



Unionist
Ulster Unionist Party

Doing what's right for Northern Ireland

The Arts



March 2016

Introduction by Party Leader

The arts matter. I cannot think of a civilisation in the history of mankind that has flourished without cherishing artistic endeavour. I do not wish to live in a society that is purely functional. I understand how art and creativity enhances lives. I want our artistic superstars recognised on a par with their sporting equals.

I accept we are enduring financially challenging times. That is not an excuse to starve the arts. In the months preceding the outbreak of war, Winston Churchill said this: "The arts are essential to any complete national life. The State owes it to itself to sustain and encourage them." He went on to warn of the dire consequences for any society "... which fails to salute the arts with the reverence and delight which are their due."

I also understand and support the drive by our universities to promote links with the business sector. The success of spin-off companies is a cause for celebration and a core driver of economic growth. But I am also concerned that the search for the next Frank Pantridge is not matched by an equally enthusiastic pursuit for the next Seamus Heaney; the next Allen McClay paired with the next F E



McWilliam, the next Harry Ferguson with the next Brian Friel. Artistic excellence must be a goal in its own right if we are to do justice to our esteemed international reputation.

Of course, art for art's sake has the added bonus of adding value to the economy and generating social capital. It is even acknowledged that patients spend less time recovering in our acute hospitals when the walls are not blank and devoid of interest.

This policy document is a token of the commitment the modern Ulster Unionist Party places in the arts. Like sports, we have practitioners of international renown and a grass roots movement of the many who simply enjoy participation. We must cherish all.

Mike Nesbitt
Leader, Ulster Unionist Party

Why the arts matter to us



The arts are exciting. They provide an outlet that allows our people to realise their creative potential. They entertain us. They force us to question and rethink our perceptions.

All of our lives are impacted by the arts. We all come into contact with artistic expression on a regular basis. Our engagement comes in many forms, at times without really thinking about it, such as at home when reading a book or watching a much-loved television programme.

The value we as a society place on the arts and creativity will shape how we are perceived on the world stage. Indeed, it also plays a role in how we perceive ourselves.

To build a forward thinking, outward looking, inquisitive and enriched society we should cherish the positive role the arts have to play in every single one of our lives. To diminish the arts would be to reduce ourselves to a very basic, functional existence. The enjoyment alone that they bring should be something we are keen to protect.

When you look at our own challenges in rebuilding a cohesive and strong society, one of the most striking aspects of the arts is the ability to bring people together and enable social mobility.

Since 1998 we have poured massive amounts of energy and resource into strategies to bring our divided communities together. Yet every single day the arts bring our people together organically through shared passions and interests, uniting and bonding people in a way that could never be the result of a formula dreamt up by central Government.

As a society we should be celebrating the fact that the type of Northern Ireland we strive to get to already exists in many forms and supporting and nurturing that, not cutting the heart of it out.

We also recognise the ability of the arts to inspire and create positive change. The sector contains the

people with the vision and the energy to drive our society forward.

A society such as ours that in many ways is just beginning to flourish cannot afford to lose out on the economic and social benefits of embracing the value of the arts.

In striving to be the most attractive small country on the planet, it seems obvious that we should place supporting and promoting creativity and artistic endeavour high up our list of priorities.

We must celebrate our disproportionate success in a number of fields for a population the size of Northern Ireland. A healthy arts sector will be a key tool not just in growing talent that we ensure stays in Northern Ireland, but also in making us an attractive place to invest.

We must change our thinking.

We are looking at new ways of opening ourselves up to new investment prospects, yet we maintain a very binary approach to investment in the arts.

The explosion of the creative industries in Northern Ireland has scratched at the surface of the abilities of our people in this field. It would seem a total contradiction that at a time when multi-million-pound production companies are recognising the potential of Northern Ireland, the Executive would not be investing for the future by supporting excellence in the local arts sector.

It is a reality that supporting creative excellence will be just as vital to the future growth of our economy as those more traditional career routes.

We can only achieve world class standing if we have long term vision.

For us, that means rethinking how we embrace and encourage creativity, right from our children's first few days at school.

Teachers empowered to recognise and encourage creative skills in our children. The realisation and acceptance that creative, non-traditional educational routes will be just as important to our future. We have had huge successes in the creative and artistic fields, perhaps disproportionately so. We must give support to those on the journeys that lead to the success stories we celebrate.



Investing in the Arts

Arts Council of Northern Ireland public investment

2011/12	£15.2m
2012/13	£14.16m
2013/14	£13.83m
2014/ 15	£13.85m
2015/16	£10.9m

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland distributes both public money and National Lottery funds. It is the development and funding agency for the Arts in Northern Ireland.

The ACNI also distributes around £10m in National Lottery funds each year.

On 25th November 2015 as he outlined the Autumn Statement in the House of Commons, the Chancellor, George Osborne, said this on investment in the arts:



"One of the best investments we can make as a nation is in our extraordinary arts, museums, heritage, media and sport. Now, £1 billion a year in grants adds a quarter of a trillion pounds to our economy—not a bad return. So deep cuts in the small budget of the Department for Communities and Local Government are a false economy."

While locally, in their Cultural Framework 2012-15, Belfast City Council estimated their investment generated:

"...a return on investment of £8 for every £1 we spent."

Our analysis

We are moving into a new era for both the Executive and Local Government in Northern Ireland, with each embracing a more compact model.

The creation of the new Department of the Communities presents an opportunity which must be grasped. The opportunity to shape vibrant, strong communities that are healthy and prosperous.

