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INSPIRE | CONNECT | LEAD

A five year strategic framework for developing
the arts 2019-2024

Draft for Consultation

Introduction

In developing this strategic framework for the arts over the next five-year period, 2019-2024, we are mindful of the wider context and of the many uncertainties affecting society as a whole – constraints on public spending, Brexit, lack of a sitting Assembly, for instance. The challenges are significant, and the arts will not be exempt. However, in certain knowledge of the unique and irreplaceable benefits that the arts bring to society, our overriding commitment will be to ensure that artists and arts organisations, working in all art forms, receive the support they need to continue to develop and work with confidence, vision and ambition.

To achieve this outcome, we will need to think creatively, offer fresh solutions, and lead the sector in a strategic direction that will not only add strength and resilience, but will create opportunity and growth. That is the role of the current strategic framework. It has been developed in consultation with the arts sector and key stakeholders, as well as our partners in local and central government, and the wider public sector. We are now pleased to put the framework out to full public consultation until April 2019.

We look forward to hearing your views.

**'Placing the arts at the heart
of our social, economic
and creative life'**

A framework not a plan...

Because we are experiencing a period of unprecedented uncertainty and there are operational challenges which will not be resolved in the short-term. The framework provides an overview of the strategic direction we are proposing to take over the next five-year period, 2019-2024. An accompanying business plan will be produced each year, setting out in detail the actions we will take in order to deliver our strategic objectives. The business plans will be linked to the Programme for Government and its associated outcomes.

The new five-year strategy needs to address some difficult issues. It needs to be realistic, yet sufficiently ambitious to meet the creative expectations of the sector, our stakeholders, and the wider public.

Context

The context and strategic challenges that give rise to the current uncertainties:

- Funding: the Northern Ireland Budgetary Outlook notes that, while the block grant will stay broadly level, rising inflation has created a reduction in real terms in public spending power.
- Brexit: the impact of Brexit remains unknown but could affect creative migration, workforce mobility, visa issues, tariffs, markets, and create disruption to touring and barriers to sponsorship.
- The absence of a sitting Assembly and Executive in Northern Ireland is affecting many areas of life. Without an Executive there is no mechanism to enact any significant change in public spending decisions. The vacuum is escalating concerns over public financing of the arts.

A framework provides a more flexible way of managing uncertainty.

Continuing the Journey

We are proud to continue our support of artists, arts practitioners and arts organisations. Our vision is to 'place arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life'. We work to achieve this by championing the arts, developing and investing in artistic excellence and enabling the creation of experiences that enrich people's lives.

As part of the development of the Arts Strategy 2019-24, we commissioned an independent review of the outgoing strategy *Ambitions for the Arts* (See appendix 1).

“You spoke, we listened”

In developing the strategy we carried out extensive consultation with a range of key stakeholders. We have summarised the most frequently expressed responses.

- The role of the Arts in society cannot be viewed in isolation; they permeate all aspects of life, transforming people’s environment, their education and their place within society. The sector wants to make society and decision makers aware of the benefits the arts bring – intrinsically, socially and economically.
- The Arts Council is seen as an advocate; a representative to engage with politicians, government departments and public agencies. The sector’s perspective is that the Arts Council’s role is to spread an understanding of the value the Arts and how they contribute towards public service goals. There is acknowledgement of the role that Local Authorities play in local Arts provision and the request that the Arts Council works more strategically with them.
- The sector generally supports the role of the Arts Council as an arm’s length body and its function in distributing grants.
- There is a call for the Arts Council to communicate more regularly with artists and organisations and to provide stronger feedback in the post-award phase, especially to artists who have been unsuccessful in their applications for grants.
- Organisations and artists express concerns about funding, in terms of the reduction and the lack of security; especially the loss of multi-annual awards. The sector stresses the need to continue investing in artists and organisations to maintain the high standards and showcasing of their work.
- In the current funding environment it is vital to ensure that access is maintained to the arts and that understanding and developing the audience base is critical to reaching as many in society as possible.
- The arts sector is ambitious and thrives on experimentation. Despite the current funding pressures, artists seek to create ground-breaking work.

Shared Vision

Because we have engaged widely with our stakeholders this is a shared vision that...

- Celebrates arts and creativity.
- Links us to a shared heritage of ideas, words and images.
- Helps us to be connected, confident and outward looking.

The Creative Ecology

We support artists and arts organisations, but they in turn are part of a wider ecology with overlapping connections in the creative industries, digital production, screen, cultural tourism, creative learning and numerous forms of applied practice in social settings.

