



**Arts Council of Northern Ireland**

# **Strategic Plan**

# 2024–34

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**Championing the Arts –  
Investing in the next 10 years**

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

# Strategic Plan 2024-34



'Agreement' by Owen McCafferty. A Lyric Theatre production in March 2023, marking the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Photo: Carrie Davenport Photography

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is committed to ensuring that artists are at the centre of the change Northern Ireland needs. We will continue to advocate tirelessly for increased government investment in the arts, for we firmly believe that investing in our artists is an investment in the future of our society.



Hollie Hunter and Alison Smyth, members of Stage Beyond, a theatre company based in Derry-Londonderry for adults with learning disabilities. Photo: Brian Morrison

# Chair's and Chief Executive's Foreword

On behalf of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, we are pleased to present our strategic plan for 2024-2034. This plan represents our unwavering commitment to championing the arts sector in Northern Ireland and propelling it to new heights of recognition.

Northern Ireland's arts sector is a beacon of inspiration and talent. Our artists, creators, and organisations have consistently demonstrated their ability to captivate, challenge, and enrich our lives through their innovative and thought-provoking work. They are the driving force behind our vibrant and diverse artistic landscape, and they deserve our utmost admiration and support.

However, it is a regrettable truth that government investment in the arts sector in Northern Ireland has not always matched the incredible potential and impact it holds. Opportunities have been missed, and the growth of this wonderful sector has been hindered by a lack of adequate resources and recognition. But we refuse to be disheartened, for we firmly believe that our arts deserve better.

Artists are not just creators; they are innovators and entrepreneurs who push boundaries, challenge conventions, and

shape the world around us. They are the catalysts for change and their work has the power to inspire and transform society. They have an uncanny ability to provoke conversations, bridge divides, and ignite imaginations. In a time when our society needs healing, connection, and fresh perspectives, the role of artists has never been more crucial.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is committed to ensuring that artists are at the centre of the change Northern Ireland needs. We will continue to advocate tirelessly for increased government investment in the arts, for we firmly believe that investing in our artists is an investment in the future of our society. We will work relentlessly to create an environment where artists in all regions of Northern Ireland can thrive, where their voices are heard, and where their contributions are valued and celebrated.

Our strategic plan for 2024-2034 is an ambitious, but realistic, long-term roadmap that charts our course towards a future where the arts sector in Northern Ireland flourishes. It outlines our commitment to supporting artists, supporting regional arts activity, and addressing gaps where they are found, promoting inclusivity and diversity,

fostering collaboration, and ensuring that the arts are accessible to all. We are determined to create an ecosystem that nurtures and empowers artists, enabling them to unleash their full potential and make a lasting impact on our society.

Together, let us embark on this journey, united by our shared belief in the transformative power of the arts. Let us seize this opportunity to shape a future where the arts sector in Northern Ireland is not only recognized but celebrated as a vital pillar of our identity and heritage. Let us dare to dream, to create, and to inspire. Over the coming decade, with the Arts Council's Strategic Plan 2024-34, we can build a brighter, more vibrant, and more culturally rich Northern Ireland.

With gratitude and determination,

**Liam Hannaway, Chair**  
**Roisin McDonough, Chief Executive**

Arts Council of Northern Ireland  
May 2024

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# Contents

<b>About the Arts Council of Northern Ireland</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Arts Council: Mission, Vision and Values</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Strategic Context</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Arts Council: Outcomes and Priorities</b>	<b>20</b>
Outcome 1: A more financially stable arts sector	<b>22</b>
Outcome 2: A sector that develops, looks after its people, and is more inclusive	<b>23</b>
Outcome 3: A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation	<b>24</b>
Outcome 4: A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment	<b>25</b>
Outcome 5: More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences	<b>26</b>
Outcome 6: A sector that is more valued across society and government	<b>27</b>
<b>Glossary of Definitions</b>	<b>28</b>

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is committed to making information available in large print, Braille, audio, and Easy Read and will endeavour to provide information in languages other than English as well as British and Irish sign language on request.

Accessible versions of the document can be found here:  
<https://artscouncil-ni.org/10YearStrategy>

An EQIA has been developed for the strategy. That can be found here:  
<https://artscouncil-ni.org/10YearStrategy>

# About the Arts Council of Northern Ireland

## What we do<sup>1</sup>:

**Support and develop high-quality arts activity** – we invest public funding to create opportunities for more people, from all backgrounds and communities, to enjoy and take part in the arts.

**Distribute National Lottery funds** – through applications to our National Lottery funding programmes, we're able to fund projects that develop new arts activity, supporting individuals, communities and organisations.

**Develop and improve the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts** – we produce strategic research and intelligence and work with partners in the cultural sector to advise the Department for Communities, Local Authorities and other bodies on matters relating to the arts. We also have strong international links in the UK and beyond.

**Increase public access to and participation in the arts** – we want to create an innovative, creative and diverse society where people can fulfil their potential and contribute fully to society.

**Raise the profile of the arts in Northern Ireland** – we're the national voice for the arts in Northern Ireland, promoting the quality, value and importance of the region's artists/arts organisations and the impact that they make.

**Influence decision-makers** – the arts take place in many different settings. They can have a dramatic impact on the quality of people's lives and the places in which they live and work. The arts are also frequently at the heart of initiatives for economic and social regeneration. Our job is to ensure that the contribution that the arts can make is recognised.

