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Survive: Stabilise: Strengthen

The Report of the Culture, Arts and Heritage Recovery Taskforce

August 2021



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Foreword, Rotha Johnston

For well over a year cultural, arts and heritage spaces and places have fallen silent. Heritage sites, historic buildings and museums have been placed in a state of suspended animation. We have not been able to enjoy the magic of live gigs, festivals, plays, street singers, visual art exhibitions, bands, recitals and many other activities that add to our cultural lives. Staff, freelancers, contractors and volunteers have been unable to work and engage with audiences. Culture, arts and heritage are woven into the fabric of our daily lives. Together they have the power to inspire, invigorate, educate, entertain, inform and heal. For too many years we have not adequately nurtured, fostered or valued the cultural and heritage places and

productions that add so much value to our lives, health and economy. Understanding this impact has been a key part of the work of the Taskforce and shaped our recommendations for the next tranche of culture recovery funding in 2021.

I would like to extend a personal note of thanks to members of the Taskforce who have shown the remarkable commitment to the work and have achieved a lot in the short time since it was established in May. We have met virtually on nine occasions, set up seven sector-based focus groups with 84 cross sectoral participants/representatives and commissioned an online survey which has received around 170 responses from organisations and individuals.


On behalf of the Taskforce sincere thanks go to all of the staff in the Department for Communities who supported our work. A special word of thanks to Louise Hyland and John Ball who have provided efficient and professional secretariat support to the group over the last eight weeks.

The Taskforce would like to express thanks to Minister Deirdre Hargey MLA, for commissioning this review and for her acknowledgement of the important role culture, arts and heritage plays in our daily lives. The Taskforce's findings and recommendations are supported by robust evidence and by the conviction that public

investment in culture, arts and heritage will deliver significant benefits to individuals, society and the economy in the short, medium and long term. The findings also resonate with the ambition reflected in the Programme for Government to shape, support and deliver public services that will achieve the best possible outcomes of societal wellbeing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Rotha Johnston'.

Rotha Johnston (Chair)
9 August 2021



Introduction

COVID-19 measures in theatre (Photo credit - Arts Council of Northern Ireland)

In March 2020 the rising tide of COVID-19 infection sparked a series of unprecedented measures that profoundly changed what we had, up until then, taken to be normal. To tackle the spread of the disease and protect public health, progressively more intensive and intrusive restrictions were rolled out by governments and administrations across Europe and across the globe. For the Executive that meant, by the last week in March, Northern Ireland was in what we came to know as lockdown. All “non-essential” activity was paused and we were all asked to stay at home.

Across the culture, arts and heritage sectors, keys were turned in locks as venues, attractions and activities shut down. Our theatres and music venues joined our libraries and museums in closing their doors. From the stateliest of castles and the most rugged or aged of monuments to the most iconic of attractions, all shut to the visitors that are their lifeblood. In community halls, dance studios, arts centres and band-rooms the length and breadth of the country, classes, lessons and rehearsals were put on hold. All of this happened with little sense of how long the restrictions might be necessary.

Our heritage and the arts are, above everything else, human endeavours based around often passionate, moving and sophisticated story-telling and so there is a very real appreciation of what people have been through in the course of the pandemic and for the need to be sensitive to those experiences.

It is an important point to make that in seeking to reopen and restore the arts and heritage, the people and organisations that make up those sectors are deeply aware of the losses that have been suffered and the concerns that remain but also of the enthusiasm of many to see the safe and professionally managed return of the activities and events that have been such an important part of their lives.

For some of the individuals and organisations impacted directly, the past eighteen months saw episodes of partial reopening for some activities and parts of the infrastructure but these were short-lived. In more recent weeks and months a wider, and potentially more sustainable, re-opening is now slowly unfolding but that process remains vulnerable.

Changes in restrictions on the size of indoor gatherings mean that classes and clubs can meet again; bands and choirs can rehearse and dance studios can reopen.

Changes to outdoor gatherings and in respect of music and dancing outdoors mean that there is the potential for summer festivals and outdoor music programmes. While relaxations agreed in July mean that for the first time in almost eighteen months audiences can return to theatres and concerts – finally addressing one of the longest closures of the pandemic to date.

The closure of sites, loss of income and financial concerns prevented planned and preventative investment in our

built heritage, accelerating decay and storing up restoration challenges and higher repair costs for the future.

Community-based voluntary arts and cultural organisations face challenges that are in some respects different to those faced by their professional counterparts and those in rural areas face particular difficulties. The reality is that these relaxations are only a beginning to the process of reopening and recovery.

Much voluntary and community-based activity has actually been cancelled for a second year, including many of the annual competition and display programmes that form the backbone of much of our amateur and community arts activity. The restrictions have impacted on skills and talent development across the sectors; have stymied recruitment and challenged retention. Community arts groups have been starved of income from membership fees and other sources of funding but can face higher costs in trying to find bigger spaces to meet and practice. Tutors and teachers have been restricted in the numbers they can accommodate in classes and organisations that rely on entrance fees and ticket sales face the reality that ongoing social distancing rules mean they are challenged to cover their running costs and, at the time of writing, live music in our hospitality venues is restricted to speaking volume.

It is also important to recognise that despite the relaxation of public health restrictions already seen and the prospect of further

relaxations, the confidence of voluntary/ community arts providers and participants has yet to recover. Evidence from the Ulster-Scots Agency shows that community summer school provision this year only returned to 50% of the pre-pandemic level, while applications for music tuition, which had been expected to increase by 20%, have actually seen a 25-30% reduction. This slow rate of recovery presents a real risk to the sustainability of voluntary cultural activity, from which much of our professional activity is ultimately drawn.

The response to the pandemic has not just deprived individuals and organisations of income and the ability to open to visitors and audiences. There are indications that the long period of closure and uncertainty of reopening has affected the confidence of a proportion of audiences in terms of attending events and activities, at least in the short term.

Perhaps most worryingly, the uncertainty over re-opening and the ongoing risks and challenges they face, are also placing a heavy health burden on those in the sectors.

Northern Ireland's culture, arts and heritage underpin and contribute to many of the values that are held most important in life: a strong sense of place and family roots, tradition, health, happiness, life satisfaction and wellbeing. So the moratorium on activity has also deprived our citizens of the rich contribution that culture, arts and heritage brings to our lives.

There is also a growing appreciation of the role culture, arts and heritage can play in helping communities reconnect and heal after the pandemic isolation, in addressing endemic issues of loneliness and exclusion, and helping local economies return to sustainable and green growth by attracting businesses, stimulating tourism, and building civic pride and community confidence.

Our arts and culture help celebrate our shared, disparate and contested identity, and they are our most accessible means of exploring, understanding and transforming our local cultural dialogue. In creating attractive, welcoming and inclusive cultural celebration, our arts and heritage offering has been consistently recognised as a draw for visitors; local, national and international.

Investment in culture, arts and heritage supports business growth, and domestic and international tourism and it acts as an incentive in attracting new business and job creation.

The arts are a major contributor to employment in NI, with almost 6,000 jobs and over 9,000 volunteers. It is also a crucial lynchpin in the development of the creative industries with the arts a key component of our broader creative economy which employs over 50,000 people. Likewise the Department for the Environment's 2012 "Study of the Economic Value of NI's Historic Environment" found that the historic environment sector sustains around 10,000 jobs and benefits from over 3,700 volunteers.

In all our schools and academic institutions, the promise of exciting new creative careers should not be solely the stuff of post-pandemic dreams but should be understood as the next stage in our educational and economic progress. COVID-19 must not stand in the way of opportunity.

Crucially it must also be recognised that imagination, creativity and enterprise are not allocated on the basis of postcode or designation of social or economic background so, in looking to the future, securing equality of opportunity to the personal enrichment and enjoyment the arts and heritage can offer will be an important design factor.

It is against this background that Minister Hargey established the Culture, Arts and Heritage Taskforce. Its membership was drawn from a wide range of areas across the sectors - a list of the Taskforce members is included at appendix 1 and a copy of the terms of reference for the work is at appendix 2.

Since beginning its work in late May 2021 Taskforce members have been active in reaching out, establishing seven sector-based focus groups, commissioning an online survey which has received in the order of 170 responses from organisations and individuals and undertaking a considerable number of meetings and calls with a wide range of relevant interests.

This engagement has delivered significant insight and evidence and has resulted in a rich and powerful discussion about

the immediate needs of the sector, post-pandemic, and about the systemic issues that existed before COVID-19 and which need work as part of a long-term vision and strategy. The first section of the report identifies 9 findings and recommendations that are required to secure the recovery of the sector in the short to medium term. The second section considers the need for a longer term vision and strategy and identifies the governance, structures and key constituent elements of a holistic strategy.

Throughout the report when we refer to culture, arts and heritage we are referring to an entire ecosystem comprising individuals, spaces indoor and outdoor, organisations and the public – all interdependent on each other. Within the Taskforce the distinct areas of culture, arts and heritage have been represented and the recommendations that follow reflect both the commonalities across the ecosystem but also, where necessary, the nuances that exist. The benefits of working in this collaborative way should not be underestimated and should set a benchmark for future work across the sector especially around a co-designed future strategy.

Arts and heritage bring people together. We can celebrate who we are, what we can contribute, what we enjoy, what entertains, and what enables our reconnection as we work towards recovery. They reflect our cultural selves and the local offering of carnivals, theatre, public art, street art and

galleries, books, comics, films, workshops and masterclasses, community plays and fashion design shows, poetry slams, concertos and gigs and myriad other events and happenings, highlight the best of our achievements and point to the depth of our collective potential as we strive to support our creative and cultural ecology survive the pandemic.

The core driver for the work of the sector in the past 18 months has been to support communities as we have made our way through this pandemic and the sector will continue to have a vital role in the social and economic recovery of NI in the months and years to come. The Taskforce has noted how the sector has quickly adapted to meet changing public needs but how the structural fragilities of the sector have prevented more change and created personal and professional stress.

