

## **Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities**

This written evidence is submitted by Eileen Walsh as an elected representative for individual artists on the Cultural Partnership Forum.

Hugely involved in the arts in Derry-Londonderry, Eileen Walsh is elected Chair of the Cultural Partnership Forum and Vice Chair of CCA Derry-Londonderry. In addition to being a practising artist and film maker, Eileen Walsh also produces and presents the weekly arts show on Drive 105 radio.

1. While the funding streams for arts and community organisations are wide and varied, I would like to highlight the fact that funding for individual artists per se is practically non-existent. Artists are extremely restricted from developing their creative practice by the lack of funding available and are limited to minimal funding possibilities through organisations like the Arts Council NI with their SIAP programme.

The Cultural Partnership Forum recently released a statement expressing their disappointment that funding applications for the Legacy Fund, a joint initiative between Derry City Council and Arts Council NI, could not be considered from individual artists. Once again, this highly anticipated funding stream was closed to individual artists. This is extremely limiting to creativity. It is also a missed opportunity in terms of nurturing the creative industries.

The recent CIIF funding strand, while providing some support for individual artists, also involves an extremely complicated application process more suitable for established businesses.

Many artists, with some financial incentives, can be encouraged to grow a little as artists, and many, with fairly limited financial support have the potential to go on to develop flourishing creative businesses.

2. Many creatives would benefit hugely from small funding incentives which they could apply for directly themselves. At present, most funding within the arts is processed through arts and community organisations and venues. While these organisations do work with and employ individual artists, many organisations have a tendency to work with artists, and increasingly curators, that they know or are accustomed to working with. While undoubtedly this provides much needed work, exposure and other benefits for these artists and curators, unfortunately this practice is of limited benefit to other artists 'outside' these organisations.

In addition to this, many individual artists simply do not wish to be attached to organisations, preferring to work on creative projects on their own, often on projects that could potentially become fledgling creative businesses. Unfortunately, financial constraints mean that most of these creatives cannot obtain financial help to develop their projects and simply cannot earn a living.

Not only does this deprive communities of the opportunity to engage with the work of these artists and all the benefits that this would bring, encouraging creativity, regenerating communities and instilling pride in their neighbourhoods, this practice also deprives the artists themselves, many of whom are part of working class communities, of the opportunity to earn a living wage.

Unemployment rates in working class communities are already extremely high. The fact that so few individual artists can attain funding to allow them to develop their creative work within these communities is thus exacerbated further. This is particularly noteworthy in Derry-Londonderry, which still languishes in its position as the unemployment capital of the UK.

It is also however a city that has a remarkably creative population. Nurturing creative projects from artists in Derry-Londonderry would go a long way to solving many of the city's current problems.

3. Instead of having a focus on artists, especially in the field of visual arts, there is an increasing emphasis on curators within many arts organisations. While there are undoubtedly certain benefits that curators bring to arts organisations, many individual artists feel doubly excluded from both arts organisations and their associate curators. This, combined with the lack of funding possibilities for artists to develop and show their work and projects, and the employment of artists and curators already connected to particular organisations has led to a feeling of isolation amongst artists.

4. More partnership opportunities are essential that allow for the public and private sectors to engage and work together to develop substantial programmes of investment to help develop the creative industries and artists, allowing artists to provide innovative and imaginative arts projects for the communities they live and try to work in. This would benefit both the communities and the artists themselves.

In these times of funding cuts, rising unemployment and challenging times for urban centres, addressing some of these issues would go some way to solving the problem of overreliance on the public sector in our economy.

5. Lastly, as with all arts projects, the participation rates are directly proportional to organisational ability to market these projects effectively.

Most funding streams again do not attach great significance to this, preferring to focus mainly on artistic excellence and project delivery. Underinvestment however in marketing is detrimental to participation rates for all arts projects and especially so in working class communities.

Potential audiences and participants need to be aware of the existence of arts projects in their communities and a lot more work and funding is needed to help develop audience engagement.

### **Summary**

There needs to be more financial assistance to individual artists to help them develop their work and projects.

Funding procedures for individual artists should not be overly bureaucratic.

More assistance should be given to artists to develop projects on their own, without excessive reliance on their selection by curators or arts organisations who they already work with or know. Artists could make applications to a fund and then, if successful, join up with an arts organisation if required for completion. Artists themselves need to be empowered, not necessarily curators.

There needs to be more focus on the artist, with all the creativity that they can bring to communities.

More emphasis needs to be placed on marketing and audience engagement if we really want a high level of participation in the arts in working class communities and elsewhere.