

AR | ANNUAL REVIEW 2023-24



www.artscouncil-ni.org



THE NATIONAL
LOTTERY



arts
council
of Northern Ireland



Our Mission

We **develop** and **champion** the arts in Northern Ireland through **investment** and **advocacy**.

Our Vision

A society where **all people** can experience a **thriving** arts sector that is **recognised** as **essential** to creativity, wellbeing and social and economic prosperity.

www.artscouncil-ni.org



Stage Beyond, the Derry-based theatre company for adults with learning disabilities, raises the roof with their variety show 'Unstoppable' in St Columb's Hall (June). Pictured are Stage Beyond members, Hollie Hunter and Alison Smyth. Photo: Brian Morrison

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Cover image: The 2023 Belfast International Arts Festival opened simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic with its collaboration with Cahoots NI's *The Vanishing Elephant* opening at the New Victory Theatre on Broadway to rave reviews. The New York Times named it a 'Critic's Pick' and audiences hailed it as "the best theatre seen on stage in some time." Photo: Melissa Gordon

Welcome

Welcome to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Annual Review 2023-24.

This calendar-style review of our combined Exchequer and National Lottery-funded activities covers many of the artistic highlights of the last (financial) year.

A summary of our Accounts for the financial year is included at the end of the report. The complete sets of audited accounts for our Exchequer and National Lottery funds are available on our [website](#)

What we do

The Arts Council is the official funding and development organisation for the arts in Northern Ireland. We support the vital contribution that the arts make throughout the region through our broad range of funding opportunities.

We distribute funding from our principal sponsor, the Department for Communities, and from the National Lottery, to organisations and people who develop and deliver arts programmes across all of society.

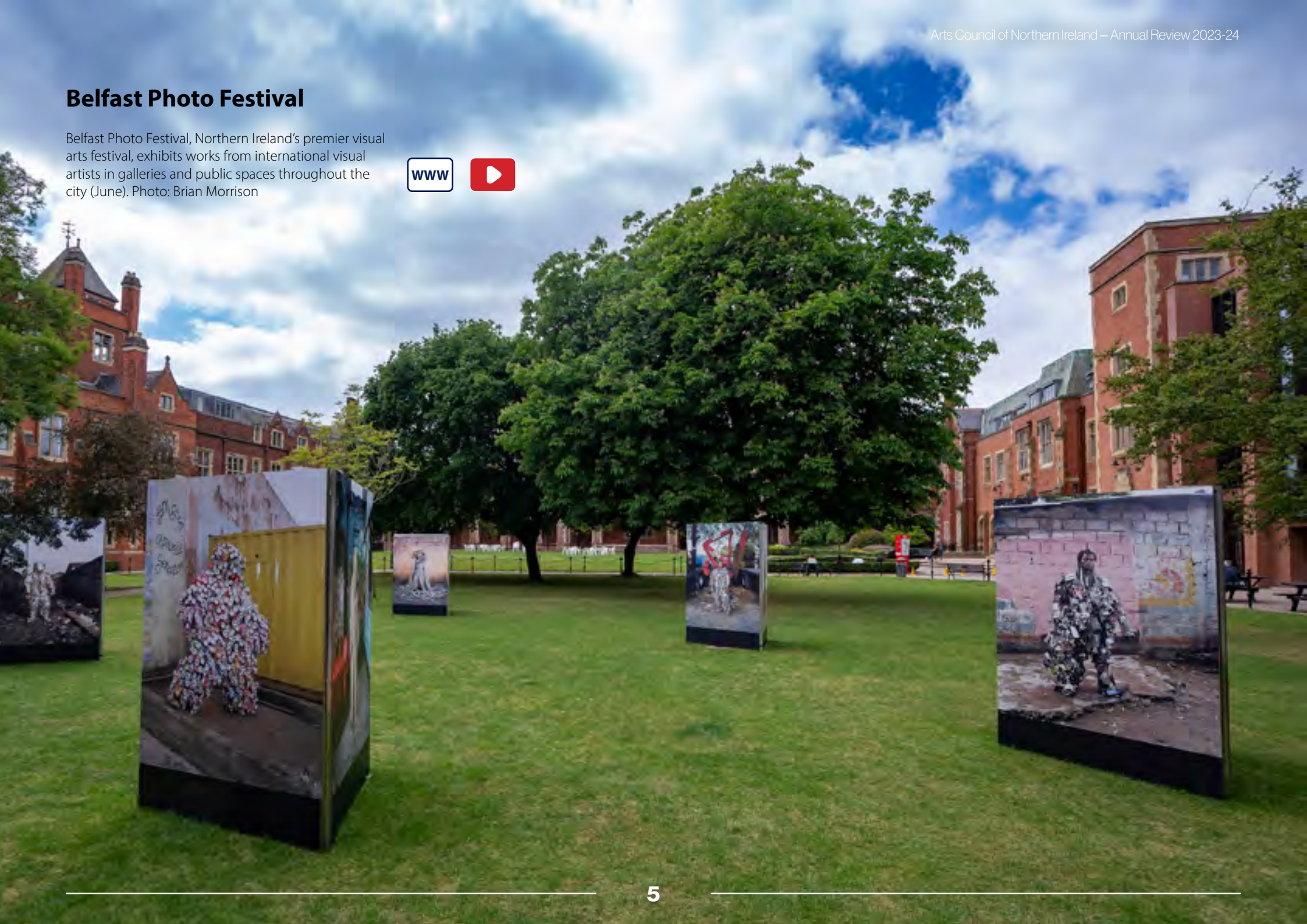
Our Arts Officers offer specialist guidance on funding and project development to artists and organisations working across the spectrum of arts activities in Northern Ireland.

- Arts and Disability
- Arts and Health
- Arts and Older People
- Circus Arts
- Comedy
- Community Arts
- Crafts
- Creative Industries
- Dance
- Drama
- Intercultural Arts
- International Arts
- Literature
- Mental Health & Arts
- Music
- Public Art
- Traditional Arts
- Visual Arts
- Young People Wellbeing & Arts
- Youth Arts

Bringing great art within the reach of everyone

Belfast Photo Festival

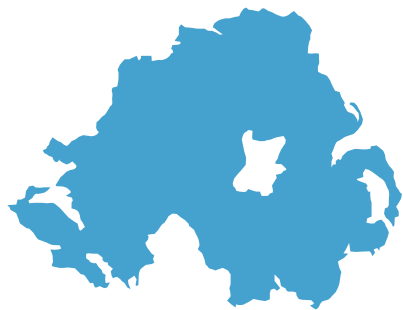
Belfast Photo Festival, Northern Ireland's premier visual arts festival, exhibits works from international visual artists in galleries and public spaces throughout the city (June). Photo: Brian Morrison



At a Glance

Arts Council funding 2023-24

Annual Funding Programme



£12,889,623

maintaining 84 arts organisations central to the arts infrastructure in NI

National Lottery (NL) Project Funding



£2,182,441

supporting 71 outstanding arts projects

NL Support for Individual Artists Programme



£1,286,171

supporting 350 professional artists

NL Small Grants Programme



£210,465

56 projects by arts and community groups

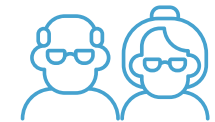
NL Rural Engagement Arts Programme



£396,478

62 projects in rural communities

NL Arts & Older People Programme



£169,994

22 community-based projects for older people

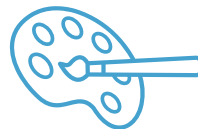
NL Young People & Wellbeing Arts Programme



£134,941

18 projects addressing health and wellbeing issues for young people

NL Creative Schools Partnership



£79,991

11 projects to introduce artists to the classroom

NL Digital Evolution Awards



£134,684

developing 14 highly-innovative digital arts projects

NL Commissioning Programme



£200,004

creating 24 exciting new works

Health & safety Capital Programme



£810,044

helping 48 organisations to safely reopen their spaces

Overview 2023-24

“The Arts Council’s outgoing 2019-2024 strategic plan, *Inspire, Connect, Lead*, covered a period in which the sector faced the most serious of challenges, including a pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis, a lengthy period without a functioning Northern Ireland Executive and reducing investment support. Yet, and despite all of this, our remarkable artists and arts organisations have never failed to find innovative, flexible, and creative ways to keep on delivering and contributing in major ways to the quality of life in Northern Ireland.”

