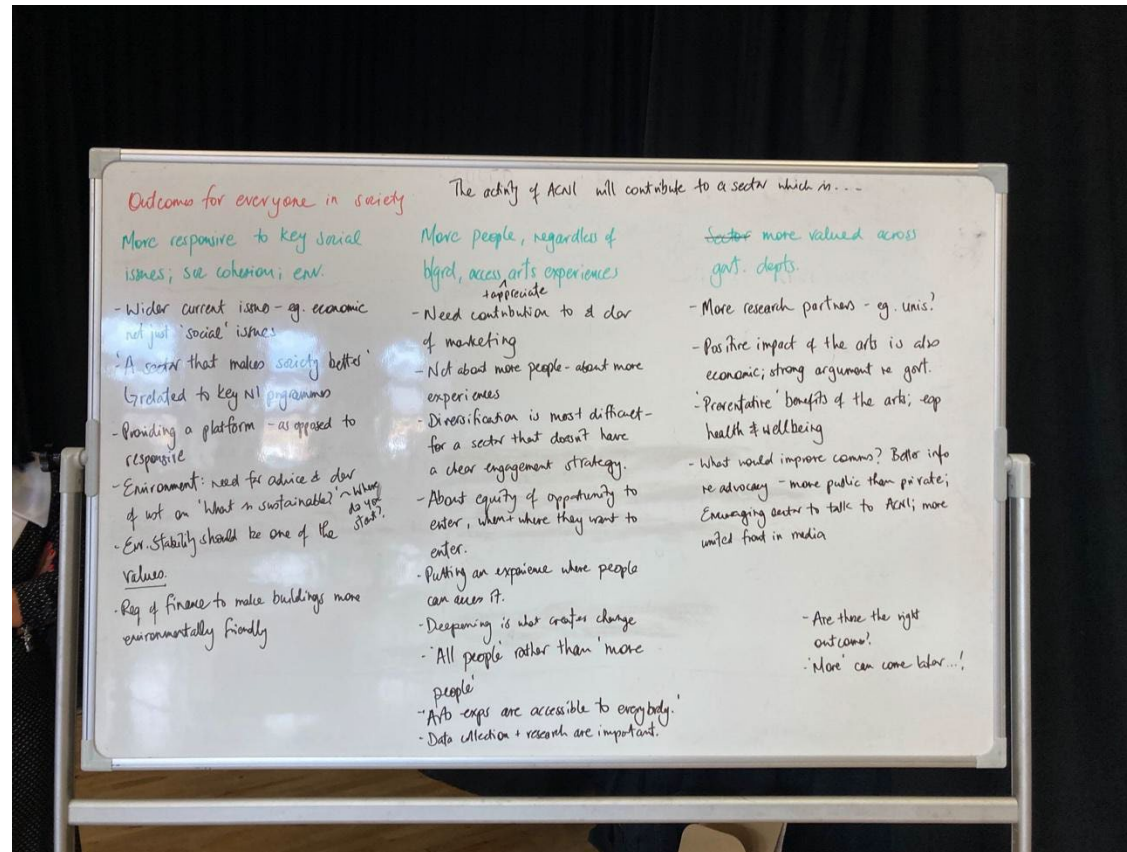


Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2024-34 Strategy

External Strategy Engagement - A Summary of Feedback



June – September 2023

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1. About this document

This document summarises the key external feedback provided in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) 2024-2034 Strategy engagement discussions with the arts sector. Twenty-four sessions were delivered in total. Fourteen sessions were delivered by RF Associates and the Director of Strategic Development (ACNI) and ran from 17 July 2023 to 10 September 2023 with some sessions delivered face to face across various locations in Northern Ireland and some offered online. The remaining sessions were delivered by the Director of Strategic Development (ACNI) in partnership with resource organisations. Engagement was sought across individual artists and organisations, in a range of locations across urban and more rural locations and with as wide a range of art forms as possible. The team also made significant effort to reach and engage with typically under-represented groups as part of this process. Appendix 1 provides a list of all the sessions held.

We are grateful to all those who gave their time to take part in these discussions. In total, there were 262 attendants across the 24 engagement sessions. In a few cases, people participated in more than one workshop representing themselves as artists or another organisation. Feedback was gathered after each workshop so the team could continue to improve upon the effectiveness of the sessions.

A wide range of issues were discussed in the sessions. The intention of this document is not to reflect every single item of feedback but to summarise the key feedback on the draft outcomes, and priorities within those, and give a flavour of the issues raised. The discussions included some examples of possible activity within the priority areas, including elements that would require additional budget for ACNI. These are included for illustrative purposes only; detailed comment is not provided on these individual elements.

We do not quantify the number of people giving particular responses, but in places we indicate scale by using the following common terms:

- Most – the majority but not all
- Some – less than half
- A few – a minority (but always more than one)

Not everyone in each group came to a consensus on themes and we were not seeking this. We valued everyone's perspective and have used the insights to inform how we move forward. Time was taken in the sessions to explain the background to the strategy development so far, the strategic context and challenges, as well as to explain how the outcomes are worded with a focus on a journey where change can be tracked over time. Draft outcomes were developed based on research, previous engagement and internal engagement and to help structure the sessions. Groups were informed of further consultation opportunities later in the year once the strategy had been developed. The feedback was presented to the ACNI Board in October 2023. Four additional sessions were subsequently scheduled in November to provide everyone with an update on how we have used the feedback to inform the strategy development.

The draft mission and vision were presented as follows:

Our mission

To **support** and **develop** the arts in Northern Ireland through funding and advocacy.

Our vision

To create a **sustainable arts sector** in Northern Ireland and ensure that **everyone has access** to arts.

We believe arts **enriches the lives** of all people, **regardless of background** or circumstance, and that everyone should be able to **participate** in, and experience, the arts.

Draft values were presented as follows:

Our work is underpinned by the following core values. These characterise how we interact with everyone.