**Develop international opportunities in the arts** – we have developed partnerships with cultural organisations such as the British Council and we work collaboratively with all the UK nations to promote art from Northern Ireland. We encourage international exchange and collaboration between artists and arts organisations.

**Work collaboratively with stakeholders and the public** – seeking and listening to feedback through our formal consultations and open conversations, we ensure that our programmes of work deliver public benefit.

**Work across art forms** – including community arts and education, circus and carnival, creative industries, drama, dance, festivals and venues, literature, music, opera, theatre, traditional arts, visual arts, craft and many more.

**Foster innovation between the arts and the wider creative industries** – by facilitating skills development and knowledge transfer in digital technology for the arts sector, encouraging collaboration, leveraging additional funding and expertise through key partners, and encouraging the creation of digital artwork to ensure the arts evolve with audiences.

## We believe:

1.

That **public investment** is a key component for a thriving arts sector. We know that the sector leverages further investment based on this vital support and that the benefits from this, derived for both individuals and communities, is substantial.

2.

In the **value of artists**. We acknowledge the crucial role that artists play in society and the importance of supporting their creative practice, professional development, and fair remuneration.

3.

In the **fundamental value of the arts**. We understand that the arts have inherent worth and contribute to the overall wellbeing and cultural richness of society, beyond economic and social considerations.

4.

That **all art forms should be respected equally**. We value and support diverse art forms, recognising their unique contributions to cultural expression and creativity.

5.

That **everyone should have the right to creativity**. We uphold the principles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which recognises the right of every individual to freely participate in and enjoy cultural life, including access to artistic expression and creative experiences.

6.

In the **added value of collaboration**. We know that the sector thrives when artists, organisations and people who engage with arts work together, and when we add value by working across the sector to create a collective energy that is more than the sum of the individual parts.

7.

In the value of **artistic expression in all its forms** from **everyone in society**. Participation in the arts as a hobby or as part of the community fosters creativity and overall wellbeing. We support arts organisations and artists that promote and encourage deeper engagement with the arts.

### The National Lottery

- Every week National Lottery players raise more than £30M for good causes.
- More than £47 billion has now been raised by National Lottery players to support good causes since 1994.
- More than 670,000 projects have been supported with National Lottery funding, the equivalent of around 240 lottery grants in every UK postcode district.

May 2024

# Arts Council: Mission, Vision & Values



Tim Shaw's collection of bronze sculptures celebrating The Armagh Rhymers

## Mission

To develop and champion the arts in Northern Ireland through investment and advocacy.

## Vision

A society where all people can experience a thriving arts sector that is recognised as essential to creativity, wellbeing and social and economic prosperity.

To achieve this vision, we will work tirelessly to build an arts sector that thrives on collaboration, innovation, and ambition. We will advocate for increased investment in the arts, recognising that such support is an investment in the wellbeing and prosperity of our society as a whole. We will forge partnerships, break down barriers, and ensure that the arts are integrated into every aspect of our community, from education to healthcare, from urban centres to rural landscapes.

This is not a vision that we can accomplish alone. It requires the collective effort and support of artists, cultural organisations, policymakers, and society in general. Together, we will create a future where the arts are appreciated as an essential thread woven into the fabric of our society.

## Values

### Expertise

We use our experience and expertise to support the arts sector in NI through investing, advocating and evidencing the impact of the sector.

### Inclusion

We recognise the importance of diversity in the arts sector and are committed to being inclusive and accessible to all.

### Collaboration

We value our strong relationships with partners and their ability to enhance arts programmes across NI and beyond.

### Integrity

We are open, transparent, and fair in how we distribute public funding.

# Strategic Context



Pendr Festival brings creative minds from across the global film, gaming, animation and immersive tech industries to Belfast to explore the space where creativity and technology collide

In developing this strategy, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (the Arts Council) has taken account of key government documents to ensure our plans reflect the ongoing policy context. We have considered the Programme for Government 2016-2021<sup>1</sup>; The NI Civil Service 'Our Giant Ambition'<sup>2</sup>, the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations<sup>3</sup>, which all member states signed up to in 2015; 'Building Inclusive Communities'<sup>4</sup>, the strategy of our sponsor department, the Department for Communities (DfC), as well as their work with the sector on the ten-year Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy. It is worth noting that the DfC Culture, Arts, and Heritage task force report<sup>5</sup> holds significant importance and aligns with our approach. We will work with DfC when the strategy is launched to understand our role in the delivery of the outcomes. We have also looked back at our own track record<sup>6</sup> and considered our impact from 2019-2024.

**It is a challenging time for society and the sector. The economy is not expected to grow above 2% in the next 4 years. Whilst the growth of the NI working age population has slowed down significantly, job growth is not expected to reach 1% any time between 2023 and 2027. Policy changes around the UK's departure from the European Union and the need for climate action will mean significant changes in cost structures and consumption patterns. Many of the issues that the sector faces were underlined to us during our engagement to develop this strategy. Below, we have summarised some of the key issues facing the sector:**

for every £1 of investment, organisations are able to raise £1.39 in other funding sources.

## Standstill funding

- Government investment in the arts has fallen by 28% in cash terms over the last decade, from £14.1m to £10.1m, closer to a 49% reduction when inflation is considered.
- Northern Ireland has the lowest levels of per capita Government spending on the arts in the UK, and the disparity of funding continues to grow. Based on the most recent budgets, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland received only £5.07 per capita (2023/24), contrasting sharply with our nearest comparator Wales at £9.45 (2024/25) and the Republic of Ireland at £21.68 (2024)<sup>8</sup>.