However, it is not difficult to see why there could be an anxiety over the future positioning of the arts within the Department. It is important that the arts are not lost as a much broader and more diverse set of policies are subsumed into one Department.

We also have the opportunity to bring greater cohesion and integration to the future of arts policy in Northern Ireland through partnerships between the Department of Communities and Local Government administrations via the latter's community planning functions.

Such partnerships can also play an important role in making sure all sections of our society have the opportunity to feel the benefits of the arts.

The Executive also requires a change in mind-set on the role of the arts in our society. Yes, art solely for enjoyment's sake is an end itself, but we must not overlook the demonstrated benefits for health and wellbeing, personal development and our economy.

Overarching, strategic goals flowing from the next Programme for Government that acknowledge the cross-cutting nature of the arts and the roles of the Departments of Communities, Health, Education and the Economy must be developed.

The Executive adopting an approach to the arts and creativity that recognises that they transcend any one Department could be transformational, not just for the sector, but also for our society.

That is why five years ago we proposed that we change how we do business in the period immediately following an Assembly election. Currently the Departments are divided up and the targets for the mandate are negotiated and agreed



while the people at the table are conscious of the budget they will be working with to deliver them.

In 2011 we proposed that the Programme for Government be agreed by the parties eligible to form the Executive before D'Hondt was run and each Party knew which Ministry they would be responsible for.

Agreeing the Executive's priorities before silo mentality sets in could totally transform the outcomes for people in Northern Ireland.

We are delighted that our proposal has become a reality and there will now be a period of two weeks immediately following an Assembly election to allow parties to agree the Programme for Government before taking up Ministries.

It is clear that there is work to be done between the political sphere in Northern Ireland and the arts sector to make it clear that we acknowledge the important role they play in our society both socially and economically and that we fully grasp their needs.

The last mandate saw a period of instability in the Arts Council Budget, with budget reductions that brought stress on the sector.

We fully recognise the financial pressures our economy is experiencing, but we also recognise that we cannot starve the arts.

We have got the message that the current short lifetime of grants needs a rethink in the next mandate. The aim should be to put in place a model that will allow the sector to be given a clearer picture of what they have to work with over a number of years. It should be built on clear and agreed aims and expected outcomes. This will ensure the full benefits of the projects are felt and that they are lasting.

The nature of having to survive hand to mouth limits the ability of the sector to think strategically, retain essential staff and build confidence in the future. The next Executive must seek to give stability back to the sector and seek to build partnerships that will improve the resilience of the sector.

The work of Arts & Business demonstrates the appetite there is amongst the business community to give support to the arts. We believe there is also an opportunity to explore potential partnerships with our universities and FE colleges that can increase the capacity of our smaller arts organisations and provide practical experience to students.

Many of our schools still ask our children to demonstrate their potential through their abilities in English, Maths and Science. Their creative potential should not be left to be discovered and developed outside the classroom.

If our children's intelligence makes them best suited to a creative route they should not be let down by a lack of opportunities in our education system. This is not to attack the system or academic achievement. Rather it is acknowledging a spark of creativity and artistic talent should be fully embraced and we should celebrate our children's unique mix of talents. Our vision for education is one where every child's ability is valued equally, celebrating their talents whether they are creative, technical, sporting or academic.

If we embrace the creative potential of the children sitting in our classrooms now, we are making an exciting investment for the future. This means accepting that for some of our children their abilities

are outside of the academic fields, and rethinking how we do things in the classroom.

In the same vein an urgent focus needs to be placed on excellence. It would be unheard of that excellence would not be sought out, nurtured and promoted within fields such as sport but in Northern Ireland there is no strategy in place to develop this in the area of the arts.

The continuing growth of the creative industries in Northern Ireland means investing in the arts and excellence should be a strategic priority for the Executive. Not just to realise the creative potential of our people who can fuel the industry, but also to make our country a vibrant arts hub that will be a place for investing and visiting.

Moving to a lower rate of Corporation Tax and the continued investment in world class facilities in areas like the Titanic Quarter demonstrates our ambition to attract jobs and investment.

We should not squander this opportunity by failing to appreciate the importance of developing a lifestyle that means people want to live here as well as work here.



What we would do

- **Include the Arts in the next Programme for Government, outlining the Executive's acknowledgement of the importance of the arts and demonstrating a commitment to them.**
- **Establish a working group between the Departments of Communities, Education, Health and the Economy to develop and agree cross-cutting priorities for the arts for the next 10 years.**
- **Work with our eleven Local Government administrations to ensure cohesion in planning targets and outcomes.**
- **Provide a longer term allocation of funding – with agreed aims and outcomes giving the sector a clearer picture of what they have to work with. This can bring a greater level of stability back to the sector and allow for lasting benefits from projects.**
- **Empower our teachers to recognise and nurture the creative potential of our children.**
- **Develop a 10-year strategy for excellence, challenging the arts sector, the creative industries, our universities, FE colleges and business to co-design a strategy to future-proof our place as competitors on the world stage.**
- **Work with our universities and FE colleges to explore opportunities for partnerships that can both help increase the capacity of our smaller arts organisations, and in turn give practical experience to students.**
- **Promote apprenticeships using the 'Unlocking Creativity' programme as a model to release individual creativity and ensure young people are prepared for careers in creative industries.**
- **In the arena of competitive funding, favourable support will be presumed for projects which demonstrably enhance the overall cultural health of an area.**
- **Work with NI Screen to develop a 10-year film strategy to increase production output.**



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