Expertise

We use our experience and expertise to support the arts sector in NI through investing, advocating and evidencing the impact of our sector.

Inclusion

We recognise the importance of diversity in the arts sector and are committed to being inclusive and accessible to all.

Collaboration

We value our strong relationships with partners, and their ability to enhance arts programmes across NI and beyond.

Integrity

We are open, transparent, and fair in how we distribute public funding.

Draft outcomes for the sector were presented as follows:

Outcomes for the **Arts Sector**

A more **financially resilient** and **stable** sector

- We will generate more income for arts in Northern Ireland
- We will pursue a different approach to investment in the arts and culture that is long term and outcomes-based

A sector that is **more attractive** to work in, more committed to **workforce development** and more **inclusive**

- We will continue to incubate, protect, and grow artistic talent
- We will ensure that the arts in Northern Ireland draws on and reflects the full range of backgrounds and perspectives in our society

A sector that can develop through **experimentation** and **innovation**

- We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts and culture sector

Draft outcomes for society were presented as follows:

Outcomes for **Society**

A sector that is more responsive to key **social issues**, promotes **social cohesion** and cares about the **environment**

- We will invest in arts and cultural projects that address key social issues including social cohesion
- We will increase public engagement with climate change by empowering the arts and culture sector and work to reduce the carbon footprint of funded organisations

More people, regardless of background can **access arts experiences**

- We will invest in arts and cultural projects that deepens, widens, and diversifies audiences

A sector that is **more valued** across all government departments

- We will continue to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and people in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts on society
- We will continue to work as an effective and efficient organisation.

This document was written by ACNI with support from external provider RF Associates.

The aim of this document is to summarise key insights on each theme and to include an ACNI response to the feedback. This may involve an amendment to the wording of the outcome as well as some detail for initial ideas of actions to meet the goal. Further detail on actions will be discussed and developed as part of ACNI's operational Business Plans.

ACNI Director of Strategic Development overview:

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the arts sector, including artists, freelancers, volunteers and representatives from arts and community organisations, and commercial businesses for their openness and engagement throughout this process. We understand that these are challenging times for the arts sector in Northern Ireland, and we acknowledge the importance of developing a strategy that is both ambitious and realistic.

During the engagement sessions, participants brought a diverse range of perspectives, which allowed for positive challenges and constructive discussions. While we recognise that not everyone will agree on every aspect, we made a concerted effort to consider all insights collectively and work towards finding solutions. Our aim was to assess the various perspectives in order to move forward and develop a strategy that addresses the needs of the sector.

It is worth noting that the DfC culture, arts, and heritage task force [report](#) holds significant importance and aligns with our approach. We appreciate its contribution to the overall process.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who took part in the sessions. We hope that this engagement will continue as we progress towards achieving our strategic goals, ensuring the development and growth of the arts sector in Northern Ireland.

Thank you once again for your valuable contributions.

2. Consultation findings: Mission, Vision, Values

2.1 Feedback: Our mission

Our mission: To support and develop the arts in Northern Ireland through funding and advocacy

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments The draft of the mission didn't draw particularly strong views in the short time we had to discuss it. However, there was some feeling that the strategy more generally lacked ambition and that the language was not aspirational enough.</p> <p>Detailed feedback It was suggested that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the theme of development should be added to the wording of the mission; - the term 'funding' should be changed to investment; - the mission should include some element of celebrating the arts. <p>There were mixed views as to whether the mission should include supporting artists making work of excellence (or international quality).</p> <p>There was discussion about the importance of definitions such as the arts and the workforce.</p>	<p>A mission is the statement of the role and activity of an organisation. Aligned to its statutory and lottery duties, ACNI has sought to develop a concise statement of its role and has focused on lifting the vision statement to ensure the context narrative reflects ambition.</p> <p>Reflecting on the feedback, a glossary will be provided in the strategy with definitions for key terms such as what ACNI means when we use the term arts sector, workforce etc.</p> <p>We have revised the mission to reflect championing and investing in the arts.</p>

Revised mission:

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

2.2 Feedback: Our vision

Our vision: To create a sustainable arts sector in Northern Ireland and ensure that everyone has access to arts. We believe arts can enrich the lives of all people, regardless of background or circumstance, and that everyone should be able to participate in, and experience the arts.

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments Some commented that the vision lacked ambition and that the language was basic, not aspirational enough, and could be much bolder. There was also some feeling that the vision didn't acknowledge what is already excellent or world class about the arts in Northern Ireland. It was also commented that the vision was 'too audience heavy' without enough emphasis on artists themselves.</p> <p>Detailed feedback It was suggested by some that the theme of 'creativity' should be added to the vision; some disagreed with this.</p> <p>It was also commented that artists and arts organisations want to see themselves mentioned or reflected in the vision; that the vision should be more about 'What sort of NI do you want to live in? What sort of country do you want NI to be?'; that the vision should show a sense of ACNI responsibility for the sector and its role in advocating on behalf of the sector.</p>	<p>Taking on board the feedback that the vision needs to use more aspirational language, various changes have been made to it.</p> <p>Some of the general feedback around the vision will be responded to in other parts of the strategy document e.g. a set of beliefs will be developed for the work of ACNI (see more on this below), as well as a section acknowledging the inspirational role of arts in NI.</p> <p>It was clear that people agreed with the intention that the arts are for everyone and that it should be a clear ambition for ACNI to engage as many people as possible in the arts. It was also felt that developing the recognition of the value of the arts, and their impact, across society should be an ambition of ACNI.</p> <p>A set of principles will be included within the strategy highlighting ACNI views/beliefs on the value of the arts. This will include statements around the following:</p>

Some queried what ACNI includes within 'the arts sector' and where does quality and excellence fit into the vision and into the outcomes. Some groups discussed the difficulty of judging what is excellent. Some commented that the vision should also look outward from NI.

