

Arts Council of Northern Ireland submission to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's Inquiry into Building a United Community

Introduction

1. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the development and funding agency for the Arts in Northern Ireland. We distribute public money and National Lottery funds to develop and deliver a wide variety of arts projects, events and initiatives across Northern Ireland.
2. The arts provide a rich offering to building peace and a shared future: a safe space where we can explore our many-faceted identities and our hopes for the future as well as appreciate difference and grow common ground; they can nurture a sense of optimism through events such as the City of Culture 2013 and Belfast Culture Night; and, indeed, we have witnessed how arts venues can be a place where genuine encounter can occur. Time and again, we experience the arts reaching across boundaries and division, providing opportunities for us to live life together in ways which serve a society seeking to be shared, healthy and embracing of diversity.
3. The Arts Council welcomes the Inquiry into Building a United Community undertaken by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Overview of Arts Council activity relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference

4. In Northern Ireland, the arts have been used as a component of peace building, helping to bring together communities split by religious, political and ethnic divides. There is a variety of arts activity and initiatives occurring across Northern Ireland, in both urban and rural areas, which promote good relations and build a shared future. These include:
 - Building Peace through the Arts: Re-Imaging Communities
 - The Intercultural Arts Strategy and Programme
 - The Cultural Funding Scheme
 - The forthcoming Community Arts Strategy
 - Arts Council funded organisations and projects (Exchequer and Lottery funding)
 - The Arts Council Troubles Archive

Building Peace through the Arts: Re-Imaging Communities Programme

5. In February 2013, the Arts Council launched the £3.1m Building Peace through the Arts: Re-Imaging Communities Programme¹. The programme is rooted in the building of a shared future for Northern Ireland. It supports community groups and

¹ This programme is funded by the European Union's Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE III) managed by the Special EU Programmes Body; the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; and the International Fund for Ireland.

local authorities across Northern Ireland and the Border Areas of the Republic of Ireland in tackling the manifestations of sectarianism and racism.

6. The programme encourages the creation of vibrant and attractive shared public space through the use of the creative arts in the public realm, which celebrate life, enhance the physical and natural environment and help people feel part of the community in which they live. The purpose of this next phase of funding is to build peace and improve community relations through consultation, creative engagement and the development of public artworks.
7. The programme aims to tackle the different forms of segregation and division in their variety of manifestations across Northern Ireland. For example, within the larger urban areas, the programme aims to free the public realm from visible displays of sectarian aggression and intimidation such as graffiti, flags and murals; and within the numerous small villages and rural communities, where displays of the visible trappings of sectarian division are limited, the programme recognises that barriers nonetheless exist and are manifest in a number of ways, including people's ability to move freely and safely about the community.
8. Projects must address one or more of the programme's strategic themes:

A. *Community Cohesion* - to provide opportunities for more stable, safer neighbourhoods and develop strong, positive relations between people from different backgrounds.

B. *Regeneration through the Arts* - to develop more inclusive civic and cultural identities through the production of high quality artwork for the public realm.

C. *Positive Relations at the Local Level* - utilise the arts and arts processes as a means with which to challenge sectarian and racist attitudes and build positive community relations at a local level.

D. *Build Peace and Reconciliation* - support progress towards a peaceful, shared and stable society and promote reconciliation through community led programmes of arts activities.

E. *Connecting Communities* - utilise the arts and arts processes as a means in which to connect communities throughout Northern Ireland and the Border Areas.

9. The programme prioritises projects that: (1) are cross-community, inter-community, cross-border or inter-cultural, (2) target the participation of young people, (3) target the participation of minority ethnic communities, (4) are located in areas which had little or no participation in the previous Re-Imaging Communities Programme, and, (5) involve the removal of signs of sectarianism / racism along main arterial routes. The programme aims to deliver long-term, cross-community and cross border projects

which will in turn complement current work by addressing issues of sectarianism, racism and prejudice between communities.

10. An evaluation of Building Peace through the Arts: Re-Imaging Communities Programme will be published in late 2015, following the conclusion of the programme.
11. Building Peace through the Arts: Re-Imaging Communities is an example of local best practice which brings divided communities together and develops shared spaces (**Committee Terms of Reference 1**). The evaluation of the predecessor programme to Building Peace through the Arts found impacts relating to: the creation of shared spaces; the usefulness of art as a medium; the building and/or strengthening of community/good relations; cohesion, empowerment and ownership; and the projects being catalysts for further improvement².
12. In relation to **Committee Terms of Reference 2**, it should be noted that communities are involved in the decision-making processes of the created artworks and that the evaluation of the first programme highlighted how it included individuals and groups not normally involved in community matters. As such, the arts could be a useful vehicle in the community development work allied to the removal of barriers at interface areas.
13. The second phase of the Re-Imaging programme sought to build on the successes of the first phase as well as seeking to address any gaps. The Arts Council recommends the development of a successor programme (a third phase) to Building Peace through the Arts: Re-Imaging Communities when it concludes in 2014. Consolidating and extending the successes to date will help the Northern Ireland Executive build a shared future for everyone in Northern Ireland working in collaboration with communities across Northern Ireland and thus, support the objectives of Together Building a United Community. (**Committee Terms of Reference 3**).

