



## **Arts Council of Northern Ireland**

**Response to the NI Executive**

### **Consultation on the Programme for Government (PfG)**

Monday 22nd March 2021

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Executive’s draft Outcomes Framework for the new Programme for Government (PfG). We welcome its ambition to develop a long-term, strategic vision for government, based on a shared and strategic vision for the future which aims to improve wellbeing for all.

Given the significance of this consultation and its relevance to the wider arts and culture sector, we have encouraged artists and arts organisations to respond individually to this consultation. This will ensure that the perspectives of those working across the arts in Northern Ireland are heard.

## About Arts Council of Northern Ireland

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) of the Department for Communities (DfC). In 2020/21 it managed £18.6m opening budgets in both exchequer and lottery funding to artists, arts organisations and community groups. The Arts Council has supported the arts and cultural sector through the COVID-19 crisis with a series of emergency grant programmes, totalling more than £25m.

The Arts Council’s five-year strategic framework<sup>1</sup>; *Inspire, Connect, Lead* (2019 – 2024) sets out its commitment to placing the work of our artists and arts organisations at the heart of our social, economic and creative life.

The framework represents a commitment to thinking creatively, offering fresh solutions to the uncertainties facing wider Northern Ireland society, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK’s transition out of the European Union.

We are committed to working with government to deliver Programme for Government (PfG) priorities.

## Draft Programme for Government and the Arts

The previous Programme for Government (PfG) 2016-21 set out a commitment to work in a more outcome-focused way, with an emphasis on: economic advancement, tackling disadvantage and improving citizen wellbeing. **It acknowledged the potential of the arts and cultural sector as an instrument for positive change.**

The new Programme for Government builds on the Outcomes-based approach and reflects the messages contained in New Decade, New Approach (NDNA); the agreement that provided the basis for the return of devolved government in January 2020. This consultation is to establish whether people agree with the outcomes and key priority areas that have been identified.

The key features of the Executive’s draft Outcomes Framework are:

1. There are nine strategic outcomes associated with this plan, a reduction of 6 compared to the previous one;
2. It is to be developed using a co-design approach, a design-led process with creative participatory methods at its centre.
3. It is predicated on a ‘whole society’ approach, drawing together expertise, local knowledge and data to target where need is greatest.

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<sup>1</sup> [ACNI-Draft-5-year-Strategic-Framework-for-Developing-the-Arts-2019-2024 \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](https://www.artscouncil-ni.org/ACNI-Draft-5-year-Strategic-Framework-for-Developing-the-Arts-2019-2024)

4. It is predicated on a commitment to working across departmental boundaries and in partnership with civic society.
5. Its vision is for an inclusive society where the outcomes of individual and collective wellbeing are the drivers for the government agenda.
6. It will be a 'live' document, responsive to changing circumstances and always open to new ideas and ways of working.

## The Arts Council's relationship with Government

As well as having a strong intrinsic value, the arts have a wider, more measurable impact on Northern Ireland society. Over the past 20 years we have worked closely with government departments and agencies to develop and deliver programmes designed to meet departmental and government based priorities relating to the economy, health and wellbeing, quality of life, diversity, identity and belonging and reconciliation.

As a consequence of this partnership working, we have developed a strong, local, empirical evidence base which demonstrates in both qualitative and quantitative terms the outcome and impact of this programme-based activity which has supported government in meeting its strategic goals.

The following examples illustrate how the Arts Council is well placed to support government delivery on its intended outcomes:

- **We currently partner Urban Villages and the Education Authority to deliver the Creative Schools Partnership Programme.** This transformative programme enables students to externalise feelings and experience, helping them gain perspective and a sense of control over their lives. Feeling valued, taking on responsibility and improving communication skills also helped to build self-confidence – an important step in developing capability and resilience in our young people and as recognised in PfG priorities. Urban Villages is a headline action within the TBUC strategy.

This programme links directly to the priority areas under *Our children and young people have the best start in life* (pg. 12): 'Equipping children and young people with the knowledge and support to make safe, healthy and sustainable life choices, building their social, cultural and environmental awareness and self-confidence through team sports and cross community activities.' **We would suggest recognising the role of creative activities here too.**

- **We support Local Authorities in the delivery of Community Development Plans.** We recognise the important role Local Authorities will play in delivering the draft Outcomes and work with them to utilise the arts as a means of delivering Community Plans at the local level.
- **We work in partnership with the Public Health Agency.** We have developed a strong and enduring relationship with the Public Health Agency and other philanthropic organisations to deliver ground-breaking interventions targeted at two of the most vulnerable groups in society: young people and older people. Our ARTiculate Programme and our Arts and Older People Programme have both demonstrated how participatory arts can be used to enhance mental health and wellbeing. For example, 87% of young people said that taking part in the project had helped them in to feel better about themselves, with young people commenting

on the positive impact of the project in improving their self-confidence and helping improve their mood.

- **Using artist-led approaches to promote interculturalism through support for cross-cultural dialogue.** The Arts Council’s Intercultural Programme used a range of encounter and collaborative based enterprises to engage people from different cultural backgrounds, creating space for participants to explore similarities and differences with people from different backgrounds in safe and inspiring environments.

## 1 Our response to the Outcomes Framework

### The arts are too narrowly defined

The contribution of arts and culture is too narrowly defined. Currently it is only referred to under two of the nine draft Outcomes areas: ‘everyone can reach their potential’ and ‘people want to live, work and visit here’. We think there is strong evidence to demonstrate relevance to a broader range of proposed Outcomes. This is demonstrated below.