Specific comments on language were:

- 'To create' – suggests that the sector does not already exist, a few suggested change to highlight;
- 'Sustainable' – considered too negative or static, that this is about the future of the sector and words like 'growing', 'thriving', 'vibrant' would be more appropriate;
- 'We believe the arts enrich the lives, or has the potential to enrich' sounds like it is already past tense and has happened;
- 'Participate in and experience' – some considered this language too basic and considered that people enjoying/being nourished by the arts should be emphasised;
- 'Regardless of background' – was considered to be too narrow / an outdated term to use;
- 'Can enrich lives' – we know it does so remove 'can';
- 'Arts sector' – Some groups queried what is meant here: Does it only include the subsidised arts or also the wider creative industries? Does it include culture?;
- The use of more active words was suggested e.g., invigorate, dynamic, celebrate.

The idea of developing a set of principles for ACNI which would communicate their views on the importance and value of the arts, was floated in several of the discussions and this idea was welcomed.

- 1) Public investment is a key component for a thriving arts sector.
- 2) The value of artists and fair remuneration
- 3) The fundamental value of arts beyond economic and social considerations
- 4) All art forms are respected equally
- 5) Everyone should have a right to creativity (UN Declaration of Human Rights)
- 6) The added value of collaboration across and with the sector
- 7) The valuing of artistic expression in all its forms from everyone in society

Revised vision:

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

2.3 Feedback: Organisational values

Organisational Values: Expertise, Inclusion, Collaboration, Integrity

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments The values were generally well received by most of the groups with few comments.</p> <p>Detailed feedback Inclusion was noted as a key value by some.</p> <p>A few people suggested each of the following ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Add advocacy as a value- Add sustainability as a value- Add recognition of the value of contemporary arts- Note that collaboration between arts organisations is valued	<p>The values apply to ACNI as an organisation and how they operate. As there were no strong views on changes, no amendments will be made to the four values discussed.</p> <p>We did consider adding an environmental responsibility value but decided it was best covered as an outcome rather than a value.</p> <p>We added 'champion' to the mission statement to cover the role of advocacy as well as a specific outcome focused on it. We have also noted as principles the importance of collaboration between arts organisations and the value of contemporary arts.</p>

3. Consultation findings: Overall reflections on the strategy and outcomes

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>Detailed feedback</p> <p>The strategy engagement sessions were presented with a 5-year strategy option. There were some questions over the time period for the strategy, some people felt the strategy horizon should be longer, in line with the DfC Culture, Arts and Heritage approach. A few thought it should be shorter.</p> <p>Other general comments, made by a few people included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the strategy should reflect more clearly the value artists have in society; - the role of volunteers in the sector and amateur arts groups within the broader sector should be noted; - the strategy should recognise the importance of equitable distribution across artforms and regions. In some discussions there was questioning as to whether ACNI should be adopting a 'place based' approach to investment similar to the approach adopted by Councils and in England through a 'Levelling Up' agenda; - the strategy should ensure there is partnership and collaboration between clients and ACNI, with a few people going further to say that clients should be called partners; - more mention should be made in relation to how ACNI is supporting arts organisations. 	<p>The Board of ACNI has considered the pros and cons of a five-year strategy versus a 10-year strategy and decided to progress with a ten year strategy and 3-year operational business plans. It is important that flexibility is built into the strategy to ensure it can reflect on contemporary challenges.</p> <p>As most people agreed with the six outcomes (with amendments to the wording/meaning) no additional outcomes were proposed at the sessions. We are confident that all the aspects noted fall under one of the outcome areas and will be addressed in the detail of ACNI annual business plans. Our focus will be amending the existing six outcomes and ensuring the actions to meet those goals are clear in business plans.</p> <p>The outcomes will be fully explained as part of the strategy and consideration will be given to how ACNI will track the impact of their work on the sector, individual artists and arts organisations. In the strategy document each outcome will be explained in more detail in response to challenges faced by the sector and the role ACNI can play in helping respond to those challenges.</p> <p>The ACNI Board has agreed to review the current internal structure aligned to the outcomes to reflect what is required to ensure we are best placed to meet these.</p>

There was an expectation from some that key challenges such as the UK leaving the EU and the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland would be mentioned.

Most groups were positive towards the 6 outcomes, agreeing with the broad sentiments behind them. Though some individuals did not like the idea of outcomes or were unsure of what they meant.

Specific feedback was given on the wording of the outcomes which is reflected in this document. A few people disagreed with a focus on outcomes wanting a focus on art's intrinsic value.

A few people noted what they considered gaps within the outcomes including:

- Where do those who are not professionals fit in the outcomes?
- Under which outcome do all the volunteers who help run the sector feature?
- Where do the outcomes mention regional disparities?
- Where do local authorities fit into the outcomes?
- Can ACNI act more as a connector across the sector?
- Are the outcomes for the sector that ACNI funds or for the sector as a whole?

Groups also noted that it is important that ACNI articulate how the outcomes relate to one another and that it is the support for the sector that enables the outcomes for society.

Some groups disliked the language of the outcomes which focused on trying to see a move to 'more' of something; for example, they

We are also exploring how to integrate the importance of creativity and the practice of arts from hobbies to professional practice as part of our core principles.

disliked the idea that the sector was not inclusive already. It was suggested that outcomes might be better phrased with a starting sentence such as: 'The activity of ACNI will contribute to a sector which is/will etc...'

Some groups noted that projects need help to measure outcomes particularly at a grassroots level. However, some felt that current ACNI reporting requirements are laborious and that these should be more proportionate and streamlined.

As noted in the introduction to this document, some illustrative examples were provided for each outcome in relation to how ACNI will seek to deliver that outcome. Some activities it has resources for; some it does not. Some people noted in the discussions elements that they saw as vitally important, despite these being activities that ACNI can not undertake within its existing budget constraints.