## Return on investment

- National Lottery funding is crucial to the arts sector and currently accounts for approximately 50% of overall Arts Council funding.
- Currently, the Annual Funding Programme (AFP) is our largest investment in organisations. Looking at this programme alone, for every £1 of investment, organisations are able to raise £1.39 in other funding sources, even after taking into account their location and art form<sup>9</sup>.
- AFP organisations have shown increasing capacity to diversify their funding sources, with non-government funding between 2010 and 2020 amounting to more than £199m in total. Without this core support, these arts organisations would see their abilities to raise additional funding and opportunities for growth curtailed.
- Similarly, it is estimated that for every £1 of AFP investment, arts organisations are able to pay an additional £1.34 in salaries.



## Short term funding cycles

- The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the only Arts Council in the UK that does not provide multiannual funding to their regularly-funded organisations, due to risks associated with annual budget allocations from the government. All other Arts Councils provide some version of a multiannual commitment to these organisations.
- Two reviews of the Arts Council's Annual Funding Programme (AFP), in 2016 and 2022, recommended moving to three-year contracts with AFP clients. Three-year funding agreements would reduce administrative costs for the Arts Council, releasing more time and resources to support arts organisations in delivering their activities and outcomes. It would give greater financial stability to arts organisations and enable them to plan and manage risk more effectively. It would also encourage and consolidate partnership and collaboration with local, national and international organisations. Conversely, being locked into three-year arrangements could limit flexibility both for organisations and the Arts Council; also, expectations would be raised with the arts sector, which perhaps cannot be met if funding is reduced.

## Public value placed on arts and artists

- Support for the arts, artists and public funding of the arts are all high amongst members of the public. In the most recent General Population Survey commissioned by the Arts Council<sup>10</sup> (2023):
  - 79% of respondents agreed with the statement, *'I believe it is right that there should be public investment in arts and cultural organisations'*.
  - 73% agreed with the statement, *'I support my local councils in investing in arts and culture in my area'*.
  - 70% agreed with the statement, *'I believe it is right that there should be public investment in individual artists'*.
  - 58% would vote for a political candidate who advocated increased spending on arts and culture.
- There is a clear understanding of the value of the arts in society and the economy. In that same survey:
  - 87% of respondents believe that arts and creativity play a role in good health and wellbeing.
  - 81% believe that arts and creativity contribute to creating a shared future / cohesive communities.
  - 81% believe that arts and creativity play a role in stimulating the local economy.
  - 56% believe that arts and creativity have a role to play in providing a sustainable environment.
- However, when asked in that same survey for their funding priorities, the arts came 7th out of 9 options (including health, well-being and education). There is clearly room to highlight to the general public how the arts could contribute to the delivery of these other funding priorities.

## Attendance and participation

- Attendance at arts events has recovered from the pandemic. According to the most recent General Population Survey (2023), 74% of adults in Northern Ireland attended an arts event at least once in the past year. However, this type of engagement with the arts tends to be higher for those classified as part of the higher socio-economic group (81%) in comparison to the working class (69%). Younger people (18-34) are also more likely to attend arts events than older adults (60+), at 87% v 61%.
- The level of participation in arts activities, unpaid or as a hobby, is 52%. Similar to the profile of those who attend arts events, participation is influenced by social class.
- The rate of volunteering in the arts is 8%, which is significantly lower than overall volunteering levels across the sectors, which, according to NICVA, is around 28% in 2019-20.
- Efforts to increase and deepen attendance and participation in the arts are hampered by lack of data, resources and experienced staff to design and implement long-term marketing and audience development strategies. A recent study by Thrive (2023) indicates that the sector needs more audience development professionals, and indeed, many of the arts professionals interviewed did not understand the difference between audience development and marketing. Similarly, many organisations lack the infrastructure to collect, clean and analyse data about their audiences and participants.
- Thrive concludes that partnerships are needed with all stakeholders with "skin in the game" (e.g., Local Authority venues and Tourism NI) to align priorities and reporting to reduce the cost of data collection. The Arts Council could ensure that budgets for marketing, audience development, and evaluation are prioritised when making funding decisions.

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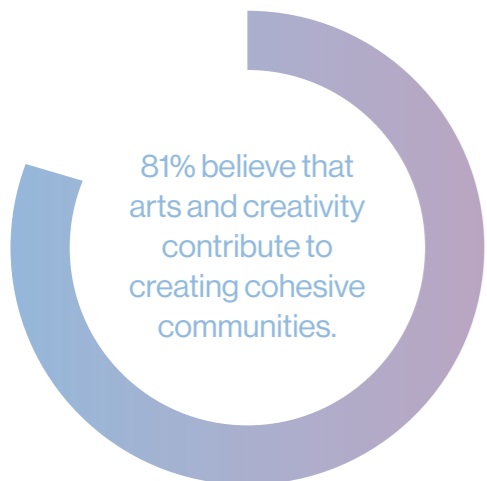
79% believe it is right that there should be public investment in arts and cultural organisations

## Climate emergency

- The arts sector has an important role to play in helping Northern Ireland prepare for the climate-changed future. Artists and arts organisations are in a unique position to challenge, inform and engage audiences in conversations about climate change and the impact it is having.
- As the urgency of the climate crisis increases, so does the need for our sector to understand its carbon footprint and to sustain a means of producing and sharing art, which supports our transition to a global low carbon future.
- All other UK nations are implementing ambitious plans to mitigate carbon emissions and adapt to the future climate in line with existing national targets. With the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 now in place, our strategy will support and enable the sector to reach its goals by building on the huge range of work already being delivered.