The next years are crucial in assisting the survival and sustainable recovery of all within the sector, enhancing our shared platform for all artistic exploration and creative engagement, so that the arts, culture and heritage sectors can look forward optimistically to supporting our recovery as a resilient, progressive, outward-looking, healthy, creative, talented people, putting their creative needs at the centre of their own lives and encouraging their community to engage and recover socially, artistically and creatively.



Quotes

Welcome Back to the Arts (Photo credit - Arts Council of Northern Ireland)

“All Art but especially The Dramatic Arts provide an unrivalled collective experience, they clear a space for new ideas and reflections on past history. Nowhere in these islands have the arts been more vital to society than in Northern Ireland and I would urge the Executive to recognise their contribution.”

Adrian Dunbar

ACTOR

“Film and the arts were lifelines for me in the quicksand of Northern Ireland in the 1970s. Now that the North is changing so much - economically, politically and socially - culture can help us through the transitions. ‘We do not tell stories for revenge, but to find our place in the world’ said the great Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene. He could have been speaking about us. Film and the arts will get us through in one piece - civilised, open-hearted and open-minded.”

Mark Cousins

FILMMAKER

“Our natural and built heritage connects us to land and people. They are our cultural foundations and our inspiration. Every day, when we look upon the everyday wonder of nature or the achievements of our ancestors, it brings us closer to our best selves. Having a connection to the world outside ourselves, can help us to be more caring and compassionate - two qualities the world definitely needs more of!”

Dara McAnulty

WRITER

“The film, television and mass media industries in Northern Ireland are now respected as among the best in the world for locations, professional actors and crew and world-class studios and facilities. If our government can support these industries and grow this sector of the economy we will be on the cutting edge of the enormous entertainment market for the rest of this century. This is a game changer for all the people of Northern Ireland.”

Terry George

WRITER & PRODUCER

“The music scene in Northern Ireland has flourished in peace time these last 20 or so years BUT it’s still a fairly young scene and needs protecting if we want to have a music scene on the other side of all this.”

Gary Lightbody

SNOW PATROL

“To be able to harness the fantastic creative talent we have on our doorstep and reflect the lockdown stories of Northern Ireland is truly exciting.”

Paul McClean

EXECUTIVE EDITOR, ARTS, MUSIC & LEARNING, BBC NI

“We need to come back. The arts community was on its knees prior to the pandemic. Theatres need to be brave. Of course, they need to be safe as well, but we also must believe that it’s going to be alright.”

Tara Lynne O’Neill

ACTOR, DERRY GIRLS

“You don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone.”

Ben Kerr

ACTOR

“Our landscape, our culture and our heritage are the pillars upon which the Northern Ireland tourism product is built. They both shape and reflect the character of our people, the stories which we share and are the essence of the authentic visitor experience that differentiates us and sets us apart from every other destination.”

“Over three million people visit Northern Ireland every year, of which over 70% come from the “culturally curious” segment of the market, these are people who come specifically to explore and enjoy our culture and our heritage.”

John McGrillen

TOURISM NI

“In my work I travel around this country, from parish to parish, village to village, townland to townland, asking people the same set of questions over and over again, “How did you and your family come to be living here? Who lived here before and what did they do for a living? What is unique about this place?” The fact that after more than 25 years of doing this, the range of responses I get still fascinates so many, is a reflection of the unfathomable variety and richness of the heritage and vernacular culture that is at the core of local identity. It would be a great loss, going forward, if only older people knew the answers to those questions. We must find ever more resourceful ways of preserving those aspects of the past that will serve us well in the future, and of presenting them in such a fashion that younger generations will recognise their value and importance.”

Joe Mahon

WESTWAY FILM PRODUCTIONS



Findings and Recommendations

Lyric Drama Studio production of Dracula, July 2021 (Photo credit - Neil Harrison)

Finding 1 – Financial Support for Individuals

The Taskforce received significant evidence of the severe financial impact COVID-19 restrictions have had on all aspects of the sectors. The consistent message has been that the impact of closure in March 2020 was immediate and devastating.

The point has also been made consistently that while there has been some relaxation of restrictions, allowing some individuals to return to earning a living, for the majority nothing had really changed. The loss of earnings that had struck them in the course of 2020/21 has continued and for many there was no obvious prospect of that position being resolved in the immediate future. The focus group work also identified a universal feeling among freelancers that they were not being recognised as significant contributors to the economy and benefit to all of society.

While there was a wide welcome for the COVID-19 support programmes that were delivered across the course of the 2020/21 financial year by the Arts Council on behalf of the Department for Communities, the programmes were not without some criticism.

A report from the Centre for Cultural Value, University of Leeds found that “it is clear there has been a slowness to

react to the needs of creative freelancers, underestimation of the pivotal role they play in creative production cycles, and a misunderstanding of their often complex portfolio working patterns.” That report also includes observations that “from our study in Northern Ireland, we have repeatedly been told that ‘the money did not come quick enough’, access to the relevant information/forms was difficult and the initial grants were not fit for purpose.”

The Taskforce conducted a survey administered by NISRA during the period 26 May 2021 to 14 June 2021 which identified that 99% of respondents had their activity restricted or closed due to the pandemic in the period prior to the easing of restrictions in May 2021; 66% identified loss of income as the major impact of not being able to re-open or resume activities.

This tends to support the findings of Arts Council surveys commissioned early in the pandemic response where in April 2020, based on responses from arts practitioners, the average loss of earnings for NI artists over the three-month period (March-May 2020) was estimated at £3,756. In a further survey in July 2020, from 305 responses received,

- 65% rated the impact of COVID-19 as severe or very severe.
- Between March and July 2020 individuals lost an average of £13,000 (of the 86 who quantified their losses), totalling £1.1m in losses.
- Of the 43 who were able to earn through new ways of working, they averaged only £1,156 in income which did not make up for lost earnings.
- For some artists there were very serious impacts:
 - 16% unable to meet their housing costs,
 - 11% struggling to afford food, and
 - 10% struggling to pay for heating

The Centre for Cultural Value provided the Taskforce with information on the impact of the pandemic on individuals and freelancers across the UK. Their work identified “the number of freelancers working in the creative industries has declined significantly due to the pandemic. As a portion of the cultural labour force, they represent around 30% in the UK. This varies significantly across art forms and sub-sectors and can rise to 88% in music, performing and visual arts. The loss of income and hours is particularly acute within this section of the workforce with the number of freelancers falling from around 176,000 in 2018 to 156,000 by the end of 2020. This has been compounded by a dramatic fall in all creative freelancers by 38,000 from the start of 2020. The research

also noted that younger freelancers have been disproportionately affected”.

However, it is important to note that not all sectors have experienced the impact of the pandemic in the same way, for example in the craft sector there is some evidence that mid-career makers were also likely to be affected.

Given the common challenges faced and the broadly common responses implemented, there seems little ground to suggest that Northern Ireland has in some way bucked the trend identified in the UK perspective. On the contrary there is an argument to be made that the impact here may in fact have been greater, given the more prolonged closure of the opportunities that live performance, in particular, offers self-employed or freelance practitioners and the potential opportunities open to them as other jurisdictions relaxed restrictions earlier and with more advance notice to supported earlier planning.

While the UK Government and the Executive did put in place an important range of financial support mechanisms including furlough arrangements and support for the self-employed, the Taskforce has received evidence of where these programmes have not been open to significant numbers of individuals engaged in the arts and heritage sectors.

Eligibility for the Self Employment Income Support Scheme was based

on more than 50% of income being derived from self-employment. Many freelancers essentially have a portfolio income made up of often short-term payroll and fee-paying assignments, making them ineligible for some of the government support mechanisms.

Notwithstanding existing social security support measures, the Taskforce is of the unanimous view that a further support package for individuals should be made available immediately. The precise detail and operational mechanics of the programme are matters to be determined by the relevant Executive department and any delivery partners.

The package follows the support given in 2020/21 and would recognise the continuing impact of the COVID-19 restrictions in terms of depriving practitioners of the ability to earn an income and the need for the individuals concerned to maintain their skill

levels etc with a view to returning to their engagement with the sector as circumstances allow. The potential impact of such an intervention is indicated by the responses to the Arts Council's May 2021 survey of all artists and organisations in receipt of any of the emergency funding provided in 2020/21, which found that:

- almost 9 in 10 artists (85%) strongly agreed/agreed that their immediate financial stress had been relieved;
- 9 in 10 respondents have said the grant protected their career in the creative industries; and
- Over 4 in 5 respondents developed new skills to help adapt in the new operating environment.

Most importantly, 9 in 10 stated that their career in the creative industries was protected by the funding received, with 81% stating they would have suffered financial stress to maintain a creative career without the emergency support.

Recommendation 1

Financial support for individuals

| Proposals | |
|--------------|--|
| 1 | A grant scheme should be developed to support individuals in the culture, arts and heritage sectors whose livelihoods and practice have been impacted directly by the restrictions put in place as a consequence of COVID-19; |
| 2 | Support for this group is essential and should be provided quickly; |
| 3 | Support should be flexible, accessible and be open to all those who create or assist in the creation or production of work or delivery of activities across the professional, amateur and community sectors; |
| 4 | Detail of the application processes to be determined by the appropriate Executive department and its delivery partners but the planning assumption should be that eligibility will be open to as wide as possible a range of roles across the sectors; |
| 5 | Governance arrangements to be in line with the awarding body's established framework. |
| Timeline | |
| • | Immediate |
| Cost | |
| • | Precise calculations will be dependent on a range of variables including the numbers that apply, the numbers that meet any eligibility criteria and the level of grants awarded. The Taskforce suggests a planning figure of around £5.5m. |
| Stakeholders | |
| • | Department for Communities |

Finding 2 – Financial Support for Organisations

Organisations, facilities and venues, whether professional or voluntary, are central to the health and operation of the culture, arts and heritage ecosystem by providing the infrastructure around which activities and events are built. They provide a focal point for people to access the benefits of culture, arts and heritage activity and are often magnets for volunteering. This can be especially true of voluntary and community arts and cultural groups in our rural areas. There the organisations and venues play a particularly important role at the heart of communities, helping to ensure access to, and active participation in, the arts and cultural activity but in areas where the density of population means they are particularly vulnerable to circumstances that cause participant or audience confidence to drop.