Liam Hannaway, Chair.

A challenging year for the arts

The findings of our annual [survey of regularly-funded organisations](#), conducted in 2023/24, showed that workforce levels had returned in the previous year broadly to pre-Covid levels and earned income had grown by 72 percent. These welcome improvements to the health of the arts sector were, however, somewhat countered by other factors, including the decline in income from European funding sources as legacy projects funded before the UK’s exit from the EU come to an end; and by a continuing rise in energy and living costs, with their subsequent impact on the running and programming costs of arts organisations.

Closer international collaboration

The Arts Council continued to share intelligence with the sector about international opportunities through our participation in the Arts Infopoint UK initiative, and we supported new opportunities for Northern Ireland’s artists and arts organisations through the Four Nations International Fund, the UK-Germany Cultural Bridges exchange programme, and the Franco-UK artists’ residency programme, Magnetic. The two arts councils on the island of Ireland extended our long history of collaboration by laying the groundwork for a new all-island dance company to be established in 2024/25.

Further cuts to the Arts but renewed optimism following restoration of NI Executive

A five percent reduction to the Arts Council’s Exchequer budget in 2023-24 added significantly to the pressure on the sector and the Arts Council as principal funder.

The Arts Council continued to press throughout the year for the [reversal of this cut](#) and for parity of funding with the rest of the UK and Ireland. We provided research and intelligence on the arts, including our findings from the 2022/23 [General Population Survey](#), which demonstrated the public’s overwhelmingly positive support both for the arts and for government investment in the arts.

The restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland in February 2024, following a two-year hiatus, and the appointment of a local Minister with direct responsibility for the arts, introduced fresh opportunity for a change in direction and the start of a process of reinvestment in the arts.

Arts Council investment

In 2023-24 the Arts Council invested £21 million through our funding programmes, supporting the full range of arts activities throughout Northern Ireland. This included interventions in areas of identified need, including our Arts and Older People Programme, Young People and Wellbeing Arts Programme, Creative Schools Partnership, Rural Engagement Arts Programme and Digital Evolution Programme.

We launched our new [website](#), which presents accessible information about the support we provide through funding, resources, news content, and advocacy. We also partnered with Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales and Creative Scotland, to launch a new website, <https://allin.online/>, part of a developing UK-wide access scheme, designed to enhance the experience of D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people attending creative and cultural events.

Towards a new long-term strategy

2023/24 marked the final year of the Arts Council's 5-year Strategy, *Inspire, Connect, Lead*. The development of a new strategy occupied the Arts Council throughout the year in our most extensive consultation exercise to date, engaging with the widest possible range of stakeholders. In April 2024, less than a month into the new financial year, we published our first 10-year Strategic Plan 2024-34, [Championing the Arts](#). The new strategy charts the course towards a future in which everyone has the opportunity to enjoy a thriving arts sector that is valued for its contribution to creativity, wellbeing and social and economic prosperity.

Obituaries

We said goodbye this year to a number of significant personages associated with the arts in Northern Ireland, including the renowned painter and sculptor Deborah Brown, dramatist and author Maurice Leitch, and one of Stage Beyond Theatre Company's longest-serving members, Catherine Campbell. Tributes from around the world were also paid to the Irish-American philanthropist Chuck Feeney, who donated £6.5bn to various causes through his foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, including the Arts Council's Arts and Older People Programme.

Artists and arts organisations entertained, inspired and enriched our lives throughout the year, supported by Arts Council Exchequer and National Lottery investment.

We hope you enjoy some of the highlights we've selected from 'A Year in the Arts, 2023-24'.



Belfast Tradfest

Belfast Tradfest and Summer School offers a week-long programme of workshops and a full programme of concerts, talks, lectures, sessions, céilís & festival clubs, bringing together both the Irish and the Ulster-Scots musical traditions in a shared celebration of culture & heritage (July).

www

A Year in the Arts 2023-24

A flavour of the year's activities by the hundreds of artists, arts organisations and venues that are supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland through our Exchequer and National Lottery funds.

April 2023



Donovan Wylie and Peter Mann: footage from the demolition of the Maze Prison in 2007. (Detail)

Blinded by the very force it imagined it could handle

Belfast Exposed presents a new film work by Donovan Wylie and Peter Mann examining the enduring legacy and architecture of the Northern Ireland Troubles, marking the 25th Anniversary of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement.

[www](#)

Beyond Belief - The Life and Mission of John & Pat Hume

The Playhouse in Derry-Londonderry marks the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement with a major new musical drama honouring the life of John and Pat Hume.

[www](#)

Agreement

The Lyric Theatre in Belfast presents a major new play by Owen McCafferty, examining the negotiations leading up to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

[www](#)

 April 2023



The new National Boys' Choir

National Youth Choir NI launches new National Boys' Choir

The new National Boys' Choir draws on the talents of 50 young boys from across Northern Ireland, providing them with professional training in choral singing. NYCNI founded its Girls' Choir in 2022.



In Your Space Circus announces plans to develop Cathedral School

In Your Space Circus announces plans to refurbish the Cathedral School building in Derry's Cathedral Quarter area into a Circus School and circus arts venue. Part of this project is funded through Arts & Business NI's 'Blueprint' programme



The Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing

The Community Arts Partnership launches the Poetry in Motion Community anthology 'Compass' and announces Sue Steging as this year's winner of The Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing, for 'Four Stories About (The Same) Crows'.





Festival of Fools

Festival of Fools, the largest annual street performance festival on the island of Ireland, brings joyful chaos to the streets of Belfast city centre, with over 70 free performances of world-class circus, comedy, music, acrobatics and street theatre (May). Artist: Janna Wohlfarth. Photo: Simon Hutchinson

www

May 2023

'Abomination – A DUP Opera' premieres at Southbank Centre

Following sell-out runs at the Outburst Queer Arts Festival in Belfast and The Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the award-winning production, *Abomination: A DUP Opera*, makes its London premiere at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre.

www



Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival

One of Northern Ireland's most dynamic arts festivals animates Belfast city centre in an 11-day celebration of live music, comedy, theatre, spoken word, literature, eclectic performance and art.

www

Inaugural Deaf Arts Festival NI

Cre8 Theatre and c21 Theatre Company launch the inaugural Deaf Arts Festival NI at The MAC to coincide with Deaf Awareness Week.

www

Conor Mitchell, multi award-winning composer, librettist and theatre-maker



May 2023



New Laureate na nÓg Patricia Forde with former Laureates Eoin Colfer, Áine Ní Ghlinn, Niamh Sharkey, Siobhán Parkinson and PJ Lynch.

Laureate na nÓg

Award-winning children's author Patricia Forde is announced the seventh Laureate na nÓg, Ireland's Children's Literature Laureate at a special event at the Arts Council.

