

**#ArtsMatterNI**

**Response to DCAL  
Budget Consultation**

# #ArtsMatterNI - Enriching lives

## Why?

Every day the Arts are enriching lives across Northern Ireland through direct participation or through citizens and visitors attending events, shows or festivals.

Arts and Culture play an important role in promoting social and economic goals through local regeneration, attracting tourists, the development of talent and innovation, improving health and well-being, and delivering essential services.

To put it simply – Arts Matter in Northern Ireland.

## Who we are

#ArtsMatterNI is an arts advocacy group of professionals, participants and volunteers from across Northern Ireland. We have engaged our constituency of interest extensively in preparation of this succinct submission; we commend and support the separate and powerful responses already made by our colleagues across the sector and urge the government to see them as a whole, unified and coherent, in these troubled budgetary times.

#ArtsMatterNI wants to remind the public, politicians, decision-makers, business leaders, community leaders, the media and society as a whole, of the value of the Arts; and works towards articulating a new language of cultural value that will help all of us to understand the essential contribution that the arts make to our lives. We ask government to view the arts as an over-arching 'value' that infuses and inspires all that it does in providing the framework within which society can flourish, individually and collectively.

#ArtsMatterNI is a sector-wide movement to resist any further cuts to funding provision for the Arts and is asking individuals and organisations to show their continuing support.

We observe the massive and broad-based expression of emotion and evidence in recent weeks on a range of proposed and actual cuts in spending from which arts groups drew in the past, from tourism, rural development and special events, to children's film, creative industries and the plight of the Ulster Orchestra. We draw comfort from the popular mandate demonstrated about these proposed cuts, with robust supporting evidence and clear public support, but we also urge government - at all its levels - to understand, absorb and acknowledge the strength of feeling and emotions thus expressed by recognising that the arts are integral, not supplementary. We reject the simplistic and facile counter posing of the arts against health and education - we need to reinvigorate a holistic, integrated society, not a lop-sided and one-dimensional facade.

## What do we believe?

We are vigorously supporting the Arts Council's *13pForTheArts* Campaign, which demonstrates that the distribution of Exchequer funds to the arts works out at just 13p per person per week. As the principal funder of the arts, on behalf of government and the people, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) stands to lose 11.1% of Exchequer funding and this will undoubtedly impact on the sector leading to job losses, closure of organisations and events, and basic provision, already low, will be further diminished.

## Consultation Principles

First, we believe that the overall Executive allocation of budgets to Departments should have been the subject of the primary consultation, not each department in secondary consultative processes, causing internal tensions and rivalries within departmental 'families' of funded bodies. It is more logical and consistent to engage on, and after appropriate consultation, decide high level objectives, at the N. Ireland tier, and then to examine how those are to be met by each department, and in turn by their funding programmes, agents and

commissioned bodies. For this reason we are addressing our critique across government, from OFMDFM and DFP to all other departments with a stake in stimulating and nourishing the creative impulse.

Second, we see little reference in the DCAL documentation to desired or actual 'outcomes' towards which we should all be aiming. If they were clearly articulated then the acknowledged experts in the department itself, its NDPBs and funded groups could work together towards their achievement. Without an agreed and common vision, there can be little alignment of purpose. We are each driven to tactical reaction, not strategic vision. This consultation is upside down, causing division and tension, rather than common and helpful purpose for N. Ireland Plc, as we are so often urged.

Third, the arts sector feels especially hard done by, as year after year, cycle after funding cycle, we have to mount rearguard campaigns for survival, as the accidental victims of not enjoying the key status of being deemed 'statutory' or 'frontline' services; we hope to demonstrate in this short, high level submission that this state of affairs is unfair, unprincipled and unfounded.

Fourth, we are unsighted on the equality impact assessments and their criteria; we would be pleased to assist in this aspect of analysis, if asked.

Fifth, we believe this consultation is in potential breach of Equality Commission NI and government guidelines on consultation (including the NICS Policy Champions' Guide to Stakeholder Engagement, published in 2013) and, more importantly, of the Gunning principles by which the courts judge fair public engagement and public consultation.

