



Arts Council of Northern Ireland

STRATEGY

2006-2011

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Introduction

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING INTRODUCTION IS SUBJECT TO REVISION

The arts have the power to broaden and enrich lives. They allow us to look at the world differently and to deepen our understanding of ourselves and society.

The arts scene at home and abroad is thriving. Ambitious and exciting things have been happening. Original and superbly crafted work is being made in all genres. Artists, writers, musicians, architects and designers from Northern Ireland are enjoying international success through showcases, festivals and tours. At home we have witnessed an opening-up of the arts with an increased range of activities that have brought the arts into the reach of everyone.

The arts make a significant contribution to a wide range of social and economic areas and can be a catalyst for change. The arts enliven and transform education. They help young people develop valuable transferable skills and help develop the creativity upon which the future competitiveness of our economy depends.

This 5-year plan will operate at a time when far-reaching changes are happening in central and local government. The Review of Public Administration will change the landscape and culture of public services. We will respond positively to these changes, developing and forging links with statutory partners, with the community and voluntary sector and with business. We are committed to working in partnership, building trust and sharing responsibility for improving the quality of life through the arts.

Our vision is to place the arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life.

This plan sets, out under four broad themes, what we believe needs to be done over the next five years to achieve this vision by: promoting the value of the arts; strengthening the arts; growing audiences and improving organisational performance.

Sitting beneath this document are the policies and guidance that detail how our ambitions will be achieved in each of the artforms and the crosscutting themes.

1. Art at the Heart - promoting the value of the arts

In a very tangible sense artists want to live and work in a society that accords value to the depth and quality of their imagination. There is a universal importance to innovative theatre, composition, writing and other forms of creative endeavour. Through the expression of artistic freedom artists inject much-needed discussion to the issues facing society. A civilised society recognises this principle and the entitlement of everyone, no matter their background, to enjoy culture and the arts.

However, many artists are already socially engaged, their role is changing and diversifying to meet the wide-ranging demands of a society in transition. Their practice is contributing to the powerful role the arts can play in society. We will continue to support them and encourage greater public awareness of the significance and value of the arts and their visibility. Through artist-led programmes like the 'Art of Regeneration' and 'Re-imaging Communities' we will continue pioneering work which is helping to make neighbourhoods vibrant, optimistic and creative. We will evaluate these projects, amongst others, and assess how they are helping to unlock potential and to transform the life of local communities. As we move into a new era in Northern Ireland, based on efforts to establish a shared future, we will highlight the ways in which local projects and the practice of artists impact upon core social issues such as racism, intolerance and sectarianism.

There is growing recognition in the policy areas of Healthcare, Education and the Criminal Justice System of the role of the arts in boosting self-esteem, enhancing well being and empowering individuals.

Urban regeneration experts argue that major new cultural buildings are key to regenerating former industrial towns. Some of the most visible signs of regeneration in both urban and rural areas in Northern Ireland have been the new landmark cultural buildings which are taking pride of place in local communities. Not only have these developments been successful in cultural terms but they are beginning to show wider economic and social impacts.

Artists are creating interesting and innovative work that is being promoted at a transnational level. Not only is this projecting a heightened profile of the arts from Northern Ireland but it can also play a role in Northern Ireland's economy for example through opportunities for increased tourism.

We will continue to encourage strong integration of the arts to other policy areas. Our ambition is to place the arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life.

- > We will champion the arts by putting artists and arts organisations at the heart of our campaign to promote the benefits of public funding of the Arts.
- > We will take on the 'evidence challenge' by building on our track record of research excellence and ramp-up our publication output.
- > We will work with DCAL to promote the case for the arts and demonstrate public value through future spending reviews.

- > We will partner the FLGA in its campaign to speak vigorously for the arts at a local level and to promote stronger regional engagement with local authorities.
- > We will work with local authorities sharing best practice and making sure that the arts are part of the new Community Plans.

