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Background briefing: Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Overview

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the lead development agency for the arts in Northern Ireland, and is an arms-length body of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Ninety-nine organisations are provided with funding through the Annual Support for Organisations Programme for 2011/12¹. Previous research has shown that such funding typically represents around 18% of an organisation's total income². Arts attendance is relatively high in Northern Ireland, with a recent survey indicating that 73% of adults visited at least one arts event in the last 12 months³, compared with 45% as an average for the European Union⁴. In 2009, there were 349,463 visits made to 7,905 performances of arts events in Northern Ireland, equating to just over 1.1 million tickets worth around £16m. 29% of these tickets were bought by households with an income of less than £13,500 a year⁵. 157,300 overseas visitors (or 11%) stated that they had participated in cultural/ historical activities while visiting Northern Ireland⁶.

¹ Arts Council of Northern Ireland. News release: *A better deal for the arts: Arts Council announces 2011/2012 funding for arts organisations*: <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/news/2011/new14032011.htm> Accessed 7.6.11.

² Arts Council of Northern Ireland. 2010. *Digest of Arts Statistics Northern Ireland 2010*: p53.

³ DCAL. 2011. *Experience of the Arts in Northern Ireland. Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2009/10*: p3.

⁴ European Commission. 2011. *Cultural Statistics*: p161 – this figure was gathered for 2006.

⁵ Audiences NI. 2010. *Audience Audit 2009*.

⁶ Tourism Ireland. 2010. *Facts & Figures 2009: Island of Ireland Overseas Visitors*.

1 Arts Council of Northern Ireland

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body, established under the Arts Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, and overseen by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. ACNI is the lead development agency for the arts in Northern Ireland, and the main support for artists and arts organisations, offering a broad range of funding opportunities through Exchequer and National Lottery funds⁷. Its mission is to 'place the arts at the heart of our social, economic and creative life'⁸.

ACNI is the second largest of DCAL's nine arms-length bodies. Figures for income and expenditure for recent years, provided by DCAL, are as follows:

Income

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
DCAL budget	18,344,519	27,481,000	16,710,000
ACNI Lottery (grant-making & recharges income)	7,115,850	8,149,601	-
Other sources	1,295,937	601,626	-
Total	26,756,306	36,232,227	16,710,000

Expenditure

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Grant spend	19,170,132	20,460,469	21,042,382	-
Capital spend	9,689,273	6,777,103	14,883,902	-
Fixed asset/ collections additions	117,770	47,320	68,130	-
Overhead/admin costs	3,652,735	3,763,220	4,235,748	-
	32,629,910	31,048,112	40,230,162	-
Admin as proportion of overall expenditure	11.19%	12.12%	10.53%	-

In its initial proposal for budget reductions, presented to the CAL Committee in January 2011, ACNI were due to have their DCAL allocation reduced by £4.2m over the four years, from £13.62m for 2010/11 to £12m by 2014/15. ACNI stated of this proposal that it represented a cash cut of 12%, and a real terms decrease of 23%, at a time of increased pressures due to additional resources required for the Lyric Theatre and the Metropolitan Arts Centre. Following a survey of their Regularly Funded Organisations,

⁷ Arts Council of Northern Ireland website. 'About Us': <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/subpages/aboutus.htm> Accessed 13.9.10.

⁸ Arts Council of Northern Ireland website. 'About Us': <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/subpages/aboutus.htm> Accessed 8.6.11.

ACNI estimated that budget reductions of this nature would result in the loss over the four year budget period of 350 performances, 80 exhibitions and 15–20 organisations.

However, in the final budget allocation, this £4.2m reduction was altered to £1.4m over the four year budget period. The Executive also made an additional £1.4 million available for capital development in the arts. In commenting on this alteration in the final allocation for the arts, the Finance Minister stated that this additional funding had been provided ‘in recognition of representations made during the consultation exercise’⁹.

Funding Programmes

ACNI provide a number of funding opportunities for organisations, individual artists, older people, young people, and community groups. A brief outline of some of their funding opportunities are outlined below¹⁰.

