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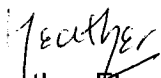
Barry McElduff
Chair
Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure,
Room 424
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

16th February 2010

Dear Barry,

Please find enclosed a response from the Community Arts Forum to the Committee on Culture, Arts and Leisure's Inquiry into Funding for the Arts.

Yours sincerely


Heather Floyd
Director

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Community Arts Forum response to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure Inquiry into the Funding of the Arts in Northern Ireland

The Community Arts Forum

The Community Arts Forum (CAF) is the umbrella body for community arts in Northern Ireland. CAF aims to support the community arts sector through a programme of: information, publications, conferences, seminars, training, research, advocacy, lobbying and networking.

The community arts sector

The community arts sector is vibrant and dynamic and operates at many levels of society including education, community development, health, disability and regeneration. Community arts programmes often work with disadvantaged groups and increase the settings in which arts take place. The Committee received oral submissions from a range of community arts groups including: Belfast Community Circus School; Féile an Phobail; CAF; ArtsEkta and New Lodge Arts. In addition, the Committee received written responses from a broader range of community arts groups. This will have given the committee a flavour of the different settings in which arts are taking place, the range of art forms involved and the wide range of issues which community arts is addressing.

CAF's response to the report

CAF welcomes the Committee's desire to increase participation and access to the arts. CAF welcomes the recognition throughout the report of community arts and the desire for a higher percentage of Voted Funds to be allocated to arts happening in a community context. It is heartening to see this recognition at the highest level of government.

CAF commends the CAL committee for its desire to see a more equitable distribution of Voted Funds. CAF argues that only 9% of revenue funds go into community arts. CAF's figure was taken from the budgetary figures available from ACNI's web site, rather than beneficiary data which ACNI has used.

In using beneficiary figures, community arts funding could be estimated at ACNI's reckoning of 56%, but this does not reflect budget allocation. Using beneficiary locations effectively answers a different question, one related to participation and TSN areas rather than budget allocation.

ACNI has exclusive access to beneficiary statistics and addresses, so it is not possible for any other organisation to analyse expenditure in this highly particularised way.

In addition, CAF figures focus solely on allocations from revenue funds as CAF believes it is essential that community arts organisations receive mainstream funding for security, sustainability and the ability to plan ahead. Many community arts groups receive lottery funding, but not ASOP funding which leads to short term planning and programming.

In terms of the appeals process, CAF was advocating for a more developmental relationship between ACNI and its clients to better understand processes and funding decisions and therefore to assist applicants to make stronger future applications.

CAF is, however, concerned that the Inquiry does not call for increased resources for the wider arts sector. CAF feels that an Inquiry into Funding for the Arts needs to prioritise the recommendation that the per capita spend is increased. Instead, the report focuses on like for like comparisons with other regions of the UK and Ireland. ACNI in its response to the Inquiry explains how the per capita spend is a like for like comparison. The core problem of the low per capita spend on arts in this region needs to be addressed urgently by the Committee, the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Arts Council and the arts sector.

CAF is also concerned that the report could be construed as divisive and non-cognisant of the fact that the community arts and wider arts sector are complementary and inter-dependent. It took the broad arts sector decades to come to a position of respect for community arts. A report which creates a wedge between these two groupings is at risk of undoing many years of negotiation and learning how to respect the many differing contexts within which the arts are operating. It could also undo healthy links which have been created between community arts groups and partnering delivery organisations, many of whom are not solely community arts groups.

In addition, CAF is concerned that the recommendations do not have any actions attached. The laudable desire to see more arts in community contexts working with marginalised groups will only materialise with a clear action plan, timeline and resource allocations.

Many of the 14 recommendations have serious resource implications, yet the Inquiry does not call for additional funds to deliver the recommendations. Without this, CAF fears that the Inquiry will be unrealisable without a realistic budget attached to most or all points.

CAF would welcome the opportunity to meet the committee to discuss these issues in more detail.