It is no longer appropriate to define the sector in terms of single artform priorities. The sector itself is exploring new ways of working, converging platforms and presenting work through digital media. This calls for a new approach to planning for arts and creativity.

Working with Government

The Arts Council has a strong track record of working with Government and its institutions to advance shared agendas and maximise resources.

In addition to their strong intrinsic value, arts and culture have 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, for instance, specific health conditions such as dementia, Parkinson's and depression.

A key feature of the draft Programme for Government is its commitment to an outcomes-based accountability model. It provides a framework that can be applied to services to improve their impact on people's lives, and it can bring about generational change for our communities. This presents a golden opportunity that is too important to be missed; one that recognises the importance of collaborative working between government departments, local government, the private sector, ALBs and the voluntary and community sectors.

We welcome this new way of thinking, with its emphasis on improving outcomes for people, placing wellbeing at the heart of the 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 can help animate change.

51% 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. There are many tangible examples of how engagement with the Arts impacts on our health and wellbeing, but we urgently need to reinvest in the Arts to ensure artists and the arts sector can continue to make a difference.

The scale and ambition of the Programme for Government calls for a change of culture in the public sector that encourages and enables those working in the arts to fully play their part.

The following list summarises some of the ways in which we work with government and its departments:

- Supporting local authorities in the delivery of their Community 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.
- Partnering the Education Authority and Strategic Investment Board (tasked with delivery of the Executive's Urban Villages Initiative) to pilot a Creative Schools Scheme.

We feel the arts can make a meaningful contribution to a the following Outcomes identified in the Draft Programme for Government (2016 to 2021).

Outcome 4:

We enjoy long, healthy, active lives.

Outcome 5:

We are an innovative and creative society where people can fulfil their potential.

Outcome 7:

We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other.

Outcome 9:

We are a shared society that respects diversity.

Outcome 10:

We are a confident, welcoming, outward-looking society.

Strategic Priorities of the Department for Communities

Our parent department, the Department for Communities, has established its own strategic priorities. These are also important areas for the arts:

1. A more confident people living their lives to the full
2. More engaged communities
3. Lower levels of economic inactivity and unemployment
4. Improved communities and better housing

Ambitions / Priorities for the next five years, structured under three headings:

Our guiding principles for the next five years are summarised in three words...

■ **Inspire**

■ **Connect**

■ **Lead**

Simple, yes, but they reflect our ambition and our passion for the arts.

INSPIRE

Great art inspires us, nurtures our understanding of who we are and the world around us, and brings us together.

CONNECT

The Arts are without boundaries. They connect communities, help build creative places, define a new sense of identity, help us tell our stories, seek out and engage wider audiences. We want to reach out and reach further.

LEAD

We see our role as enabling and empowering the sector to achieve its ambitions, and to speak out for the arts; but we won't be able to do that alone – we will need to work together with other stakeholders to deliver on this promise.

In the following pages, this framework outlines strategic objectives and actions under each guiding principle; informed by the needs of the sector.

Principle	Objective	Actions
INSPIRE	1. Create the conditions in which work of excellence is made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="943 224 2100 345">a. Place quality and creative risk-taking at the centre of a revised assessment framework to ensure work of vision, power and imagination is made Years 1 - 5 <li data-bbox="943 386 2100 467">b. Incentivise innovation and experimentation through our grant-making processes Years 1 - 5 <li data-bbox="943 508 2100 589">c. Develop good-practice guidelines with the sector for self-assessment of creative work Year 2
	2. Create a confident, vibrant arts infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="943 686 2100 768">a. Invest in strategic programmes (Resilience and Blueprint) that build capacity in the sector Years 1 - 3 <li data-bbox="943 808 2100 849">b. Consider reinstatement of multi-annual funding Year 1 <li data-bbox="943 889 2100 1011">c. Introduce a small-scale asset purchase / maintenance scheme to ensure arts organisations have the right equipment to deliver their work Year 2 <li data-bbox="943 1052 2100 1141">d. Encourage more private giving by helping organisations build their fundraising capacity Years 1 - 5
	3. Invest in workforce, skills and leadership development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="943 1247 2100 1369">a. Commission a review of leadership needs and skills shortages and establish the extent of workforce diversity in the sector Year 2 <li data-bbox="943 1393 2100 1515">b. Support the arts sector to invest in workforce development and succession planning to meet future leadership needs Years 3 - 5

