



SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE

TO:

COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

FOR:

**THE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO INCLUSION IN THE ARTS OF
WORKING CLASS COMMUNITIES**

March 2014

Introduction

Audiences NI is the audience development agency for Northern Ireland and was set up in 2004 by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. The agency's aim is to help arts and cultural organisations increase, broaden and diversify its audiences through support to enhance audience development capacity within the sector. Audiences NI is a membership based organisation and currently has 113 members from across the artforms and across Northern Ireland. Audiences NI services include: training to embed key skills and knowledge within the sector, research using box office data, customer intelligence via audience profiling using Mosaic NI and collaborative audience development projects which work across the sector to target hard to reach audiences who do not traditionally attend the arts.

Many of Audiences NI's members already undertake work to ensure they and the work they produce and present reaches all communities including those within the working classes. For the purposes of this submission, Audiences NI will focus on three collaborative projects that demonstrate how the sector engages with audiences who do not traditionally attend. These projects are:

1. Test Drive The Arts NI
2. The DCAL Xmas Ticketing Initiative
3. The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Arts

While the term working class is not one that Audiences NI use in our analysis and interpretation, for the purposes of this submission we understand the term to mean those who do not traditionally engage with the arts and are often, although not always in areas of social deprivation.

Audiences NI also make some recommendations for consideration by the Inquiry alongside other submissions.

1. Test Drive the Arts NI

1.1 Test Drive the Arts NI makes use of the estimated 45% of spare capacity at ticketed venues across a year by introducing people to the arts for the first time or in some cases re-attending venues and artforms they have forgotten about. In its first 4 years Test Drive has had over 20,000 attenders enjoy an arts performance through the project. Arcos NI there are 96 venues which regularly participate in Test Drive with all art forms from theatre to opera, music to comedy being featured. Once people have attended via Test Drive, the participating venues can begin to build a customer relationship leading to more regular attendance.

1.2 Follow-up research indicates that Test Drive works to encourage people to re-attend. The research undertaken in 12/13 shows the following:

- 85 % of Test Drivers indicated their experience was good (18%) or excellent (76%)
- 96% indicated a positive intention to re-attend
- 73% indicated they had definitely re-attended since their Test Drive experience.
- 75% of those re-attending said that they had increased how often they went to the arts with 95% indicating that Test Drive played a part in that increase.

1.3 Further research tells us that only 3% of those participating in Test Drive were BOTH already aware that the event was taking place and definitely intending to attend before they made their Test Drive application. Test Drive the Arts NI is genuinely attracting people to these events who would not have been going to attend.

1.4 In order to see how this project facilitates communities across the economic spectrum, Audiences NI have analysed deprivation in relation to engagement with the arts through the Test Drive the Arts NI project. This was carried out using mapping and profiling via the Mosaic NI classification and the Multiple Deprivation Measures of Northern Ireland.

Mosaic NI is a classification system which segments customers into nine demographic groups specific to Northern Ireland, based on the postcode attached to the customer record. Although it does not give detailed information about audience behaviours, is it a useful way of assessing how different types of households with varying levels on income and this propensity to attend the arts, actually engage with the arts.

1.5 The arts generally, and Test Drive the Arts NI in particular, continues to engage across the entire spectrum of demographics in Northern Ireland.

- 40.4% of successful Test Drive bookers came from Mosaic NI Groups with above average levels of Household Incomes less than £7,500 per year.
- 47.8% of successful Test Drive bookers came from Mosaic NI Groups with above average likelihoods of having adults with 1 O-Level or less in the household.
- 34.4% of successful Test Drive bookers came from Mosaic NI Groups with above average likelihoods of having unemployed adults in the household.

1.6 When comparing Test Drive participants with the profile of those who usually attend the arts, Test Drive The Arts NI attracted a higher than average level of non-typical arts attenders compared to the stereotypical composition of arts bookers (based on the results of Audiences NI's Audience Review for 2013), particularly in the Students and Singles, Poor Seniors and Solos and Housing Exec Tenants Mosaic NI groups.