[www](#)

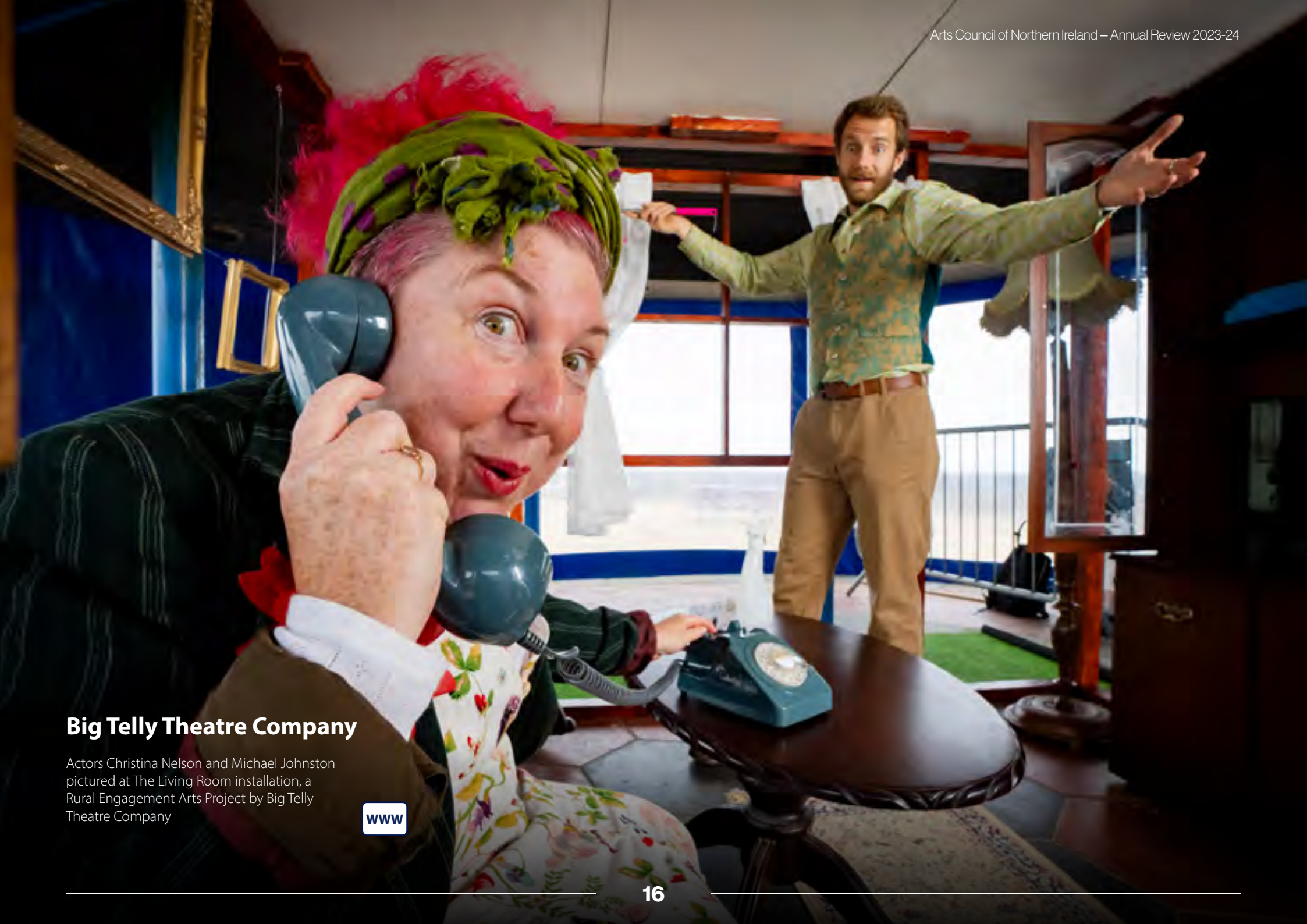
TG4 Gradam Ceoil 2023

Arts Council of Northern Ireland/BBC NI Young Musicians' Platform Award recipient, Méabh Smyth, and Fintan Vallely, receive Gradam Ceoil Awards at the TG4 Gradam Ceoil 2023. Méabh picked up the award for Ceoltóir Óg/Young Musician and Fintan won the Gradam Saoil/ Lifetime Achievement award.

Rosy James Memorial Trust Award

Glass artist Alison Lowry, sculptor John Rainey and ceramicist Eleanor Wheeler are each awarded the Rosemary James Memorial Trust Award 2023, an annual craft bursary worth £15,000.

[www](#)



Big Telly Theatre Company

Actors Christina Nelson and Michael Johnston pictured at The Living Room installation, a Rural Engagement Arts Project by Big Telly Theatre Company



June 2023

Deepa-Mann-Kler's innovative digital art exhibition, *The Metaverse and Me*

'The Metaverse & Me' features artworks combining cutting-edge digital animation and a soundtrack, with each painting containing a virtual show that remains hidden until viewed through a mobile phone.

[www](#)


Crescent Youth Theatre selected to perform new play at National Theatre in London

The group competes against 250 youth theatre groups across the UK to make it to the final ten selected by judges to take part in the 2023 Connections Festival.

[www](#)


Belfast Book Festival

The annual Belfast Book Festival at the Crescent Arts Centre offers a host of book-related activities, including readings, 'in conversation' events with eminent writers, and the annual Mairtin Crawford Awards.

[www](#)


*Deepa Mann-Kler received funding through the Individual Artists Digital Evolution Awards scheme to develop her digital art project, *The Metaverse & Me**

July 2023



Youth circus performance at the Carnival of Colours

Carnival of Colours hits the streets of Derry City

In Your Space Circus brings its flagship Circus, Arts and Music Festival, 'Carnival of Colours' to the city centre for the 16th edition of one of Derry's favourite arts events.

[www](#)

InterAct Youth Arts Festival

The Millennium Forum in Derry-Londonderry and its Youth Forum presents the annual InterAct Youth Arts Festival, including workshops on DJ skills, hip hop, drag costume design, sound tech, poetry, animation and more.

[www](#)

Ulster Orchestra Crescendo Schools Project

Children from four Primary Schools in North and West Belfast lying within areas of marked social deprivation join the full Orchestra at the Ulster Hall for a special music showcase to mark a milestone for the P7 pupils who are the first cohort to complete seven full years of the project.

[www](#)

July 2023

DU Dance NI's All Boys Group represent NI at National Festival

An all-boys dance group, based at the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast, represents Northern Ireland at the prestigious U. Dance National Festival in England, with their performance of TRIBE.



John Hewitt International Summer School

The annual John Hewitt International Summer School and festival of literature, arts and politics, welcomes speakers and artists including Joseph O'Connor and Sarah Moss to The Market Place, Armagh.

Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy Taskforce report

The Taskforce publishes its recommendations in 'Investing in Creative Delivery', a development and investment report to re-orientate how the culture, arts and heritage sectors are collectively perceived, engaged and supported across NI government.

