

To the Executive Office

Please find following Equity's written response to the draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'.

Equity is a trade union of 50,000 creative practitioners, united in the fight for fair terms and conditions across the performing arts and entertainment industry in Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland. Our members are actors, circus performers, singers, dancers, designers, directors, models, stage managers, stunt performers, puppeteers, comedians, voice artists, and variety performers. They work on stage, on TV sets, on the catwalk, in film studios, in recording studios, in night clubs and in circus tents, and are largely treated as self-employed.

We were disappointed, confused and concerned to see no specific reference to arts and culture within this programme.

We know that "What Matters Most" to our communities includes access to the arts. Arts Council NI based their conclusion that "Support for the arts, artists and public funding of the arts are all high amongst members of the public" on the [ACNI General Population Survey 2023](#).

We know that "What Matters Most" also includes wellbeing. Arts Council England in their paper "[The Value of Arts and Culture to People in Society](#)" refers to research that "has evidenced that a higher frequency of engagement with arts and culture is generally associated with a higher level of subjective wellbeing."

If the programme can identify the value of sport, "Sport can be life-changing and has the potential to build strong relationships across communities. Building on our stadia and interest in sports here, we want to maximise sports' potential for community wellbeing and to support physical and mental health." why does it ignore the value of arts?

Our elected representatives have previously recognised the value of the arts in the Programme for Government 2021-2015, when the programme made reference to Priority 4: Building a Strong and Shared Community. This priority include a specific reference to "unlocking the potential of the culture, arts and leisure sectors as instruments for positive change." It had targets to, for example increase visitor numbers to 4.2 million and tourist revenue to £676 million ... and support 200 projects through the Creative Industries Innovation Fund.

No reference whatsoever is made to arts and culture in this 2024-2027 draft Programme for Government despite that:

Arts will contribute to growing a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy. The [Centre for Business Research 2020](#) report states that "This report also finds that the arts and culture industry is a highly productive sector. On average between 2015 and 2018, it produced an annual GVA per FTE worker of £69,000, compared to £57,000 for the non-financial UK economy as a whole" and "For every £1 of turnover directly generated by the arts and culture industry, an additional £1.23 worth of turnover is supported in the wider economy through indirect and induced effects."

Arts contributes positively to the desired outcomes referenced in this Programme's Well-Being Framework, eg

Happier Children

"Arts subjects and experiences have an evidenced role in contributing to improving outcomes for children and young people, providing them with skills for life and skills for work.... We

describe the arts as being ‘full spectrum’ subjects, supporting the development of critical thinking, oracy, self-expression, self-belief, independence, initiative, focus, flexibility, collaboration, compassion, responsibility, resilience, achievement, and creative freedom.” (Tambling, P. and Bacon, S. [The Arts in Schools: Foundations for the Future. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation](#), 2023: p13)

Healthier Lives

[From Healthy Attendance: The Impact of Cultural Engagement and Sports Participation on Health and Satisfaction with life in Scotland 2013:](#)

- Those who attended a cultural place or event were over 59% more likely (odds ratio 1.592) to have reported good health compared to those who did not attend any cultural place or event in the last 12 months.
- Those who participated in cultural activities were nearly 38% more likely (odds ratio 1.378) to have reported good health than those who did not participate in any cultural activity in the last 12 months.
- Those who participated in cultural activities were 30% more likely (odds ratio 1.304) to have reported they were satisfied with their lives, compared to those who did not participate in any cultural activity in the last 12 months.
- Those who attended a cultural place or event over one and a half times more likely (odds ratio 1.523) to have reported high life satisfaction, compared to those who did not attend any cultural place or event in the last 12 months.

“The analysis found that, after controlling for other factors including socio-economic factors, participation in culture and sport are independently and significantly associated with good health and high life satisfaction.”

Mental Health Foundation’s [“An Evidence Review of the Impact of Participatory Arts on Older People”](#) refers to Mental wellbeing including that “for older adults with dementia, participatory art can help improve cognitive functioning, communication, self-esteem, musical skills, pleasure, enjoyment of life, memory and creative thinking”. They conclude “it is evident that engaging with participatory art can improve the wellbeing of older people and mediate against the negative effects of becoming older.”

Brighter Futures

Arts Council England’s CEBR [“Contribution of the arts and culture industry to the UK economy”](#) states “Businesses in creative industries benefit from a vibrant arts and culture scene which helps to improve the attractiveness of urban areas to skilled creative workers.”

Since the last Programme for Government passed by Stormont came to its conclusion, investment in the arts in Northern Ireland has decreased by over 40%. Not only is this disastrous for the industry, its workers and the communities and adjoining industries it supports, it has meant a **loss of income** for NI economy and an exodus of creative workers from this place.

Equity demands that the Programme makes reference to the huge contribution that the arts makes to our economy, our well-being, our communities, our health and our national and international reputation.

After consultation is complete and a final Programme for Government is put in place, the budget process will prioritise commitments made in the Programme for Government. If there is no reference to arts and culture the ability to push for investment, which should **increase revenue** for the Government, will be a more difficult argument to make on behalf of our communities' well-being, employment of artists and for those who benefit from the industries that revolve around arts and culture such as the night-time economy, transport and hospitality, technology and tourism.

We urge you not to restrict the ability for Stormont to **increase economic and social benefits** brought by investing in the arts here in omitting this crucial area from the priorities for Government for a full three-year period.

Sincerely,

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