Crucially, the organisations, facilities and venues can be significant employers and centres of expertise supporting the wider sectors and they provide an outlet for the work of large numbers of, for example, freelance performers and technical professionals.

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on organisations was immediate and striking. Organisations and venues required support through grant and emergency funding including programmes provided by the

Executive and UK Government. For many, the furlough arrangements provided by the job retention scheme provided an important means of support. However, with that scheme ending in September and already tapering, the organisations and individuals that rely on it are facing another significant challenge.

While the Taskforce has noted announcements on the easing of restrictions in recent weeks and is aware that levels of activity are rising, the reality is that the mitigations associated with relaxation and COVID-19-safe operating practices, do themselves carry significant additional costs and limitations.

In particular, social distancing requirements have a profound impact on the financial viability of events and activities, particularly indoors and particularly those that rely on ticket sales, entrance fees or charging for activity. The reality is that a social distancing requirement, even at one metre, makes it highly likely that many cultural venues and activities will be unviable.

As a rough rule of thumb, events and performances tend to require something over 80% of capacity sold in order to break-even but with social distancing at one metre the capacity of an indoor venue might be reduced to something around 25%. The arithmetic of this position is self-evident.

In the theatre sector, a number of venues are unlikely to re-open at all while social distancing is a requirement. Other venues that are currently advertising programmes and concerts may also have to consider their position without an early change to social distancing arrangements.

While many organisations have worked hard to identify potential earned revenues from, for example, programming online activities, research shows that audiences are not likely to pay the same ticket prices as for live events, with an expectation that some content will be provided free of charge. Furthermore, the impact of venues being closed or limited in the type of work they can programme then flows down to production companies which cannot secure bookings from venues to tour work and to present to audiences. The consequence of a long term continuation of social distancing requirements includes the potential for some organisations to close permanently with the loss of a significant number of jobs and reduced opportunities for workers and participants.

Organisations are therefore juggling with three interlinked challenges:

- ongoing loss of income which is set to continue until full and safe re-opening can occur;
- increased accumulated deficits that threaten organisations very existence; and

- significant adaptation to ways of delivery to meet societies changed and changing needs.

In addition, volunteers, who are the lifeblood of many organisations from museums and heritage attractions to festivals, are also impacted by this public health situation and the enhanced requirements of public restrictions. Organisations are finding it challenging to get volunteers back, especially as many are in the older demographic, and those who come back feel the nature and requirements of volunteering has changed with much additional responsibility.

These sectors have an unparalleled ability to creatively support our community in its recovery from COVID-19, facilitating welcoming and safe opportunities to explore and facilitate reconnection. Supporting audiences while assisting communities to re-engage in active participation in arts, culture and heritage will promote civic recovery beyond COVID-19. The dedicated expertise within this sector, will be a key instrument in reconnecting individuals and communities to new opportunities, learning and practical life-enhancing benefit as we emerge from COVID-19's long shadow.

The Ulster University Economic Policy Unit, Outlook, summer 2021 noted that 2020 "may be regarded as the year which saw unemployment postponed rather than avoided". HMRC data as at March 2021 indicates that the furlough support take-

up rate by the arts and entertainment remained at 46%, (6,164 employees), the highest of all sectors in Northern Ireland. With little or no income and depleted reserves, organisations in the sector will have difficulty in contributing 10% to salaries in July and 20% in August and September 2021, when the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme comes to an end.

The Taskforce has concluded that the position faced by many organisations is little different from the circumstances in 2020/21 and it is clear that without further significant financial support culture, arts and heritage organisations remain at serious risk in 2021 and beyond.

The Arts Council provided evidence that 85% of organisations would have reduced scale without the COVID-19 support funds delivered by it on behalf of the Department for Communities. Additionally it was noted that just over half of organisations stated they are able to continue trading into 2021-2022 but there is uncertainty about longer term sustainability.

The serious challenges and wide-ranging needs apply just as starkly among community arts organisations. The Ulster-Scots Agency provided evidence that of 615 groups supported through its COVID-19 Resilience Small Grants, 55% were new recipients and a further 16% had returned after a long absence, suggesting a large pool of small organisations that have previously

operated under their own steam or with minimal support, but which have needed financial support during the pandemic.

These emergency interventions provided in the course of 2020/21 were an essential protection for many organisations and the Taskforce finds that further support for organisations is required in 2021/22 if we are to protect our cultural and heritage assets and have a sector to return to.

If there is a delay in disseminating support many will be forced to lay off their staff and many revenue-dependent spaces like theatres will be in real peril of closing completely. If this happens all hard won gains in infrastructure will collapse with talent and expertise lost for good. The costs of rebuilding this infrastructure will be much greater than the costs of immediate emergency support and the consequences will be felt for generations.

Our ambition not only for the arts themselves but for our communities and our society has not been diminished. Together our economy and our creative futures must be aided to adjust to the COVID-19 world and sustained. In so doing, the future well-being of our society in terms of social cohesion, promoting equality, tackling exclusion and social deprivation will be supported alongside assisting a multi-faceted creative economic sector to survive the challenge of re-enabling this decimated sector.

Recommendation 2

Financial Support for Organisations

| Proposals | |
|--------------|--|
| 1 | A grant scheme should be developed to support organisations across the culture, arts and heritage sectors whose operations continue to be adversely impacted by COVID-19 restrictions and required mitigations; |
| 2 | Support should include provision to assist with adaptation of business model requirements to facilitate re-opening; |
| 3 | Detail of the scheme objectives and application processes to be determined by the appropriate Executive department and its delivery partners; |
| 4 | Governance arrangements to be in line with the awarding body's established framework. |
| Timeline | |
| • | Business case to be drafted in September 2021 |
| Cost | |
| • | There is a number of significant variables which impact on the potential scale of need. These include factors around the rates of transmission; Executive decisions on restrictions and the pace at which organisations are able to restore reasonable levels of activity. These variables and uncertainties make an accurate assessment of need difficult but based on previous experience a fund of up to £6.4m may be required. |
| Stakeholders | |
| • | Department for Communities |
| • | Department for the Economy |

Finding 3 – Need for a Roadmap from Lockdown to Recovery

The Taskforce acknowledges that the Executive published its approach to re-opening in “Moving Forward: The Executive’s Pathway Out of Restrictions”. This document set out a model of the stages and steps that could expect to be followed in the process of re-opening.

The Executive’s approach was to not provide an indication of timeframe within the sector pathways in the documents, unlike the approach in other jurisdictions. The Taskforce understands the complexity and uncertainty of the circumstances that underpin decisions on relaxation of restrictions and the variables that can impact the transmission rates, hospitalisations, serious illness and ultimately the fatalities associated with the disease. In that respect the Taskforce does not envy the Executive its solemn responsibilities.

However, the Taskforce’s engagement suggests that the nature of many of the activities associated with culture, arts and heritage and particularly live performance and events, has not been taken fully into account in the development of the Pathways approach.

Live performance, whether amateur or commercial requires a significant degree

of long-term planning. Theatre and concert programmes in particular have a long lead-in time and even in normal circumstances, large events carry significant commercial and contractual risk. At a practical level, significant amounts of time are required for planning and technical design, casting, staging, rehearsal, advertising and ticket sales and all the other myriad steps that lie behind the successful and safe delivery of an event.

Planning a concert or theatre programme adds a further level of difficulty, with performer, cast and crew scheduling, venue availability, the logistics of touring productions etc meaning programmes can be years in gestation.

A clear and consistent message from across cultural, arts and heritage organisations is the need for a forward pathway, to be able to plan and deliver performances, workshops and events to the public, who have been deprived of cultural engagement.

The reality is that our venue operators are professional and accountable and extensive planning, preparation and investment has already been put in place to provide as safe and COVID-19 secure an environment as possible. Promoters and producers realise their professional and

commercial reputations are at stake and they are committed to working within the guidelines to put the health and safety of attendees, staff and volunteers first.

Taking account of the evidence emerging from the UK Government's Events Research Programme and the experience of test programmes in Scotland, Wales and our own learning event at the Irish Cup final in May, it is clear that well planned and delivered events are in-themselves safe experiences that can play a vital role in reinvigorating the local economy and in supporting the health and wellbeing of those who work across the arts and heritage and of the public who enjoy them.

While the Taskforce appreciates the need for caution, it is important that the sectors it represents are afforded a degree of certainty in terms of being able to plan activities and secure its future, including retaining local talent and supporting local jobs.

The Taskforce acknowledges the progress that has been made to date in terms of the relaxation of restrictions. We also note that restrictions in England, Wales and Scotland have now been significantly eased to allow arts and cultural events to resume at full capacity (with some exceptions in Scotland). However, here there remain a number of key mitigations – in particular in relation to social distancing – which in their current form are a significant barrier to the successful operation of most culture, arts and heritage activities and events.

In order to support the sectors' capacity to plan effectively, even if conditionally, the Taskforce recommends that every effort is made to ensure that as much information as possible is provided to the sectors in terms of planned or pending relaxations. The Taskforce acknowledges that with so much uncertainty and so many moving parts it may be asking too much for guarantees on timetables but the provision of advance indicative timelines for potential relaxations, leading to a safe reopening of arts and cultural venues as soon as possible and at full capacity is essential to enable plans to be put in place.

The Taskforce also recommends a more open dialogue on the potential nature of mitigations that might remain in place or be put in place. Such an approach would build on the improved engagement and communication that has been experienced in the course of the pandemic. It would also allow government the benefit of the experience of providers, practitioners, producers and promoters and would allow those same people to take a greater level of ownership, influence and responsibility over the protections and mitigations which continue to apply for the benefit of all.

Finally, a group comprising representatives from both the arts, cultural and heritage sectors and from across government departments should be established at the earliest opportunity to monitor and oversee the implementation of the safe and timely reopening of all arts and cultural spaces.

