

NvTv
Community
Television for
the Belfast area

NORTHERN VISIONS/NvTv

Response to Enquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities

Thank you for the opportunity to comment to this Enquiry.

Northern Visions is an arts and digital media centre based in the Cathedral Quarter of Belfast. We engage in all arts and film activities – creative writing, cinematography, music, graphics, digital post production, digital arts and computer graphics, drama, sound recording, web based activities etc, as well as training and mentoring.

We define digital media as *"the creative convergence of digital arts, science, technology and business for human expression, communication, social interaction and education"*. We are advocates of community arts practice in filmmaking.

The organisation was founded in 1986 and approximately 80% of its work is conducted with those at disadvantage or risk of social exclusion.

Northern Visions successfully bid to Ofcom for the licence to broadcast local public service television. NvTv will launch on Freeview Channel 8 in September 2014, broadcasting to 220,000+ households in the Greater Belfast area. Programming will also be made available on a range of mobile and tablet devices and negotiations are underway with Virgin cable and SKY.

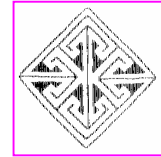
Local Public Service Television is a UK government priority. We are part of the Local Television Network broadcasting to 12-14 million households across the UK.

We are also one of 11 TV broadcasters and film production sources from Ireland, including RTE and TV3, which supply the current daily programme content direct from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to MHz Worldview Channel *"Today's Ireland"*, broadcasting across the USA to 41 million households.

Being an organisation of long standing in the community, our general view is that accessibility to the arts in working class communities has improved over the last thirty years.

1. Arts Practice

Northern Visions is open access, caters for all ages and abilities and works in partnership with those who are delivering anti-poverty programmes, social inclusion, lifelong learning, skills-based initiatives for the unemployed and eradicating child poverty. We have collaborative initiatives with local artists and arts organisations, which explore the fusion and cross-pollination of different arts disciplines with film, new media and technology.



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We are interested in seeking new ways to push the creative boundaries of film through embracing avant-garde experimentation as well as community process-driven approaches. Some of our best work occurs when these two elements come together.

2. Community Filmmaking & Training

Within our own context as an organisation, community filmmaking is based on community arts principles, the main ones being:

- It promotes participation, regardless of the existing level of skill or talent.
- It provides opportunities for people who through economic or social circumstance have little access to the means to participate in the arts.

Our view is that film is:

- A highly flexible and immediate medium;
- Embodies all art forms;
- Brings a community together to voice concerns, stimulate local innovation, reflect and exchange ideas or simply be creative;
- Is capable of being applied in many different situations to enable greater participation in society and is particularly useful in giving marginalised groups a means to express themselves;
- As a recording medium it captures art, poetry, drama, music, personal testimony, storytelling through face-to-face contact;
- May be used to provide a therapeutic and communicative environment for the mentally ill, impaired or disempowered;
- Is easily shared and has the potential for global distribution.

We have initiated various schemes designed to support the individual and the community through outreach arts and film activities. Formal qualifications and traditional film industry experience are not required; most participants do not have media qualifications or experience of film and television.

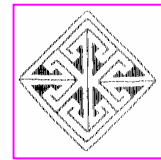
The learning environment is designed so that training and skills enhancement takes place during engagement in the creative process on projects. Originally we took this view, rather than one based on training where there is no tangible creative team process, because it yielded good results. More latterly, the Government's Digital Inclusion reports have made clear that partnerships and innovation are the major drivers to further digital engagement and that a range of activities is required to enhance skills across communities, including the disabled.

3. Independent Research

In the last five years, two pieces of independent research were carried out with regard to Northern Visions.

The first, for Belfast City Council, found that demand for Northern Visions resources was higher than availability, and increasingly, demand for services caused some operational problems.

Numbers of participants on Northern Visions outreach arts programme were exceeded by 56% and the number of arts projects completed rose by 28%. Volunteers doubled over the three-year period from 180 to



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397 and the participation of young filmmakers trebled. There were 1,250+ participants in TSN areas in each year.

The second piece of research examined the social benefits of local television using example case studies with Belfast, Cardiff, Immingham and York at the request of the then DCMS Secretary of State. It was agreed the report would explore the number of training places/apprenticeships that had been offered over the past five years, the types of skills gained and the numbers going on to work professionally in media and the creative industries.