It is important that the contribution the arts can make to Northern Ireland society is driven, not by an ability to measure it, but by the contribution it makes to improve the wellbeing of its citizens. This broader relevance is demonstrated below under each of the proposed Outcome areas:

Outcome	How the arts can support its achievement
We all enjoy long, healthy active lives <u>and</u> We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives	<p>The arts help aid our recovery and support longer lives, better lived. It can help meet major challenges facing health and social care including aging, long-term conditions, loneliness, mental health and well-being. The arts can also help save money in the health service and social care sector in the form of arts on social prescription.</p> <p>This is particularly important post-COVID. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland commissioned Social Market Research (SMR) in October 2020 to undertake a survey to establish the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the consumption of the Arts in Northern Ireland. We know that 68% of respondents engaged with the Arts for personal enjoyment and wellbeing.<sup>2</sup></p>
Our children and young people have the best start in life	The arts are used in education settings to improve learning outcomes for children and support the delivery of the core curriculum. It has been proven as particularly effective in engaging marginalised young people through creative learning.
We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect	The arts provide a vehicle for communication and a creative voice for the most marginalised and excluded groups in Northern Ireland society, providing new and alternative visions for the future. They enable communities to express their cultures and identities positively and to engage with other communities.

<sup>2</sup> [ACNI-Arts-Culture-engagement-levels-in-NI-during-Covid19-Pandemic-Infographic.pdf \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](https://www.artscouncil-ni.org/ACNI-Arts-Culture-engagement-levels-in-NI-during-Covid19-Pandemic-Infographic.pdf)

<p>Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral</p>	<p>Prosperous economies are characterised by a strong creative sector and the creative industries are recognised across the globe for their potential for wealth and job creation. It is one of the fastest growing sectors in the Northern Ireland economy and driver of economic and social innovation. The Arts are the lifeblood of the creative industries; this vibrant sector has huge potential and can have significant spill-over impact into other business areas such as manufacturing and tourism.</p> <p>In 2018 the Northern Ireland creative industries were worth £1.2bn to the NI economy, employed 29,000 people (3.4% of all jobs) and grew 5% faster than other areas of the economy in NI between 2018 and 2019. There are an estimated 3,200 creative businesses in NI, and account for 5% of all business units.<sup>3</sup></p>
<p>Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other</p>	<p>Transformative, participatory arts work is used within the Northern Ireland criminal justice system, and within community settings, as a springboard for positive change. The Arts help change behaviours, develop personal skills and increase confidence in those most marginalised.</p>

### Proposed change to Outcome descriptor

Under the Outcome ‘*people want to live, work and visit here*’, sport, arts and culture is recognised as a key priority area. We think this is appropriate and justified, but that the current descriptor falls short of fully recognising the outcomes true potential as an agent for positive change.

For this reason, we would suggest changing it from:

*Providing access to sports, arts and culture and encouraging and facilitating opportunities for people to get involved. Promoting built heritage, eco-tourism and outdoor recreation. Providing spaces and facilities for sports, arts and culture events and activities to take place.*

To

*Attracting and retaining creative talent is a key factor for economic competitiveness in the years to come. This places particular emphasis on the quality of place: in particular, access to sports, arts and culture and the outdoors.*

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<sup>3</sup> NI Creative Industries estimates for 2020: [Creative Industries Economic Estimates 2020 \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](https://communities-ni.gov.uk)

## Choosing appropriate Outcome indicators

The PfG Indicators (missing from the consultation) chosen to demonstrate progress towards each outcome need to be relevant, sufficiently flexible, and developed in consultation with the Arts Council and relevant bodies.

The proposed set of indicators to be used to measure progress towards the outcomes is not included in this consultation and will be developed after the Action Plan has been completed. The Arts Council would encourage government to consider using an alternative arts-related measure than the one used under the previous Programme for Government, as aligned to Outcome 5 (indicator 27) which failed to reflect the true contribution arts and culture makes to improving Northern Ireland society.

Instead, we would suggest including a suite of input, process and outcome indicators incorporating both population and performance based accountability. **Greater reliance should be placed on data generated by the Arts Council, which is collected in line with its designation as a producer of Official Statistics.**

## The absence of a Departmental led cultural strategy

The absence of a Departmental led culture, arts and heritage strategy should be visible amongst the strategies identified as integral to delivering each of the nine Outcomes.

The Department for the Communities' intention to develop and co-design a strategy for culture, arts and heritage should be clearly referenced, to guarantee the attainability of this outcome and to ensure the cross-cutting benefits of the arts to be realised. At the very least, it should be clearly listed within *People who want to live and work here* and *Everyone can reach their potential*.

## A multi-annual funding cycle

A multi-annual funding cycle is needed to enable the Executive to meet its long-term goals and to enable the Arts Council to provide the sustained investment needed to support the arts sector, particularly post-Covid.

The Government must set out a long-term, multi-year financial plan to support the transformation of public services outlined in New Decade New Approach. It needs to be aligned to the Outcomes proposed in the plan and not retrofitted to the traditional Departmental model.

A one year plan is not sustainable. It needs to take into account the effects of Covid-19 on public finances in Northern Ireland, prioritise mental health and wellbeing and be cross-cutting.

## Reinstate Outcome Five in full

The removal of '*we are a creative and innovative society*' from this Outcome statement, as defined in the previous Programme for Government, removes the primary driver needed to achieve it: creativity.

Creativity is intrinsic to people meeting their true potential and can be harnessed through the arts. We encourage government to reinstate the full Outcome statement associated with the previous framework, revising it to: '*We are a creative and innovative society [where] everyone can reach their potential*'.