Recommendation 3

A Roadmap from Lockdown to Recovery

| Proposals | |
|--------------|---|
| 1 | When considering relaxations and restrictions, the Executive should provide as much information as possible to the sectors impacted. This “roadmap” should aim for a reopening of arts and cultural venues as soon as possible at full capacity but bearing in mind at all times the importance of maintaining high standards of public safety. Information and guidance on how best to achieve this should be provided as far in advance as possible to take account of the particular long-term planning needs of the culture, arts and heritage sectors and should contain an indicative timetable for planned actions together with an assessment of the factors that will be taken into account when making decisions; |
| 2 | That the approach to future potential relaxations, restrictions and mitigations should include a more open dialogue on the potential nature of measures that might remain in place or be put in place; |
| 3 | A group comprising representatives from both the arts, cultural and heritage sectors and from across government departments should be established at the earliest opportunity to monitor and oversee the implementation of the safe and timely reopening of all arts and cultural spaces. |
| Timeline | |
| • | Road map and guidance for the sector should be developed and published immediately. |
| Cost | |
| • | Funding from existing resources |
| Stakeholders | |
| • | The Northern Ireland Executive |
| • | The Executive Office |
| • | Department of Health |
| • | Department for the Economy |
| • | Department for Communities |

Finding 4 – Need to build capacity in the sector

The social and cultural value of the culture, arts and heritage sectors are not only embedded in the everyday life of the community but are also part and parcel of our economy. Any recovery must not only recognise and protect the intrinsic cultural power and assets as symbols of reaffirmation but also help define the economic health and social benefits capable of being delivered by our highly nuanced, expert and multifaceted arts, culture and heritage sectors.

However, there are significant risks of a talent drain within the culture, arts and heritage sectors. In a report from Ulster University's Economic Policy Unit, it is estimated that of the 39,100 jobs in culture, arts and heritage, 12,000 to 16,000 are at risk as a result of the ongoing impact of COVID-19. This puts over 50% of jobs in heritage, culture, galleries, music, theatre and the visual arts at risk.

Given the nature of employment in many areas of the culture, arts and heritage sectors, there is a genuine concern that organisations will be unable to attract and retain talent in an environment where the future is so uncertain.

To survive, stabilise and strengthen the sectors, public policy intervention is

required to ensure the sector, with its rich and diverse range of skills, is focussed on retaining, upskilling and attracting the next generations of talent. Given the important role freelancers play in the ecology of the sector it is important that programmes are made available to both organisations and individuals.

A perspective on capacity loss based on their work across the UK was provided to the Taskforce by the Centre for Cultural Value. That work reported emerging evidence of significant job losses across the culture sector and that a significant number of cultural workers, particularly freelancers, left the sector in 2020.

Their findings on re-skilling, up-skilling and training suggest that in the hiatus, significant numbers of cultural and creative workers had either upskilled, for example through post-graduate study, and remained in the sector or re-skilled in other areas during the pandemic. This was echoed in their labour force analysis with cultural and creative workers enrolling in education as a direct response to the crisis.

Beyond the higher education opportunities, increasing concerns were being expressed about the availability of training opportunities in relation to matters such as

human resources management and mental health first aid which were not being met in some places. Across the Scottish festivals cohort there has been a need identified in understanding rights management and copyright PRS for collaborative online work. In Northern Ireland the majority of interviewees pointed to the need for specific skills in creating work for screen or to be viewed on smartphones, tablets and other devices. The interviewees point to a specific lack of this within the publicly funded arts.

While some further work would be merited to test the observations in the NI context, many of the points raised by the Centre for Cultural Value reflected the Taskforce's experience through the focus groups.

What is clear is that COVID-19 has had a disruptive and often destructive impact on those who work in, or are considering a career in, the culture, arts and heritage sectors.

The uncertainty present here and the opportunities on offer elsewhere suggest a real risk of talent drain as current and new potential entrants to the sectors are drawn to opportunity elsewhere.

In considering potential responses to the challenges identified it is also important to remember that culture, arts and heritage is not a solely metropolitan phenomenon. Indeed the challenges faced by venues and organisations in rural areas in reopening in a financially viable form and in attracting

and retaining talent are likely to be greater, with the potential that they not appear as an attractive career path for those considering a future in arts & culture.

The Taskforce recommends that to address the talent drain, encourage new entrants and enhance the skills base a range of measures is required. This is an area where productive partnerships and collaboration across culture, arts and heritage and with other sectors would deliver significant benefits and impact.

The sustainability of the enterprise of artists, practitioners, craftspeople, participants and organisations, has never been so unsure. Without a definitive policy re-affirmation and economic protection of the central role culture, arts and heritage can and do play, that uncertainty will only see a loss of skills and experience, which in turn will blight its longer term future potential.

The loss of skills will impact all areas, from community engagement to international showcasing. The OECD has reported "By artistic skills, we mean not only the technical skills developed in different arts forms (playing an instrument, composing a piece, dancing, choreographing, painting and drawing, acting, etc.) but also the habits of mind and behaviour that are developed in the arts. Arts education matters because people trained in the arts play a significant role in the innovation process in OECD countries: the arts

should undoubtedly be one dimension of a country's innovation strategy".

There are local models available on which the sectors might build, for example where the hospitality and tourism sector has created skills development programmes with Northern Ireland Further Education and Higher Education Colleges and partners such as the Clore Foundation have created programmes through partnerships that relate to challenges in specific locations. Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities has established a sectoral group to

focus on heritage skills, working with the Construction Industry Training Board.

The Taskforce also recognised the role played by entrepreneurship across the sector and the importance of supporting those seeking to open new enterprises or expand existing ventures. Such support could include the establishment of mentoring arrangements; the provision of advice, guidance, support and training in relation to business development and financial planning and their own personal development and wellbeing.

Recommendation 4

Talent Acquisition, Retention and Development Programme

| Proposals | |
|-----------|--|
| 1 | A professional development programme for freelancers and staff delivered by appropriately qualified organisations and umbrella bodies across and beyond the sectors. It is suggested that this could be offered through the Arts Council and National Heritage Lottery Fund, to offer continuous professional development and mentoring. |
| 2 | Specific support should be identified for those establishing or expanding enterprises related to the sectors; |
| 3 | Programmes should be designed to facilitate the uptake of new digital skills, including content creation, production, distribution, digital communications, social media management, data analytics and website marketing. |
| 4 | Apprenticeships to the culture, arts and heritage sectors, with clear pathways to employment, should be developed. Lessons from existing and previous apprenticeship schemes to be drawn upon. |
| 5 | Internships - should be at least 6 to 12 months, offer a living wage and not incur additional spend for host organisations. Existing and previous schemes should be looked at as well as partnerships with schools, colleges and the higher and further education sector. |
| 6 | Explore the potential for BBC Skills Academy in collaboration with Department for the Economy. |
| Timeline | |
| • | Engagement on the nature of the professional development process should begin immediately with pilot activities no later than the new calendar year. |
| • | Short-term pilot apprenticeship programme leading to comprehensive longer term programme to attract new entrants into the creative sector with structured pathways. In partnership with FE&HE and other industry relevant bodies. |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| • | The development and introduction of a fuller programme and development of proposals associated with apprenticeships etc could realistically begin within the 18 month horizon of the work of the Taskforce and could be further developed in the design and implementation of a future culture, arts and heritage strategy. |
| Cost | |
| • | £1,200,000 |
| Stakeholder | |
| • | Department for Communities |
| • | Department for the Economy |
| • | Arts Council for Northern Ireland |
| • | National Lottery Heritage Fund |

Finding 5 – Concerns for health and wellbeing

As we continue to deal with the impacts of COVID-19 we are on a long journey of recovery, not only for our culture, arts and heritage community but for our whole society. The wellbeing of those who live and work here is central to the Executive's Programme for Government and the eleven council community plans and it is important that the cultural sector plays a key role in recovery.

During the evidence gathering phase of the Taskforce's work, we heard first hand of harrowing situations that put individuals at severe risk to health and wellbeing. We also received evidence from a report commissioned in 2018 by Inspire Wellbeing, Changing Arts and Minds that identified significant concerns for the wellbeing of those in the sector.

- 20% are paid at a level less than the poverty line
- 3 times more likely than the general population to suffer anxiety – 36%
- 60% have experienced suicidal thoughts
- 37% plan for suicide
- 16% suicide attempt

Many of those who work in the culture, arts and heritage sector have experienced significant financial loss and trauma during the COVID-19 lockdown. With almost all venues closed from March 2020, many have been left without income, affecting living standards, health, wellbeing and mental health. Even those who retained employment or received a salary through furlough have found the period of lockdown and the ongoing uncertainty challenging both personally and professionally.

The particular conditions associated with employment in the sector contribute to the pressures and concerns felt by cultural and creative professionals. Characteristics include, financial insecurity, portfolio work pattern and inadequate financial reward.

The Taskforce took the view that the sorts of impacts experienced by those who work in the sectors on a salaried basis are likely to be shared to some extent by the thousands of people who volunteer in grassroots community and amateur activities; whose work is critical in sustaining the longer term viability of the sectors and who have similarly experienced the challenges brought by the lockdown and ongoing restrictions. On that basis consideration of the impacts on volunteers across the sector should also be an important consideration.

The Taskforce was made aware of a number of health and wellbeing support programmes but also that there was a lack of a co-ordinated approach, funding and information provision. Working in partnership with organisations, departments and the sector, a range of support programmes would add value to the lives of individuals at risk and to the sectors more broadly. There are schemes in place to offer support through online resources and phone access to counsellors. For example, Theatre and Dance NI supports members through their Membership Assistance Programme delivered by Spectrum Life, though the provision may be difficult to sustain in the longer term without additional resourcing. Also 'Minding Creative

Minds' is a scheme operating across the island. It currently receives 10% of requests from Northern Ireland and is funded on a public sector, private sector basis.