We are being asked for opinions and evidence well after the 'formative stage' of decision-making; we are not being given adequate information, including financial information on other spending programmes; option appraisal is truncated; inadequate time is being offered, well below the recommended 12 weeks, particularly over both an extended public holiday period and an intensive political Talks process (rendering ministers and officials even less amenable to serious discussion, because of understandably competing demands); we fear that government's 'conscientious consideration' of our and others' responses is necessarily fettered and therefore vitiated.

We also note that the Stormont House Agreement, published just before the public holiday period, on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, includes significant fresh financial and budgetary detail, that clearly impacts upon the pre-existing plans and budgets, in both conceptual and practical terms; we also note that para 65 of that Agreement proposes to limit public policy consultation periods, like this one presumably, to eight (rather than 12) weeks; given that this one was already truncated below even eight weeks, we contend that the process is therefore flawed irrevocably.

We reserve the right to question and challenge this consultation process by reference to the Ombudsman, and to the courts, if necessary. We note recent successful judicial reviews in this arena, including on the Dalriada.

## Response to the DCAL consultation

The Department for Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has launched a short-life consultation in which it is outlining the spending and savings proposals within the department.

Some specific extracts of the consultation which are causing us particular concern include:

*"[Arts Council NI] Grant programmes **will be significantly cut**. It is highly likely that some organisations involved in the promotion and delivery of arts **will cease to receive funding and this may put their viability into question**."*

*"In arriving at proposed allocations to its various business areas, the Department took into consideration representations from these areas, departmental priorities and achievability of savings. Following this, a decision was taken to **offer some level of protection to the libraries sector – sufficient to allow all existing libraries to remain open**. This reflects the essential role that libraries play within communities. The draft budget for Libraries NI therefore shows a 7.5% cut and that in turn increases the reductions in all other areas from 10% to 11.2%."*

What is not explained is how this is fair or evidence-based, given that the Arts has already shouldered more than their fair share of recent cuts, leaving the Arts with just 0.1% of the overall budget for Northern Ireland.

Mention is made of 'representations', 'departmental priorities' and 'achievability of savings' - can we see and cross-examine these apparently private representations? Can we explore again the departmental priorities, in which our interests also feature, without any previous hierarchy or internal ordering? Can we challenge the new criterion of 'achievability'? As was demonstrated at the single face-to-face opportunity of interaction with DCAL officials in this most current process (a member session at NICVA in December), this is arbitrary, unfair and unprincipled, unsupported by evidence or rationale.

We support the protection of libraries from arbitrary cuts, too, and offer our solidarity to staff, users and volunteers in that domain. Nevertheless, we ask for further elucidation from DCAL on what criteria were deployed to make this 'decision', if indeed it is a decision, or merely a proposal? Were these criteria for significant policy directional change published, consulted on or otherwise available for scrutiny and questioning? What research evidence was utilised? How were libraries deemed to represent frontline services, when the remainder of the DCAL portfolio is not? If not, can that part of this process be rescinded?

## How the Arts help across government priorities

Here we list just some stated priorities from the current Programme for Government 2011-2015, to indicate, without overstating the case, that the arts and cultural development makes an intrinsic contribution to meeting government objectives, including most recently the PETS approach:

### *Our Approach*

- Goal of a shared and better future for all; all of our policies and programmes across Government will be built upon the values of equality and fairness and the ethics of inclusion and good relations.

- Equality: we will ensure that no section of the community is left behind; equality of opportunity, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations will be watchwords for all our policies and programmes across Government.

### *Our Priorities*

- Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future
  - > Encouraging innovation and R&D
  - > Acting to improve the mental health and wellbeing of our people
  - > Invest in social enterprise growth to increase sustainability in the broad community sector (DSD)
- Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Wellbeing
- Protecting Our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities
  - > Improving health (mortality and morbidity) and wellbeing (including social inclusion and safeguarding)
- Building a Strong and Shared Community
  - > Building relationships between communities/ better relations between communities
  - > Unlocking the potential of the culture, arts and leisure sectors as instruments for positive change Advance social cohesion and integration. collaborative working
  - > Improving community and personal wellbeing
  - > Publish the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy to build a united community and improve community relations (OFMDFM)
- Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services
  - > Modernisation of Public Library Service

*Health and Social Care Board, Public Health Agency:*

*Draft Commissioning Plan 2014/15*

*Ministerial Targets and Indicators of Performance by Priority Area*

Ministerial Priority 4: To promote social inclusion, choice, control, support and independence for people living in the community, especially older people and those individuals and their families living with disabilities

Ministerial Priority 5: To improve the design, delivery and evaluation of health and social care services through the involvement of individuals, communities and the community, voluntary and independent sector

Ministerial Priority 7: To ensure the most vulnerable in our society, including children and adults at risk of harm, are looked after effectively across all our services.