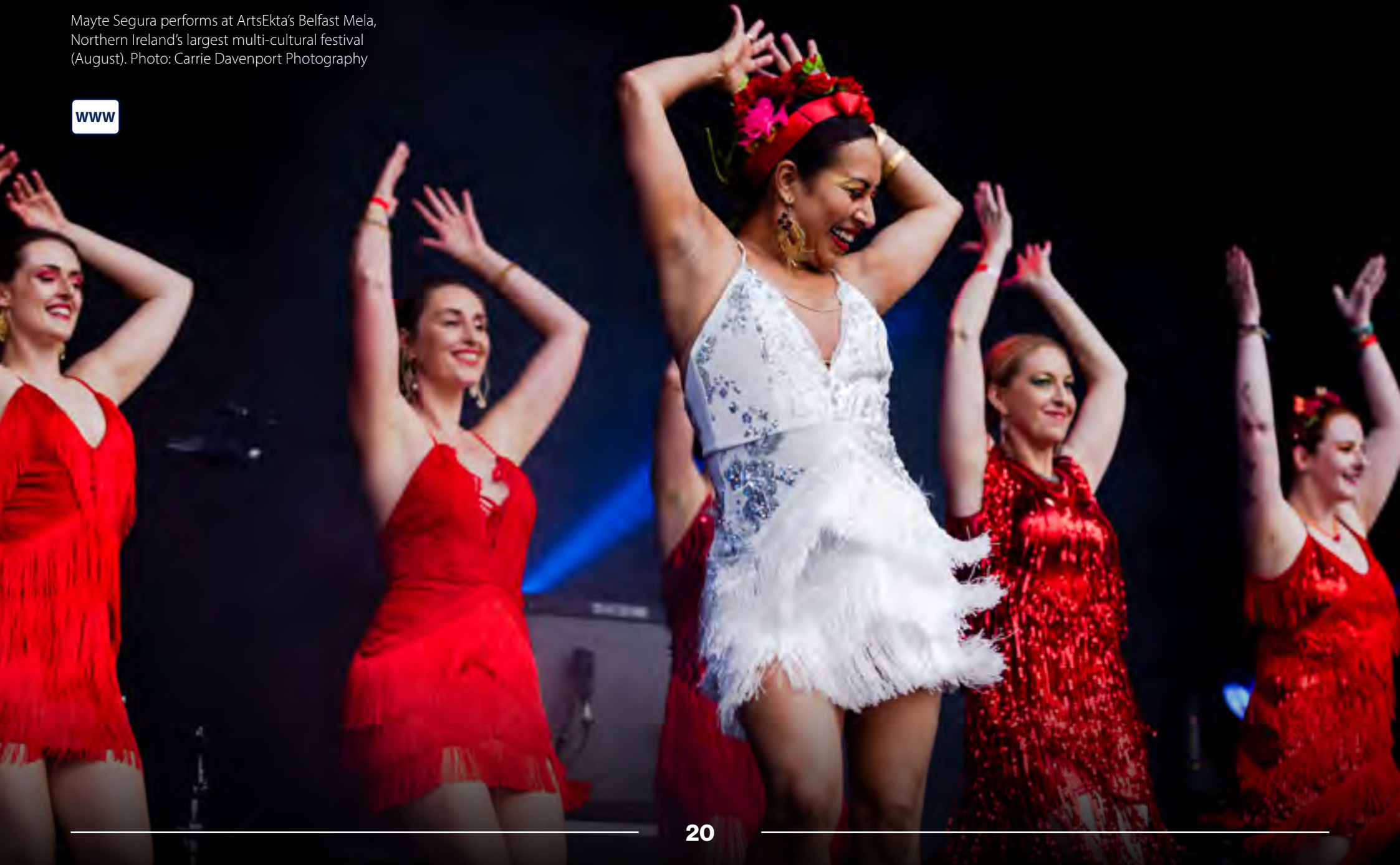


DU Dance NI's Belfast Boys, pictured at a recent performance in Crawfordsburn

Belfast Mela

Mayte Segura performs at ArtsEkta's Belfast Mela, Northern Ireland's largest multi-cultural festival (August). Photo: Carrie Davenport Photography

www



August 2023



Spotlight on Theatre and Dance from NI at Edinburgh Fringe Festival

Now in its fifth year, the Spotlight event showcases seven major works created by some of Northern Ireland's leading theatre, dance and arts organisations. The initiative is delivered by Theatre and Dance NI in collaboration with Belfast International Arts Festival, supported by British Council NI and Arts Council NI.

Seamus Heaney HomePlace marks 10-year anniversary of Poet's death

The HomePlace hosts a special programme of events to commemorate the great poet's life and legacy, opened by Paul Muldoon, Ireland Chair of Poetry.



Ulster Youth Orchestra marks 30th Anniversary with two celebratory concerts

Celebrations in Dublin and Belfast feature a new commission by composer Greg Caffrey, performances from UYO patrons Barry Douglas and Michael McHale, plus a show-stopping West Side Story finale.



Alice Malseed's 'The Half Moon'. Thistle and Rose Arts. Edinburgh Festival Fringe

August 2023

Féile An Phobail celebrates 35th anniversary

The biggest community arts festival on this island celebrates its 35th anniversary with 120,000 people enjoying 350 events in and around West Belfast

www

Eastside Arts Festival

EastSide Arts Festival offers a packed festival programme featuring over 100 artists across more than 80 events taking place in a range of venues in East Belfast.

www

Bangor's Open House Festival celebrates 10th anniversary

The 10th anniversary programme features ticketed events at Bangor Castle Walled Garden, free events in the city and fringe events at the charity's recently refurbished music venue, The Court House, on Bangor seafront.



Féile Carnival Parade. Photo: Stephen Hamilton/Presseye

August 2023



Lorraine Calderwood, Young People Wellbeing Arts Programme Manager at the Arts Council, with Tyrone Armando and Amy Bogue.

Enniskillen Youth Arts Project supports Mental Health and Wellbeing

As part of the Arts Council's Young People Wellbeing Programme, Fuel, based at the Find Centre in Enniskillen, uses film making, animation, coding, photography, graphic design and DJing to address the stigma around mental health issues and create a positive environment for young people to come together to learn new skills.



Craft Month shines a spotlight on talented craft makers

The annual August Craft Month brings Craft NI, the Design & Crafts Council Ireland and Cork Craft and Design together to promote craft-making across the island, profiling makers, venues, arts centres and craft retailers.



Charles Wood Festival and Summer School

The annual Charles Wood Festival marks 30 years of celebrating the music of Charles Wood and giving singers and musicians an opportunity to perform and develop their talents.



Artist Career Enhancement Scheme (ACES)

Ten of the twelve exceptional emerging and mid-career artists to become the latest winners of the National Lottery Artist Career Enhancement Scheme (December).



September 2023

Michael Hofmann appointed Seamus Heaney International Visiting Poetry Fellow at Queen's

The fellowship is part of the Arts Council and Queen's joint ten-year Seamus Heaney Legacy project, supported by Atlantic Philanthropies. The appointment is worth £20,000 annually and made to a distinguished poet of international repute.

www

Ciaran Carson Conference

The Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's hosts 'Last Night's Fun', a conference and celebration of the work of the late poet, writer and musician, Ciaran Carson.

www

Féile le Chéile

Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin in Derry-Londonderry stages a grassroots celebration of the city's many generations of traditional music pioneers.



Michael Hoffman, 2023 Seamus Heaney International Poetry Fellow

September 2023



Svetlana Kasyan as Floria Tosca. Photo: Neil Harrison/NI Opera

Tosca at the Grand Opera House

NI Opera presents Puccini's operatic thriller 'Tosca' at the Grand Opera House, with the Ulster Orchestra and NI Opera Chorus



Shared Island Arts Investment projects

The Irish Government announces five new all-island arts investment projects which are being delivered with a total allocation of €7.4m from the Shared Island Fund: Irish Architectural Archive; Irish Film Institute; Irish Traditional Music Archive; Tyrone Guthrie Centre; Bellaghy Bawn



October 2023

City of Derry International Choir Festival celebrates 10th anniversary

More than sixty choirs from across Ireland, the UK and Europe participate in a packed schedule of competitions, workshops and community performances.



61st Belfast International Arts Festival

The Festival opens simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic, with its collaboration with Cahoots NI on the company's latest stage show, 'The Vanishing Elephant', opening at the New Victory Theatre on Broadway in New York, while in Belfast, Gary Mitchell's new play, 'Burnt Out' opens at The Lyric.



Bounce Arts Festival returns with extraordinary celebration of diversity

The Festival offers more than 30 events celebrating Northern Ireland's artistic diversity and inclusion, as its organiser, The University of Atypical, celebrates 30 years of supporting and developing the talent of d/Deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse artists.



The Sixteen return to Derry's Guildhall for the third time, performing their Watchful Gaze programme

October 2023



142nd Royal Ulster Academy Annual Exhibition

142nd Royal Ulster Academy Annual Exhibition

The RUA's annual exhibition provides a unique platform for acclaimed artists and emerging talent to showcase their artwork in the Ulster Museum.

[www](#)

Thrive launches 100 untold stories emphasising why arts and culture is crucial for society

The project, based on a year-long research project with over 100 people across NI interviewed to better understand what arts and culture mean to the public, explodes the myth that the arts are only for certain types of people.

[www](#)

NI Theatre acknowledged at UK Theatre Awards

The Lyric Theatre dominates the 2023 UK Theatre Awards with two winning productions: 'The Beauty Queen of Leenane', a collaborative production between Lyric Theatre Belfast and Prime Cut wins Best Play revival; and Garry Hynes picks up Best Director for the Druid Theatre production 'Druid O'Casey', a trilogy of stories written by Irish dramatist Sean O'Casey.

[www](#)



www

Africa House

Africa House launches a new arts initiative designed to help and support people coming to live in Northern Ireland, in particular those seeking sanctuary, students, health professionals, children and young people (April).

November 2023



All In UK-wide creativity and culture access scheme

'All In' UK-wide access scheme

The four UK Arts Councils launch the new 'All In' access scheme and [website](#), which aims to enhance the experience of D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people attending creative and cultural events.