Another more broad example, from the public mental health framework Confident Communities, Brighter Futures (DoH, 2010) states that mental health is intrinsic to wellbeing which it defines as: 'a positive state of mind and body, feeling safe and able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities and wider environment'. Participation in the arts and creativity is given as an example of how promoting participation and purpose can enhance engagement for both individuals and communities.

Recommendation 5

Support the health and wellbeing of those working in the Culture, Arts and Heritage Sectors

| Proposals | |
|--------------|---|
| 1 | Umbrella organisations and membership associations should be encouraged and supported to offer support services to individuals experiencing stress and poor mental health and wellbeing. This would build on existing work already carried out in the sector and complement wider provision offered by the Department of Health and local trusts. |
| 2 | Working with the Arts Council for Northern Ireland, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency dedicated health and wellbeing programmes should be made available and publicised to all those operating in the culture, arts and heritage sectors. |
| Timeline | |
| • | Immediate engagement with relevant organisations on the nature of programmes. Roll-out as soon as possible. |
| Cost | |
| • | £500,000 |
| Stakeholders | |
| • | Department of Health |
| • | Department for Communities |
| • | Public Health Agency |
| • | Arts Council NI |
| • | National Heritage Lottery Fund |

Finding 6 – Investment in Built Heritage and Capital Investment Renewal

How we protect, invest in and value our many cultures and heritages provides an insight into our wider values. As far back as 2013 the Historic Environment Division highlighted the under-investment in heritage buildings; the situation has continued to deteriorate as illustrated in related NI Audit Office reports of 2012 and 2016. Our built heritage is a strategic and non-renewable asset that needs to be treasured and protected, sentiments reflected in the insightful words of Dara McAnulty, Nature Writer.

“Our natural and built heritage connects us to land and people. They are our cultural foundations and our inspiration. Every day, when we look upon the everyday wonder of nature or the achievements of our ancestors, it brings us closer to our best selves. Having a connection to the world outside ourselves, can help us to be more caring and compassionate - two qualities the world definitely needs more of!”

Investment in heritage assets is required to address the cumulative effects of long

term and serious decline in condition and ongoing asset losses. In 2013/14, 30.8% of Northern Ireland’s listed buildings were identified as needing some investment and repair works (from Historic Environment Division (HED) condition survey). Indications suggest this need has only increased in the interim, and COVID-19 has also exacerbated the decline in condition as owners (whether private, charity or public sector) have lacked the resources to invest in even limited repairs or essential maintenance, thereby storing up the need for much more costly and significant work in the future.

The pandemic resulted in the unprecedented closure of venues, attractions and facilities. While most have been permitted to open for rehearsal and recording, a significant number, particularly of theatres, have remained closed for the entire period. The process of re-opening will take time and financial resources for testing of systems like lighting rigs and P.A systems. Recommendations in terms of the installation of carbon dioxide monitors, improving/installing HPVAC air conditioning systems and more straightforward housekeeping like the removal of graffiti, physical adjustments to allow social

distancing, sanitisation stations will all cost money and will all be important in building the confidence of audiences and participants to return to the facilities.

For rural areas it will also be important to include particular consideration of the arts infrastructure and community venues where their scale and condition might present particular challenges to enabling them to bring audiences and participants back, especially as we head towards winter.

The pressure is no lighter on cultural venues run by volunteers. Survey data provided to the Taskforce by the Ulster-Scots Agency and Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland found that 82% of respondent venues hosted Ulster-Scots cultural activity and almost all of the halls reported a need for additional support to help with running costs, COVID-19 measures and maintenance costs, against a backdrop of reduced incomes and slow recovery.

The renewed focus on outdoor spaces is likely to generate potential opportunities for developments and minor changes that could facilitate more outdoor activities to take place. Such proposals would need to include consideration of improved access for people with disabilities. Departments and councils need to adopt a long-term strategic approach to asset disposals taking account of environmental and sustainability factors as well as the potential lost opportunities for the public's health and well-being.

Local councils are responsible for much of the outdoor public space in our cities, towns and villages and provide and maintain a significant proportion of the culture, arts and heritage infrastructure including community centres, parks, theatres and heritage sites. As such they, and those charged with responsibility for planning, heritage conservation, and for urban regeneration, have important roles to play in maintaining these spaces and places in the public interest.

The Taskforce recognises that dealing with this range of capital investment is a significant challenge but it is important, in order to safeguard previous capital investment in cultural infrastructure and minimise emergency capital funding asks.

Crucially, capital investment will also help to maximise the opportunities these cultural spaces offer in terms of regeneration of towns and cities, balancing rural and urban communities' requirements, responding to people's needs for how they connect with others to begin the healing process and meeting the need to re-imagine and re-purpose our High Streets.

As such the Taskforce recommends that capital investment should be a significant aspect of the response to re-opening and recovery. However, the Taskforce recognises that the funding identified as the Barnett consequential does not include a capital element. We also recognise that by their nature, capital

developments can take significant time to deliver and from a standing start would be likely to stretch beyond the 18 month horizon of the Taskforce.

The Taskforce acknowledges that some work has already been undertaken through existing capital programmes and endorses

that approach. We recommend that COVID-19 related health and safety works are considered a priority heading within existing programmes and that rather than re-invent the wheel, the priority should be for funders to increase the sums available to take forward the work in existing maintenance and development programmes.

Recommendation 6

Capital Investment

| Proposals | |
|--------------|--|
| 1 | Funding is required to support the capital needs of organisations across the sector to meet the investment related to the COVID-19 pandemic; |
| 2 | Support is required for organisations across the sector, from large theatres to small community venues, all of which sustain cultural activity; |
| 3 | Support needs to include consideration of improved access for people with disabilities; |
| 4 | Financial support is required for some natural and historic environment locations which have been experiencing significant visitor pressure during and after lockdown. A condition survey report is required to fully assess the capital investment needs of each property. |
| Timeline | |
| • | 6-12 Months for the condition study; Immediate in terms of consideration of minor works proposals and larger development proposals to be considered within existing capital investment programmes |
| Cost | |
| • | The Taskforce recommends enhancement of existing, relevant capital programmes budgets supplemented by small capital equipment funds where appropriate. The additional requirement will be dependent on demand (which is likely to be significant) and the availability of funds. An additional amount of £2m would permit a significant contribution to the work required. |
| Stakeholders | |
| • | Department for Communities |
| • | Department for the Economy |
| • | Local councils |

Finding 7 – The need to create new content

Among its many other impacts, COVID-19, and the measures deployed to address it, have had significant consequences in terms of the creation, exhibition and performance of new artistic endeavour. Practitioners have reported practical difficulties in accessing their workspaces; galleries, theatres, cinemas and other important cultural spaces have been closed; colleges and other forms of learning and teaching have been altered. For a new generation of practitioner there has been a reduction in market, in audience and in opportunity to learn and develop.

That is not to say that there hasn't been important work created and presented. The innovative drive of creative people has seen many look to other mediums as outlets, with significant numbers developing or adopting their digital presence. And of course individual endeavour has continued across the course of the pandemic where circumstances and work practices have allowed.

The creation of new work is the product of talent, skill, imagination, vision, determination, grit and time. The reality is that the time taken to get from a blank piece of paper or blinking cursor to a stage or a screen can be measured in years. The same can be said for all the creative and transformative processes that lead from an idea and some raw materials to a finished product that engages, inspires, impresses or moves those who experience it.

The Taskforce recognises the important contribution that encouraging the creation of new content can make in terms of stimulating, supporting, and showcasing the work of new and established artists, the reopening and recovery of the creative sector and in terms of broader economic and social impact and recovery.

The Taskforce recommends the creation of a new Commissioning and Development Fund. The purpose of the fund will be to stimulate original creative content across all genres, including different community practices. The fund could be used to support collaboration and partnerships across arts, culture and heritage to deliver maximum impact for the public.

The Taskforce recommends the establishment of a digital innovation programme to encourage new ways of delivery to existing and new audiences. As part of the work to create a long-term strategy for culture, arts and heritage, the Taskforce also highlights the importance of trans-border engagement and collaboration and recommends the creation of financial support, including commissioning funds in partnership with other jurisdictions, that support inclusivity and reconciliation within and across these islands and stimulate and support cultural touring and engagement across the EU and beyond.

Recommendation 7 Commissioning and Development Fund

| Proposals | |
|--------------|--|
| 1 | The Taskforce proposes a new Commissioning and Development Fund to stimulate original creative content. This commissioning fund could be used to support collaboration and partnerships across arts, culture and heritage to deliver maximum impact for the public; |
| 2 | An ambitious commissioning programme will take time to develop so in the short term, funding is urgently required to support artist and project commissions (direct to artists and via individual arts organisations and consortia) that helps to support local talent and ensure innovative new work is created and presented to audiences; |
| 3 | A digital innovation programme to encourage new ways of delivery to existing and new audiences; |
| 4 | Develop long-term strategic collaborations with North/South and East West cultural organisations to create commissioning funds that will support inclusivity and reconciliation. |
| 5 | Explore funding opportunities to work with partners in the EU and beyond. |
| Timeline | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence development immediately with a view to launching scheme by end of calendar year. |
| Cost | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> £1,000,000 in year plus £1,000,000 staging in 2022 |
| Stakeholders | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department for Communities Department for the Economy |

Finding 8 – Strategic Collaboration, Councils and Place-making

Despite its extraordinary, detrimental effects COVID-19 has also sparked some positive creative consequences. Experience and anecdote offer numerous examples of new or deepened collaborations and partnerships being formed across the wider cultural ecosystem and among practitioners within and across art-forms and specialisms. New coalitions have emerged, often building on existing relationships but with a new, common purpose.

From a structural and strategic point of view there is also a growing sense of greater understanding and appreciation of what the culture, arts and heritage sectors actually contribute to society. In particular, the sectors have a significant amount to offer in terms of societal recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 and more broadly in terms of a wide range of economic and social policy issues.