Principle	Objective	Actions	
	4. Invest in accessible career pathways in the creative and cultural industries	a. Enhance the quality of creative careers advice in schools in partnership with NI Screen and the Department for the Economy	Years 1 - 5
		b. Create a dedicated career pathway component within the Creative Schools Partnership programme	Years 1 - 3
	5. Renew art form policies to reflect current needs	a. Review art form classifications to ensure their continued relevance in light of digital developments and implement a rolling policy review.	Year 2
		b. Involve an independent multi-disciplinary arts panel in the review process (Consultative Assembly)	Year 1
	6. Create more opportunities for children and young people to explore and engage in creative practice	a. Invest in arts organisations which create high-quality learning experiences in and out of schools	Years 1 - 3
		b. Invest in the Creative Schools Partnership (The Executive Office, Education Authority & ACNI) to improve creative and educational outcomes for children living in deprived areas	Years 1 - 3
	7. Inspire local communities to engage in transformative, high-quality arts experiences	a. Improve the regional and rural reach of funding through joint projects with local government, such as local place-based cultural initiatives.	Years 1 - 5
		b. Strengthen arts activity in areas of low engagement	Years 1 - 5

Principle	Objective	Actions	
CONNECT	1. Transform the relationship with local government through partnership working to strengthen local arts provision	a. Formalise bilateral relations with individual councils through Service Level Agreements.	Years 2 - 3
		b. In conjunction with local government hold a biennial conference on the role of the arts in place making	Year 2
		c. Develop guidance on common data collection on the social impact of the arts	Year 2
	2. Improve access to / participation in the arts for people with a disability	a. Renew the Disability Action Plan	Year 1
		b. Carry out a Disability Audit of funded arts venues	Years 1 - 2
		c. Rebrand and launch Equality Access Charter with improved processes and usability; advocate its use within the sector	Year 2
		d. Introduce the Hint Card for people with disabilities to Northern Ireland	Year 3
		e. Scope a Northern Ireland-wide Buddy Scheme for people with disabilities amongst core funded organisations	Year 3
	3. Accelerate growth opportunities in the Creative Industries through R&D partnerships with FE/HE and industry partners	a. Establish a working partnership with the Creative Industries Institute to create research and career opportunities for artists	Years 1 - 5

Principle	Objective	Actions
	4. Work with sector partners to improve market intelligence and increase audiences for the arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Evaluate current audience development practice Year 3 b. Build marketing capacity for arts organisations through programmes such as Pathway to Blueprint Years 1 - 5 c. Create dedicated digital training for arts organisations to exploit market opportunities Years 1 - 3
	5. Capitalise on increased tourism through creating compelling visitor experiences and generate increased revenues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Work with Belfast City Council on the development of a major city centre cultural and visitor attraction Years 1 - 5 b. Increase strategic engagement with Tourism NI to increase market visibility and brand awareness of arts and culture Years 1 - 5
	6. Connect to the world by supporting artists and arts organisations to present their work internationally, and thereby strengthen our cultural profile and global reputation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sustain international residencies and showcasing opportunities to enhance the global reputation of artists from Northern Ireland Years 1 - 5 b. Support international touring through funding programmes Years 1 - 5
	7. Encourage innovative practice that cross artform boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Create a seed fund to support new ideas that use digital technology in the arts Year 2

Principle	Objective	Actions	
		b. Broker a partnership that connects the Creative Industries Institute and industry leaders to build digital capability within the sector	Years 3 - 5
	8. Promote knowledge exchange through funding better networks for the arts	a. Invest in resource organisations to support practitioners through the creation of networks and the provision of training and professional development	Years 1 - 5

Principle	Objective	Actions	
LEAD	1. Demonstrate the important role of the arts to society through research and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish a research partnership with the Policy Evidence Centre at the Ulster University to promote critical thinking and analysis to inform policy development b. Commission evaluations of strategic programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Years 1 - 5 Years 1 - 5
	2. Make the case for a better resourced arts sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Grow public investment in the arts b. Build public and political support for a better resourced arts sector by engaging with decision makers c. Commission an attitudinal survey of stakeholders (MLAs, local government, departments and agencies) to assess perceptions of the value of the arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Years 1 - 5 Years 1 - 5 Year 2
	3. Ignite the imagination of the public by articulating how the arts improve our lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Capture the value of the arts through communication campaigns, case studies and video interviews b. Establish a Northern Ireland Arts Week with activities in core funded venues as part of an annual celebration of creativity c. Commission a biennial survey on changing public perceptions of the arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Years 1 - 5 Year 2 Years 2, 4
	4. Future-proof the investment in the sector by helping organisations grow by generating income from more diverse sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Prepare funded organisations for future challenges through the Resilience and Pathways to Blueprint programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Years 1 - 5