Of 29 trainees and apprentices studied, all of whom were engaged in Northern Visions outreach activities in the community, 21 were unemployed on entry, 4 were in casual/part time work and 4 had just completed education, on exit, 18 found full time employment, 3 found freelance employment, 6 went into further education, one set up their own business and one emigrated.

Of 100 participants engaged on Northern Visions Access Initiative, an active citizenship programme working with communities, 37 were unemployed. Of those unemployed, 14 found full time posts, one found part time employment, 5 gained employment as freelancers in the industry, 6 went into further and higher education, one received a photographic commission, one started a business, one became a house husband and one went to Australia. Eight remained unemployed.

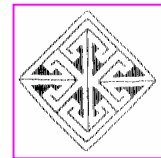
In both the above examples, full time employment posts included arts management, community work, independent television production, a post in a publishing house, community radio, teaching, a regional television presenter, BBC production, Channel 4, a health charity and audiovisual entertainment.

In the current financial year 2013-2014, we began piloting a new digital media initiative "*Tellus A Story*" with schools, the majority in North Belfast, centred on storytelling, puppetry, music, and sound recording allied to digital technology and computer graphics. As research has shown children in a number of areas of North Belfast have less access to digital media than in wealthier areas of the city. In this we were supported by Arts for All in Lower North Belfast and received assistance from the Fab Lab in the New Lodge.

This initiative, which took over three months to develop before it went into production was made possible by arts revenue funding from ACNI, which guaranteed the freedom to pilot aspects of the initiative, not just with the 174 children (7-10 years) and 9 schools, who took part but also for the artists themselves who were experimenting with new concepts and computer software.

Given the restraints due to the curriculum, working with schools takes time to arrange and this particular project had to take place on our premises given the complexity of the technologies involved. This meant there were a number of logistical challenges including transport for the children and adequate staffing (average of 1 staff/artist to two pupils).

The completed series of 10 films for children aged 3-5 years will be screened on Local Television in the autumn of 2014.



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4. Suggestions for the CAL committee to consider

In conclusion, we believe television is not only a powerful distribution system; it is also a powerful tool to widen every community's involvement in broadcasting. It has the power to be inclusive, to represent all under-represented communities and most important of all, the potential to encourage everyone's creativity, skills and innovation.

Within this context, we suggest the CAL committee could consider the following:

- Historically community filmmaking has been under-resourced leading to numerous constraints as a result of that under-resourcing. The CAL committee could analyse Film Lottery monies in relation to their consultation brief on inclusion, ensuring that appropriate measures are in place so that funds are accessible to those wishing to make films in disadvantaged communities and/or with older people, people with disabilities, youth, women, the unemployed, minority ethnic communities through non-traditional means – for example, not led by production companies and regional and/or national television but by the community organisations, groups and arts organisations themselves. We believe this would help to ensure equality of opportunity to Lottery monies for all art forms.
- The CAL committee could analyse the current framework of the Ulster Scots Broadcast Fund, which we understand, from what we have read in the DCAL Evaluation, is limited and is underperforming for the very audience it was designed to serve. The community, itself, should be a significant and vibrant part of the creative process producing programmes consistently throughout the year. In terms of our own organisation, and the opportunities which we believe Local Television presents, we would like to see the framework of the fund extended to train up apprentices, support participation and skills enhancement and eventually, ensure that this approach and hopefully, appropriate outreach facilities, are embedded firmly in the community.
- Traditionally it has been, and continues to be, difficult to get a foothold in the film and television industry, which remains London centric (three out of five programmes made by our public service broadcasters are produced in London), and predominated by the university-educated middle class. We are currently working with others to establish creative outreach hubs, housed within existing resources, such as community or cultural centres in disadvantaged communities. The hubs support unemployed youth through creative apprenticeships and practical training to produce content with the community for the Local Television service. This will be a unique learning environment not available elsewhere and being grassroots in ethos, it supports not just the learning of skills and employability but the communities the creative outreach hubs are designed to serve. This is a challenging initiative and we welcome your knowledge and support in making this initiative a reality.
- We welcome all ideas in relation to the new Local Television service, which have a positive effect on the lives of everyone in our community.

We also refer you to previous submissions, which touched on the issues you raise in this consultation.

Northern Visions, March 2014
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