

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

**Response to the NI Executive
Consultation on the Draft Programme
for Government (PfG)**

7th October 2024



A detailed fully referenced response to the draft Programme for Government was submitted recently. This included a great variety of examples from programmes, projects and organisations that are delivering impact. One of the key messages is that the missions-based approach that is being pursued in the draft Programme for Government provides a clear direction of travel around how the current government would like social and economic dynamics to change in Northern Ireland. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, artists and arts organisations have a solid track record of working in partnership with Government and its institutions to advance shared strategic priorities and maximise the use of resources. We have a strong commitment and experience in delivering projects in line with public policy agendas that maximize wellbeing.

Key points:

- 1) The draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 rightly emphasizes a commitment to fostering a globally competitive and sustainable economy in Northern Ireland. It includes a set of clear actions to take under that priority. However, the role that arts, culture, and creativity can play in helping achieve this priority is not included in the draft Programme for Government ([Oxford Economics, 2021](#)). In particular around:

- Attracting Investment and Tourism
- Stimulating Innovation and Creative Entrepreneurship
- Enhancing Skills and Workforce Development
- Place-making and Urban Regeneration ([University of Reading, 2024](#); [Impacts 08, 2008](#)).

Key recommendation: Embed Arts, Culture and Creativity as part of the mechanisms to help deliver this priority.

- 2) The draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 rightly identifies the importance of providing better support for children and young people, particularly those with special educational needs (SEN), to ensure they have the best start in life. Artists and arts organisations can be crucial partners in achieving these goals by offering tailored, inclusive, and engaging experiences that contribute to the social, emotional, and educational development of children and young people. Arts-based approaches have been shown to enhance the learning experiences of children and young people with SEN by providing alternative methods of communication and expression ([Brookings, 2019](#); [Harvard School of Education, 2018](#)).

Key recommendation:

- Incorporate arts-based educational interventions into the SEN curriculum to promote cognitive and emotional development.
- 3) The Safer Communities priority within the draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 rightly identifies the need to reduce crime and create safer

environments for the people of Northern Ireland. Achieving safer communities, however, requires a nuanced approach to safety and community cohesion. It involves not just law enforcement but also community engagement, relationship-building, and fostering shared understanding and respect among diverse groups.

Key recommendation:

- The Programme for Government should expand the Safer Communities priority to include a holistic approach that incorporates initiatives aimed at strengthening social bonds, rebuilding trust, and providing constructive outlets for young people and marginalized communities. Artists and arts organisations have a proven track record in contributing to safer and more cohesive communities.
- 4) The investment in infrastructure should include provisions to maintain, strengthen and expand our existing arts, cultural, heritage and creative infrastructure.
- 5) We welcome the inclusion of an indicator around participation in arts and cultural activities in this framework. It is not clear how this indicator is related to the priorities and missions listed in the draft Programme for Government.