4. Consultation findings: Outcome 1

4.1 Feedback on Outcome 1: A more financially resilient and stable sector

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments</p> <p>Groups strongly acknowledged the importance of this outcome and that all the other outcomes and priorities rely on it. They wanted to see the sector prioritised for funding and support.</p> <p>It was also clear that individual artists generally find it impossible to focus on their work as an artist as there is a need to have another job to provide enough income to live on.</p> <p>Groups were clear about the precarity of running arts organisations; that there have been no new arts organisations entering the sector for some time and that solely working as an individual artist is financially impossible for many.</p> <p>Detailed feedback</p> <p>A few people asked what is really meant by helping the sector to be more ‘financially resilient’ and in general there was a mixed response to the use of the term ‘resilient’. Some considered that the sector is already resilient, whilst others considered this a good way to articulate what the sector needs. Other words suggested included: vibrant, viable, buoyant, thriving, secure / security, appropriately resourced, being more confident and outward looking, improving or increasing investment into the sector.</p>	<p>ACNI recognises the importance of this outcome in enhancing the other 5 outcomes. The work of ACNI under this outcome will focus on achieving more stability for the individuals and organisations that work in the arts. We believe that achieving more financial resources for the sector and supporting organisations and individuals over a longer term will enable greater stability. A stable sector provides more opportunity for individuals and organisations but ACNI will also explore longer-term opportunities for individual artists.</p> <p>Reflecting on the feedback, we have removed the term ‘resilient’ and kept the focus of the outcome on a more financially stable arts sector.</p>

<p>Some commented that it is important there is support to the sector to enable not only organisations to be financially stable, but also individual artists and those who work freelance.</p> <p>Most people agreed with moving towards language like ‘investment’.</p>	
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Revised outcome 1:
A more financially stable arts sector.

4.2 Feedback on Priority 1: We will generate more income for the arts

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments Participants in the groups were clear that there has been significantly reduced funding to the arts sector from government and a lack of support at local government level. There was frustration at the disparity in funding for the arts across the 5 nations (England, Scotland, Wales, NI, Rep. of Ireland).</p>	<p>There are no changes proposed to the wording of this priority. In the final strategy document, the context to this priority will make clear the seriousness of the funding situation facing the sector and the requirement of ACNI to focus their activities to generate more income and focus their activities accordingly.</p> <p>We acknowledge that the majority of sessions noted that this would require further resources within ACNI to deliver effectively.</p>

Many organisations commented on the complexities and difficulties of running organisations on decreasing budgets and it was commented that few if any new organisations have been set up in recent years.

There was also some feeling that the arts sector often loses out to the wider creative industries when it comes to advocacy and investment.

There was some feeling that the strategy needs to work hard to stem the funding decline but also some concern as to how much ACNI can do within its resources/limited capacity. Some considered that the strategy should be more radical.

Detailed feedback

There was some suggestion that ACNI needs a separate resource to generate additional income for the sector.

Many groups discussed how ACNI should go about generating more income. There was an expectation that this would involve e.g.

- More advocacy work to Department for Communities
- Working through the proposed new cross government structures as part of DfC long term vision for culture, arts and heritage
- Working with other government departments such as Department of Health and bodies such as Tourism NI to support the delivery of their objectives
- Working more on an all-Ireland basis
- Achieving European funding through Peace monies
- Seeking international investment
- Being clear about the role that the arts play in supporting the creative industries

Possible actions going forward:

The ACNI Board discussed the importance of income generation for the sector and ACNI's role in facilitating this beyond National Lottery and Exchequer funds and has agreed that the first business plan will prioritise scoping out existing income generation and partnerships as well as prospective opportunities globally to determine next steps in how ACNI will proceed.

In addition we will take forward the following activities:

- Advocate to DfC for further resources each year and in-year.
- Maintain partnerships with other government bodies and organisations.
- Support programmes for financial sustainability in the sector.
- Invest in private sector partnerships

- Influencing local councils' support for the arts
- Influencing members of the public
- Influencing politicians
- Developing links with philanthropic organisations
- Developing work with British Council
- Activity outside of NI e.g., to attract support from the Irish diaspora across the world particularly in the USA. The importance of being able to show work outside Northern Ireland was emphasised in several group discussions
- Partnership working to attract funding with other organisations
- Encourage businesses / corporates to support the arts

Specific areas for financial support were mentioned across the discussions, including:

- Accessible spaces for arts practice, collaboration, production, workshops etc.
- Accommodation for touring
- Mentors and business support
- Support to help local venues to be viable
- Funding for apprenticeships
- Support to buy equipment
- More funding for individual artists
- More emphasis on funding for people to go outside of Ireland for exhibitions or fairs etc., reaching global markets, bringing revenue back, circulating their name, looking more outwards
- Funding for programmes that develop financial sustainability
- Funding to develop a maker hub that provides mentors, guidance, funding

- Funding to develop a co-operative – providing opportunities for makers / artists for public interaction and business development
- Funding for an incubator – providing a bridge to developing skills. (Referencing models in America, Canada, Australia as well as Kilkenny)
- Funding for craft-specific training and professional development e.g., ‘Adopt a Potter’ scheme, in England, took on graduates
- Funding to bring people with arts skills into schools to nurture perspectives and futures of younger generations
- More grass roots funding for arts activity taking place at a community level
- More travel funding for artists to go abroad to research, undertake residencies or tour their work
- Increased development of ACNI resourced “Challenge Funds” to address specific themes/issues e.g., Social Inclusion

Specific comment on wording:

- A few considered that ‘generate’ was not very persuasive

The discussion in relation to this priority overlapped with the discussion in relation to Outcome 6: A sector that is more valued across all government departments.