Scheme	Description
Annual Support for Organisations Programme (ASOP)	Grants for programming costs for organisations running arts programmes through the year
Arts and Older People	Grants to help older people access and participate in the arts
Building	Feasibility, development and construction costs
Equipment	To enable organisations to purchase equipment
Musical Instruments	To enable bands to purchase new instruments
Project Funding	To assist organisations to deliver arts projects which contribute to the growth of the arts in the community
Public Art	Commissioning art for public spaces
Re-imaging Communities	Small and large grants to improve public spaces
Small Grants Scheme	Includes grants from £500 to £10,000

Table 1: Summary of ACNI funding programmes

The Annual Support for Organisations Programme (or Regularly Funded Organisations programme) accounts for the largest level of grant funding, providing £10.9m to 99 organisations in 2011/12¹¹.

2 Recent developments

(a) CAL Committee inquiry into funding for the arts

This inquiry took place in 2009, and sought to establish how and to what level the arts are funded in Northern Ireland by the public and private sectors, the impact of this funding, and how funding is allocated across the various art forms. The committee also

⁹ Official Report. 4.3.11. Minister of Finance and Personnel, ‘Budget 2011-2015’.

¹⁰ Arts Council of Northern Ireland ‘Funding and Awards’ <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/subpages/funding.htm> accessed 24/05/2011

¹¹ Arts Council news release. 14.3.11. ‘A better deal for the arts: Arts Council announces 2011/2012 funding for arts organisations’.

examined the state of research into these issues and sought to highlight areas where further work was required. Among its conclusions, the committee found that there was a lack of information regarding how much money the public sector invests in the arts in Northern Ireland. It was recommended that DCAL should undertake research to ascertain how much funding is allocated to the arts by other departments in the NI Executive, and that an inter-departmental group on funding for the arts is set up.

The Committee also came to the view that more money should be spent on community and voluntary arts, and expressed concern that arts groups in communities without a history of arts funding should be pro-actively encouraged to access available funding.

(b) Arts spending per capita

One of the issues which arose from this inquiry was the need to establish a reliable and consistent methodology for producing a per capita figure for spending on the arts in Northern Ireland which could be compared with other jurisdictions. A study carried out by ACNI in 2009 showed that the amount of money spent per capita on the arts in Northern Ireland for the financial year 2008/09 was £7.58¹². Another study, however, conducted by DCAL calculated this figure to be £9.95.¹³ A subsequent attempt was made in 2010 by both DCAL and ACNI researchers, and the gap between these two figures was narrowed but not completely closed. A per capita spending figure calculated by DCAL for the year 2008/09 compares with figures provided by other jurisdictions as follows:

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales	ROI
2008/09	£9.95	£7.89	£14.42	£10.42	€18.45

Table 2: Arts spending per capita in 2008/09

This would indicate that the level of spending on the arts in Northern Ireland is somewhat lower than elsewhere in the UK and Ireland. England is the only exception, though economies of scale may be a relevant factor there.

An Assembly Research and Library Service paper summarises the methodologies used in each case¹⁴. A key difference remains in that the DCAL method includes internal DCAL expenditure on the arts (including arts staff within the department), whereas figures produced elsewhere in the UK only include funding provided by the relevant department to the relevant arms-length body. A figure produced for the same period by ACNI, but removing departmental staffing and arts branch costs, produces a reduced figure of £9.23.

¹² Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 26.2.09. 'Submission by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure'.

¹³ DCAL Research Paper- Arts Spend per Capita

¹⁴ NI Assembly Research and Library Service papers. 24.11.10. *Arts Spending Per Capita in Northern Ireland*.

3 Similar bodies in other jurisdictions

In general, arts support is provided by similar institutions across the UK and Ireland. However, there are two key differences which emerge from a comparison. The first issue relates to changes to the 'core-funding' or 'regularly funded organisations' model, whereby a number of organisations are provided with arts council grants towards their core and programming costs. Such a funding model has been a staple of each of the arts councils across the UK for some time, but in England, Scotland and Wales, reviews have been conducted recently which have resulted in changes to core-funding, and in some cases its replacement with an open application process instead. However, this model remains unchanged in Northern Ireland. A second point of interest is the fact that in Scotland, Scottish Screen and the Arts Council were merged to form a new body, Creative Scotland, in 2010. In all other jurisdictions, including Northern Ireland, the model of having two separate organisations to deal with arts and the screen industry is retained.

