Arts Council of Northern Ireland
Opening statement to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media.
Topic under discussion: The development of local and community arts (policymaking and funding)

Wednesday 10th May 2023

OPENING STATEMENT
by Karly Greene, Director of Strategic Development & Partnerships

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the official funding and development organisation for the arts in Northern Ireland. We fulfil broadly similar functions to those of An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

At the heart of what we do, is a commitment to increasing public access to, and participation in, the arts. We want the arts to contribute to the creation of an innovative, creative and diverse society where *everyone* has the opportunity to fulfil their creative potential.

The Arts Council's investment in community arts provides an important assurance that traditionally hard-to-reach communities, and underrepresented communities, have the same opportunities as others to enjoy the benefits of the arts.

We support the widest possible range of arts organisations, including support organisations such as the Community Arts Partnership, the University of Atypical, which supports disabled, D/deaf and neurodivergent people's involvement in the arts; and others, like Beyond Skin and Arts Ekta, who work with refugees and asylum seekers.

Where we identify gaps in service across the region, we intervene with targeted resources. Three current interventions are producing pioneering work in the area of arts and health. The Arts and Older People Programme, the Young People and Wellbeing Arts Programme, and the Creative Schools Partnership, each benefit from a pooling of expertise as well as funding, with

professional artists introducing new creative dimensions to the work of a range of partners, from the Public Health Agency to the Education Authority.

With the Review of Public Administration in 2015, local authorities assumed greater responsibility for the arts in their local areas. However, district council spending is under considerable pressure, and this additional responsibility has not always been met consistently across the region. The Arts Council has taken measures to incentivise spending on, and the integration of, the arts at a local level.

In 2019 we introduced a capacity and resilience programme, with Belfast and Derry and Strabane Councils, to support arts organisations as they adapt to the changing environments of these growing cities. We also established a deliberative forum for Rural Communities in 2021, to strengthen the voice of artists and activists, and this forum led to the development of the Arts Council's three-year £1.5 million Rural Arts Engagement Programme, now in its second year.

The lack of a sitting Executive in Northern Ireland is undoubtedly impacting on the role that the arts can play in helping to deliver government priorities. However, the single most critical factor holding us back is decades of chronic under-investment. Northern Ireland's arts receive the lowest level of government support across these islands, currently standing at just €5.36 per capita. Compare this with €25.47 in Ireland. The Irish government, to its great credit, clearly cherishes its arts and appreciates their value.

Thankfully the strong historical relationship between the two arts councils on this island continues to be significant as we emerge from the pandemic and the increasing cost of living challenges. We will explore joint initiatives, which will build on the framework of support that we already offer to our jointly-funded clients.

The Arts in Northern Ireland consistently achieve a level of national and international success whose return far outweighs its government's investment. Just think how hard our brilliant, highly-talented, highly-skilled artists are making that money work. Just imagine the heights we could achieve with even just a little bit more.