*DETI Operating Plan 2013-2014:*

- Increase tourism revenue to £676m\* by 31 December 2014, from a baseline of £534m in 2011.
- Support the delivery of key Northern Ireland Tourism Events in 2013/14
- Delivery of Departmental and Agency Actions as set out within Tourism 'Priorities for Action' up to 14/15

*DCAL Business Plan 2014-15:*

- DCAL is committed to harnessing culture, arts and leisure to promote equality and tackle poverty and social exclusion
- There will be particular emphasis on making culture, arts and leisure more accessible, promoting and supporting our cultural identity, lifelong learning, and excellence in service delivery.
- Develops partnerships, enhances its processes, and invests in its people
- Innovative programmes aimed at improving the economy and the environment; enhancing education, health and wellbeing; and promoting social inclusion across society.
- The creative and cultural sectors are increasingly recognised across the world as important drivers of wider economic and social innovation. They can act as catalysts and enablers of positive societal change – helping individuals and communities to overcome barriers to realising their potential.

*DEL – Key External Strategies:*

- Older people should be able to enjoy active lives for longer and share their skills and experience with the rest of the population



- Aims to enable older people to fully contribute in a society where they feel valued
- There are people who will require a greater degree of support than others to participate fully in social, economic, political and cultural life
- Promoting Social Inclusion is an important element of Northern Ireland's anti-poverty strategy, "*Lifetime Opportunities*" which aims to target resources at those areas, groups and individuals in greatest objective need.'

### *DENI – Key Priorities:*

*Vision Statement: Every young person achieving to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development*

- Raising Standards For All; (with specific reference to curriculum support and delivery across the Arts as a Learning area, Foundation Stage Creative Learning, Arts subjects AND the delivery of non-arts education and learning)
- Closing the Performance Gap, Increasing Access and Equity;
- Developing The Education Workforce;
- Improving the Learning Environment

### *Priorities for Youth:*

- To contribute to raising standards for all and closing the performance gap between the highest and lowest achieving young people by providing access to enjoyable, non-formal learning opportunities that help them to develop enhanced social and cognitive skills and overcome barriers to learning; and
- To continue to improve the non-formal learning environment by creating inclusive, participative settings in which the voice and influence of young people are championed, supported and evident in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes.

What we already do in local communities, at grassroots level, from *'where people are at'*:

Here we demonstrate some of the cross-cutting, multi-disciplinary activity undertaken by arts groups, contributing to achievement of higher level objectives of joined-up government; we believe them to be representative only of hundreds of such similar examples, quietly completed year after year, without fanfare; they form the weft and weave of a cohesive

society to which we all aspire, and for which our body politic strives. They cannot be underestimated; that cannot be lost.

### *Case study - ULSTER ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH DRAMA*

The Ulster Association of Youth Drama (UAYD) is the lead body working in Northern Ireland to support and promote youth theatre and drama for young people aged 11 – 25. In Northern Ireland there are over 40 groups and organisations providing youth drama activities. These groups are spread throughout the region and engage thousands of young people every week. UAYD members include Belfast Youth in the Arts, a cross community non-profit making organisation based between the Shankill and the Falls, and Ulidian Youth Theatre based at the Waterside Theatre in Derry-Londonderry.

In July 2014, 21 young people represented Northern Ireland in an International Performing Company as part of the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. The young people had the opportunity to learn and work with some of the UK's leading Directors while collaborating with other young people from across the Commonwealth. The young people performed at the start of the Baton relay in Glasgow Green and met Scotland's First Minister at the time, Alex Salmond. These 21 young people came from various areas of Northern Ireland. Without the support of UAYD, and the youth drama groups these young people are regularly participating in, these individuals would not have had the opportunity to take part in this rewarding experience.