[www](#)

Outburst Queer Arts Festival

Two of the UK's most vital and influential queer voices join forces for a three-part operatic first, the world premiere and Outburst 2023 Opening Event, 'The Headless Soldier', with music by Conor Mitchell and libretto by Mark Ravenhill.

[www](#)

#GiftTheArts campaign

The Arts Council launches its annual promotional campaign to encourage people to visit theatres and venues and buy the gift of an arts experience for Christmas.

[www](#)

November 2023

Belfast Boys Model unveils new community mural

A colourful new community mural created as part of the Creative Schools Partnership by year 10 students at Belfast Boys' Model School marks the end of their two-year project, which also involved working with journalist Mark Devenport to create a local community magazine.



Arts Council celebrates NI Arts at Downing Street

Key representatives from Northern Ireland come together at a special reception at No.10 Downing Street to celebrate the arts and culture of Northern Ireland.

Sound of Belfast Festival

The annual Sound of Belfast festival organised by the Oh Yeah Music Centre celebrates the music of the city with over 60 events, plus this year's Oh Yeah Legend Award presented by IMRO to Paul Brady.



Belfast Boys' Model students Brandon Ferris, Adam Fleck, Jake Ledey, Callam Courtney and Finley Hubershon celebrate the launch a new community mural, designed by students, in Ballysillan.

November 2023



Singer-songwriter, Siobhan Brown, recipient of National Lottery Minority Ethnic Artists Mentoring and Residency Scheme.

National Lottery Minority Ethnic Artists Mentoring and Residency Awards

Thirteen ethnic minority artists working across a range of arts disciplines are awarded grants to support their creative practice and professional careers.

[www](#)

Cinema for the qu(ears)

An audio installation featuring soundscapes from the lives of LGBTQI+ young people living in rural areas of the North West premieres at the Foyle Film Festival, as part of the Arts Council's National Lottery Rural Engagement Arts Programme.

[www](#)

Brian Irvine wins Ivor Novello Award

The Ivor Novello Award for Best Stage Work is awarded to NI Composer Brian Irvine for his one-act opera, 'Least Like The Other, Searching for Rosemary Kelly'.



www

Major Individual Artist Awards

Visual artist Sharon Kelly, writers Gail McConnell and Jan Carson, and poet Stephanie Conn (not pictured), are presented with Major Individual Artist Awards, worth £15,000 each, the largest honour bestowed on artists each year by the Arts Council (November). Photo: Brian Morrison

December 2023



Comber Brass Band, one of the groups to receive funding through the Bands strand of the Musical Instruments Scheme.

Musical Instruments Scheme

With capital investment from the Department for Communities, the Arts Council invests £395,000 to increase the quality of music making in Northern Ireland by helping musicians, bands and performing groups purchase new musical instruments.



Arts Council Art Collection opens at Ards Arts Centre

The Collection exhibition provides an opportunity to see a specially curated selection of the Arts Council's Collection, including recently acquired works as well as works from some of the leading names in Northern Irish Arts.



Eleven schools receive Creative Schools Partnership funding

Eleven post-primary schools in Belfast and Derry~Londonderry receive up to £15,000 each to take part in the National Lottery Creative Schools Partnership, a landmark programme which boosts educational outcomes for students by bringing more creative skills into the classroom.



Winter Circus

Tumble Circus presents their annual Extravaganza of Winter Circus mayhem in Belfast (December).

www



January 2024

Holding Ground Festival



The three-day festival in Belfast premieres a new play, 'Holding Ground' created with Tinderbox Theatre Company, and a series of workshops in a creative-activist response to the impact of domestic violence on young people.

Bardic Theatre creates inclusive arts project for young people from ethnic minority backgrounds living in rural Tyrone

Bardic Theatre's Rural Engagement Arts Programme (REAP) project brings together 74 young people from a variety of ethnic minority and religious backgrounds in the Mid-Ulster area through music and theatre workshops based around West Side Story, culminating in public performances at the theatre.

Arts & Business NI Awards

Partnerships between the corporate and cultural worlds take centre stage at the 2024 Arts & Business NI Awards in Belfast, where 200 guests see The Millennium Forum recognised for its long-term commitment to delivering inventive projects with local businesses.



Holding Ground. Performers Jack Dawson and Holly Hannaway at Brian Friel Theatre



Array Collective

Belfast-based Array Collective's Turner Prize-winning installation, 'The Druthaib's Ball' is acquired by the Ulster Museum, where it is exhibited until September 2023.

Photo: Gary Jones Photography

February 2024



'Whisk(e)y Wars' Writer and performer, Joyce Greenaway

Co. Down story of family treachery and whiskey staged in Brussels

Award-winning writer, Joyce Greenaway, stages her play 'Whisk(e)y Wars' at the Bozar Theatre as part of the Arts Council/NI Executive Office's Brussels Platform, promoting NI's arts and culture at the heart of the EU.

[www](#)

Michael Keegan-Dolan Dance Intensive

Organised by Theatre and Dance NI and The MAC in Belfast, 20 talented dance artists have the opportunity to participate in a week-long intensive programme of dance workshops

Belfast TradFest Winter Weekend celebrates our shared traditional music traditions

Some of Ireland and Scotland's finest traditional singers, musicians and dancers take to the stage for an extravaganza of jigs, reels, strathspeys, sean nós dancing, plus the very best of traditional singing.

[www](#)

February 2024

RENDR Festival

RENDR presents an epic line-up of speakers across two evenings, alongside live and interactive demonstrations of new technology, digital art and gaming.

www

Disabled Artists International Residency

Two leading artists from Northern Ireland and Germany participate in a new international exchange programme co-ordinated by the University of Atypical, aimed at creating accessible opportunities for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists.

www

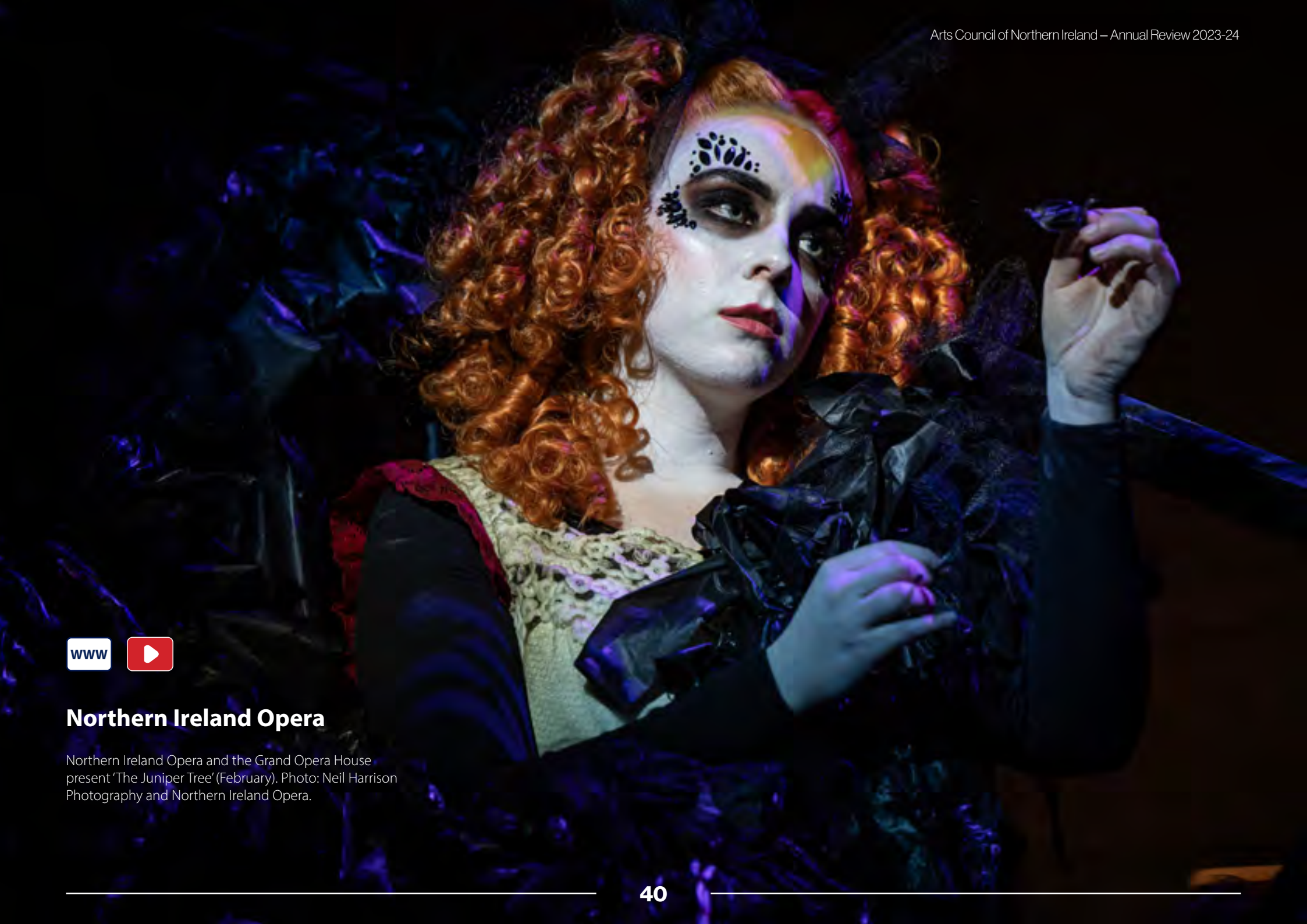
St Joseph's Boys get creative with Millennium Forum