## Representation and EDI

- The percentage of minority ethnic groups living in NI has risen and accounts for 3.4% (65,604) of the usual resident population, an increase of 1.6 percentage points on the 2011 Census<sup>11</sup>. It is important for the Arts Council to continue to create opportunities for specialised training, research, cultural exchanges, networking and learning for individual artists, creative practitioners and arts administrators from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds.
- The Census shows that, while the overall population increased by five percent, the number of people aged 65 or more grew by nearly 25 per cent. These NI population estimates are continuing to show an ageing population, highlighting the importance of focussing programmes in this area.
- There is still a significant proportion of the arts workforce where disability is not known. However, we do know that there are significantly more non-disabled artists than disabled (89%) in 2021/22.
- The Arts Council also acknowledges other underrepresented groups e.g. rural/urban, gender identity, working classes and cultural identity.



## Arts across the region

- The Arts Council plays a crucial role in supporting and developing the arts across Northern Ireland. We distribute funding from our principal sponsor, the Department for Communities, and from the National Lottery. We invest public funding in artists, arts organisations, venues and festivals across the region. This investment creates opportunities for more people, from all backgrounds and communities, to enjoy and take part in the arts.
- Local Authorities also play an important role in supporting arts regionally, in their specific council areas including funding, managing and maintaining cultural venues and facilities, arts programming and planning and local arts policy. They ensure that arts are considered in their broader strategies for economic development, tourism, regeneration and community wellbeing. We are committed to working in partnership with Local Authorities across NI to advocate for the importance of investing in the arts across NI and raise awareness of the value of arts and culture in society.
- Arts Council investment programmes are open to organisations and artists across NI and are not place based. We do, however, monitor activities delivered by location to ensure it reaches beyond urban centres<sup>12</sup>. Historically, Arts Council funding patterns have reflected the high concentrations of artists and organisations living and working in urban areas. Most artists and organisations based in Belfast, for example, deliver activities outside the Greater Belfast area, and several operate on a region-wide basis<sup>13</sup>. We recognise that more resources are required from all investment partners to further strengthen arts provision to all parts of Northern Ireland.

## Precarious nature of employment in the arts

- The most recent General Population Survey shows that people have an accurate perception of the working conditions of artists in Northern Ireland: Only 35% agreed with the statement, *'I believe artists receive a fair compensation and have good working conditions'*. In effect, artists in Northern Ireland face precarious working conditions. For instance:
  - The 2023 Report on Working and Living Conditions of Artists in Northern Ireland shows that artists earn approximately £18,900 from all sources of income, 59% of which is arts-related income. Comparing this income to the 2010 research survey baseline, artists have faced an 11% real-term reduction in overall income.
  - The 2023 UK census of musicians<sup>14</sup> (including those living in Northern Ireland) indicates that the average annual income from music is £20,700 (21% lower than the median salary in Northern Ireland, according to NISRA<sup>15</sup>). For 44%, a lack of sustainable income is a barrier to their music career.
  - A similar study of dancers showed that 58% had an annual personal income of under £17,300<sup>16</sup> with 18% of their work unpaid.
  - The Royal Society of Literature reports that only 1% of authors in Northern Ireland earn more than £30,000 from their writing<sup>17</sup>. The equivalent figure for Scotland is 7%. For London and the South of England it is 33%. Author incomes in Northern Ireland fell by almost three quarters between 2016/17 and 2020/21, according to the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society.
- We know from our own funding programmes that more than 1,800 artists applied for the Covid emergency funding, whilst the number of applicants to the Support for Individual Artists Programme (SIAP) keeps on increasing. This demand has revealed the wide range of needs of artists in Northern Ireland. The pressure on individual artists has been further increased due to a 32.5% reduction on expenditure on artists by AFP organisations from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

## Digital economy: opportunities and threats for the arts

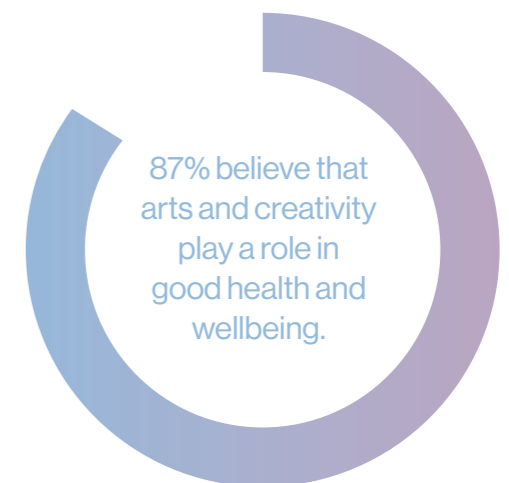
- In 2022, the UK digital economy was worth £52.5 billion, according to DCMS and the ONS. One key indicator of how the digital world has penetrated the art world is the world of cryptocurrencies, or more specifically, non-fungible tokens (NFT). Whilst their overall growth has decreased since late 2021, NFTs in the arts have recorded sales of more than £734 million around the world. Similarly, it is expected that by 2027, gaming will become the highest-grossing media segment in the world, overtaking TV and digital media. In the UK, the gaming industry is expected to increase its revenue by 43% (Statista, 2022). This sector is not only growing, but it is also evolving dramatically. Since 2015, more developers are working on AR & VR solutions and headsets. This is offering gamers a more realistic and interactive experience. It is likely that the cost of producing this technology will decrease significantly in the next few years, helping it increase its consumer reach.
- The metaverse and artificial intelligence are bringing all of the key developments in the digital economy together, promising significant changes in the way we do everything. The metaverse is likely to become the user-friendly interface that powers the decentralised web 3.0. The metaverse is likely to change the way we understand, for instance, music concerts (e.g., Warner Music is creating a music themed world within the metaverse of the Sandbox gaming platform), museums (e.g., Musee Dezentral is the first decentralised NFT museum) and personalised content (e.g., Disney is working to develop content using the metaverse for its entertainment products and services). The metaverse is still developing, betting on stronger artificial intelligence to help it build differential and inclusive experiences.