1.7 In addition to Mosaic NI, Audiences NI also analysed the participants in Test Drive the Arts NI through The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010, which enables the identification of the most deprived areas across NI.

- 13.6% of successful Test Drive applications comes from the most deprived areas in NI
- £49,738 worth of tickets have been provided at no cost to households in the top 100 Deprived areas of Northern Ireland through Test Drive the Arts NI.

1.8 Both the Mosaic NI and the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation analysis shows that arts organisations who participate in Test Drive the Arts NI are working to engage with all types of communities across NI and they work with Audiences NI to build on their own work to ensure access is inclusive.

1.9 Some of the comments below from Test Drive attenders show just how positive the experience is for those who do not traditionally attend the arts.

Fantastic opportunity; Test Drive really opened the door for me into a new type of music. Thanks!

A great experience, received tickets in good time and the seats were great right at the stage overall a fantastic first experience of the Ulster Orchestra(who were superb) at the Waterfront.

I think it's a brilliant initiative and definitely got me interested in going to more of these type of events. Show itself was very entertaining and would have been well worth the money!

1.10 Test Drive the Arts NI is a collaborative and sustained approach to encouraging *individuals* across Northern Ireland, to attend the arts that would not normally do so. In December 2013, Audiences NI had the opportunity to try and encourage attendance from harder-to-reach audiences via working with community groups across Belfast. This project was the DCAL Xmas Ticketing Initiative.

2. DCAL Xmas Ticketing Initiative

2.1 In December 2013, the Minister for Arts & Culture initiated a project aimed at providing socially and economically disadvantaged families with the opportunity to obtain free tickets for Christmas productions in the MAC, the Lyric Theatre and Grand Opera House. Audiences NI managed the promotion, registration and logistics of this initiative.

2.2 Whilst this initiative was open to any family or community group that met with eligibility criteria, there was a targeted attempt to encourage applications from specific geographic areas, particularly within Belfast. Audiences NI uses box office data to target audience development initiatives to increase the numbers of people participating in the arts, based on key trends. This data highlights a

correlation between areas of high deprivation and social and economic disadvantage and low arts attendance figures. This information was incorporated into the planning of this initiative to ensure that promotional materials encouraged applications from high priority target populations within the Belfast area. The demand for the tickets was extremely high and after the project, Audiences NI undertook evaluation with the groups who participated in the Xmas Ticketing Initiative. Some of the key findings include:

- 92.8% of respondents indicated that before booking through the initiative they were 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to have attended
- 71.4% of respondents followed by 'lack of available budget' as a factor for non-attendance
- (64.3%) indicated 'transport availability' as a barrier
- Only one organisation selected 'lack of interest' as stopping them from attending.
- 85.7% of organisations indicated that the tickets they received was **their first visit to the venue.**
- 100% of respondents indicated that they were 'extremely satisfied' with their overall experience of the ticketing initiative.
- 21.4% were 'very likely' and 71.4% were 'somewhat likely' to re-attend following this initiative.
- 100% of respondents stated that they would like to be contacted by Audiences NI regarding similar initiatives in the future.

2.3 In addition to the figures, some of the verbatim from respondents are also given to illustrate the positive success of the project.

"I think it was a fantastic idea to do this for people who may not get this experience, I tend to take my children to local pantos put on by New Lodge Arts as she loves drama and would like to act ...although the pantos are fantastic in our area this showed her what she could achieve if she kept as the drama classes put on by her local centres."

"I personally.. had never been to a panto or even the Grand Opera House before in my life considering I've lived round the corner for over 40 years and I loved it."

"The staff at the Lyric responded very professionally to our needs in relations to accessibility and disabled usage. These are really important projects for our communities and young people."