From February 2004 - November 2005 over 100 artists have been involved with the Arts Council's Creative Youth Partnership (CYP) Pilot Programme and have taken part in 277 projects in both formal and alternative learning environments with children and young people across Northern Ireland.

A recent study values the annual turnover of creative enterprises at £900m and estimates the number of jobs at 29,000 (4% of the Northern Ireland workforce).¹

2. Strengthening the Arts - individual artists

Individual artists are at the heart of all the richness that arts and creativity brings to our society and Northern Ireland has been a cradle of creativity. In literature, theatre, music, the visual arts, the extraordinary quality and range of that work has had a colossal impact that far exceeds what might be expected of a small region.

Along with our artists we think on an international scale, positioning Northern Ireland as a culturally confident and outward looking region. We value and celebrate the achievements of our talented and productive artists - we will accord recognition and commitment through our grants, commissions, residencies and travel awards and by creating opportunities to showcase their work internationally.

Their willingness to take risks, to try out the new, will ensure that Northern Ireland remains at the cutting edge. But in order to sustain their practice, some artists are portfolio working by pursuing concurrent, non-cultural careers. We need to better understand the prevailing conditions in which they live and work and the kind of career and business choices they make.

We will commission with the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon a comprehensive survey of the changing conditions of practice in Ireland to ensure our mechanisms of support for artists remain relevant, targeted and effective.

We need to engage with the creative industries to determine what type of support artists and creative entrepreneurs working the sector have. The range of possible sectoral interventions is diverse. Exciting and popular mechanisms are emerging for showcasing culture, as the way in which we produce, present and consume art is changing. We will encourage artists to expand into new markets. We will

¹ Jeffcutt, P; forthcoming publication QUB

support the provision of affordable managed workspace. We encourage the exploitation of new channels for distribution with a view to improving the financial welfare and sustainability of practicing artists.

In order to sustain a bright future we need to support the sector by encouraging talented artists to live and work in Northern Ireland. We need to think not only in terms of local development but global positioning of creativity.

- > Working with a range of partners, we will help artists develop the visibility and entrepreneurial skills necessary to exploit new commercial opportunities.
- > In partnership with DCAL we will pursue long-standing concerns about the provision of high-quality, affordable studio space for professional artists.
- > We will encourage networking opportunities for artists and make it as easy as possible for them to exchange ideas and best practice.
- > We will develop national and international opportunities to showcase and celebrate the work of artists from Northern Ireland.
- > We will develop a sound evidence base of artists' labour markets and employment opportunities.
- > We will encourage emerging artists by setting aside funding for special awards.

The Arts Council's Support for the Individual Artist Programme (SIAP) distributed approximately £4 million to individual artists in the five year period from 2001/2 to 2005/6.

Strengthening the Arts - arts organisations

Arts organisations and producers are one of our greatest cultural assets; collectively they are the very fabric of the arts infrastructure. Their work touches the lives of countless individuals, transforms our view of ourselves and contributes to a progressive and outward looking society. Over the years, it has been primarily through enlightened public support that Northern Ireland has developed a network of cultural organisations that is dynamic, diverse and confident. We are committed to nurturing the health and wellbeing of organisations and sustaining excellence, creativity and access. We will promote the best of our arts organisations, improving their long-term creative and financial stability.

Arts organisations need to have long-term guaranteed funding in order to plan and operate effectively. We will roll-out three-year funding to core organisations but we also recognize that in today's environment, arts organisations have to look beyond traditional grants and lever growth from the market, maximizing their customer-base and through sponsorship. We will support cultural organisations to develop a mix of income streams, to bring new approaches and to their work, and we will work with others to promote a culture of enterprise within the sector.

We want to ensure leadership in the sector is strong. We will work with a range of players to support learning and development for board members. We will establish a Chairs' Forum to encourage new approaches, discuss governance issues and help them accomplish their objectives. We will invest in the

executive leaders of our arts organisations by establishing a Leadership Programme designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills to respond to an ever-changing environment - their vision and commitment lies at the heart of a vibrant, sustainable sector.

