

DCAL Inquiry into the Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities

1. PURPOSE

This submission is made by Lisburn City Council with the understanding that the purpose of this Inquiry is to examine the accessibility and outreach activity of arts venues and bodies to establish the impact they are having on the inclusion of working class communities in the arts to pinpoint and understand what barriers are faced by such communities and to make recommendations as to how these barriers might be overcome.

2. LISBURN CITY COUNCIL STRUCTURE

30 Councillors represent the Council's operations and services, all of which are coordinated through 4 departments: Chief Executive's Office; Corporate Services; Environmental Services and Leisure Services. Each department has its own Committees.

3. RESPONSE

In 2001, Lisburn City Council opened its new 3.1 million Arts Council lottery funded arts venue, ISLAND Arts Centre as part of the development of its new Council Headquarters in Lisburn.

In preparation for this and with an understanding that the venue had to be accessible to as wide a range of people as possible, especially the local community, funding was secured through Phase 1 of the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation to appoint a full-time Community Arts Officer with associated funding for a community arts outreach programme. This then resulted in the permanent recruitment of a Community Arts Officer and new and dedicated community arts funding to not only actively complement the provision of all arts events and services based at ISLAND Arts Centre but to continue using creative processes to develop active community participation in the Arts, regardless of ability, age, experience, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, economics or geographical location in order to regenerate and transform both the community and individual alike.

Community Arts and the inclusion of working class communities within this remit has always been about working with and for the local community through a hybrid practice of combining techniques drawn from arts marketing, arts education, participatory arts and community development and in doing so, significant experience has been developed over some 15 years in creating, developing and managing a huge range of high and low level community arts projects and events than have ranged in costs of up to £800,000.00 over their lifetime, to date.

In referencing more recent benchmarks, this outreach work has contributed substantial community arts funding and support over the last 3 years as follows:

% Figures Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities across Lisburn City							
YEAR	Community Festivals Fund (average annual budget of 55k per annum)	PEACE III	Civic Events including Halloween, Mayor's Parade, Children's Festival (Annual budget of app £76,000)	Arts Training (annual budget of 6k)	Arts Grants Support (annual budget of app £25,000 via Lisburn Arts Advisory Committee)	Arts Outreach Programme (annual budget of 22k)	Arts Education (annual budget of £2,500)
13-14	55%	£124,150 (100%)	93%	83% (to date)	66.08%	64% (to date)	62%
12-13	78%	£	86%	64%	56.79%	53%	48%
11-12	66%	£43,500.00 (100%)	82%	57%	49.08%	59%	66%

In addition, the Council has worked in partnership with local agencies and across its own internal departments to use the arts as an intervention tool to make meaningful contributions to social inclusion within the city's working class communities by working across all the areas listed below:

- Health and Well-being / Mental Health Awareness / Physical Disability Awareness / Cultural Diversity Awareness
- Good Relations / Issues affecting GLTB communities / Ageism Awareness / Youth Culture / Urban Regeneration / Arts Education

In consideration of the fact that the local community is constantly evolving, the Council also undertakes substantial annual research into the barriers that exist within the city that may prevent people from participating in arts activity to ensure that the best delivery of community arts provision is being supported and offered where it is most needed. Most recently, such consultation has noted that currently these barriers include:

- lack of time due to family commitments – people are increasingly 'time poor'
- economic costs due to the current recession – 'night in' vs. cost of 'night out'
- poor transport systems restricting accessibility to ISLAND Arts Centre
- poor urban night-time infrastructure within the main 'city centre'
- social and psychological perceptions that the arts are for the educated

In response the Council has implemented the following:

- more varied times for participation e.g. evening / weekend initiatives
- engagement in Audience NI's Test Drive the Arts Initiative offering opportunities for people who have not previously attended ISLAND Arts Centre's live performances to acquire 2 free tickets to enable those from low socio economic backgrounds an opportunity to attend
- free bus service to disengaged groups and individuals wishing to attend events at ISLAND Arts Centre. In addition, the Council operates a Buddycard Scheme that allows the Carer of an individual to attend any Council paid event free-of charge
- cross-departmental working with Economic Development in urban regeneration schemes such as public art programmes, free events through Culture Night programmes and animation of the city centre through increased arts programming by a Council established dedicated voluntary urban regeneration arts group working in partnership with Lisburn City Centre Management and the South Eastern Regional College
- improvements in community arts marketing through the web and social media, making the outputs of engagement instantly accessible to the wider community to demonstrate that such engagement is creative and enjoyable in its own right with the aim of widening the audience base for future participation

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN POLICIES, DELIVERY MECHANISMS AND COLLABORATION

Recommendations to develop the contribution of the arts to a more inclusive and cohesive society and particularly working class communities and how these policy issues could be tackled are listed under each of the 5 areas below:

Better Policy Coordination at a National Level

- Between local authorities (RPA / merging of Councils may assist this)
- Between local authority arts groups (RPA/merging of Councils may assist this)
- Between local arts organisations (RPA/merging of Councils may assist this)
- Amongst Community Arts Officers (RPA/merging of Councils may assist this)

Management and Certainty of Funding

- Multi-annual funding needs to be implemented to sustain such community arts work and its associated benefits
- Investment by local government into the resourcing of dedicated Community Arts Officers to improve the overall infrastructure of community development through the arts and to improve accessibility to arts venues through interactive programmes of learning to remove any existing stigmas about attendance
- The mainstreaming of successful community arts pilot projects across all new Councils would allow for a more judicious and holistic approach to the benefits of such investment

Supports for Children and Young Adults as Audiences of the Future

- The provision of Artist-in-Residence programmes in schools for young people
- Specific funding for Artist-in-Residence programmes for disadvantaged schools
- Better links between schools and artists through complementary arts venue-led arts education programmes

Targeted Measures for Specific Groups

- Public awareness campaigns to promote community arts outreach programmes and their benefits not only in improving social inclusion within local communities but also at their own arts facilities e.g. case studies
- The provision of specific funding initiatives similar to that of Audience NI's 'Test Drive the Arts' for low income communities to enable attendance at arts events and arts venues more than once

Staff Training to improve Data Capture and Evaluations

- More data on who is and who is not participating in the arts
- Statistics to accurately measure the social impact of community arts
- Implementation Mechanisms guided by a National Strategy Committee to review means tested discounts for disadvantaged/working-class communities
- Increasing Community Arts Partnerships across the new Council areas to improve the reach of social inclusion projects at reduced costs and increased benefit for the involved parties.

5. CONCLUSION

Lisburn City Council is one of the few local authorities that have a dedicated Community Arts Officer and associated funding resource and given its high levels of sustained output and engagement, the Council offers a model of good practice in this area. It is felt that it is important for DCAL to recognise that this investment has substantially exceeded that of many of the Council's counterparts over the last 15 years and that working directly with local communities to proactively respond to the type of arts activities, which the community wants, has led to this success.

The Council is keen to play a full part in this debate and would welcome an opportunity for further consultation once more detailed and revised proposals are available.