4.3 Feedback on Priority 2: We will pursue a different approach to investment in the arts and culture that is long term and outcomes based

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments – Longer-term approach</p> <p>The idea that ACNI move to a 3-year funding relationship was generally supported. Most seemed to like the idea of ‘investment’ versus ‘funding’. It was considered that a 3-year approach would help organisations and individuals to plan with more confidence. This would offer more stability to staff and freelancers working with organisations and less time would be spent on admin / applying for funding from ACNI. It was also commented that this approach might also help with seeking funding from other funders and that having a longer-term approach to investment may help with attracting people to work in the sector (outcome 2) as it might provide longer term contracts.</p> <p>Groups clearly had questions how about how this change would work in practice including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does this relate to a 5-year strategy? - Will there be an annual fund as well for those who are unsuccessful in applying for support over three years? And would an annual fund have very different or the same priorities? - What is the status of these funds? Losing AFP and moving to lottery felt like a ‘loss of status’ for some in the discussions - How will organisational size affect the obligations organisations have under this 3-year investment cycle? 	<p>This priority was welcomed by the sector and has had careful consideration by ACNI as our funding allocation is on an annual basis.</p> <p>We have made a slight change to the wording to the outcome to remove the term culture.</p> <p>We appreciate the feedback that this priority will not tackle the issue of underfunding but that longer term arrangements will still be beneficial in relation to planning and sustainability.</p> <p>Possible actions going forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Board of ACNI has agreed to move to a three-year investment arrangement for organisations. More detailed work will be completed by ACNI on delivering funding on a three-year basis and on developing the outcomes-based approach. ● ACNI will also explore its support for individual artists with the potential of opening twice a year and for longer periods to support individual artists. ● Work will also be completed by ACNI to review our current grant making structure and processes with the intention of streamlining for applicants.

- Would a 3-year cycle mean getting stuck in low levels of funding?
- Could there be a singular application process to apply for all ACNI grants?
- Where does quality fit in here?
- Would less reporting be required? There was a feeling that onerous reporting requirements undermine the development of trusted relationships with organisations and projects. A few mentioned familiarity with the Flexible Funders Charter, and that perhaps this is something ACNI could investigate.
- How does a 3-year funding cycle relate to encouraging innovation?

General comments - Outcomes based approach

Some groups liked the clarity of an outcomes-based approach, and some felt it was what ACNI was already doing.

Questions in relation to taking an outcomes-based approach included:

- Would there be more, or less, evaluation required?
- Would the required outcomes be proportionate with the project?
- Will more support/advice be available to undertake evaluation?

Other comments relevant to ACNI support for organisations / individuals included:

- That it would be useful to have a calendar with dates for each of the funding schemes ahead of time so that organisations / projects / individuals know when funding opportunities will be opening and closing

- ACNI will publish a work plan each year with planned programmes opening when we receive our budget allocation.
- ACNI are considering a single application process for all ACNI grants so that if applicants are not successful for 3-year funding and their application is eligible for annual funding this can be assessed without applying again.
- All of ACNI's investment will be strategically important and aligned to our outcomes no matter what programme it is or what budget the investment comes from (Exchequer or National Lottery).
- ACNI will consider, within existing resources, publishing a toolkit to support organisations in measuring outcomes.
- ACNI will collect and analyse official statistics about the financial status of arts organisations.
- ACNI will strengthen how we monitor and evaluate our investment programmes, including designing and implementing an outcomes framework to guide investment processes.
- ACNI will develop a set of investment principles for all investments

- That some aspects of arts will be funded to be stable, other areas are capable of growth and that this may require different approaches
- That small pots of funding can be onerous to apply for and administer
- That organisations with healthy reserves should not be penalised for good governance
- Core funded organisations should be incentivised to support other sector organisations e.g., in terms of using rehearsal and performance space
- Are there ways to encourage collaboration between organisations in the sector rather than competition?
- Artists should be involved in funding decisions
- Some organisations need support to make an application to ACNI, this should also be considered
- Individuals have less resources open to them than organisations as they don't have eligibility or capacity to apply to trusts and foundations
- A few noted that they find it a challenge to navigate ACNI funding. They commented that travel awards no longer cover the extent of travel, that it would be good if grant programmes were open on a rolling basis and if artists could apply for multiple projects rather than single projects

There was only one general comment on the wording of this priority which related to a general comment across the strategy, which was to focus on arts rather than culture. A few noted that the language of "the Arts" might feel exclusive and unattainable to some, a suggested alternative was 'creatives'.

Revised priority 2:

We will pursue an approach to investment in the arts that is long term and outcomes based.

5. Consultation findings: Outcome 2

5.1 Feedback on Outcome 2: A sector that is more attractive to work in, more committed to workforce development and more inclusive

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments</p> <p>Generally, this outcome was supported. Discussions noted the issues workers face in the sector including low salaries and precarious contracts; not enough work at good rates so people are leaving the profession as well as moving to work in other geographic areas (e.g., Republic of Ireland) where pay rates are better; artists having other jobs outside the arts and are less able to focus on their craft. As a result of these issues there is little resource that allows organisations and artists to focus on their professional development.</p> <p>It was noted that it is difficult to work in the sector if you do not come from a background where you have some financial support. There was general interest across the groups in the universal basic income trial that is underway in the Republic of Ireland with some interested to know if such an initiative might ever be rolled out in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>It was noted that this outcome relates to the first outcome; if working in the sector is less precarious financially, and the workforce are paid fairly, then this will help to retain the existing workforce and attract new people to come and work in the sector.</p>	<p>Both the terms ‘art sector’ and ‘workforce’ will be outlined and defined in the Strategy document to ensure that it is clear what is being referred to.</p> <p>Some changes have been made to the wording of this outcome to take on board the feedback that the sector is already attractive to work in and need support to develop its people and be more inclusive.</p> <p>The Board explored ACNI developing a specific succession planning programme to support the sector and develop emerging leaders and agreed this could not be achieved within existing resources but that work would be undertaken to source a philanthropic organisation who works in this area.</p> <p>Possible actions going forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invest in a three-year programme in partnership with the Baring Foundation to support artists/freelancer wellbeing and mental health ● Invest in programmes for individual artists (e.g. SIAP, Individual Artists Digital Evolution Programme for Individuals)

From the discussions it was also clear that not everyone understood or saw themselves included in the term 'workforce'.