Intercultural Arts Strategy and Programme

14. The overarching aim of the Arts Council **Intercultural Arts Strategy** is to increase access to and participation in the arts amongst minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. The strategy was prepared in recognition of the priorities set out in ACNI's five year Strategy, *Creative Connections 2007-2012*. The strategic themes include:
 - **Intercultural Engagement** - Promoting exchanges between different cultural groups within society.
 - **Developing the Minority Ethnic Arts Infrastructure** - Develop collaborative working, through arts and cultural activity between new and existing communities.

² More information can be found here: http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/Re-Imaging_Final_Evaluation.pdf

- **Using the Arts to develop Community Cohesion** - Working to promote cohesion and integration for a shared and better future for all.
 - **Using the Arts to increase awareness of diversity** - Develop understanding of the diversity that exists in Northern Ireland.
 - **Using the Arts to develop Good Relations** - Working to develop good relations between new and existing communities in Northern Ireland.
 - **Using the Arts as a vehicle to Tackle Racism** - Working to tackle racism between new and existing communities in Northern Ireland.
15. The Arts Council has committed £300, 000 over a three-year period to the **Intercultural Arts Programme**. Launched in May 2012, the programme has a number of elements: Intercultural Arts Grants; Artist in the Community Awards; Minority Ethnic Individual Artists Awards; Intercultural Arts Support Programme.
16. The Interim Evaluation indicates that a future programme should include ongoing development of programme strands (grants programme, support for artists, support and networking opportunities for minority ethnic communities) and ongoing training and support for the Arts Council’s Annually Funded clients in providing inclusive and accessible programmes of activities. The final programme evaluation is due in May 2015.
17. As noted above, the Intercultural Arts Programme is based upon the findings of the research contained within the Intercultural Arts Strategy and seeks to use the arts to develop community cohesion, to increase awareness of diversity, to develop good relations and as a vehicle to tackle racism. Using the arts in this way allows the exploration of perspectives relating to sectarianism, division and good relations and the bringing together of divided communities in a manner which builds trust (**Committee Terms of Reference 1**).
18. We advocate the continued development of the Intercultural Arts Programme beyond the lifetime of the current programme in order to build upon the achievements to date. The evaluation of the programme will recommend the trajectory for any succeeding programme to take in the years ahead. It is our view that given the increase in racist attacks this year, continued support remains of strategic importance to building a united community (**Committee Terms of Reference 3**)

Cultural Funding Scheme

19. In September 2013, the Arts Council announced the creation of a Cultural Funding Scheme in collaboration with Belfast City Council to support cultural and community groups. Over a three year period, the scheme will target communities which are less likely to participate in culture and arts due to social, economic or other barriers. Each organisation has committed £450,000 to provide an overall investment of £900,000.

Each of the successful projects must demonstrate the use of arts and culture to address the challenge of social inclusion and demonstrate that they are: Cross-community; Cross-city; Delivered in partnership between arts and community organisations; Benefit hard-to-reach areas and communities.

20. Three of the first four projects to be funded as part of Creative and Cultural Belfast have relevance to building a shared future. They are³:

- **Abhainn bheo na Fearsaide/The living River Farset** - The River Farset gave Belfast its name, but today, it has largely been built over and forgotten. Abhainn bheo na Fearsaide – a partnership between Cultúrlann and Spectrum Centre – will return the Farset to the heart of Belfast through creative workshops, heritage digs and public art.
- **Draw Down the Walls 2015** - Golden Thread Gallery is commissioning a new visual arts project that will provoke debate about the ‘barriers in our society’. Its vision is to create the conditions needed to imagine a city without barriers.
- **Nine Nights** - ArtsEkta’s Nine Nights will be an outdoor theatre spectacle. Working in partnership with Walk the Plank – producers of the Derry/Londonderry City of Culture event, the Return of Colmcille – Nine Nights will combine music, dance and pyrotechnics, retelling centuries-old Hindu folklore as a thrilling, contemporary Belfast celebration.

21. Funding streams such as this are sound examples of how the Arts Council (together with Belfast City Council) is seeking to develop relations between communities across the city of Belfast and to use the arts to develop spaces as both shared and vibrantly alive. (**Committee Terms of Reference 1**).

22. Supporting and promoting projects such as those highlighted above is important in helping Northern Ireland tackle the racism and sectarianism and other forms of intolerance (**Committee Terms of Reference 3**).