The Millennium Forum unveils a new partnership, through the Creative Schools Partnership, with St Joseph's Boys School, that sees Year 9 and 10 students develop their creative skills whilst gaining invaluable access to the Northwest's leading arts venue.

www



RENDR Festival. Matthias Oostrik, immersive media artist



Northern Ireland Opera

Northern Ireland Opera and the Grand Opera House present 'The Juniper Tree' (February). Photo: Neil Harrison Photography and Northern Ireland Opera.

 March 2024

The Queen's Reading Room comes to NI

The Queen's Reading Room stages its Northern Ireland debut with a special poetry performance in partnership with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, celebrating culturally-important works of some of NI's most famed poets in front of an audience that included Her Majesty Queen Camilla.

www

Imagine Belfast! Festival of Ideas and Politics celebrates 10th anniversary

Over the last decade, this festival has organised 1,050 events attracting an audience of 193,000 people with approximately 3,000 speakers and performers involved and an estimated turnover of £780,000 for the wider economy.

www

Brilliant Corners Jazz Festival

Moving on Music presents an incredible mix of jazz, including a new suite of music written by local legend Stephen Davis.

www



Her Majesty Queen Camilla with poets and guest speakers, Sinéad Morrissey Raquel McKee, Frances Tomelty, Michael Longley, Ian McElhinney and Paul Muldoon

 March 2024



Maas theater en dans perform BullyBully at the Belfast Children's Festival

Belfast Children's Festival

The annual festival of hand-picked shows and events for all the family has a special Dutch focus this year, with some of the finest performances for young audiences from the Netherlands.

[www](#)

Walled City Music Festival, Derry-Londonderry

The annual Walled City Music Festival offers a packed programme of classical concerts and workshops with internationally-renowned guest musicians, including the Piatti Quartet and the Ulster Orchestra.

[www](#)

Children's Writing Fellow at the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's

Young Adult author, Shirley-Anne McMillan, is announced as the new Children's Writing Fellow, created as part of Queen's University Belfast and the Arts Council's joint ten-year Seamus Heaney Legacy project supported by the Atlantic Philanthropies.

[www](#)

Agreement

Dan Gordon as John Hume and Patrick O’Kane as David Trimble in the Lyric Theatre production of Owen McCafferty’s ‘Agreement’. ‘Agreement’ plays to a completely sold-out audience over four weeks, including dignitaries Hillary Clinton and Senator George Mitchell (March). Photo: Carrie Davenport.



Funding Programmes and Research Publications 2023-24

Funding Programmes

Annual Funding Programme 2023-24

April 2023

The Arts Council supported the core and programming costs of 84 organisations central to the arts infrastructure in Northern Ireland with £12.8m of AFP support.

<https://artscouncil-ni.s3-assets.com/acni-annual-funding-programme-awards-2023-24.pdf>

Rosy James Memorial Trust Award

June 2023

Alison Lowry, John Rainey and Eleanor Wheeler each receive bursaries of £15,000 from the trust fund designed to help craft makers develop their professional careers.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/artists-alison-lowry-john-rainey-and-eleanor-wheeler-set-to-receive-the-15-000-rosy-james-memorial-trust-award>

Lottery Project Funding 2023-24

July 2023

Arts Council awards grants totalling £2.1m to support the development of high-quality arts activities across Northern Ireland.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/arts-council-awards-2.25m-of-national-lottery-funding-to-support-arts-projects-across-ni>

PPL Momentum Music Fund

August 2023

NI musicians Lilia Vargen and Dana Masters are two of the 11 UK-based artists to receive funding through this new music and talent development fund, supported by the PRS Foundation, Creative Wales and Arts Council NI.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/11-artists-to-receive-the-ground-breaking-ppl-momentum-music-fund-support>

National Lottery Rural Engagement Arts Programme

September 2023

Arts Council announces £396,478 rural arts projects.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/arts-council-announces-funding-for-63-rural-arts-projects>

Shared Island Arts Investment Projects

September 2023

Funding is announced for five new all-island Arts investment projects, which are being delivered with a total allocation of €7.4m from the Irish Government's Shared Island Fund. Bellaghy Bawn writers residencies receive up to €4.6m, the Irish Traditional Music Archive €1m and the Tyrone Guthrie Centre €1.5m.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/shared-island-arts-investment-projects>

'Magnetic' Bi-lateral Residency Programme

October 2023

Northern Ireland visual artist Charys Wilson is selected to take part in a residency in France while French visual artist Rodriguez Teare takes part in a residency at Flax Art Studio, as part of the network of residencies in France and the UK, launched in 2022.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/announcement-of-the-artists-for-the-second-edition-of-magnetic-the-franco-uk-initiative-for-a-bilateral-programme-of-visual-artists-residencies>

Arts & Older People Programme

October 2023

Arts Council awards £169,994 of National Lottery funding to support 22 community-based arts projects for older citizens across Northern Ireland

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/older-people-to-benefit-from-169-994-arts-council-ni-funding>

Major Individual Artists Awards

October 2023

Leading NI artists, writer Jan Carson, poet Stephanie Conn, visual artist Sharon Kelly and writer Gail McConnell, are presented with Major Individual Awards, worth £15,000 each. The awards are the highest value honour bestowed on established artists in Northern Ireland each year.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/leading-ni-artists-jan-carson-stephanie-conn-sharon-kelly-and-gail-mcconnell-honoured-with-major-awards-by-arts-council-of-northern-ireland-thanks-to-the-national-lottery>

Minority Ethnic Artists Awards

November 2023

Arts Council awards £49,995 to 13 ethnic minority artists to help them develop their creative practice and their professional careers.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/minority-ethnic-artists-awarded-arts-council-national-lottery-investment-to-support-career-development>

National Lottery Individual Artists Digital Evolution Awards

December 2023

Arts Council awards £75,679 to support eight individual artists in the creation of high-quality arts projects using innovative digital technologies, with funding from the National Lottery and Future Screens NI.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/arts-council-announces-funding-for-innovative-digital-arts-projects>

Musical Instruments Scheme

December 2023

With capital investment from DfC, the Arts Council makes 55 awards totalling £488,350 for the purchase of new instruments by professional individual musicians, bands, and professional and non-professional performing groups.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/funding-announced-to-support-musicians-purchase-new-instruments>

Artists Career Enhancement Scheme

December 2023

£82,559 is awarded to 12 emerging and mid-career artists, to support their professional development.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/acni-announces-national-lottery-funding-to-support-the-careers-of-12-exceptional-artists>

Support for Individual Artists Programme

January 2024

Arts Council awards £1,286,171.00 of National Lottery investment to support 350 artists working across all disciplines.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/arts-council-announces-national-lottery-investment-to-support-292-individual-artists>