Aligning with the DCAL minister's priorities of tackling poverty and social exclusion, UAYD has supported the establishment of a new youth theatre at the Crescent Arts Centre. This youth theatre has no charge for participants. The aim of which is to remove any potential barriers young people may have to access the arts. In its first term, the group was fully booked with a waiting list in place.

SkillsTap is UAYD's leadership development programme, aimed at skilling up those working in the youth drama sector, through offering high-quality training with experienced artists from the UK and Ireland. More than 50 facilitators engaged in the 2013/14 programme, in which one of the training sessions focused on creating theatre for people with profound and multiple learning difficulties with Replay Theatre Company. In addition to this, UAYD provided training bursaries for five youth drama practitioners to further develop their

practice. The bursaries supported the individuals to attend a weekend training conference in Scotland. These two programmes enable UAYD to engage with the many drama facilitators working throughout Northern Ireland, inspiring their work and developing their skills, which ultimately is being passed back to the thousands of young people participating in drama activities every week.

"I applied for a bursary to improve the standard of my classes in youth drama and to re-energise my way of working with young people in Northern Ireland. Interchange (conference) provided a platform to do all of those things and more. Since attending Interchange I feel my work is much more structured, exciting and energetic, since I now feel much more confident in my own ability to lead workshops and create, in particular, devised pieces of issue-based theatre." Feedback from one of the bursary recipients

Currently none of UAYD's activities are supported by exchequer funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

### *CASE STUDY - Culture Babies by Young at Art*

During the summer of 2014, Young at Art launched its 'Culture Babies' project, a creative parent and toddler group for children aged 0-5 years. It took place in the organisation's pop-up art space in Castle Court Shopping Centre, in Belfast city centre and the centre was a partner in the project.

Over ten sessions, the project engaged with over 658 adults and children, offering free high quality creative workshops and increasing access to arts experiences to families from across Northern Ireland. The project was extremely successful, with audience uptake exceeding expectations and each session full to capacity. The location of the group proved to be a factor to its success; by taking place in a 'neutral' setting, the project attracted a variety of ethnic minority groups, people from areas of both high and low deprivation and those with disabilities. Sessions changed each week to showcase a wide variety of activities and art forms, specially catered to very young children. Crossover activities such as 'make your own musical instrument', 'baby yoga' and 'messy painting' were especially popular, as parents commented upon how the sessions gave them new ways to bond with their child, and new creative ideas to try at home.

The project was guided by key aims:

- To increase awareness of Young at Art's activities and the Belfast Children's Festival
- To grow critical appraisal skills among children and adults
- To demystify arts experiences for families
- To increase the profile of CastleCourt as a family-friendly shopping centre.

Feedback from the project (both qualitative and quantitative) proved it to be successful in achieving these objectives, as findings showed that 50% of those who attended the group had previously never heard of Young at Art or attended the Belfast Children's Festival before, whilst 100% said that after attending Culture Babies, they would be more likely to attend another arts event.

The project was funded by Arts and Business NI through their NI Investment Programme, to extend the partnership with Castle Court in March 2014. A key aspect of the project therefore involved increasing footfall to the centre, and raising the profile of Castle Court as a family friendly shopping destination. Castle Court proved to be a good delivery partner in the project, as it assisted with marketing and promotion of the group. Feedback from the survey showed that 100% of parents thought that there should be more events like Culture Babies in shopping centres, and feedback also revealed that it improved their perception of the shopping centre. "I would purposefully go to Castlecourt for events like these, fantastic fun, very welcoming and inclusive." Statistics showed that 45% of participants spent over £10 at each session, and 95% of people spent over £5 after attending the sessions through car parking, coffee, and lunch etc.

The project showed that there is definite demand for creative activities for young children in the city centre, as participants often voiced that there is little for parents and young children to do together.

