



IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS ON THE NORTHERN IRELAND ARTS SECTOR

Findings from a financial survey of artists and arts
organisations relating to the impact of the
coronavirus

SUMMARY REPORT

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Summary

- The web-based survey was open for 16 days between 26th March and 10th April 2020 during which time it generated 329 responses. Sixty per cent of responses were from individual artists / freelance workers, with a further 37 per cent from individual arts organisations.
- Based on a response from 152 artists (77 per cent of artists questioned) the average loss of earnings over the three-month period between March and May was estimated to be £3,756.
- Based on data from 108 organisations (89 per cent of all organisation respondents), anticipated income loss over the three-month period was expected to total £3.97m, an average of £36,714 per organisation. This varied significantly depending on the scale of the organisation.
- Those organisations dependant on earned sources such as the box-office income seem particularly vulnerable to financial losses.
- Asked to quantify the anticipated financial impact on a scale between 1 (not severe) and 5 (very severe), the average response from arts organisations was 4.15 and artists 4.33.
- The immediate closure of arts venues and organisations has had a direct and immediate impact on the provision of all services with the cancellation or postponement of: public facing classes, workshops, local and international touring and work within schools, outreach (and community engagement work)
- This places at greater risk vulnerable groups in society including older people with dementia and young people with poor mental health and wellbeing. It has also compromised the ability of some artists, working in inter and intra community contexts, to build relationships with participants through their creativity, potentially compromising important peace building work.
- The inability of arts organisations to deliver planned activity will have a severe impact on their ability to recruit and retain artists contracted to deliver services. In a minority of cases, artists contracts have been honoured, but most have been terminated.
- Evidence demonstrates a severe and immediate economic impact on artists, the consequence of their inability to create and deliver activity in a range of education and social settings. Respondents relied on their income as artists to support

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themselves and dependants with some already seeking financial help from family and friends to make ends meet.

Impact on the community

Responses to this question demonstrated the diverse range of settings artists and arts organisations operate in and articulated the impact stopping engagement will have on vulnerable groups within Northern Ireland society.

Children and young people in schools, care homes, hospitals, youth clubs

- *The loss of schooling for Irish medium educated children will have real repercussions linguistically.*
- *I work in hospitals as a Clown Doctor and cannot enter the wards to visit very ill children.*
- *I will not be completing work on a fantastic project involving post-primary students; an all-female piece of development work that has been planned for over a year.*
- *The focus of my work is on young people. The need for them to physically engage with each other, at a time when peer affirmation is important for social development, is crucial. I can't do this work anymore.*

Older people

- *Complete stop on outreach work. Children and elderly affected the most. Their mental health is going to suffer.*
- *One of the projects [I am working on] is a reminiscence project with elderly people in nursing homes - the very people more likely to be at risk... and those who will suffer so much from not having their families, let alone artists come in to facilitate creative, fun, stimulating activities with them.*

Mental health and wellbeing

- *[There has been] virtually a complete end of contact with community groups, numerous people who are socially isolated, individuals with mental health issues who derive much benefit and support from their creative outlets and the social connections that arise from these.*
- *Groups I facilitated can no longer meet therefore there is an impact on their mental health - leaving people without the local support they need.*
- *I worry that the lack of project work will compromise the mental health of previous groups and individuals I worked with.*

Minority ethnic communities

People from local communities (all over NI) who will not have access to multicultural outreach events which I am normally working at as a performer.

People with disabilities

- *One of my projects is focused on autistic self-advocacy in healthcare settings, and in that capacity, I can say that Coronavirus is an existential threat to my community.*
- *I would be worried about how disabled people in the community will suffer as a result of no contact or art workshop therapy*

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LGBTQ

- *Cancellation of ten planned performance and writing workshops for early queer students about to enter third level education in September*

Communities and social isolation

- *There will be a reduction in engagement with peers, community members will be isolated from support networks and there will be a reduction in group creativity and empowerment. Lack of personal development through connection with others.*
- *Reduction in outreach work, cancelled an exhibition that was to feature work from a group I worked with over several months in Donegall Pass.*
- *The smaller towns [we] reach out to will cease to have any theatrical interaction and be left with Netflix and online content. The loss of theatre as a live medium means stories aren't being told and shared.*
- *I work as a dancer in healthcare, it may quite a while before I can enter such spaces, which can lead to social isolation for individuals living alone in the community*
- *It will be difficult as a one to one approach within the theatres provides great opportunities to communicate and strengthen community spirit.*

Respondents also spoke of the longer term impact the close down will have on audience's willingness to engage with the arts and the disproportionate impact reduced outreach will have on deprived communities.

- *The audiences will lose their connection and engagement with the work and the organisations and it will be much harder to bring them back in the galleries and the theatres.*
- *Outreach work will be cancelled and the less privileged will be hit by this. Art and creativity are essential during difficult times, but it is the first thing that gets overlooked and lost.*
- *I am worried this pandemic will push people further away from live theatre and live events*

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Concluding Comments

Evidence indicates the financial impact of the coronavirus and subsequent lockdown will be considerable with significant implications for some organisations on their ability to trade and artists to earn a living wage, many of whom rely entirely on their income as artists to support dependants.

Organisations with restricted reserves and those reliant on earned income sources (for example box-office income) are particularly vulnerable. Large organisations have furloughed some front-of house staff to reduce core expenditure, indicating that a long-term shutdown may lead to permanent job losses.

Some organisations have chosen to deliver services on-line, incurring additional costs as a consequence but maintaining some contact with customers. This was unlikely to yield the same level of income as face-to-face services and was thought by some to compromise artistic integrity.

The closure of arts venues, theatres, community art facilities, galleries, schools and community hubs has severely restricted the ability of organisations to deliver community outreach and public facing services, vital for the wellbeing of vulnerable groups in society and for artists (working as facilitators) to earn an income and develop their artistic practice.

This has compromised the ability of some artists working in inter and intra community contexts to build relationships with participants through their creativity, potentially compromising important peace building work.

Arts organisations have not been able to recruit artists to deliver services as part of festivals or productions, pointing to the need to postpone or cancel existing contracts. Some producing organisations identified potential longer-term consequences with recruitment levels post-shutdown likely to be lower due to restrictions in demand and the need to restrict programme expenditure.

A significant proportion of visual artists have been unable to work since the shutdown as access to their studios has been cut-off. This has had a creative impact and further compounds the economic consequences of their work not reaching markets due to the closure of galleries and retail outlets.