Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) response to the Consultation on Approach to 10X Technologies and Clusters

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland welcomes the 10X strategy and recognizes its potential to drive economic growth and create jobs.

As the main development agency for the arts in Northern Ireland we recognise the vital role it plays in driving innovation and creativity in the wider creative industries and its potential to do more, given adequate resourcing.

Our current strategic plan Inspire, Connect, Lead (2019 to 2024) provides a strong foundation for action by enabling and enhancing collaboration, research, and development across the creative arts sector through digital production, screen, and creative learning. A key outcome of our new draft strategic plan is how we can better support the arts sector and enable innovation, experimentation and artistic risk taking.

The arts sector's impact extends well beyond traditional artform areas, it is a driver of innovation, a source of creative skills and can help growth in other sectors such as cultural tourism.

Role of the Arts in the Screen Industry

The consultation document notes that a priority cluster is the screen industry, and it is important that the strategy also includes a strong focus on the arts; reflecting their importance in the talent pipeline and IP generation within screen.

The screen industry acknowledges that many of the staff operating in their sector have come from the arts; providing the necessary skills sets from visual arts, textiles, or theatre direction but attracted by better pay.

The intellectual property key for the screen industry is created by screenwriters, concept artists or composers. The arts provide the invisible foundation that the creative industries are built upon.

As the screen industry evolves it is noted that Virtual Production and Studio Ulster are listed as part of the priority cluster. This new medium is still being

developed requiring creatives not only to operate the facilities but also artists to create content that can test the potential of the technology.

For example, virtual production pre-production skills such as screenwriting, concept art, motion capture, games engine programming and 3D design all have their origins within creativity, as do skill sets associated with post-production such as composition and music direction.

STEAM (Science Technology Engineering ARTS mathematics) A platform for success

Sir Peter Bazalgette's Independent Review of the Creative Industries (2017) recognized that the enormous potential of the creative industries could be limited by the lack of investment in the "talent pipeline" and that there are high social and informational barriers to entry and there is a limited availability of post-secondary education and training.

This is in part a result of not fully considering the whole value chain of, for example, the screen industries, leaving out the importance of fully exploiting the role of the performing arts, visual arts and literature in the creative industries.

To build a solid foundation of the screen industries, the review finds, it is necessary to invest in programmes that could deepen and expand the talent pipeline, starting at secondary schools.

To focus on growth in the creative sector and make virtual production a pillar of the 10x strategy, while only encouraging growth in STEM subjects misses the core skills needed to generate the intellectual property that brings these technologies to life.

UK Research and Innovation finds that an area of underinvestment is the talent pipeline that expands all the cultural and creative industries. More precisely, there seems to be a misalignment between the skills that are being taught and the ones that are needed by employers. Similarly, recruitment practices still rely on informal networks and channels, limiting the pool of people who can enter the sector.

The economic benefit

As well as having a strong intrinsic value, the creative industries have a wider, more measurable impact on Northern Ireland economy.

The direct GVA contribution generated by the arts and culture industry in Northern Ireland is £168m, 0.7% of its total non-financial GVA (2020) (CEBR, 2020) and is consistent with that generated in Scotland and Wales.

Contribution	Direct	Multiplier	Aggregate footprint
GVA (£m)	168	1.93	324
Employment (FTEs)	4,674	2.11	9,845

This economic contribution is particularly reflected in tourism. In their consumer sentiment research, Tourism NI has identified that 23% of survey participants stated that visiting art galleries was one of the top 5 things that would most interest them during a short break in Northern Ireland[2]. 23% included Performing arts shows (music, dance, theatre) in their top 5, 5% exploring screen tourism and 34% visiting a museum. This same survey shows that 57% of survey participants would be interested in seeing/finding out more about the local arts and crafts (painting, sculpture) in Northern Ireland.

The 2023 This is Music report[1] demonstrates the scale of the economic contribution the wider UK music industry makes to the UK economy, generating £4 billion in 2022, contributing £6.7 billion in GVA and employing 210,000 people. Overall, the creative industries sector grew by 6.9% in September 2022 compared with the same month in 2021.

Our Work

Over the last strategy period we have shown the value of the arts to the wider creative economy, influenced policies to help it grow, and helped arts and cultural organisations thrive by making the most of digital technologies and new funding sources.

---

[1] UK Music, annual economic report (2023)

How arts funding impacts screen productions

The creative talent of NI based actors can bring a unique perspective and skill set to the screen industries, such as storytelling, creativity, and attention to detail. This was recently demonstrated when the NI short film 'An Irish goodbye', won the Oscar for Best Live Action Short Film at the 2023 Academy Awards. The film received support in its development stage through NI Screen's Short Film Development Support, which is funded through the Arts Council's National Lottery funds.

How Arts Funding explores talent pipelines

We are working on the working and living conditions of artists, following the 2010 report. There is a gap in the literature to map the career progression of artists and creative practitioners in the entire cultural and creative industries. We welcome opportunities to work together to build the evidence needed to close this gap and inform policy making.

In addition, in 2023, we have utilised qualitative and quantitative studies to examine the skills availability and skills gaps within the arts sector to understand how the artistic workforce can contribute towards the needs of organisations.

Employees have shown to have lower levels of skills within Fundraising, Income Generation, Marketing, and Finance skills, with organisations noting that these skills, and digital skills are more challenging to recruit. However Continuous Professional Development in these areas is a barrier due to financial costs and staff capacity within organisations.

There are also a lack of progression routes within the arts, with 69% consider lack of remuneration as an incentive to move. The qualitative study identified that organisations experience staff moving to screen industries in search of better pay. 61% of respondents also consider moving country is a means to progress their career.

Fostering Collaborative Research and Development

ACNI actively encourages collaboration between arts practitioners and creative technologists. Since 2019 we have run programmes that develop projects at the intersection of art and technology.   Through these projects, research and development in new and emerging screen technologies encouraged skill

development and innovation in areas that are highly applicable to virtual production.

These projects have included partnerships with key creative technology firms in Northern Ireland including Retinize, Yellow Design, and Aura Studios, while others have supported firms access specialised academic support.

*Working with Future Screens NI, ACNI established and led the Creative Industries Seed Fund which was acknowledged by Prof. Andrew Chitty (*UKRI Challenge Director) *as best practice within arts and technology research and innovation:*

"The partnership between Arts Council NI and Future Screens NI to develop the Creative Industries SEED fund shows just what funders can do when they work together but also focus on the needs of artists, creatives and businesses across the sector. SEED has the potential for a transformative impact across the region, stimulating experimentation and innovation and encouraging private investment. The result has been some of the most exiting projects supported by the Future Screens NI cluster and a new model for arts driven creative R&D"

Between 2019-2023 56 grants totalling £760k has been awarded for collaborative research and development grants.

ACNI continue to advocate strongly for innovation within the technology sector through its partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the regional Arts Development Agencies.

Collectively, a national research and innovation fund of over £6m is being developed to explore artistic and creative uses of new and emerging technologies. This programme is due for release in 2024.

Creating a place where people can live, work and thrive

The arts and creative industries can act as a magnet for highly skilled workers and talented individuals, enhancing Northern Ireland's attractiveness as a place to live, work, and do business.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this draft strategy on 10X technology clusters. The Arts Council and the arts sector are already achieving positive outcomes in relation to the departments 10x Economic vision and we welcome any further partnership to support this growth, in particular partnership opportunities and policy actions to adequately support and

resource the arts sector, including artists and creative practitioners to drive growth in these important key areas.