The challenges of the project were mostly financial; whilst the project was provided free of charge, there is considerable demand for Young at Art to continue to run regular weekly drop in art-sessions for young children. Without funding, the Culture Babies project cannot run again, and whilst parents commented that they would be happy to pay to attend, the terms and conditions of the organisation's lease prevent them from being able to charge for

events. The organisation continues to seek support for this but with ACNI funding being cut from core salary costs, its fundraising capacity will be compromised and a project like this will be unable to be repeated or continued.

### *CASE STUDY - Case Studies for Consultation Response by Lyric Theatre*

#### *Pat & Plain Project*

Pat and Plain was an award-winning school-based drama project run by the Lyric's Creative Learning department from 2009 to 2013.

The aim of Pat and Plain Project was

- To bring quality, performance-led creative learning to primary school children;
- Present a model of professional theatre production to teachers.

The project, supported by the Ulster-Scots Agency, was an innovative and dynamic creative learning and outreach programme, offering primary school-age children the opportunity to experience the magic of theatre in a relaxed, friendly, fun and accessible way.

It supported teachers in encouraging children to plan and produce a play following a professional theatre company model and was structured either as an after-school activity or a stimulating framework through which to deliver the curriculum.

The project involved the commissioning of six new scripts by local writer, Dan Gordon, each celebrating various elements of the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland. Each of the participating schools was given a production grant of £500 and supported by at least 30 hours of advice and practical assistance from professional theatre directors, facilitators and designers. Schools were encouraged to follow the model of a small theatre company, involving children in all aspects of the production.

#### *PLAYSCRIPTS*

1. *The Boat Factory* (Harland & Wolff Shipyard in Belfast)
2. *A Lemonade Bottle For Clabberin' Hitler* (Belfast Blitz)

3. Kissing the Shuttle (The Linen industry)
4. Sit There For The Present (School Life in the 1950s)
5. Scaldies Up The Chimley (World War 2 Evacuees)
6. *Titanic* (for completion in Spring 2012)

The playscripts including director's notes, sound files, costume notes and basic lighting design have been published and distributed to every primary school in Northern Ireland.

At the outset the project partners were the Lyric Theatre, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Ulster Scots Agency. By year three it had grown to include Foras na Gaeilge and the National Museums of Northern Ireland. In years three and four, the play texts were also translated into Irish and performed by two Irish language schools.

In its final year the local schools were joined by Bidstown Primary from Birkenhead as part of the commemorations of the centenary of the sinking of the Titanic.

In 2012 Lurgan High School filmed a performance and streamed it live on the internet to be viewed by the extended families of newcomers, back in their home country.

The project won the UK Theatre award for Cultural Diversity.

The table below summaries the participation and attendance for the project.

*Phoebe Lyle*

Phoebe was critically injured in a road accident while on holiday in Spain at the age of three and left paralysed from the neck down. In 2011, at the age of 13 she joined the Lyric Summer School as a participant. She immediately felt at home and welcome in a place where her disability wasn't an obstacle. She went on to join the Lyric Theatre School,

<i>Year</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Pupils Involved</i>	<i>Staff Involved</i>	<i>Audience</i>	<i>Performances</i>
2009	6	220	35	1375	14
2010	12	591	81	3870	34
2011	12	623	85	4600	43

attending every Sunday throughout the school year. Phoebe, now 16, has progressed to become a Junior Facilitator within our Theatre School, helping other young people make the most of their talents and develop their potential. Most recently Phoebe starred in a Lyric Theatre promotional video, examining how a group of young people have use the theatre and its programme of activities to achieve their full potential. The video is available on [YouTube](#).

After seeing it Phoebe sent us this email :

*"Phillip*

*Just saw the video for the lyric and it is so good. Can't fully say what emotions it made feel as I've got so many more experiences through the lyric.*

*I won't be at work much in the New Year as I'm away directing but will be there for the 11th of January then the 22nd of February.*

*To be honest; I just want to say that I can't fully say how thankful I am for being a part of the lyric.*

*Like I have said to myself every now and again, "I'm never going to say that I chose the lyric since something tells me that, that theatre chose me".*

*Just want to say yet again that the video is fantastic and I hope you have a very good Christmas and happy new year.*

*Phoebes Lyle"*

*Annadale Haywood Residents Association*

The Lyric has sought to build relationships with its local community, particularly those of Ballynafeigh, Lower Ormeau, Botanic and Annadale. A recent project with the Annadale Haywood Residents' Association saw a group of children and older people attend the theatre to see the Christmas productions of Sleeping Beauty and Mistletoe & Crime.