## Developing the strategy in this context

- All of these changes represent opportunities for the arts sector, in terms of providing artists with new tools and techniques, new forms of artistic expression and collaboration, the chance to provide personalised experiences to audiences, increasing reach and impact, and generating new work. However, during the strategy engagement sessions, artists expressed concerns about the monetisation of these digital tools. Related to issues around copyright and limited bargaining power, it is perceived that artists are being asked to provide their work for no or little compensation, letting major corporations financially appropriate the value of their work. There are also concerns about job displacement, which in turn will push salaries even lower for most artists.

The development of this strategy has been a team effort across the Arts Council and across the sector. Engagement has been completed both internally and externally with support from Ruth Flood Associates. External discussion sessions ran from 17th July 2023 to 10th September 2023, with some sessions delivered face to face across various locations in Northern Ireland and some offered online. Engagement was sought across individual artists and organisations, in a range of locations, both urban and rural, and with as wide a range of art forms as possible. Several sessions were also delivered by arts resource organisations based across Northern Ireland. We are indebted to all those who gave their time to take part in these discussions. In total, 264 people gave feedback. A wide range of issues were discussed in the sessions. A summary of the feedback from these sessions can be found [here](#)<sup>18</sup>.

The draft strategy was rural proofed, equality screened, and an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was completed and both the strategy and EQIA was open for public consultation between 12th January and 12th April. 171 responses were received, analysed, discussed and refinements completed. A summary report, analysing the data and providing summary insights from the consultation can be found on the Arts Council website<sup>19</sup>.



# Outcomes and Priorities



Belfast-based Cahoots, specialising in creating magical theatre for young audiences, is the New York Times' 'Critic's Pick' for the Broadway staging of their production, 'The Vanishing Elephant'. Photo: Melissa Gordon

We have taken an outcome-based approach to the development of our strategy. This means that we have focused first on what we would like to see achieved for the arts sector, and then used this to inform what we do. This document focuses on the strategic outcomes and priorities that we want to achieve, with some basic information on areas of activity over the next ten years, and how we will track our progress.

Detailed three-year organisational business plans will be published and reviewed annually. They will provide much more detail, as will a detailed monitoring and evaluation plan.

### Our outcomes

We have derived a set of outcomes for the art sector, and a set of outcomes that the sector then delivers as a result for society. The outcomes overlap and are reliant on one another.

Under each outcome area, we have developed priorities that we believe, if delivered, will directly influence the achievement of that outcome:

### Outcomes for the arts sector

Outcome 1: A more financially stable arts sector.	Outcome 2: A sector that develops, looks after its people, and is more inclusive.	Outcome 3: A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation.
1. We will pursue an approach to investment in the arts that is long term and outcomes based.	3. We will create the conditions to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce.	5. We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector.
2. We will generate more income for the arts.	4. We will ensure that the arts sector in Northern Ireland is inclusive and reflects society.	



### Outcomes for society

Outcome 4: A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment	Outcome 5: More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences.	Outcome 6: A sector that is more valued across society and government.
6. We will support arts projects that address contemporary societal challenges.	8. We will invest in the arts sector to deepen, widen and diversify audiences and participants.	9. We will work in partnership to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and people in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts.
7. We will support the sector and act as a catalyst to drive awareness, engagement and positive change in response to climate change.		
10. We will work as an effective and efficient organisation.		

A performance monitoring tool with indicators to track our journey towards these outcomes is available [here](#)<sup>20</sup>.

## Outcome 1:

# A more financially stable arts sector

### Context:

The arts sector plays a crucial role in enriching society, fostering creativity, and driving economic growth. However, financial challenges often hinder the sector's ability to fully realise its potential. Artists and arts organisations face various funding constraints, including limited resources, unpredictable income streams, increasing costs and different exposure to opportunities based on your location with artists tending to move towards urban centres. These challenges can impede artistic innovation, limit access to the arts, and create barriers to sustainable careers in the sector.

**The Arts Council of Northern Ireland acknowledges that addressing these financial challenges requires a comprehensive and strategic approach. By prioritising financial security and stability, we aim to create an enabling environment that supports the arts sector.**

### Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

#### Priority 1

We will pursue an approach to investment that is long-term and outcomes-based, through:

- Launching a strategic arts investment programme that will be a 3-year cycle and outcomes based.
- Developing a set of investment principles for all investments.
- Strengthening how we monitor and evaluate our investment programmes, including designing and implementing an outcomes framework to guide investment processes.
- Collecting and analysing official statistics about the financial status of arts organisations.
- Ensuring that the three-year investment promotes activity across the region beyond urban centres.