- > We will rollout 3-year funding to core organisations.
- > We will support cultural organisations to develop a mix of income streams.
- > We will invest in the leaders of our arts organisations by establishing a cultural leadership programme.
- > We will establish a Chairs' Forum and strengthen the governance of our arts organisations.

From 2001/02 to 2004/05, the Arts Council, through its Annual Support for Organisations Programme, allocated £25.68 million to approximately 130 organisations throughout the region².

Arts and Education

Artists and arts organisations recognize the importance of promoting creativity and cultural understanding through education. That is why we have singled out arts and education as a priority in this plan in order to extend the cultural learning experience in and out of school hours. The Arts Council has taken a strategic approach to promoting partnerships between the arts sector and education. An arts-rich education contributes to achievement in other realms of learning and life. We want to see the arts valued as part of every child's cultural entitlement, in and out of school hours.

The Creative Youth Programme has helped to build, develop and sustain arts programmes and interventions for young people, from 3-25. It has unlocked the creative potential and imagination of literally thousands of children. Pioneering and inspiring projects have been developed with artists in schools, youth clubs and community groups in every corner of Northern Ireland.

- > With DCAL we are committed to build on the success of CYP.
- > We will encourage schools to mainstream strategic partnerships with the cultural sector including the ambitious work undertaken by CYP and the CYP Co-ordinators.

Government's vision for 'Extended Schools' creates a new ethos and culture in which the school will engage with families and local groups, become the hub of the local community and deliver better outcomes. We can see the value and benefits during and beyond the school day and particularly in rural communities where the physical resources for creative engagement may otherwise be limited.

² Deloitte (2006), The Arts Council - Review of Five Year Plan

The vision provides a policy context to deliver our ambitions. We will partner with other agencies and stimulate opportunities for creative engagement.

However, we also recognize that Education is a lifelong process which takes place through play, teaching, personal enthusiasm and experience. Formal education is a critical part of that process, but it also covers a whole range of self-development opportunities from support for parenting and early years education, access courses for adults, progression to new vocational skills and attaining unfulfilled ambitions in retirement. We will work in a clear and focused way and support the cultural sector to develop and maintain key partnerships with a range of learning providers.

A recent survey revealed that an overwhelming 99% of respondents agree that all school children should have the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument or participate in other activities³.

Strengthening the Arts - arts infrastructure

As a result of major capital investment, audiences are now enjoying unprecedented opportunities to experience the arts in exciting new buildings and sympathetically restored older ones. Our long-term ambition of providing an arts building of quality within a radius of 20 miles of every citizen is close to completion.

There are remaining gaps and more needs to be done, such as fulfilling the vision for Cathedral Quarter; provision of affordable, quality studio space for artists; managed workspace for the creative industries and establishing a flagship contemporary visual arts gallery for the region. In partnership with DCAL, DSD and others we will work towards the realization of these projects.

We will encourage good design, creativity and sustainability in architecture. At the heart of the 'Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland' policy is a demand for a step change in the quality of design and construction. We challenge and inspire higher standards so that our cities, towns and neighbourhoods provide an exciting and welcoming environment and we will actively support the principles set out in Government's Sustainable Development Strategy. We will also promote collaboration between artists, design professionals and clients to encourage the integration of art in the design of public buildings and spaces.

- > We will bring to fruition key capital projects throughout the region.
- > We will examine the case for a major new gallery for the region.

The Arts Council awarded grants totalling approximately £12.5 million to Capital build projects throughout the region between 2001-2006.

³ Stevenson, G (2004), Arts and Culture in Northern Ireland, 2004 Baseline Survey

3. Growing Audiences

Research shows that the demographic profile of the population is changing. While Northern Ireland has one of the youngest populations of any region in Europe (under 16s make-up 24%), UK forecasts estimate that numbers in the older age groups will be significantly larger in future years.

We can predict there are going to be more people in retirement with time to spend on leisure pursuits but we also know there are some persistent barriers to attendance encountered by certain socio-economic groups that are significantly under-represented in the arts audience.