After the show they sent the email below :

*"Hi Philip*

*Can you please send our thanks to the management & staff at the Lyric Theatre for inviting our young people along to the Opening Night of Sleeping Beauty? The young people really enjoyed the show and thought it was great getting to go back stage with the stage actors!!. We can't thank you enough for opportunities like this. 22 young people from different cultural / religious backgrounds were in attendance, some of which live in Annadale and wider Ballynafeigh Community, Belvoir and East Belfast. This is the first time for many of these young people to be sitting in a grand theatre getting to watch one of their favourite pantomimes.*

*The seniors really enjoyed Mistletoe and Crime last Wednesday evening too, and our volunteer coordinator Mary commented on their giggling. We don't get to do much with our seniors as our activities are limited due to lack of space at the community flat - so they pretty much rely on getting opportunities like this to get out and about and do things that they normally don't get the opportunity to do. Our seniors group was set up following a spate of burglaries and during which one of them was assaulted as she came face to face with an intruder. They did not know each other prior to their now weekly drop-in , instead remained feeling isolated and often frightened living within their own community !! It is only now we are actually seeing them coming out of their shell, as they look forward to meeting up each week.*

*It would be great if we could take our group of kids from diverse backgrounds and in partnership with the Lyric Theatre let them produce their own little pantomime, that maybe residents from the local community could go along and watch – it will be a first!! not sure whether that would be difficult to achieve but what I can see is an new audience for the Lyric as parents go to support their kids, stronger relations between the different communities living in Annadale and a lot of happy children ☐ "*

*Young Offenders*



The Lyric has been working on a number of projects with Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre and Female Prison. The current project is being delivered in partnership with Edwards & Co Solicitors. The purpose of the project is to develop the interview skills of the young residents through workshops with the solicitors from Edwards & Co and is designed to boost their self-esteem, build their confidence and articulate their thoughts. The project also aims to re-defining the relationship between lawyers and young people involved in crime. Solicitors helped to understand their clients. There is reliable evidence that the risk of re-offending is substantially reduced when offenders are involved in these activities. Other projects with Hydebank Wood involve helping offenders develop their employment skills and residents providing maintenance and landscaping services to the Theatre.

### *Rural Primary School*

Often the barrier to schools attending theatre is the cost of transport, not the cost of the ticket. We have worked with a number of schools to fund their transport to the theatre; ensuring young people are not disadvantaged because of a lack of money or of their rural location.

### *Transformative Power of Theatre*

The Lyric provides bursary places on its summer school and year round theatre school to children from economic disadvantage. One 6 year old boy who benefited from the bursary scheme was living in foster care and awaiting adoption.

Clearly affected by his circumstances, the boy was shy and withdrawn, reluctant to participate or engage in any activity or to communicate with anyone in a meaningful way.

That began to change when he attended the summer school. His confidence grew and he returned in September to take part in the Theatre School. As time progressed he came he became less withdrawn and more communicative, blossoming to become confident enough to take on a major part in the school play later in the year.

### *CASE STUDY - Sounds of the City by the MAC*

The very first MAC community project was Sounds of the City, a music and heritage project which reflected the histories of the communities located directly around the MAC.

Participants from Sailortown, New Lodge and Dee Street worked closely with us over six months to create soundscapes and songs which reflected the rich history and character of the areas supported by the Docks and shipyard.

The resulting interactive exhibition and events involved 1500 participants and were seen by over 3000 audience members including hundreds of local people from the participating communities Sailortown, New Lodge and Dee Street.

This level of quality, depth of engagement and exposure to public audiences is testament to the value we place on the work we create with communities.

Other examples of this are: Common Ground, a community garden project involving 20 young people from Tigers Bay and Newlodge;

MAChord, a multicultural music project, involving Arts Ekta, Cloughmore Male Voice Choir and Bosco Youth Club (both from Newry) and Cranmore Intergrated Primary School, the Amal Project, a visual art exhibition created by female refugees and asylum seekers in partnership with Mediation NI and Belfast Rocks, a cross community drama project involving teenagers from Springmartin, Highfield and Clonnard jointly delivered with Belfast Interface Project.