There is also evidence of greater levels of engagement with funders, administrators and policy-makers, with contacts spreading beyond what might have been the established engagement footprint. These improvements in communication and collaboration must be preserved and expanded in order to support the recovery phase and the longer-term health and growth of the sectors.

The Taskforce sees a significant opportunity to enhance the overall offering of culture, arts and heritage and recommends the creation of a collaborative framework with councils on the development of regional plans and in particular the re-imagining of outdoor spaces owned and operated by the councils.

Culture, arts and heritage services provided by local councils play a significant role in supporting social cohesion, health and wellbeing, civic pride and economic prosperity. These services have the potential to support the recovery of people, place, and prosperity. Councils are deliverers, funders, partners and facilitators of much culture, arts and heritage infrastructure and activity and view this work as essential to delivery of their Community Plan outcomes as well as specific regeneration, growth and tourism strategies at a local level.

The new collaborative partnerships should focus on place-making which at its simplest is the process of creating and/or retaining quality places that people want to live, work, play, and learn in. Evidence shows that when culture, arts and heritage is involved in place-making alongside communities the impacts are stronger and the benefits are wider.

The development of creative public realm, the regeneration of high streets and creating a child-friendly town are all examples of place-making and capitalise on a local community's assets, inspiration

and potential, with the intention of creating community spaces that promote people's health and wellbeing, happiness, equality of access to opportunities and educational and economic prospects.

Recommendation 8 Strategic Culture, Arts and Heritage Partnerships with Councils

| Proposals | |
|--------------|--|
| 1 | Create a framework of 11 strategic partnerships with local councils to co-design and deliver a coherent and consistent approach to place-making; |
| 2 | These partnerships should involve a range of stakeholders including local community groups and voluntary sector organisations. Consideration should be given to establishing a forum with councils to accelerate this work; |
| 3 | Department for Communities to encourage local councils to utilise existing financial support to aid the reopening of theatres and other indoor performance spaces and to re-assess and re-imagine their use of outdoor spaces; |
| 4 | Councils are supported to ensure that financial pressures created by COVID-19 do not mean a cut to culture, arts and heritage activity, essential given the important role of culture in the social and economic recovery of citizens across Northern Ireland. |
| 5 | Consider a range of festivals in collaboration with councils and other strategic partners in the autumn of 2021 or spring 2022 to relaunch wider participation in culture, arts and heritage events. |
| Timeline | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-6 Months |
| Cost | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding from existing resources |
| Stakeholders | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local councils Department for Communities Department for Infrastructure Department for the Economy Arts Council for Northern Ireland National Lottery Heritage Fund |

Finding 9 – Audience Confidence

The Taskforce acknowledges that significant steps have been taken to permit the attendance of audiences in greater numbers to performances and events. We also acknowledge the continuing public health situation and the ongoing risks associated with COVID-19 and its variants.

Across the course of the restrictions, surveys have identified a reticence among a proportion of the public to return to attending as part of an audience. The level of comfort varies to some extent based on the nature of the venue and activity. As the sectors continue to open up there will be an opportunity to test the public reaction but the fundamental point is that for performance to be viable, audiences need to be allowed and willing to attend.

Placing audiences and participants at the centre of our planning is crucial. Without people coming back to live events, participating in workshops, classes and other activities, organisations cannot create income, pay and employ artists or deliver public benefits. Dealing with this is crucial to protect the long-term sustainability of the sector and to supporting social and economic recovery.

Recent research shows the public need reassurances around five areas: health and safety, access, financial, social and brand. The Taskforce recommends that a

programme of ongoing tracking of audience attitudes is necessary and should inform a focussed communication strategy. The strategy should be aimed at providing the assurance people require that it is safe to return to cultural spaces, attend events and take part in cultural activity in a COVID-19 secure environment and in compliance with any regulations agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Taskforce has noted and would encourage the adoption and adaptation of existing schemes such as UK Theatre’s “See It Safely” programme and “We’re Good to Go” which is supported by TourismNI and to which a number of venues are already subscribing. The Taskforce has also noted and would support consideration of a separate, specific scheme relating to the safety of events, where that would be helpful in building public confidence. The interpretation and application of such a scheme should be consistent across all council areas. The Taskforce acknowledges the very considerable efforts that have been made by event and activity organisers to develop and implement COVID-19-safe arrangements in their planning and delivery strategies. The Taskforce recommends that to support the safe and effective re-opening and ultimately the recovery of the sectors, clear and unambiguous guidance on a range of health and safety measures for event and activity organisers to follow should be produced.

This should be informed by the outcomes of various pilot schemes in Great Britain and should be supported by a programme of measures, including training and support, for completing risk assessments and delivering covered, safe performing environments, infrastructure support. (e.g. additional and more spacious crew and artist changing/ work facilities, track and trace systems, queue management controls, lateral flow tests and the use of QR codes to assist with track and trace and to add ease of access to venues and events).

The Taskforce recognises that even with the best planning and delivery systems in place, the nature of the transmissibility of

COVID-19 means that there is the potential risk that events and activities may be impacted by infections and outbreaks. The Taskforce recommends that consideration is given to supporting organisers with meeting increased insurance costs.

The Taskforce recommends the creation of a time-limited “welcome back” voucher scheme should be considered to encourage audiences and to support local community and cultural activities. In the first instance it should be clarified if the Department for the Economy’s proposed voucher scheme for every adult in Northern Ireland permits expenditure in the culture, arts and heritage sector.

Recommendation 9

Keeping Audiences Safe and Building Confidence

| Proposals | |
|--------------|--|
| 1 | Ongoing tracking of the impact of COVID-19 on audience attitudes to culture, arts and heritage events and activities. We also need to understand how the public and audiences continue to engage with arts and culture online; |
| 2 | the development and delivery of a short-term co-ordinated campaign aimed at building public confidence to include information about mitigations in place and reassurances around the 5 key areas; |
| 3 | to support the safe and effective re-opening and ultimately the recovery of the sectors, clear and unambiguous guidance on a range of health and safety measures for event and activity organisers to follow. The guidance should be backed-up by a programme of training, advice and support; |
| 4 | consideration should be given to supporting organisers with meeting increased insurance costs; |
| 5 | a welcome back voucher scheme should be considered on a time limited basis to encourage audiences and to support local community and cultural activities. It should be clarified if the Department for the Economy proposed voucher scheme permits expenditure in the culture, arts and heritage sector. |
| Timeline | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work across all these recommendations can begin immediately |
| Cost | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Est £1,000,000 |
| Stakeholders | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department for Communities Department for the Economy Department of Health |

A large crowd of people is seated on a grassy field at dusk, watching a film on a large outdoor screen. The screen displays the 'Film Hub NI' logo. The sky is a mix of blue and orange from the setting sun. The audience is seen from behind, filling the foreground and middle ground. The screen is illuminated, casting a glow on the surrounding area. There are some trees in the background and a few flags or banners on the sides.

Culture, Arts and Heritage – Proposed Approach for a Vision and Strategy to Strengthen and Grow the Sector

Belfast Film Festival outdoor screening of *The Wickerman* at The Giant's Ring featuring The Armagh Rhymers

Vision and Strategy

The Taskforce recommends the development of an overarching ten year Vision as the basis for a five year Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy. This should include clarity and mapping to establish the full culture, arts and heritage footprint; its economic impact, capital spend, skills, training, audience development, public engagement, and innovation. Some of these have been highlighted in the Department for Economy 10X economy document.

The Strategy and the Programme for Government

The experience of the pandemic has underlined the contribution of culture, arts and heritage to our quality of life, to health & wellbeing, education, to tackling deprivation and building inclusion, to the economy, to tourism and across the range of social policy issues that are the focus of much of the work of government.

The breadth and relevance of the contribution of culture, arts and heritage to achieving key economic and social policy objectives can be clearly seen in the Executive's consultation on a proposed new draft Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework. In its January 2021 document, nine strategic outcomes were set out:

- Our children and young people have the best start in life
- We live and work sustainably
 - protecting the environment

- We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect
- We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives
- Everyone can reach their potential
- Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral
- Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other
- We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives
- People want to live, work and visit here

The links between the work of culture, arts and heritage and these proposed objectives are clear to see and the Strategy should demonstrate the contribution the sectors make to the achievement of Programme for Government outcomes. It should also drill down further and include alignment to other cross-departmental strategies e.g. Green Growth, and the Tourism Recovery Action Plan. The Strategy should identify where the achievement of outcomes is dependent on a review of existing policies, e.g. in relation to land-use planning, or funding mechanisms. It is vital to have cross-party agreement on the vision and overarching Strategy and policy so that the sectors are not destabilised when ministers change.

Co-Creation of Strategy

The Strategy should be co-created by representatives from the sectors, Executive, local government and other key stakeholder groups. The process of developing a strategy, including agreement on the scope and nature of the Strategy brief, should be entrusted to an advisory group appointed by the Department for Communities, other government departments should also be involved as a cross-departmental approach is vital, given the range of outcomes to which culture, arts and heritage contributes. Queens University Belfast and Ulster University should be involved in supporting the research needed to inform the Strategy alongside recognised industry bodies. The advisory group should be chaired independently and include a wide range of suitably qualified arts practitioners.

It is also vital to involve the public in this process. While it is acknowledged that government strategies have to go to public consultation it would be preferable if additional engagement work was carried out to ensure the public help to shape the Vision and Strategy.

We should remember that within today's population of children and young people are all our future writers, painters, playwrights, poets, DJs, composers, musicians, architects, town planners, digital creators, song-writers, film makers who will shape Northern Ireland and our understanding of it in the next 30-40 years and who will have an impact on the following fifty years.