The report Art and Culture in Northern Ireland provides analysis of the first large-scale survey carried out in the region on attendance, participation and attitudes towards the arts. The need to manage and better understand the composition of audiences and the communities in which they are based is one of the significant challenges facing the creative community - especially in the face of competing pressure on the leisure pound. Audience development takes time and dedicated resources. It therefore needs to be part of a long-term strategy to grow business and develop the market. We will work to develop the diverse range of tools and resources that can be used effectively by cultural organizations to engage audiences.

Setting-up Audiences Northern Ireland as a membership-based agency has been an important aspect of this wider strategy. Its members access its expertise in marketing and ticketing technology, consultancy and training services as well as being part of the community that shares the benefits of strategic co-operation.

Research and analysis is taking forward our knowledge of the market but we need to develop another string to our bow if attitudes of indifference and barriers to attendance are to be changed. We need to show people from every walk of life how rewarding taking part in the arts can be by extending the range of spaces and places where people encounter art, by stimulating targeted initiatives, and by achieving a far greater broadcast and media profile for the arts of the region with greater diversity and coverage. (Arts coverage in newsprint, radio and television should be considered in broader terms than performance review.) We will also stimulate demand through interest-free loans to make quality paintings, sculpture and craft affordable.

- > We will provide sustained, long-term support for audience development.
- > We will work with ANI to develop the range of tools and resources that can be used effectively by cultural organisations.
- > We will introduce loans to make quality art affordable.
- > We will work in partnership to continue to remove the barriers that prevent people from taking part in the arts.

Patients taking part in arts activity within the Mater hospital reported strong positive effects in terms of feeling at ease, relaxed and relief of stress and worries.

4. Improving Organisational Performance

If we are to put Art at the Heart of our society we also need to sustain our commitment to improve the performance and processes of the Council. Building on and learning from the findings of the Client Satisfaction Survey, we will continue to forge strong links with our clients, ensure our grant programmes and processes are working effectively and strengthen our partnership working.

We feel that the relationships with our clients should be clearly structured and easily understood. To assist this process we have begun to draw up a Service Charter which sets out what our clients can expect from the Arts Council, and what we expect from them. To ensure that our programmes and processes are effective, we will engage with the sector through regular and specific artform meetings and we will also consult on broader, more general issues.

We will strengthen our grants and financial management systems. We will streamline the number of funding schemes and their application processes. We will increase the level of peer assessment of applications and introduce more systematic evaluation and feedback procedures.

We need to maintain and strengthen our relationship with DCAL to ensure that government policy expectations are met, and that we in turn can influence government policy. A key element in this will be the prioritisation of research to underpin the Council's evidence-based approach to decision making.

Work is underway on improving the quality of information available using the web and other media and we will develop the Council's Staff and Board so that they can provide leadership and direction to the sector over the next five years.

- > We will strengthen and develop working relationships with artists.
- > We will strengthen our relationship with DCAL and other government departments.
- > We will streamline the grant-making process.
- > We will strengthen the quality of our communications.

The 2004 Baseline Survey revealed that 79% of respondents agreed that arts and cultural activity helps to enrich our lives.

Our Values

- Excellence: We are committed to excellence in arts and arts practice. We will consult, encourage feedback and provide services that meet or exceed the standards expected by clients and the public.
- Courage: We will be bold and ambitious for the success of the arts.
- Creativity: We value creativity and believe that it can be a powerful tool for change.
- Relevant: We are working to place the arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life.
- Ethical: We will be fair, trustworthy and transparent in all our dealings, and use time, money and resources wisely.
- Listening: We will involve and listen to others, be open and responsive.
- Diversity: We will provide equal access to opportunities for all sections of society.
- Reliability: We will deliver what we commit to and keep those people affected informed of progress.

These values are important to us. They are reflected in the Service Charter. The Charter is a guide to the level of service you can expect. You can find more information at: www.artscouncil-ni.org.



Alternative formats of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland Strategy 2006-2011 may be available on request.

The Strategy can be downloaded from:

www.artscouncil-ni.org

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