### *Lighthouse*

March this year saw the launch of a Photography exhibition created by a group of men from traditionally separate communities in North Belfast who have been affected by suicide. Created in partnership with Lighthouse, a suicide prevention charity, the men worked with professional photographer Kelly Morris to create original photography on the theme of hope. The men involved not only found the artistic process hugely beneficially to their mental health but have also been amazed that their work has been valued and given a public space by the MAC.

The men, many of whom are from the Tigers Bay area have become frequent visitors to the MAC independent of any outreach programme. They regularly buy tickets to performances, attending talks and workshops, come to visual art exhibition openings or simply meet friends in the MAC's café. All of us who worked with Lighthouse gained as much from working with them as they did working with us and we hope to be able to continue the MAC's relationship with this great group of men.

### *ID2014*

Similarly our work with the Belfast Education and Library Board Equality and Diversity unit has been long-standing and fruitful. Since January this year their group of multi-ethnic and multi-ability young people from across the city have been meeting every Wednesday night in our dedicated community space, The Den. From their work we developed the idea of a day in which we could engage a large number of young people around the idea of Identity. This became ID2014.

For ID 2014 we involved 120 students from specially targeted schools across Belfast in a day of discussion and creativity around the subject of identity. Wellington College, St Joseph's, St Dominic's, Malone College, Our Lady of Mercy College, Ashfield Boys, Girls Model and Colaiste Feirste, six of which rank in the top 20 of the Free school meal index, questioned a diverse panel, chaired by William Crawley which included politicians, musicians and sports people from Northern Ireland talked about their personal views on their own identity. Workshops with drama and visual artists and musician Brian Kennedy gave students an opportunity to creatively reflect their own sense of self.

Broadcaster William Crawley said, "*There are few more important questions for our society than those we explored together at ID2014. And in many ways this event modelled a way forward for Northern Ireland by creating a safe and open space for learning about ourselves and each other.*"

The event received incredibly positive feedback from schools and students and cemented the idea of the MAC as a neutral place in which to discuss important and sensitive topics. Planning is already underway for ID 2015 and we predict that this event will grow year on year.

## *Now*

One example of the nature of the relationships we are continuing to build with working class

participants is evidenced through our work with the NOW project.

NOW provides training, employment and volunteer support services for people from deprived areas of Greater Belfast. Their youth service members have been using the MAC for approximately eight

months and now meet every morning in the venue. For their young members, many of whom

have learning difficulties, the MAC represents a safe and welcoming place for them to meet, work and to access the city centre.

Over a number of months we worked with the young people to develop a drama piece which

was aimed at building their skills and confidence. They performed their work in May, in our Upstairs Theatre, to an audience of friends and family and the NOW staff were truly amazed that these vulnerable and marginalised young people performed with such courage and confidence.

In November 2014 NOW awarded the MAC a NOW Champion Award and we are currently planning the development of this partnership to better integrate the MAC's arts provision with NOW's training programme and establish clear paths to employment for their members.

This will include NOW members becoming MACTivists through a jointly designed and delivered supported volunteer programme.

The NOW Project has been part of the MACCommunity project throughout 2013/14 and this is what they said about us:

I enjoy meeting new people and being in a friendly environment. Being in the MAC I have been in dramas which give me confidence to get to know new people.

It was good to use the theatre and I am so proud of what I achieved so far. The activities were good, it showed me that I didn't have to fear.