Principles

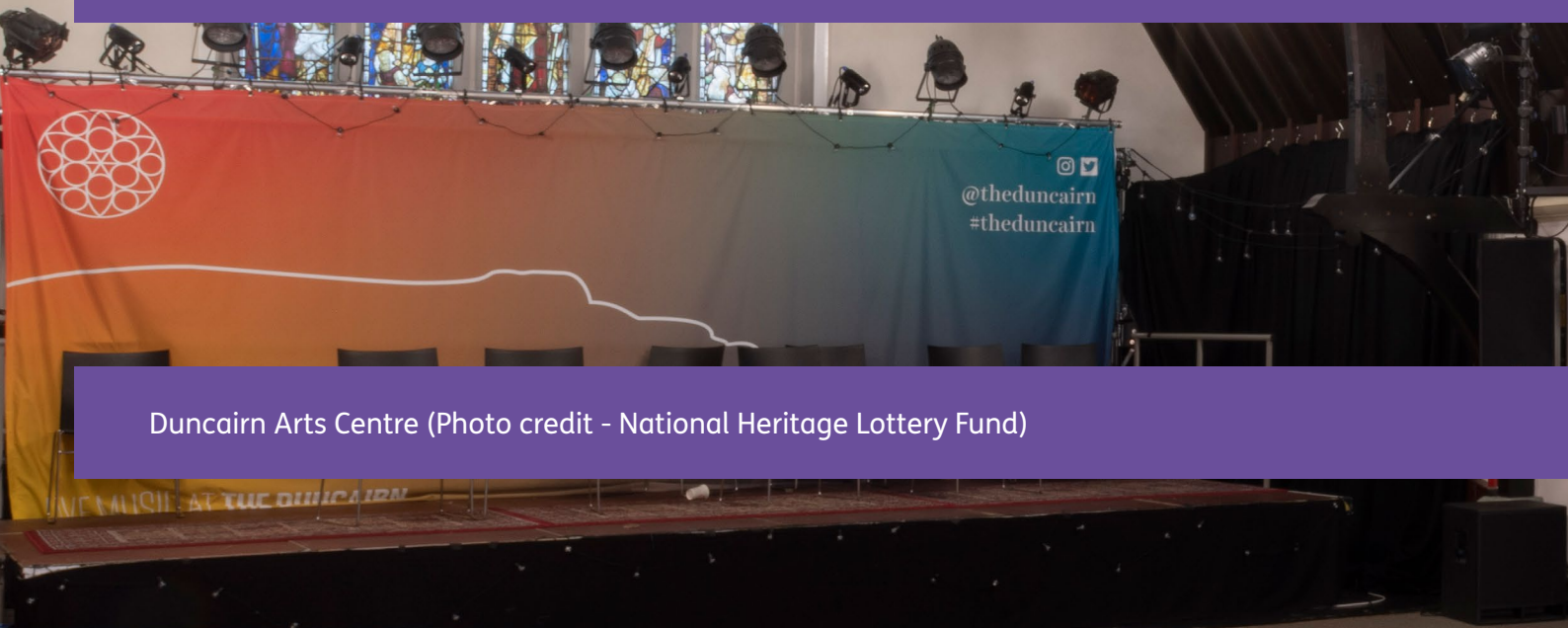
A series of principles or values should be developed including: equality, diversity and inclusion and ensuring all members of society have equal access to culture, arts and heritage, including indigenous language communities.

The Strategy should reflect the ambition of increasing per capita spend on the arts to, at a minimum, bring Northern Ireland into line with other countries in these islands.

There should be a clear commitment to increasing public understanding and promoting the positive impact and benefits of culture, arts and heritage in reflecting an increasingly diverse contemporary culture and to promote equality.



Issues to be considered during development of the Strategy



Duncairn Arts Centre (Photo credit - National Heritage Lottery Fund)

Quantify the Economic and Social Value Contributed by the Culture, Arts and Heritage Sectors

The Taskforce received detailed information indicating a clear structural underfunding of the culture, arts and heritage sector relative to benchmark locations. Sustained underfunding has an impact on the health, wellbeing, sense of place and identity and the ability of community to move towards healing, growth, and reconciliation. Future funding should be based on the level of need and the recognised benefits culture, arts and heritage bring to society and the economy.

The Strategy should reflect the ambition of increasing per capita spend on the arts to bring Northern Ireland into line with other countries in these islands. Sustained sectoral research is required, looking at:

- The sector itself – scale, scope, characteristics, impact, value;
- Public attendance and participation levels and motivations and behaviours to inform and shape future activity and ensure relevance to people across NI.

Demographic Challenges and Systemic Inequalities

There is a number of demographic and geographic challenges and opportunities for the Strategy to examine. It should take an evidence-based approach to

consider whether there may be systemic inequalities in the distribution of culture, arts and heritage funding affecting, for example, rural communities; people with disabilities; indigenous language/culture communities (Irish and Ulster-Scots) and BAME communities. If there are found to be inequalities or barriers to equality of access the Strategy should seek to identify means to prevent, address or overcome these.

The Strategy should also consider the impact of an aging population on the workforce and on visitors and audiences.

Artistic Development

The Strategy should seek to support new opportunities for talent development, increase skills and employability in relation to current and future needs of the cultural and creative sectors. Key to this will be identifying and resourcing opportunities for international collaborations and partnerships to enhance artistic skills and knowledge, develop new inter-disciplinary practices and to share our stories and culture with peoples around the globe.

Arts and Education

The Strategy should consider a shared cultural agenda with the education sector to promote a diverse and rich arts curriculum in schools, colleges and universities. This would enhance young people's well-being and appreciation of the benefits of personal creativity as well as contributing to Northern

Ireland's growing, dynamic, creative ecology and reputation internationally.

Internationalism

International collaborations and partnerships between artists improve the cultural offer available to artists and communities. Artists benefit from being able to develop their practice whilst audiences have the opportunity to experience arts events from different cultures across the globe. Furthermore, working internationally gives our artists and ensembles the opportunity to develop new markets and audiences overseas, thus helping to both develop sustainable careers whilst enhancing Northern Ireland's profile and reputation abroad. Consideration should therefore also be given to ensuring that internationalism features prominently in the new Strategy, particularly in light of the consequences of Brexit on the cultural economy.

Digital Strategy & Infrastructure Plan

A long-term digital strategy should be developed for the region which recognises the complex ecology of the creative spaces and supports the growth of the industry over the next ten years.

The building of a digital infrastructure plan which would identify barriers to access and ensure key developmental factors such as access for all, high broadband bandwidth, and baseline skills levels.

This is seen as essential aspect of the Government's levelling-up commitment.

Opportunities for creative research, development and innovation that supports artists and arts and heritage professionals, increasing interdisciplinary research, access to facilities and collaboration across the digital and creative industries will also need to be key aspects of the strategy.

Protect and invest in our Built Heritage

The Taskforce believes it is important for the Department for Communities to develop a coherent long-term strategy for the 'hard heritage' element of Northern Ireland's cultural heritage including consideration of the restoration of its status as a stand-alone PfG objective.

Supporting the need for environmental sustainability and how the sector can contribute, and in many ways, lead on this by championing the role of culture, arts and heritage in regeneration. Addressing structural fragility especially around finance is also important and working with the social enterprise sector and others to explore viable options.

Cultural Tourism

Information from TourismNI suggests that 70% of visitors to Northern Ireland travel here because they are "culturally curious". An independently created cultural tourism strategy which acknowledges

the key contribution of arts and cultural festivals and events to attracting visitors is essential and should be properly resourced.

The draft Cultural Heritage and Tourism document ‘Embracing the Challenge, Seizing the Opportunity’ provides much of the context and actions required in this area and the resource required should be part of the overall resource attached to the Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy.

Communication and Engagement Strategy with the Sector

The Taskforce received significant and repeated evidence that the sector does not feel that there is an adequate method of engaging and informing stakeholders of key developments. The building of formal communications networks to ensure a two-way flow of knowledge between the creative sector and key decision-making bodies.

Multi-year funding where appropriate

The creation of long-term funding mechanisms so that organisations are not existing on a year-to-year basis and can engage in sustained strategies or work programmes embedded in the overarching Strategy, delivering environmental, economic and social benefits.

Examine the impact and cost of universal income schemes in benchmark regions

Investigation into the introduction of a universal basic income scheme. Research into how such schemes operate in France, Germany and the current pilot in Ireland, and the outcomes achieved.

Structure and Resources

The Taskforce acknowledges the extensive remit of the Department of Communities and the support offered to the sector. However, a recurring theme highlighted during our consultations was whether an enhanced resource model would assist in the development of sectoral knowledge and successful implementation of a new strategy. Suggestions included;

- A review of the resources within the Department to validate the allocation of staff to support delivery of strategy;
- Appointment of a Culture, Arts and Heritage Advisory Board, comprising representatives from across the sector;
- Appointment of a Junior Minister to support the Minister on culture, arts, heritage and languages;
- Secondments to and from the sector to better understand sectoral, organisational, practitioner and audience needs.

Five year plan with indicative funding allocation model

Clear policy objectives underpinning the Strategy for Culture, Arts and Heritage investment underpinned by a five year business plan setting out targets and key performance indicators will be essential.

Outcomes and Evaluation

It is important that the Strategy has clear identified outcomes and that an advisory board, appointed by the Department for Communities should be put in place to

monitor the progress and achievement of targets. Regular evaluation and review of the strategy must be built in from the beginning with resource allocated for an independent evaluation process.

Timeline

Work on the development of the Strategy should commence in September 2021 with a view to completing by spring 2022.



