

Mr Colum Boyle
Permanent Secretary
Department for Communities
1-7 Bedford Street
BELFAST
BT2 7EG

02/06/23

Dear Mr Boyle

I am writing on behalf of the Society of Authors (SoA) about the proposed cuts to the arts in Northern Ireland. The SoA represents all types of writers, illustrators and literary translators across Britain and Ireland. Our members in Northern Ireland, and the communities that they belong to, will be negatively impacted by your department's proposals.

For communities to thrive, arts and culture need to thrive. The arts contribute to better health, improved mental health and wellbeing, economic opportunities and a shared sense of community. Arts organisations employ, support and develop writers, actors, musicians and other workers in the creative sector. A publicly supported arts sector is essential for community wellbeing.

Without public investment, vital arts infrastructure is financially unsustainable and access to the arts becomes unaffordable for much of the population, including people from the groups your consultation refers to. As your consultation document sets out, the Department must consider how budget cuts will impact on members of the community. Cuts to the arts would negatively impact upon all of the groups identified in the consultation document, including people with different religious beliefs, from different racial groups, of different ages, with different marital statuses, with different sexual orientations, with or without a disability, with or without dependents, with different political opinions and men and women generally.

Community arts projects play a crucial role in promoting good relations between people with different religious beliefs, different political opinions or from different racial groups. They help to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in public life. Cuts to the arts would therefore negatively impact on essential community relations work and the promotion of disability equality.

Arts funding is already significantly lower in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland invests only £5.44 per head of the population, compared to £7 in England, £10.35 in Wales and £25.90 in the Republic of Ireland. Government investment in the arts in Northern Ireland has fallen over the past decade from £14.1m in 2011 to £9.7m in 2023.

The creative sector in Northern Ireland plays a vital role in inspiring, educating and entertaining people, in building peace, reconciliation and inclusion, in promoting health and

wellbeing, and in providing economic opportunities. We need more investment in the arts in Northern Ireland not less. I urge you to ensure that there are no cuts to Arts Council NI funding and instead the Department considers how it can invest more in the arts to redress the funding gap we endure.

Yours sincerely

Hilary McCollum