Lauren (24) NOW Project Participant

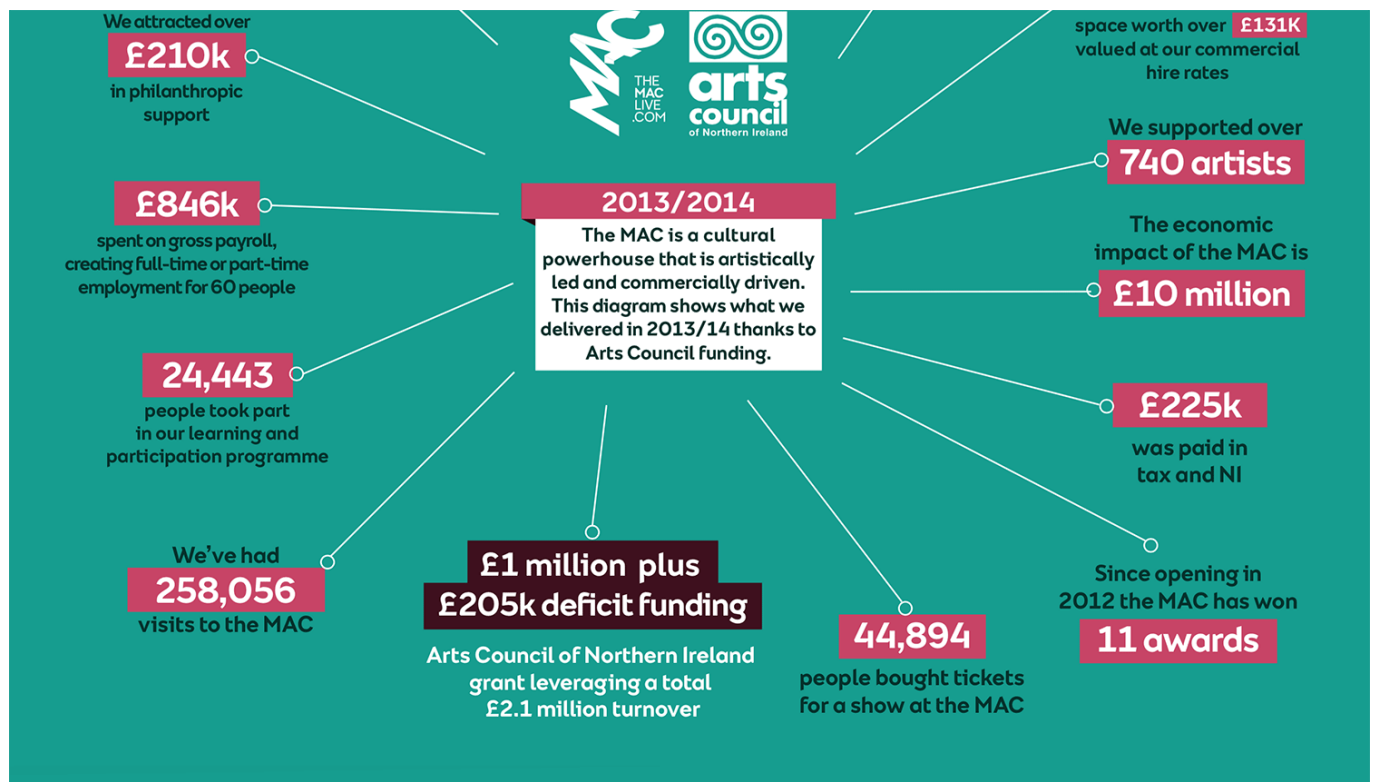
I enjoy going to the MAC every day to meet my friends. We always get to use the rooms and even got to work in the theatre and it was class.

The drama made me feel really good and Mary (Jordan) said she was really proud of me. Caoimhe, NOW Project

Our collaboration with the MAC has been pivotal for us as we have found a beautiful venue where our young people feel welcome and included.

It's a brilliant base for so many of their adventures and our guys being based there is as beneficial for the other people using the building as it is for us.

Maeve Monaghan, CEO, NOW Project.



## What does this mean?

We are firmly of the belief that the case for the arts is well made in our conceptualisation of the values, benefits and outcomes achieved, through our arguments and these sample case studies.

We believe the consultation process itself (including the equality impact assessment) to be flawed, as articulated above, and suggest that it is suspended, if not abandoned; otherwise it risks time-consuming and expensive challenge, and losing credibility as an effective instrument of government public policy.

We commend this response to all arms of government, and contest that its fundamentals should be mainstreamed across the collective reaction by government to all consultation responses across all government departments and incorporated into the future programme for government and consequential budgets.

**#ArtsMatterNI December 2014**