2.4 There were a number of significant learnings from this project some of which are reflected in the recommendations section. However given the high levels of demand, the positive responses and the openness to re-attending, this initiative proved that that if approached and supported correctly community groups provide a meaningful way for people to access the arts in working class communities.

3. The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Arts

3.1 If Test Drive The Arts NI focuses on individuals and the Xmas Initiative was aimed at groups, the most recent Audiences NI project, the Hitch Hikers Guide to the Arts, tries to meet a gap by creating individuals within working class communities who can become advocates and champions for the arts within their own areas and networks, by offering the chance to Test drive more than one artform.

3.2 The pilot involves a small group of 20 couples from social disadvantaged/deprived areas across Belfast who attend five events in five different artforms over eight weeks. These events are chosen with care to ensure accessibility and the availability of a tour, talk or introduction from a curator, director or artist.

3.3 Prior work has focused on driving attendances at arts events, but engagement and dialogue with groups has shown that there is a need for more qualitative analysis and much is to be learnt from developing relationships with individuals over a longer time-frame.

3.4 Audiences NI work (Feedback from Community Engagement report) has shown that the key barriers to engagement are a sense that the arts are 'not for them' and concerns around not knowing how to behave/where to sit etc. Further research has showed that the common barriers faced by the public include cost, lack of time, location, lack of public transport, lack of information, unsuitable events and feeling uncomfortable or out of place. For others barriers are more specific, such as lack of disabled access, language, lack of facilities for children and relevance to culture. The format of this project is specifically informed by this research and will provide qualitative research to aid future audience development project.

3.5 The participating organisations and art forms are as follows - the Lyric Theatre (drama), Late Night Arts (Visual art), Waterfront Hall (opera), QFT (Cultural cinema) and the Black Box (music).

It is hoped that the Hitch Hikers project will result in:

- Increased penetration in to new and non-traditional arts audiences
- Increased long-term participation in arts
- Increased confidence and engagement amongst project participants evidenced by attitudinal change
- Increased social diversity in the shared cultural space of Belfast

3.6 The project is due to complete in April with full evaluation being undertaken in April and May to aid future project development.

4. Recommendations

4.1 The three projects outlined above all demonstrate the work Audiences NI and its members are undertaking to understand the needs of all audiences, including those in working class areas, and to overcome barriers to engagement with the arts. These collaborative projects facilitate the pooling of limited resources and the sharing of learnings to ensure audience development work is informed by actual audiences' experiences and by insight and intelligence from the marketplace. To ensure

this work continues the following recommendations are made for consideration by the CAL committee.

- I. Ensure that quality of experience remains an important part of the debate around social inclusion for the arts. As indicated in some of the direct responses from comments in the Test Drive the Arts NI and Xmas Ticketing Initiative, participants want to enjoy a range of arts events from locally produced and presented work to national professional work and international touring work presented in Northern Ireland. Audiences NI have found that having a choice of arts experiences is vital to give opportunities for audiences from working class communities, and all groups, to find something within the arts that engages them and is relevant to their experiences and aspirations.
- II. Raise the profile of Test Drive the Arts NI among arts organisation and members of the public as a sustained engagement with the arts in NI from audiences who do not traditionally attend.
- III. Develop and source funding for a collaborative community-based ticketing scheme with agreed KPIs to build on individual venues community ticketing schemes and use the learnings from the DCAL-funded Xmas ticketing initiative.
- IV. Enhance the research and intelligences across the arts sector through a focus on profiling and segmenting audiences to identify needs and develop clear action plans for arts organisations to maintain and build engagement with the arts across working class communities in rural and urban areas of Northern Ireland.
- V. Enable the collection and recognition of best practice in this area of audience development through a focus on how the arts in Northern Ireland are leading the way in this type of work. Some opportunities already exist to do this via EU funded programmes but in the same way that Creativity Month celebrates the best of Northern Ireland creativity and the Creative Industries, it may increase impact to have an audience focus in a particular month looking at research, insight and best practice around audience engagement to help support inclusion across all communities including those from the working classes.