The following is a list of the arts councils, or similar bodies, in each of the other jurisdictions:

Arts Council England

Arts Council England (ACE) 'works to get great art to everyone by championing, developing and investing in artistic experiences that enrich people's lives.'¹⁵ Its budget was reduced substantially following the UK spending review, and began 2011 with a 14.9% reduction in its grant-in-aid budget. In November 2010, ACE announced a change to its long-running Regularly Funded Organisations funding model, stating that it would be replaced with an open-application National Portfolio Funding Programme. The funds awarded by this new programme are awarded for a fixed term (normally of three years), and 'will be based around 'strategic' and 'programme' relationships, rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' relationship'¹⁶. The fruits of this change were announced in March 2011, with the result that 695 organisations were funded, with 206 previously core-funded bodies receiving nothing, but 110 bodies funded for the first time. ACE's overall grant-in-aid budget was reduced by 14.9%.

In a further major change, from January 2012 Arts Council England will also take responsibility for museums issues, following the abolition of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council by the UK government in 2010.

Creative Scotland

Creative Scotland came into existence on 1 July 2010, bringing together Scottish Screen and the Scottish Arts Council, following a major review of arms-length bodies through the 'Simplification Programme'. Creative Scotland has recently conducted a

¹⁵ Arts Council England 'About Us' <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us>

¹⁶ Arts Council England news release. 4.11.10. 'Biggest change to arts funding in a generation'.

review of its approximately 50 'core-funded' bodies to assess value-for-money and set out a new strategy.

Arts Council of Wales

The Arts Council of Wales (ACW) is an independent charity and is the country's funding and development agency for the arts. Its 'principal supporter' is the Welsh Assembly Government.¹⁷ In 2010, ACW undertook a strategic investment review of its funded bodies, in common with its equivalent bodies in Scotland and England. Developments have occurred as a result of this review, with the results announced by Heritage Minister Alun Ffred Jones on 29 June 2010. From 2010-11 onwards, ACW funding was distributed in a more concentrated manner to fewer bodies. The Minister stated that, 'the central concern was that the historic pattern of revenue funding for just under 100 arts organisations was failing to optimise the contribution to Welsh life and, indeed, to the Welsh economy'¹⁸.

Arts Council of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, the Arts Council of Ireland/An Chomhairle Ealaíon is an agency of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and is responsible under the provisions of the Arts Act 2003 for stimulating public interest in the arts, promoting knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts, and assisting in improving standards in the arts. It works in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policy makers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life¹⁹, and seeks to develop the arts by supporting artists of all disciplines to make work of excellence, by promoting public access, participation, and engagement in the arts by demonstrating and facilitating the important contribution the arts make to the social and economic well-being of Ireland. A new strategic document states that the Arts Council has a dual focus of (a) supporting artists and arts organisations and (b) seeking to increase public engagement and participation in the arts²⁰. The Arts Council's grant from the Irish Exchequer in 2011 is €65.2 million²¹.

¹⁷ Arts Council of Wales 'About Us' <http://www.artswales.org.uk/about-us> accessed 26/05/2011

¹⁸ Alun Ffred Jones, Minister for Heritage. 29.6.10. 'Written – a Review of investments by the Arts Council of Wales'. Welsh Assembly Government website: <http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2010/100629art/?lang=en&ts=1>

¹⁹ Arts Council Ireland 'About Us' http://www.artscouncil.ie/en/who_we_are.aspx accessed 26/05/2011

²⁰ Arts Council of Ireland/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon. 2011. *Developing the Arts in Ireland: Arts Council Strategic Overview 2011-2013*.

²¹ Arts Council Ireland 'Financial Support' <http://www.artscouncil.ie/en/intro/funding.aspx> accessed 26/05/2011