Detailed feedback

ACNI providing guidance on pay rates was generally welcomed. A minority said that they did not need to receive guidance as they knew the sector. However, most groups considered that equitable pay rates are an issue across the sector and that there are many different rates. A minority wanted ACNI to have a stronger stance that went beyond guidance. They wanted ACNI to make sure that funded projects paid equitable rates. However, organisations generally also wanted to be able to set their own rates. Providing guidance on rates was also considered important for other government departments. This information would demonstrate ACNI standing up for the sector. It was suggested that this guidance should include everyone in the sector including administrators and be as comprehensive as possible in terms of roles.

Specific comments on language were:

- Rather than 'attractive', perhaps 'financially realistic' as it was felt that the sector is already attractive to work in, just not from a financial point of view
- Rather than 'committed to workforce development' (as it was felt there is already commitment just not the resources), 'able to deliver workforce development'

and Travel Awards and manage the Rosemary James Memorial Trust Award.)

- Develop local, national and international showcase opportunities for arts organisations and artists.
- Work with local councils to support and enhance the provision of artistic studio and rehearsal spaces.
- Ringfence support for new/emerging artists.
- Consider additional support beyond grants (mentoring schemes, opportunities for artist collaboration).
- Work within DfC CAH strategy and support extension of Art Work apprenticeship scheme.
- Publish pay rates guidance and explore working with NICVA on pay rate scales for the arts sector

Revised outcome 2:

A sector that develops, looks after its people and is more inclusive.

5.2 Feedback on Priority 3: We will continue to incubate, protect and grow artistic talent

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments</p> <p>It was considered that the language of this priority needed to be extended to focus beyond ‘artistic talent’ to reflect all those who work in the sector including, for example, technicians and administrators.</p> <p>Other specific comments in relation to how ACNI could support entry into the profession / career development included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Themes around raising the status of the arts to ensure it is considered an attractive and worthwhile sector to enter. There was some feeling that there is a need to improve recognition of the arts as a professional career option; ACNI should ideally influence curriculum, GCSEs etc to encourage engagement in the arts - Addressing barriers to new talent entering the sector: Creatives need sustainable entry points and pathways into the sector in order to develop their careers; Funded organisations need to support new and emerging talent; Can apprenticeships be supported? - Addressing issues for those already working in the sector: Groups said that existing talent is leaving the sector due to low pay and the financial precarity of working in the sector. Finding affordable accommodation can be an issue for artists (such as actors) who need to move around from place to place to work; Affordable studio spaces were considered 	<p>Reflecting on feedback we understand that it is important artistic talent is still defined specifically in the outcome, but that developing the wider arts workforce is also important. We have amended the outcome to use both terms and used the language pertinent to ACNI role and how we can help create the conditions to grow talent and the workforce.</p> <p>Possible actions going forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ringfence investment for underrepresented artists (e.g. Minority Residency Scheme, REAP and the Creative School partnerships). ● Refresh and review the Minority Ethnic/Global majority and Rural forums. ● Build a stronger and deeper knowledge base of artists working and living conditions and the impact our funding has on them. ● Introduce new measures of diversity (e.g., socio-economic background/social class) to strengthen the evidence we have to inform decisions. ● Develop with partners schemes to improve access to the sector for disabled, D/deaf and neurodivergent artists and other workers.

difficult to find, it was suggested that ACNI could work with local authorities to help create spaces at low or reduced cost

- Finding ways to help the workforce develop: Suggestions included ACNI providing opportunities for the sector to connect with one another e.g., consider possibility of gathering together different roles to meet up, e.g., box office staff, or education officers etc; Can networking be facilitated especially for people working their way into the sector? Are there better opportunities for people to break into the sector?; Can venue spaces be used more to support career development - e.g., artists in residence programmes?; Being able to showcase work locally and internationally can contribute to development; SIAP being open only once a year was considered to limit development, could it be open on a rolling basis?
- Finding ways to ensure the sector is inclusive and supportive of D/deaf and neurodiverse artists, suggestions included: combining mentors of the D/deaf and hearing community to make diverse workspaces, supporting a D/deaf artists festival, Braille and audiobooks to help make actual artworks and exhibitions more inclusive, Include D/deaf and the blind community in educational settings- e.g. when teaching about inclusivity and art in schools, contact D/deaf organisations to see where they need most funding and help, an ambassador for the artists and disabled artists within ACNI who show up to events on the Arts Council's behalf, more disabled people on the Arts Council
- D/deaf and blind lack of information through lack of accessibility- most of the D/deaf group members weren't aware of SIAP as the information isn't accessible, more

- Explore how we consider accessibility costs within our programmes
- Regular equality reports using data to ensure we actively engage with underrepresented groups
- Enhance our work with Local Authorities to collaborate on shared interests (e.g. residencies, studio spaces)

outreach to disability schools and workshops. (22% of NI is disabled. Only 3% freelance employed in ACNI RFO, only 5% Permanent staff, and only 5% on any board membership. Therefore, there is a lack of representation in employment and Governing bodies in the art sector from the DDN community.)

Other comments included:

- People who don't get ACNI financial support - can there be some sort of endorsement of them as artists? (Or proof of a threshold they pass)
- How can smaller organisations be supported to grow talent?
- Support is needed to build the digital capacity of the sector, including the use of AI
- Whilst there was support for research on work and conditions within the sector a few raised concern that investing in a survey on the workforce when there was less money for the workforce was a bad idea
- Succession planning is an issue for the sector

Specific comments on language were:

- Suggestion to remove the term 'continue' from 'we will continue to incubate...'

Revised Priority 3:

We will create the conditions to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce.