#### Priority 2

We will generate more income for the arts, through:

- Advocating to DfC for further resources each year and in-year.
- Undertaking a scoping exercise to assess how the Arts Council can generate more income for the sector (opportunities across private, public and philanthropic funders).
- The development of more partnerships with the private sector.
- Supporting programmes for financial sustainability in the sector.
- Exploiting the opportunities to partner with other Departments presented through the new DfC cross-government strategy.

## Outcome 2:

# A sector that develops, looks after its people, and is more inclusive

### Context:

The arts sector relies on the creativity, skills, and expertise of its workforce to produce high-quality artistic experiences and engage diverse audiences. However, challenges such as limited employment opportunities, unequal access to resources, and lack of diversity and representation can hinder the sector's ability to attract and retain talent.

**The Arts Council of Northern Ireland acknowledges these challenges and is committed to supporting the sector to address them.**

### Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

#### Priority 3

We will create the conditions to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce, through:

- Investing in a three-year programme to support mental health, training and wellbeing of artists.
- Considering additional support beyond grants (mentoring schemes, opportunities for artist collaboration).
- Supporting artists and individuals by investing in specific programmes (e.g. Support for Individual Artists Programme [SIAP], Individual Artists Digital Evolution Programme, Travel Awards and manage the Rosemary James Memorial Trust Award).
- Developing local, national and international showcase opportunities for arts organisations and artists.
- Working with Local Authorities on areas of shared interest (e.g. residencies, studio spaces) and ensuring artists have access to development opportunities in their local areas and are aware of funding opportunities.
- Ringfencing support for new and emerging artists.
- Working within DfC CAH strategy and supporting extension of Art Work apprenticeship scheme.

### Priority 4

We will ensure that the arts sector in Northern Ireland is inclusive and reflects society, through:

- Ringfencing investment with underrepresented groups (e.g. minority ethnic residencies and mentoring scheme, supporting rural artists).
- Refreshing and developing Minority Ethnic and Rural Forums for artists to engage with the Arts Council.
- Building a stronger and deeper knowledge base of artists' working and living conditions and the impact our funding has on them.
- Introducing new measures of diversity (e.g., socio-economic background) to strengthen the evidence we have to inform decisions.
- Developing schemes with partners to improve access to the sector for disabled, D/deaf and neurodivergent artists and other workers.
- Publishing regular equality reports using data to ensure that we actively engage with underrepresented artists.

## Outcome 3: A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation

### Context:

We know the value of creativity and that artists are innovators, entrepreneurs and risk takers. They play a pivotal role in driving social and economic outcomes, making our region a vibrant and inspiring place to live and work. We want to foster innovation and provide a space for experimentation that is essential for the growth and development of the arts sector. By prioritising this outcome, we aim to create an environment that supports artistic innovation, nurtures risk-taking, and enables the sector to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

**The Arts Council of Northern Ireland acknowledges that traditional approaches to investment may not always meet the needs and expectations of audiences and artists. Therefore, we are committed to prioritising creating an environment that encourages experimentation, supports innovation and fosters the development of new artistic forms, ideas, and methodologies.**

**The Arts Council will be measuring innovation and experimentation in terms of the work the artists and the sector does in the following areas;**

- Conceptualisation – new ideas, approaches that challenge norms.
- Originality – distinct and unique from previous works.
- Audience engagement – engage audiences in a new way.
- Collaboration/interdisciplinary – different art forms/sectors.
- Technological integration – use of new technologies.
- Impact/influence – role in the sector to influence others.

Experimentation and innovation are encouraged in processes and methodologies as well as products and outputs for both artists and people engaging with the art.

### Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

#### Priority 5

We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector, through:

- Strengthening opportunities for artists to collaborate and exchange ideas within our investment by facilitating networking and making connections.
- Encourage and enhance R&D within existing investment (e.g. 3-year funding cycles).
- Ensuring outcomes measurements cater for personal development and risk taking.
- Raising the importance of personal development within our outcomes framework.
- Developing an annual knowledge exchange event across art forms, across the sector.
- Developing Creative Industries programmes focused on assisting artists, arts organisations and entrepreneurs to undertake projects using digital and immersive technologies.
- Working within DfC CAH strategy to support digital development and innovation in sectoral organisations.

## Outcome 4: A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment

### Context:

Arts have the power to inspire, challenge, and provoke change. The arts sector has a unique role to play in influencing and reflecting societal values, promoting dialogue and fostering a sense of community. The arts sector is already leading change and positively impacting social and economic outcomes like health, wellbeing and tourism. We want to protect and enhance this work. As the world faces urgent environmental challenges, it is crucial for the arts sector to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable practices and environmental responsibility.

**The Arts Council of Northern Ireland acknowledges the sector's potential to effect positive change and aims to harness that potential through its strategic focus on this outcome. By prioritising this outcome, we aim to create an arts sector that both contributes to positive change and demonstrates a commitment to environmental sustainability.**

### Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

#### Priority 6

We will support arts projects that address contemporary societal challenges, through:

- Developing one National Lottery programme that contributes to social and economic benefits (this amalgamates current programmes with the intention of streamlining the process for clients and the Arts Council).
- Independently evaluating the impact of all lottery investment to demonstrate impacts against key social and economic outcomes.
- Working within DfC CAH strategy to expedite cross-departmental and public sector collaboration in relation to health and social care.

