14.**

**Table 1:** Alignment between PfG Strategic Outcomes and Arts Council programme activity

Outcome 14: We give our children and young people the best start in life	Outcome 9: We are a shared society that respects diversity	Outcome 4: We enjoy long, health, active lives	Outcome 8: We care for others and we help those in need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Articulate:</b> Improving the mental health and wellbeing of Northern Ireland’s most vulnerable young people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Building Peace through the Arts:</b> redefining contested spaces to create visible manifestations of residents desire to present a positive community identity.</li> <li>• <b>Intercultural Arts Programme:</b> growing social capital by increasing cross-cultural dialogue and engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Arts and Older People Programme:</b> improving the health and reducing loneliness of older people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Arts and Older People Programme:</b> improving the health and reducing loneliness of older people</li> </ul>

Arts and culture plays a particularly strong role in delivering Outcome 9 of the draft Programme for Government (*we are a shared society that respects diversity*). The indicator recognises that reconciliation is an important element of peacebuilding but that particular issues and difficulties experienced around interface areas, in particular the use of shared / contested space frustrates meaningful progress on this front.

The Arts Council has successfully delivered a number of programme interventions with peace building objectives at their core, most notable and enduring of which is the Building Peace through the Arts (BPttA) which has created unique, community based frameworks for reconciliation within divided communities since 2007. The model is based on an artistic examination of contested space and the external message it conveys, leading to the development of new, area based visions and the removal of existing symbols of cultural aggression. Despite the significant success of this programme, and others, including the Intercultural Arts Programme, there is no tangible recognition of this at the indicator level in the Programme for Government, creating a narrow, one dimensional focus to the plan.

In a similar vein, sustained engagement in music, dance and other arts, as delivered through the Arts Council's Arts and Older People Programme, extends cognitive function. Amongst older people, this has the potential to prevent poor mental health and delay the onset of mild cognitive impairment and dementia – a key target of Making Life Better strategy developed by The Public Health Strategy (2013 to 2023) which is aligned to Outcome 4 of the Draft Programme for Government.

## 2. The relevance of Indicator 27

We and others in the sector previously expressed concern at the use of engagement in culture, arts and leisure as a measure to capture the wider aspects and impact benefits from cultural engagement. The revised draft neglects the points that were made during the consultation on the Framework document. Fundamentally, Indicator 27 is unsuitable to capture progress towards helping to show how we are an innovative and creative society where people can fulfil their potential.

Given that the Continuous Household Survey (CHS) represents the sole source of data used to demonstrate the effectiveness / impact of cultural policy at the general population level we question whether it is capable of providing the evidence needed. Our concerns are outlined below:

- We are concerned that the high levels of engagement reported are both inaccurate and misleading. Reading and cinema attendance over inflates the headline figure, creating the false impression that engagement with the arts is high. Cinema, for example, will include attendance at viewings provided by commercial providers; a sector over which the subsidised, amateur and participatory sectors have little influence over. Our own data sources indicate that, excluding cinema and reading, engagement is significantly lower than reported and feel strongly that emphasis needs to be squarely focused on non-engagement rather than engagement, since this is our collective policy focus.
- The extent of attribution that can be established between a percentage point increase, or decrease in the headline measure and the impact of measures specified in delivery plans associated with Indicator 27 is extremely limited, especially given the inclusion of CHS engagement categories which are unrelated to activity delivered by the arts sector.
- Despite the significant policy emphasis placed on children and young people, the survey mechanism proposed to collect relevant data is only run every 3 years. This will create a significant lag in establishing the efficacy of policy or programme interventions, compared to the adult survey. It is also unclear whether there is sufficient question alignment between the adult and young person's survey to draw any significant comparison in terms of engagement patterns. We would also be concerned that the small size of sub-samples (for example relating to socio-economic variables) would mean confidence intervals around estimates would be large.
- The realignment of policy into an outcome focused framework has particular significance for local authorities in Northern Ireland who have been asked to develop new relationships with central government by taking on more responsibility regarding policy making and delivery. We place a significant onus on its relationships with each of the local authorities, in part the

consequence of its statutory obligation<sup>1</sup> to provide cultural activities for local communities. The Arts Council is concerned that, as it currently stands, local authorities will only be able to reflect their contribution to Indicator 27 based on a combination of three years data. Not only will this create a significant lag in establishing outcome, it will not be possible to determine engagement by key socio-economic variables as the number of cases will be too few to be reported in many instances.

- Despite the strong policy focus on non-engagement in the delivery plan for Indicator 27, the Continuous Household Survey does not prioritise this proportion of the population for more detailed questions around their motivations or barriers to participating. To adequately fulfil these policy obligations, new questions would need to be placed in the survey that specifically explore non-participation.

Given the weaknesses highlighted above, it would seem more pragmatic to conduct a review of current population surveys conducted to create a central, long term strategy designed to align topics and questions with the Programme for Government priorities. In relation to Indicator 27, a more serviceable and reflective methodology would be to develop a suite of outcome variables using data from the CHS. This would remove the pressure on the sole indicator, creating a more accurate measurement across four areas: participation (excluding reading); attendance (excluding cinema); participation in multiple activities and attendance at multiple event types.

Care needs to be taken when interpreting culture. The term culture is used throughout the draft PfG to relate to national identity, ethnicity and employment in cultural industry. Distinctions need to be made to ensure clarity.

By expanding the definition of cultural participation at the delivery plan level to include participation in sport, historic monuments and buildings and archaeological heritage, you are devaluing the distinct contribution these other components make to Northern Ireland society and our individual wellbeing. Of particular concern, is the failure to measure change in sport participation at the general population level. The intention, as stated in the delivery plan, to gather the necessary data at the programme level, will not provide the holistic evidence needed to demonstrate the impact of actions at the population level.

In summary

The Continuous Household Survey provides viable and valuable data on cultural participation and attendance but the evidence described above has shown that the CHS has challenges in being an adequate tool in helping Government illustrate clearly how it is fulfilling Programme for Government policy objectives. In addition, as the example illustrate, there is a golden opportunity to weave the thread of the arts and creativity more extensively across the Programme for Government, in particular to Outcomes 4, 8, 9 and 14. At present, this opportunity has not been realised with its contribution narrowly defined along purely cultural goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 10 (1) of The Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986.