Appendices

Mayte Segura - Independent Dancer

Appendix 1

Membership of the Culture, Arts and Heritage Taskforce

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Rotha Johnston (Chair) | Northern Ireland Screen |
| Lynne Best | The Fourth Pillar |
| Johnny Billsborough | Department of Finance (for part) |
| Martin Bradley | Millennium Theatre/ Chair, Arts & Business NI |
| Damien Coyle | University of Atypical |
| Ian Crozier | Ulster Scots Agency |
| Terry Deehan | Department of Finance (for part) |
| Sam Dempster | Department of Education |
| Michele Devlin | Belfast Film Festival |
| Charlotte Dryden | Oh Yeah Music Centre |
| Jimmy Fay | Lyric Theatre |
| Ursula Fay | SOLACE |
| Niamh Flanagan | Theatre & Dance NI |
| Kevin Gamble | Féile an Phobail |
| Aine Kearney | Tourism NI |
| James Kerr | The Verbal |
| Declan Legge | Musician |
| Brendan McAleer | Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann |
| Roisin McDonough | Arts Council of NI (Chief Executive) |
| Craig McGuicken | NI Environment Link |
| Stewart Matthews | Department of the Economy |
| Paul Moore | Future Screens NI |
| Paul Mullan | National Lottery Heritage Fund (NI Director) |
| Diane Ruddock | National Trust |
| Conor Shields | Community Arts Partnership |
| Nisha Tandon | ArtsEkta |
| Richard Wakely | Belfast International Arts Festival |

Secretariat:

| | |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| John Ball | Department for Communities |
| Louise Hyland | Department for Communities |

Appendix 2

Terms of Reference

The measures proposed should be practical and achievable, where possible starting immediately, deliverable within the short to medium term (up to 18 months) and take account of financial implications. Both the proposals and their delivery should be exercises in co-design. In particular the Culture, Arts and Heritage Recovery Taskforce is commissioned to propose measures:

- to support the reopening of heritage sites, theatres, performance venues and relevant public gathering places in line with the Executive's Pathway Out of Restrictions;
- to stimulate culture, arts and heritage activity, re-start the cultural economy and enable the sector to play a central role in rebuilding social and economic life here;
- to explore outdoor performance/activity, including at youth, amateur and community level across the summer, autumn and into the longer term, as a means of encouraging participation and building audience confidence as the opening of indoor and outdoor facilities and activities rolls out;
- to advise on any short-term actions to support skills retention and to provide opportunity for potential new-entrants embarking on a career in the sectors; and
- to identify medium to long term actions which might be considered in the development of a new Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy.

Appendix 3: Acknowledgements

The Chair would like to thank the following for their contribution to the work of the Taskforce through their meetings with her:

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Claire Cosgrave | SSE Arena |
| Katie Daughen | Department of the Taoiseach, Ireland |
| Eugene Downes | Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland |
| Eoghan Duffy | Department of the Taoiseach, Ireland |
| Clare Duignan | Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce, Ireland |
| Conor Falvey | Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Ireland |
| Robert Fitzpatrick | SSE Arena |
| Robert Hull | Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland |
| Shona McCarthy | Edinburgh Fringe |
| Claire McColgan | Director of Culture Liverpool |
| Richard Wigley | Ulster Orchestra |
| Joe Dougan | Belsonic: The Limelight: The Academy Dublin: CHSQ: TSW Management: The Telegraph Building: ShineRichard |
| Mike Edgar | BBC NI |
| Jane Ide | Creative & Cultural Skills |
| Sarah Jones | Creative & Cultural Skills |
| Shaun Kelly | Chair of the Irish Arts Centre, New York |
| Peter Johnston | BBC |

The Taskforce would like to thank the following for their contribution to the work of the Taskforce through their presentations at our meetings:

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Patrick Barr | NI Audit Office |
| Moira Doherty | Department for Communities |
| Ali Fitzgibbon | Queens University Belfast |
| Joanna Gray | Department for Communities |
| Karly Greene | Arts Council NI |
| Iain Greenway | Department for Communities |
| Sue Hayton | Centre for Cultural Value, University of Leeds |
| Carol Morrow | The Executive Office |
| Gavin Patrick | Department for Communities |
| Maeve Walls | Department for Communities |
| Ian Young | Chief Scientific Adviser, Department of Health |

The Taskforce would like to acknowledge the contribution to its work made by Dr John Wright of the Centre for Cultural Value, University of Leeds

Appendix 4

Focus Group Engagement

The Taskforce is grateful to the following people and organisations for their contribution to its focus group activity:

Music:

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| James Ayo | Hotbox Entertainment |
| Lynne Best | The Fourth Pillar (Taskforce) |
| Laura Bradley | Belfast Philharmonic Choir |
| Mick Bonnar | Moving On Music |
| Peter Cinnamond | Mirador |
| Brian Coney | Chordblossom |
| Paul Connolly | Musician / Wood Burning Savages |
| John D’Arcy | Queens University Belfast |
| Jimmy Devlin | No Dancing Records |
| Cliona Donnelly | NI Opera |
| Joe Dougan | Shine |
| Charlotte Dryden | Oh Yeah Music Centre (Taskforce) |
| Kieran Gilmore | Open House Festival |
| Paddy Glasgow | Glasgowbury |
| Terence Goodall | aka DJ Tez |
| Mark Gordon | Score Draw Music |
| Matthew Greenall | Walled City Music |
| Paul Hamilton | Focal Management |
| Rhain Hanson | Freelance musician |
| Les Hume | Dawsons Music |
| Matthew Jordan | Rising PR |
| Paula Kiernan | Moving On Music |
| Ciaran Lavery | singer/songwriter |
| Declan Legge | Big Space Studios (Taskforce) |
| Holly Lester | Free The Night |
| Nikki MacRae | Help Musicians NI |
| Mark McCambridge | aka Arborist |
| Cheylene Murphy | Musician / Beauty Sleep |
| Sarah Murphy | Wall2Wall Music |
| Maurane Ramon | Thrive |
| George Sloan | Half Bap Recording Studio |

Venues:

James Kerr
Kevin Murphy
Anne McReynolds
Sophie Hayles
Oliver Green
Paul Mason
Grainne Powell
Pádraig Mac Congáil

Verbal (Taskforce)
Playhouse
MAC
Crescent Arts Centre
Studio 2
Millennium Forum
Sticky Fingers
Cultúrlann Uí

Theatre & Dance:

Max Beer
Albie Beirne
Fiona Bell
Martin Bradley
Mags Byrne
Rebecca Cooney
Oliver Corr
Maggie Cronin
Jimmy Fay
Niamh Flanagan
Emma Jordan
Richard Lavery
Simon Magill
Fleur Mellor
Francis Mezza
Dominic Montague
Brian Mullan
Claire Murray
Una Nic Eoin
Cheryl O'Dwyer
Louise O'Neill
Oliver Quinn
Gary Redpath
Richard Wakely

Dumbworld
Echo Echo Dance
Thrive
Millennium Forum & Arts and Business (Taskforce)
DU Dance
New City Productions
Craic Theatre, Coalisland
Independent Theatre maker
Lyric Theatre (Taskforce)
Theatre and Dance NI (Taskforce)
Prime Cut
Accidental Theatre
The MAC
Choreographer, Dancer, Producer
Independent Theatre maker
Independent freelance theatre maker
Replay Theatre Company
Lyric Theatre and TDNI Board member
Prime Cut
Youth Action
DU Dance
Marketplace, Armagh
Association of Irish Musical Societies
Belfast international Arts Festival (Taskforce)

Freelancers:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Adam Adnyana | |
| Jimmy Fay | Lyric Theatre (Taskforce) |
| Niamh Flanagan | Theatre and Dance NI (Taskforce) |
| Terence Goodall | aka DJ Tez |
| Nicky Harley | |
| Declan Legge | (Taskforce) |
| Martin McAuley | |
| Lee McMahon | |
| Joe McStravick | |
| Francis Mezza | Independent Theatre maker |
| Matt Minford | |
| Francesca O'Connor | |
| Gemma Reid | quarto |

Heritage:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| John Anderson | Ulster Architectural Heritage (Taskforce) |
| Elizabeth Crooke | Ulster University |
| Manus Deery | Historic Environment Division |
| Roisin Doherty | Derry City and Strabane District Council |
| Iain Greenway | Historic Environment Division |
| Margaret Henry | National Lottery Heritage Fund |
| Keith Lilley | Queens University Belfast |
| Scott McBurney | Private listed-building owner |
| Laura McCorry | Hillsborough Castle and Gardens |
| Craig McGuicken | NI Environment Link (Taskforce) |
| Nikki McVeigh | Ulster Architectural Heritage |
| Tom Maguire | Ulster University |
| Paul Mullan | NLHF (Taskforce) |
| Shane Quinn | Belfast Buildings Trust |
| Gemma Reid | quarto |
| Rhonda Robinson | Historic Environment Division |
| Diane Ruddock | National Trust (Taskforce) |
| Siobhan Stevenson | NI Museums Council |
| Kerrie Sweeney | Maritime Belfast |
| Kathryn Thomson | National Museums NI |
| Rachel Tracey | Queens University Belfast |

Community Arts:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Eileen Brannagh | Open Arts |
| Damien Coyle | University of Atypical (Taskforce) |
| Carole Kane | community arts practitioner |
| Conor Shields | Community Arts Partnership (Taskforce) |
| Nisha Tandon | ArtsEkta (Taskforce) |
| Beat Carnival | |
| Belfast Community Circus | |
| Community Arts Partnership | |
| Down Community Arts | |
| Greater Shantallow Arts and Studio2 | |
| In Your Space Circus | |
| Kabosh Theatre Co | |
| Kids in Control (by phone) | |
| NVTV | |
| Open Arts | |
| Replay | |
| Spanner in the Works | |
| Terra Nova Productions | |
| University of Atypical | |

Digital:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Lucy Baxter | Darkley Films, Queen's University Belfast |
| Fiona Bell | Thrive |
| Rory Clifford | NI Screen |
| Michelle Devlin | Belfast Film Festival |
| Matthew Greenall | Walled City Music |
| Rachel Hooper | Walk On Air films |
| Declan Keeney | Ulster Screen Academy |
| Kris Kelly | Enter Yes |
| Bronagh McFeely | Lyric Theatre |
| Bernard McCloskey | NI Screen |
| Martin Melarkey | Nerve Centre |
| Paul Moore | Ulster University (Taskforce) |
| Hugh Odling-Smee | Film Hub NI, Queen's University Belfast |
| Joan Parsons | Queen's Film Theatre |
| Deirdre Robb | Belfast Exposed |
| Zoë Seaton | Big Telly Theatre Company |
| Lewis Smith | Ulster University |
| Louise Taylor | Little Forget Me Notes |
| Richard Wigley | Ulster Orchestra |

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