XRtists Scheme

January 2024

New £3.6m programme supports over 200 UK-based artists and organisations to explore the creative potential of virtual, augmented and mixed-reality technologies. The Nerve Centre is one of the four core partners based in each of the UK nations who will work with artists in their region.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/new-funding-supports-uk-artists-to-work-with-immersive-tech>

Commissioning Programme for Organisations

February 2024

Twenty-four arts organisations, across all artforms, are given the opportunity to create new works of high artistic quality with £200,004 of National Lottery funding.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/arts-council-commissions-24-new-works-thanks-to-national-lottery-funding>

Cultural Bridge Fund

February 2024

The MAC and Brink! are among 20 new partnerships for 2024-25 between UK and German organisations, awarded a total of £310,000 to develop creative and cultural projects exploring issues faced by communities across both nations.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/the-mac-and-brink-awarded-cultural-bridge-funding-for-uk-germany-arts-projects>

The snapshot of General awards cited above is one part of the Arts Council's SIAP programme which also includes schemes, such as MIA, ACES, MEAMR, IADE and Travel Awards referenced on page 6 - see below the breakdown of the 346 awards referenced there

Scheme	No	Value (£)
Artists Career Enhancement	12	82,559.00
Artists International Development Fund	8	34,460.00
General Art Award	292	1,047,033.00
International Residency - Vedaaranya at Ramgarh Shekhawati Rajasthan	1	1,765.00
Major Individual Award	4	60,000.00
Minority Ethnic Residency & Mentoring Programme	13	49,995.00
Travel Award	17	8,409.00
WOMEX Bursary	3	1,950.00
Total	350	1,286,171.00

Research Publications

Arts Council Business Plan 2023-24

May 2023

Arts Council publishes its Business Plan for 2023-24, setting out the organisation's strategic objectives and corresponding actions for the financial year.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/business-plan-2023>

Response to DfC Consultation on 2023-24 Budget Allocations

June 2023

Following the confirmation of the Department for Communities' budget allocation, the Arts Council releases its response to the equality impact consultation on the impact a 5% reduction in funding would have on the arts sector.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/governments-lack-of-investment-in-the-arts-is-affecting-those-most-in-need>

Climate Change Survey 2002

July 2023

Key findings from a survey of the Arts Council's Annually Funded and National Lottery Funded clients. The survey establishes current levels of organisation awareness, action and impact relative to climate change and the environment, and identifies what support organisations need to address the climate crisis.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/climate-change-survey-2022>

General Population Survey 2022-23

September 2023

The Arts Council commissions Social Market Research to undertake a General Population Survey based on a representative sample of 1,015 adults. Key findings include: 79% of people agreed that there should be public investment in arts and culture.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/general-population-survey-2022-23>

Annual Funding Survey 2022-23

October 2023

Findings from the Arts Council's Annual Funding Survey reveal the impact that the cost of living crisis is having on the arts sector, as it struggles to return to pre-covid programming and audience levels.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/news/arts-organisations-seek-new-sources-of-funding-amid-rising-costs>

Creative Schools Partnership Evaluation Report

October 2023

Evaluation of the programme which has been running since 2017/18.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/creative-schools-partnership-evaluation-report-2023>

Annual Review 2022-23

November 2023

Arts Council publishes its Annual Review 2022-23, recounting the many highlights of the (financial) Year in the Arts in Northern Ireland, supported by Arts Council exchequer funding from the Department for Communities as well as National Lottery funds.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/annual-review-2022-23-2>

Response to Consultation on Approach to 10X Technologies and Clusters

December 2023

The Arts Council submits response welcoming the 10X strategy and recognizing its potential to drive economic growth and create jobs.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/response-to-the-consultation-on-approach-to-10x-technologies-and-clusters>

Response to DfE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI: 10-Year Plan

January 2024

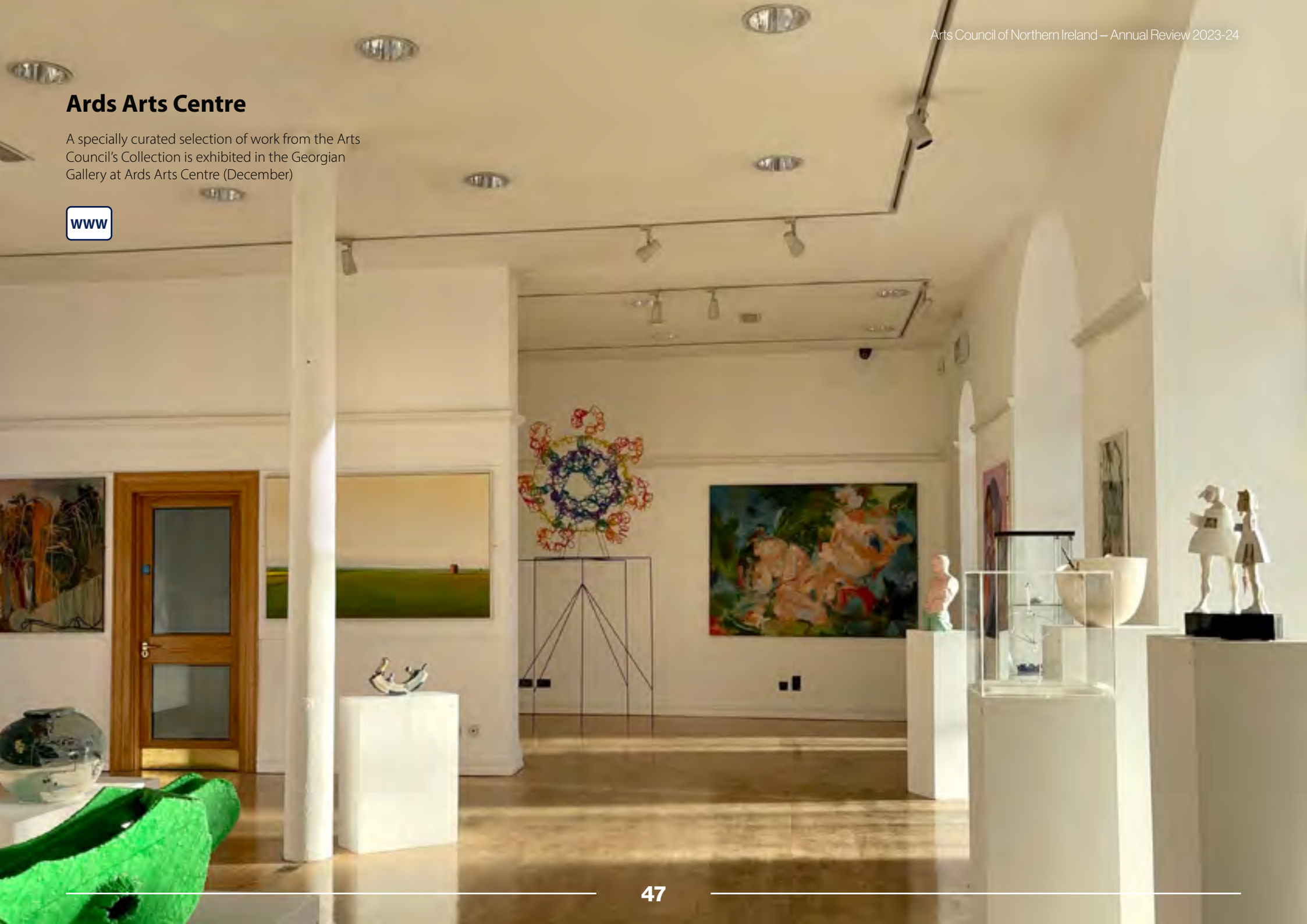
The Arts Council submits response welcoming the development of a 10-year Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland and supporting the ambition of establishing Northern Ireland as a year-round world class destination.

<https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/acni-response-to-dfe-tourism-strategy>

Ards Arts Centre

A specially curated selection of work from the Arts Council's Collection is exhibited in the Georgian Gallery at Ards Arts Centre (December)

[www](#)



The Board of the Arts Council

The Board of the Arts Council provides leadership for the executive body, in particular in defining and developing its strategic direction. It monitors performance in order to ensure that the Arts Council fully meets its aims, objectives and performance targets, and acts in a way that promotes the

highest standards of public finance. The Council is made up of the Chairperson plus members, providing a broad cross-section of expertise and including representatives from the arts and culture sector.