5.3 Feedback on Priority 4: We will ensure that the arts in Northern Ireland draws on and reflects the full range of backgrounds and perspectives in our society

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments</p> <p>Groups noted that there can be many barriers faced by those who wish to engage in the arts including socio-economic background, disability, age and ethnicity.</p> <p>Ideas for how ACNI could support accessibility into the sector included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focusing on increasing the diversity of artists giving visibility to minority artists - Providing access to mentoring and development schemes - Developing a framework for training for D/deaf, neurodiverse and disabled artists - Working with education so that people with disabilities see arts as a possible career - Supporting accessibility audits. Organisations suggest that they have found this a hard skill to find and that perhaps ACNI could consider providing a centralised resource - Linking to the DfC programme, 'Access to Work' which provides support to access employment - Developing an information hub that provides information on accessibility of the sector - Identifying the groups that are missing and finding ways to encourage engagement from them - Finding ways to tackle key issues such as class, geography 	<p>Reflecting on the feedback the outcome has been amended to make it clear what our intention is (i.e. inclusivity and that the sector reflects society).</p> <p>Progress has been made on supporting D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists but more needs to be done. ACNI will monitor support for D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists and signpost effectively and ensure all processes are accessible.</p> <p>ACNI have considered how to appropriately include costs to support accessibility within existing budgets and within all grant programmes. We will not restrict this to applicants to ensure organisations can work with a range of people and accessibility costs will be covered within the existing budget.</p> <p>ACNI to regularly measure public attitudes on engagement and participation in arts.</p> <p>Organisations to consider measuring social class of audiences, participants of specific programmes and ACNI to consider how venues can share this information appropriately within grant arrangements.</p>

- Providing career development support for artists at all levels
- Providing support for childcare costs
- Inviting representative experts onto boards or panels to inform ACNI
- Considering how to make the application process as accessible as possible, e.g., it was commented that the application process is challenging for many artists for whom English isn't a first language, artists with disabilities / neurodiverse artists. Processes were streamlined during COVID-19, and this made a big difference.
- Offering more than mentoring to artists of colour / ME artists? Learn from the Go For It programme
- Providing specific support to D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse (DDN) artists to allow them to get the pay they deserve e.g., support around the provision of interpreters
- More support for communication services such as BSL/ISL
- ACNI could share case studies of people working in the arts with disabilities but not just artists, it's important to include other roles in the workforce such as technicians to show that the sector is inclusive and to help those with disabilities consider the arts as a possible career option
- Ensuring good clear accessible information on how artists can get support and raising awareness of funding programmes
- AFPs should be incentivised to work with global majority artists. It was noted that there are no organisations that focus solely on developing the skills of global majority actors.

Detailed feedback

Specific comments on language were:

Possible actions going forward

- Strengthen opportunities for artists to collaborate and exchange ideas.
- Invest in creative industries programmes and organisations.
- Consider how we enhance R&D within existing investment (e.g. 3 year funding cycles)
- Ensure outcomes measurement cater for personal development and risk taking
- As part of ACNI development role lead on knowledge exchange events topic led to give artists and organisations from a range of art forms the opportunity to engage and discuss important topics
- Work within DfC CAH strategy to support digital development and innovation in sectoral organisations

- Use the term D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent rather than disability
- 'Background' – was considered to be too narrow / an outdated term to use
- Some disliked 'more committed to workforce development' as it looks like the sector are not committed currently

Other specific comments included:

- Querying if the resources assigned to the accessibility card scheme were enough

Revised priority 4:

We will ensure that the arts sector in Northern Ireland is inclusive and reflects society.

6. Consultation findings: Outcome 3

6.1 Feedback on Outcome 3: A sector that can develop through experimentation and innovation

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments</p> <p>This was generally welcomed as an outcome. However, groups considered that in the current economic and funding climate that it can be difficult to experiment and innovate and that funding structures frequently work against innovation and that artists can be reluctant to take risks as they are concerned in case it means they will lose funding.</p> <p>A few craft sector contacts considered there to be an issue with supporting people to experiment and innovate as they believe you should already be doing that in your business.</p> <p>Groups particularly noted that part of experimentation and innovation is trial and error and permission to fail as a project, and they were unclear how this would be managed by ACNI.</p> <p>Groups discussed, what does innovation mean? It was generally agreed that it shouldn't only be considered as 'digital' and that methods and processes can themselves also be considered as experimental / innovative and that it is not always solely about the output or outcome being innovative.</p>	<p>ACNI will provide a definition of what they consider innovation to be.</p> <p>This outcome varied the most between the different types of groups we explored this with. The wording has been amended to reflect what ACNI's role in experimentation and innovation is within the constraints of public funding.</p> <p>A number of areas on how ACNI could meet this outcome were discussed. These are explained in response to priority 5 below.</p>

<p>Other groups noted that innovation may be innovating the process of creating rather than the output or that ACNI should not over focus on experimentation and innovation when it should be about continuing to maintain the things that are working well and delivering positive outcomes.</p> <p>Other groups did not feel it was ACNI's role to be 'innovative' and that the artists and sector were more suited to this.</p>	
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Revised outcome 3:
A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation.