#### Priority 7

We will support the sector and act as a catalyst to drive awareness, engagement and positive change in response to climate change, through:

- Adding climate as a theme within all of our investment areas to support and enable artists and organisations to respond to the climate crisis.
- Involvement in a sector climate action group for knowledge sharing and insight gathering.
- Encouraging sustainable policies and practices within all of our investment.
- Investing in partnerships with organisations in UK and ROI that are working on the response of the arts sector to the climate crisis.
- Undertaking an organisation-wide environmental review and publishing a corporate climate policy and action plan on energy, water, waste and business travel reduction.
- In collaboration with the Four Nations group, actioning ways to reduce the carbon footprint of international touring.

## Outcome 5:

# More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences

### Context:

Access to arts experiences plays a crucial role in fostering creativity, personal development, and bringing communities together. However, certain barriers, such as physical, financial, social, and cultural factors, can limit individuals' ability to participate fully in the arts. The Arts Council believes that access to arts is a fundamental right for all individuals.

**The Arts Council of Northern Ireland recognises the importance of addressing barriers to engagement with the arts. By prioritising this outcome, we aim to break down those barriers and ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland can engage with and benefit from arts experiences. We are committed to promoting inclusivity, diversity, and equal access to the arts.**

### Example of some of our activities to deliver this outcome:

### Priority 8

We will invest in the arts sector to deepen, widen and diversify audiences and participants, through:

- Prioritising activities to specifically increase the involvement of groups of people with low engagement in arts activities.
- Promoting and raising awareness about arts projects across all media channels targeting under-represented groups.
- Supporting the Arts Council Collection, the leading public contemporary art collection for NI, to reach more people.
- Developing local, national and international opportunities for arts organisations and artists.
- Commissioning the General Population Survey of participation and attendance at arts and cultural events yearly.
- Collecting national statistics about the activities and outputs of arts organisations.
- Supporting organisations who work within the sector to help develop audiences.
- Working with the UK/Ireland Arts Councils on launching the UK-wide Access Scheme 'All In', supporting venues to ensure d/Deaf, neurodiverse and disabled audiences have access to arts experiences.
- Valuing marketing and audience development activities in investment decisions as equally as other areas and ensuring the reach is beyond urban centres.
- Encouraging venues we support to share audience data with organisations that they are working with.
- Working within DfC CAH strategy to deploy technology and innovation to reach and build audiences.

## Outcome 6:

# A sector that is more valued across society and government

### Context:

The arts sector contributes to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Northern Ireland in numerous ways. It stimulates creativity, encourages innovation, promotes reconciliation and brings communities together, and supports tourism and economic growth. However, the full potential of the arts sector may not always be recognised or prioritised across all government departments. The Arts Council seeks to address this by advocating for the value of the arts and fostering stronger relationships between the arts sector and government entities.

At the Arts Council, our people are the heart and soul of our work. They are the backbone of our organisation and we are committed to providing our staff with the resources, support, and opportunities they need to thrive. By investing in our people, we are investing in the future of the arts in Northern Ireland.

**By prioritising this outcome, we aim to foster a greater appreciation and recognition of the arts sector across all government departments in Northern Ireland. We believe that the arts have a significant impact on various aspects of society, and we strive to ensure that this impact is acknowledged and supported by all levels of government and people in Northern Ireland.**

### Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

### Priority 9

We will work in partnership to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and people in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts through:

- Commissioning and undertaking research and evaluation projects.
- Monitoring and evaluating our investment programmes focusing on the short- and medium-term outcomes of arts organisations.
- Developing an advocacy strategy and dedicated webpage as a sector resource for advocacy.
- Sharing case studies and promoting projects across media channels.
- Commissioning the General Population Survey yearly.
- Working with the sector on joint advocacy messaging.
- Exploring specific campaigns to demonstrate the value of arts in NI.

### Priority 10

We will continue to work as an effective and efficient organisation, through:

- Ensuring we are accountable and transparent to the public through effective operations that promote best value for money.
- Fostering a skilled, agile and diverse workforce.
- Working in an efficient and timely manner.
- Modelling diversity, equity and accessibility through all of our activities.
- Investing in our technology for processing applications, monitoring and evaluation activities, and streamlining data end to end (application – assessment – impact).
- Developing a staff training programme.
- Collecting data on perceptions and satisfaction of our work from our partners.
- Commissioning an annual staff engagement survey and developing action plans.
- Exploring suitable premises to support agile working.

# Glossary of Definitions

The following glossary provides more detail on some of the wording that we use in the strategy

## Advocacy

The Arts Council is the main advocate for the arts sector in Northern Ireland. Our role is to work with statutory bodies and provide government and others with trusted research and evidence, demonstrating the beneficial social, cultural and economic outcomes associated with investing in the arts. We champion the achievements of the sector as a whole.

Advocacy is a shared responsibility. The work of artists, arts organisations and the people participating and engaging with it, provides the clearest demonstration of the benefits of the arts. Their unique insight makes them the most compelling ambassadors. The Arts Council, in its capacity as an 'arms-length' public body, supports and strengthens the voice of the sector by providing key advocacy facts, guidance and strategic direction in relation to the arts environment in NI.