Biographies of board members are available at <https://artscouncil-ni.org/about-us/our-people/our-board>



Mr Liam Hannaway
Chairperson



Mr William Leathem
Vice Chairperson



Mrs Lynne Best



Mr Paul Boyle
(to Aug 24)



Mr Paul Brolly



Mr Joe Dougan



Mr Sean Kelly



Mrs Laura McCorry



Dr Gearóid Trimble



Mr Ray Hall

The Executive of the Arts Council

Chief Executive



Roisín McDonough

The Chief Executive sets the direction and oversees the operations of the Arts Council. She is responsible for the development and implementation of the strategic plans and policies established by the Board.

Arts Development



Noírin McKinney,
Director of Arts Development
(job share)



Gilly Campbell,
Director of Arts Development
(job share)

The Arts Development Department provides funding support to artists and arts organisations through its Exchequer and National Lottery funds. It is responsible for the development of the art form genres supported by the Arts

Maria Lynch,
Director of Operations

Council. Funding is available through dedicated funding programmes which are linked to the Arts Council's strategic plan. The Arts Council's art form officers provide specialist expertise and advice. This department is also responsible for corporate communications and media relations.

Strategic Development



Karly Greene,
Director of Strategic
Development & Partnerships
(to July 24);



Javier Stanzola,
Director of Strategic
Development & Partnerships
(July 24 -)

Strategic Development is responsible for developing the Arts Council's strategic, corporate and business plans. It is in charge of research, policy and advocacy; for ensuring the Arts Council's compliance with statutory requirements such as Equality and Freedom of Information; and for inter-agency co-operation with other government departments and local authorities.

Finance and Corporate Services



Geoffrey Troughton,
Director of Finance &
Corporate Services

Corporate Services provides the core administration for the Arts Council. Its main areas of responsibility are finance, personnel and training, IT support, Reception, Registry and general office services.

Full staff list is available at:
<https://artscouncil-ni.org/contact>

Financial Summary 2023-24

The Arts Council provides the main support for artists and arts organisations working in Northern Ireland, offering a broad range of funding opportunities through our Exchequer and National Lottery funds. Our funding programmes reflect the aims and objectives of our Strategic plan.

The complete sets of audited accounts for our Exchequer and National Lottery funds are made available on the Arts Council's website, <https://artscouncil-ni.org/about-us/annual-reports>

The Arts Council invested £21 million to support the full range of creative activities across Northern Ireland in 2023-24*

*Based on the Exchequer and National Lottery Accounts for 2023-24

Arts Council Exchequer funding 2023-24[†]

The Arts Council awarded funding of £11.58 million through its Exchequer fund. These funds were awarded through a set of programmes developed to support the full range of activities of artists and arts organisations across Northern Ireland, including:

- Annual Funding Programme
- Arts Development Fund

Local Authority Area	Number of Awards	Value of Awards (£)
Antrim and Newtownabbey	4	27,031
Ards and North Down	8	176,962
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	8	64,231
Belfast	95	9,278,732
Causeway Coast and Glens	4	162,354
Derry and Strabane	28	1,341,898
Fermanagh and Omagh	9	109,150
Lisburn and Castlereagh	4	35,433
Mid and East Antrim	6	47,292
Mid Ulster	5	49,493
Newry, Mourne and Down	10	111,874
Other	3	176,999
Grand Total	184	11,581,449

Artform	Number of Awards	Value of Awards (£)
Circus/Street Theatre/Carnival	7	82,594
Combined	42	3,316,471
Craft	2	148,321
Dance	4	63,907
Drama	18	2,174,834
Literature	4	295,844
Music	38	3,410,090
Opera	1	660,409
Other	1	612
Traditional Arts	47	353,971
Visual Arts	20	1,074,396
Grand Total	184	11,581,449

[†]The figures on pages 51-52 represent grants awarded directly to artists and arts organisations. The complete investment picture is available in the Exchequer and National Lottery Accounts, published to the website <https://artscouncil-ni.org/about-us/annual-reports>.

Arts Council Lottery funding 2023-24

The Arts Council awarded funding of almost £9.1 million through its National Lottery fund. Lottery funds supported arts projects throughout Northern Ireland.

Funding programmes included:

- Annual Funding Programme
- National Lottery Project Funding
- Support for Individual Artists Programme
- Arts & Older People Programme
- Commissioning Programme
- Creative Schools Programme
- Individual Artists Digital Evolution Award
- Rural Engagement Arts Programme

Note on funding patterns

Funding patterns in Belfast and Derry/Strabane reflect the high concentrations of artists and arts organisations living and working in these areas, as well as the location of several major 'umbrella' arts organisations whose services extend to Northern Ireland as a whole.

Local Authority Area	Number of Awards	Value of Awards (£)
Antrim and Newtownabbey	29	166,873.00
Ards and North Down	43	311,418.00
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	36	394,665.00
Belfast	321	5,554,320.00
Causeway Coast and Glens	24	215,651.00
Derry and Strabane	74	1,198,413.00
Fermanagh and Omagh	34	258,158.00
Lisburn and Castlereagh	18	151,405.00
Mid and East Antrim	20	79,820.00
Mid Ulster	29	225,676.00
Newry, Mourne and Down	40	336,382.00
Other	12	173,064.00
Grand Total	680	9,065,845.00

Artform	Number of Awards	Value of Awards (£)
Circus/Street Theatre/Carnival	24	597,461
Combined	102	3,141,454
Craft	18	66,812
Dance	22	387,774
Drama	81	972,783
Film	1	7,410
Literature	77	511,686
Music	154	1,567,136
Opera	10	48,712
Other	11	40,299
Story Telling	2	11,000
Traditional Arts	34	739,889
Visual Arts	144	973,429
Grand Total	680	9,065,845



www

Queen's Reading Room

The Queen's Reading Room staged its Northern Ireland debut in March, with a very special poetry performance in partnership with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Poets and guest speakers included Sinéad Morrissey Raquel McKee, Frances Tomelty, Michael Longley, Ian McElhinney and Paul Muldoon. Pictured: Sir Nicholas Coleridge, Chairman of Historic Royal Palaces; Liam Hannaway, Chair of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; Her Majesty Queen Camilla; Vicki Perrin, CEO Queen's Reading Room.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I apply for funding?

The Arts Council offers a range of grant programmes that you can apply to for funding. Some programmes are specifically for organisations and others are for individual artists. We are currently reviewing our funding portfolio and we expect to introduce multi-annual funding to replace our Annual Funding Programme in 2026. We also intend to amalgamate all National Lottery Funding programmes into one main application route. For full information on all the programmes that we offer, the criteria for each programme, application deadlines and how to apply, visit the Funding pages of our website, <https://artscouncil-ni.org/funding>.

When can I apply?

Most grant programmes take place in funding rounds with specific dates when we will accept applications. Some programmes are open all year round. For information on funding deadlines, visit the Funding pages of our website.

How long will it take to reach a decision?

This may vary with each programme, although we would generally aim to make a decision on applications from individuals and organisations within three months.

Where can I get help with my application?

The guidance notes for each programme provide information on the assessment criteria, eligibility and application process. Our Arts Development Officers can also offer [advice](#) on eligibility before you submit an application. Contact details are available in the [About Us](#) section of our website, or you can contact the switchboard and you will be directed to the most appropriate person.

How do I complain to the Arts Council?

The Arts Council has a Service Charter which outlines the standard of service our clients should expect from us. We operate a Service Complaints Procedure to handle general complaints about our service. In addition, we operate a Funding Review Procedure for those who want to appeal a decision about a grant application. These documents are available on the website.

Arts Council
E: info@artscouncil-ni.org



For further information please contact:

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

E: info@artscouncil-ni.org

W: www.artscouncil-ni.org



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Alternative formats of this publication may be available on request.

For further information,
Email: mhendry@artscouncil-ni.org



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