Principle	Objective	Actions	
		b. Support the development of tailored fundraising measures for the sector	Years 1 - 5
	5. Provide sectoral leadership by producing new thinking on challenges that the sector faces	a. Identify emerging opportunities through horizon scanning; hold advice clinics and other dissemination events	Years 1 - 5
	6. Establish a Consultative Assembly of arts professionals to provide independent advice on sectoral issues	a. Establish a multi-disciplinary arts assembly to involve artists in policy issues (assessment of quality, review of grant processes) and provide a touchstone for sectoral opinion	Year 2
	7. Create shared opportunities for the arts through engagement with stakeholders to achieve broader outcomes	a. Establish data sharing agreements with local government and the Policy Evidence Centre	Years 2 - 5
		b. Build ongoing relations with a range of public and philanthropic funders to achieve broader social outcomes	Years 1 - 5
	8. Improve the living & working conditions of artists	a. Re-test the findings of the Living & Working Conditions of Artists survey	Year 3
		b. Develop a new scheme aimed at emerging artists	Years 1 - 5
	9. Be advocates for change, supporting sector organisations to empower deaf/disabled artists	a. Increase programming and touring opportunities for disability-led performances	Years 1 - 5

Statement of purpose

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the development and funding agency for the Arts in Northern Ireland.

We distribute public money and National Lottery funds to develop and deliver a wide variety of arts projects, events and initiatives across Northern Ireland.

From theatre and literature to art in the community, we work in partnership with hundreds of artists, arts organisations and venues. Art has the ability to reach across boundaries, inspiring, teaching and bringing people together.

That's why we believe in placing "Art at the Heart", because we know that art makes a difference.

Statement of functions

The Arts Council is the statutory body through which public and National Lottery funding for the arts are channelled. We are also responsible for a number of important functions, including: developing and improving the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts; increasing public access to, and participation in, the arts; and advising the Department for Communities and other government departments, district councils and bodies on matters relating to the arts. The Arts Council is the principal advocate for the arts in Northern Ireland.

Our partnerships

We are committed to supporting a range of partnerships and community engagement for the benefit of audiences and cultural life.

The Arts are recognised as an increasingly important delivery mechanism to enhance the services of other key agencies: Public Health Agency, Education Authority, Urban Villages, local government.

Appendix 1

The last 5 years: what the independent review says in summary

The desk-based review cast a critical eye on the Arts Council's performance over the last five years, drawing evidence from evaluations, survey findings and interviews to identify what was achieved, what wasn't achieved, and what the key challenges are.

- The arts sector faced exceptional stress: Government and National Lottery investment fell significantly. This reduction meant the Arts Council received less per head of population compared to other UK regions. In 2017-18 the Arts Council of Northern Ireland received £5.31 per capita compared with £10.03 in Wales and £12.79 in the Republic of Ireland.
- Societal changes are creating increased opportunities for the arts. The Creative Industries is a growth sector; young people are moving from a value system based on possessions to ones focused on experiences; digital technologies are making creative resources available to more and more people.
- However, arts organisations are showing signs of real financial stress: in order to safeguard artists' costs, expenditure on publicity, marketing and promotion are falling. This will have a long-term impact on organisations' ability to build audiences and hence generate income through box office.
- Core funded arts organisations have increased their level of activity. Participation levels have increased but audiences have fallen.
- Despite the prevailing uncertain financial environment, the Arts Council delivered a portfolio of targeted programmes which impacted on individuals and communities. New, innovative programmes such as Creative Schools Partnerships, the Arts and Older People programme and the Intercultural programme have extended the reach of the arts to address societal challenges around mental health, isolation, loneliness and cohesion.
- Strong partnerships at a strategic and operational level have been built with the education, health and the community sectors. The Arts Council now works closely with the community, voluntary and statutory sectors to deliver its work in an efficient and targeted way.
- The Arts Council has been successful in supporting volunteering activity through its Annually Funded Organisations. Findings suggest that volunteer engagement is relatively deep and therefore likely to be impactful.

Overall, the review reported that the Arts Council has delivered a diverse and high quality programme with broad reach within the arts sector and local community. This was considered a "remarkable achievement" by the report's author, given successive funding cuts.

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