## Arts

When we use the term 'arts' we are referring to a wide range of creative activities, including:

- community arts and education (including youth arts, carnival and circus, arts and health, disability arts)
- creative industries
- drama and dance
- festivals and venues
- literature (including poetry, novels/novellas, short stories, performance-based work, scriptwriting, non-fiction, essays and criticism, storytelling, children's books, graphic novels),
- music and opera
- theatre
- traditional arts
- visual arts and craft.

*(Please note this list is not exhaustive)*

## Creative Industries

Under the UK government's definition, the 'Creative Industries' consist of the following subsectors:

- advertising
- architecture
- crafts
- design and designer fashion
- film and TV
- radio
- photography
- museums and galleries
- libraries
- music
- performing and visual arts
- publishing
- software and computer services (including video games).

*The Arts Council recognises that arts and creativity are fundamental elements throughout the Creative Industries. We support projects that forge collaboration between arts and other creative sectors (e.g. the intersection of arts and technology).*

## Innovation

The Arts Council considers innovation to be the creation and exploration of new ideas and forms of artistic expression to bring fresh, exciting experiences for artists and audiences. This could mean the integration of technology, exploring interdisciplinary collaborations or introducing unconventional concepts or themes to inspire, provoke thought and contribute to evolving artistic practices. This could not only include a new product or output but also using new methodologies, techniques and processes to realise and bring ideas to life.

## People in the arts

This includes all those who are involved in the creation and sharing of artistic practices, processes and outputs in some capacity. This includes many who would meet the traditional definition of an artist, practitioners, freelancers, arts managers or administrators, technicians and support staff. This also includes volunteers. This will be described throughout the strategy document as 'workforce' or 'sector'.

## Society

Society is people in general, thought of as a large, organised group.



# Championing the Arts 2024-34

The **6 outcomes** we want to achieve and our **10 priorities** to get there

## Mission

To develop and champion the arts in Northern Ireland through investment and advocacy.

### A more financially stable arts sector.

- 1. We will pursue an approach to investment in the arts that is long term and outcomes based.
- 2. We will generate more income for the arts.

### A sector that develops, looks after its people, and is more inclusive.

- 3. We will create the conditions to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce.
- 4. We will ensure that the arts sector in Northern Ireland is inclusive and reflects society.

### A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation.

- 5. We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector.

### A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment

- 6. We will support arts projects that address contemporary societal challenges.
- 7. We will support the sector and act as a catalyst to drive awareness, engagement and positive change in response to climate change.

### More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences.

- 8. We will invest in the arts sector to deepen, widen and diversify audiences and participants.

### A sector that is more valued across society and government.

- 9. We will work in partnership to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and people in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts.

- 10. We will work as an effective and efficient organisation

## Vision

A society where all people can experience a thriving arts sector that is recognised as essential to creativity, well-being and social and economic prosperity.

## Values

### Expertise

We use our experience and expertise to support the arts sector in NI through investing, advocating and evidencing the impact of the sector.

### Inclusion

We recognise the importance of diversity in the arts sector and are committed to being inclusive and accessible to all.

### Collaboration

We value our strong relationships with partners and their ability to enhance arts programmes across NI and beyond.

### Integrity

We are open, transparent, and fair in how we distribute public funding.

*3-year business plans will support the delivery of our long-term goals.*



# Endnotes

- 1 [The Arts Council \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1995 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
- 2 [Programme for Government \(PfG\) 2021 | Northern Ireland Executive](#)
- 3 [People. Planet. Prosperity – Our Giant Ambition | NI Bureau](#)
- 4 [THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](#)
- 5 [Department for Communities Building Inclusive Communities Strategy 2020-2025 | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#)
- 6 [Investing in Creative Delivery – A report from the Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy Taskforce | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#)
- 7 [Infographics2023-FINAL.pdf \(s3-assets.com\)](#)
- 8 Please note these figures are subject to change based on annual budgets and exchange rates. The most recent figures can be found here: [artscouncil-ni.s3-assets.com/ACNI-2023-Advocacy-Cards.pdf](#)
- 9 [Annual Funding Survey Findings 2022/23 \(s3-assets.com\)](#)
- 10 [General Population Survey 2022-23 | Arts Council NI \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](#)
- 11 [2021 Census | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)
- 12 [ACNI 10-year Strategy EQIA Equality Impact Assessment January 2024 \(s3-assets.com\)](#)
- 13 E.g. Belfast based organisations delivered 43% of activities outside of Belfast based on the sum of activity reported by Annual Funded Organisations between 2017 and 2022. What constitutes activity varies by artform and organisation and multiple activities can be delivered at individual locations or venues.
- 14 [Help Musicians | The first ever Musicians' Census report launched](#)
- 15 [Employee earnings in NI 2022 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)
- 16 [Dance Counts Report 2022 - Dance Ireland](#)
- 17 [Literature in Britain Today | Ipsos](#)
- 18 [Summary of engagement feedback during development... | Arts Council NI \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](#)
- 19 [Strategy Consultation 2024-34 | Arts Council NI \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](#)
- 20 [Performance Monitoring Tool \(s3-assets.com\)](#)





Artist and facilitator Leona Devine working with a group from the rural village of Lettershandoney, participating in an Arts and Older People Project. Photo: Brian Morrison



Belfast-based Array Collective's Turner Prize-winning installation, 'The Druthaib's Ball'. Photo: Gary Jones Photography



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#ACNI10yrStrategy



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