23. The second funding round of the Cultural Funding Scheme opened in early September 2014.

The forthcoming Community Arts Strategy

24. Community Arts reaches and speaks to the most marginalised given its underpinning principles of authorship and ownership within an approach of collaborative arts practice. It also reflects the understanding that art is not created in a vacuum but within, and with reference to, a community, embedded within place and identity. Engagement with communities is predicated on sound practice, and with the pursuit of artistic excellence at the forefront of ambition. This is achieved by developing

³ The fourth project is - *BabyDay* - In 2015, Replay Theatre Company will bring the world’s first BabyDay to Belfast. BabyDay will decorate the city with playful art and fill the streets with families, much like on Culture Night – but for babies.

flexible, creative and imaginative responses to local issues, empowering artists, individuals and communities to fulfil their creative potential and address some of the challenges facing Northern Ireland such as poverty and social exclusion.

25. For over three decades the Arts Council has been an advocate of the transformative power of Community Arts. It has encouraged other government departments and funders to support Community Arts practice to help them realise their own policy objectives. These have been in fields such as regeneration; peace-building; community development; and in building confidence and skills amongst marginalised children and young people. **(Committee Terms of Reference 1)**
26. During research for the Community Arts Strategy, our strategic stakeholders told us that they recognise the contribution Community Arts can bring to the social change agenda including: promoting equality of access (economic, social and physical); creating shared spaces; accessing 'hard to reach' sections of the community; bringing communities and generations together. **(Committee Terms of Reference 1)**
27. In community arts, the sector's effectiveness in engagement is a key strength. Consideration could be given to the role of the arts in community engagement in order to achieve Executive objectives such as the removal of interface barriers. **(Committee Terms of Reference 2)**
28. We continue to recommend government departments across the Executive to consider the impact that community arts can make in realising individual departmental objectives. The ability of the arts to nurture, strengthen and challenge the theory and practice of community in equal measure should not be under-estimated. **(Committee Terms of Reference 3).**
29. In 2014/15, the Arts Council will implement a revised Regularly Funded Organisation (RFO) survey in to more accurately measure the quantifiable outputs from all arts organisations working in community contexts. We will publish the findings of the revised RFO Survey.

Arts Council funded organisations and projects (Exchequer and Lottery funding)

30. In 2013, the Arts Council distributed over £13m to its core funded arts organisations through the Annual Funding Programme (AFP) which is designed to support organisations to deliver year round arts programmes. These organisations represent the Arts Council's primary means of engaging with local communities by taking their work to new audiences via outreach schemes and audience development initiatives. By way of example, two Arts Council annually-funded organisations with a high level of cross-community work are Greater Shantallow Community Arts and Arts for All.

31. In addition, in the Regularly Funded Organisation Survey 2011/12 (published in February 2013), it is reported that 69% of arts activity was described as cross-community in nature, involving a mix of individuals from both the main community backgrounds. This does not necessarily mean that activity was designed to strengthen cross-community relationships; rather that it simply involved a balance of individuals from more than one community background. However, the impact of encounter in a shared setting has a number of benefits including: building respect, sharing common interests and breaking down the perception of difference.

32. In July 2014, the Arts Council announced Lottery project funding awards to fifty-four organisations amounting to £1.5m. By way of example, three funded projects impact upon how the arts build community relations and allow encounter in shared spaces to occur. These are:

- **Culture Night Belfast:** CNB encourages audiences to explore and engage in new arts activities with many activities coming alive in public squares and streets, resulting in a vibrant celebration of the cultural life of Belfast city. It brings life, laughter and a sense of family-friendly fun to Belfast.
- **North West Carnival Initiative:** This organisation aims to promote participation in and production of high quality carnival arts and performance in the North West, and support communities in celebrating and showcasing their work, reflecting the cultural diversity of the city.
- **Spectrum Centre:** The Spectrum Centre aims to build partnerships and increase the number of Belfast wide events taking place at the centre, support community arts programmes and contribute to the Greater Shankill Neighbourhood Action Plan through activities which address reconciliation, social awareness, community engagement and education.

33. In addition, Arts Council Lottery funded projects including the *Small Grants Programme* and *Public Art Programme* can support the development of community cohesion. An example of this is:

- **Artichoke:** In April 2014, the Arts Council awarded funding towards the development of a large public art project for the Derry/L'Derry area. 'Temple' will be created by internationally renowned sculptor, David Best through extensive city-wide engagement and aims to bridge divisions through a programme of cross-community work leading to a public light performance on International Day of Peace (September 2015). *Temple* will see the creation of a citywide shared platform through the delivery of apprentice, back-to-work

and voluntary training schemes, aimed at fostering ownership while addressing the movement towards a *One City*.

(Committee Terms of Reference 1, 2 and 3).

The Arts Council Troubles Archive

34. The Arts Council will soon launch its Troubles Archive, a digital archive containing many of the key artistic works that were created against the backdrop of the Northern Ireland Troubles. It has been produced in recognition of the contribution that the arts make to our understanding of the Troubles, and of the impact that the conflict has had upon the arts in Northern Ireland. We will continue to develop the depth and scope of material as we build this unique, comprehensive record. **(Committee Terms of Reference 1)**

Closing Comments

35. Together Building a United Community notes its commitment to the continued use of the arts as a means of improving good relations. The Arts Council welcomes this commitment and will continue to build upon its support to organisations and projects which enhance community relations and cohesion.