6.2 Feedback on Priority 5: We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts and culture sector

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>Detailed feedback Discussions focused on how innovation and artistic risk taking could be supported by ACNI.</p> <p>Ideas included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A requirement for openness at the initial funding stage - Separate funds for experimental / innovative / R&D activities - Year one of a three-year cycle being allocated to experimentation / innovation / R&D - Inclusion of these themes within SIAP 	<p>ACNI are considering the best ways to deliver this priority. At the moment considerations include:</p> <p>Exploring how innovation and experimentation can be measured and encouraged within existing programmes. Encouraging R&D within existing investment as part of a 3-year relationship</p> <p>A shift to outcomes that can include personal development.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ability to re-profile your project as you go along to enable innovation - Funding of individuals or a consortium of individuals to enable dynamism outside of organisations or legal entities - Catering for multiple art forms / hybrid artists - Including flexibility on timing, funding may need to be over a longer time - Development in connection with other government departments on themes such as health and education - This also relates to artist development so links to Outcome 2 and its associated priorities and this could form part of a fund focused on development - ACNI providing collaborative/development spaces at low or no cost to facilitate innovation and collaboration across organisations, art forms, sector etc. It was also considered that collaboration spaces will allow for artists to inform each other about developments, opportunities etc - Innovation hubs in rural areas - Access to new technologies may be required - Consider innovative funding models e.g., Funding without the requirement of being a registered company until the project is underway - Can links be made to Invest NI innovation vouchers? <p>Participants wanted to understand what this priority would mean for evaluation and noted the importance of the development of trusted relationships between ACNI and the projects they fund. Some mentioned the use of the IVOR model in this context.</p> <p>Other comments included:</p>	<p>As part of ACNI development role the hosting of Knowledge exchange events (Once a year / Across art form / Topics led e.g climate).</p> <p>Ensure documentation of the process is valid in outcomes tools if personal development/learnings from this.</p> <p>Maintaining Creative Industries programmes for artists and arts organisations working in this area to experiment with new and immersive technologies.</p> <p>Encouraging collaboration between artists across art form boundaries to explore and experiment.</p>
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There is an overlap on the detail of this priority between creative industries and the arts and this needs clarification.

Quality relates to innovation, as it can come after several iterations, how might it be addressed?

Touring does not necessarily relate to innovation and artistic risk taking; it can only be undertaken with a certain amount of financial security and with a developed product.

Specific comments on language were:

- Language needs to be different from 'risk', - innovation implies a learning process, not risk or failure, keep language positive
- Should mention interdisciplinary practice / approaches

Revised priority 5:

We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector.

7. Consultation findings: Outcome 4

7.1 Feedback on Outcome 4: A sector that is more responsive to key social issues, promotes social cohesion and cares about the environment

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments Groups were very clear that the arts make a huge contribution to society socially, economically and culturally and talked about this using a wide range of examples. There was some feeling therefore that the expression of this outcome was too narrow focusing on social issues and at the same time too generic. There was also concern that the arts should not be seen simply as a way to address social issues and that arts are for many people an escape from the pressures of daily life. A few also raised concerns that artists are sometimes ill-supported to provide all this support and help, and that more support needs to be provided to them. There was also a general comment wanting to see economic impact included within the outcomes somewhere.</p> <p>Detailed feedback Specific comments on language were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Groups disliked the terms ‘more responsive’, ‘social issues’ and ‘social cohesion’. 	<p>There was a diverse range of views on this outcome and the role of the arts within it. The majority of people acknowledged the significant value of the arts on society and the economy and how we can better capture this impact. They also acknowledged the role of ACNI as a public funder and aligning to wider government priorities.</p> <p>The outcome has been amended to reflect the conversation and to make it clear about what our goal is in this area.</p> <p>Actions were discussed on how ACNI could meet this goal in the priorities below.</p>

Revised outcome 4:

A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment

7.2 Feedback on Priority 6: We will invest in arts and cultural projects that address key social issues including social cohesion

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments</p> <p>Groups were clear that the arts provide social benefits in a wide range of ways in general to wellbeing through participation but also that it can be a uniting activity that also can provide a voice to underrepresented groups and a space for groups to represent their views.</p> <p>Some were concerned that the arts are considered to be able to solve all social issues.</p> <p>It was noted that to undertake projects around social issues that you need to have good connections with community and voluntary sector organisations and that this can be challenging.</p> <p>Detailed feedback</p> <p>Ideas for ways to help ACNI deliver work in this area included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Considering if there is a way to align to social prescription funded activities - Facilitate collaboration with charities relevant to key themes - Targeting activity to areas of deprivation - Consideration should also be given to the mental health of artists themselves - Provide support for minority ethnic artists and minority ethnic groups 	<p>Reflecting on the feedback, we have removed the term social cohesion and social issues. This is part of what we do, but not all of what we do so we want to make it clear this is not the only investment priority.</p> <p>Possible actions going forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop one rolling National Lottery programme that contributes to social and economic benefits (this amalgamates current programmes with the intention of streamlining the process for clients and ACNI) ● Independently evaluate the impact of all lottery investment to demonstrate impacts against key social and economic outcomes ● E.g. outcomes: Excellent experiences in the arts for all, artistic development, fostering community relations, supporting learning experiences and appreciation for arts for children and young people, supporting mental health and wellbeing for people in Northern Ireland, supporting the tourist sector and job creation in Northern Ireland ● Work within DfC CAH strategy to expedite cross departmental and public sector collaboration in relation to health and social care

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Provide examples of good practice to support with monitoring and evaluation- Consider how to develop structures which support collaboration- Importance of public spaces being used to showcase / promote arts for free <p>Specific comments on language were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Priority should mention reconciliation, conflict, legacy	
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Revised priority 6:
We will support arts projects that address contemporary societal challenges

7.3 Feedback on Priority 7: We will increase public engagement with climate change by empowering the arts and culture sector and work to reduce the carbon footprint of funded organisations

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments</p> <p>The discussion around this theme strongly endorsed that climate should be a theme within the ACNI strategy but that it cannot be a responsibility of the sector alone. There was concern as to how the sector can really address climate issues with a lack of funding, as well as a lack of control over the spaces that offices are based in etc, and a general sense that each part of the sector will face very different issues (e.g., potters need to fire a kiln, audiences need to travel to gigs and shows, artists need to create items to sell) so it can't be a case of one size fits all.</p> <p>Groups felt strongly that addressing climate change requires significant financial resources e.g., to retrofit buildings to make them climate friendly, but financial resources were not the only concern raised. Some groups were clear there is a lack of knowledge around this area, particularly of the sorts of interventions that the sector might be able to make. Groups said there is a need for knowledge and expertise in relation to initiatives that might be achievable.</p> <p>Groups were also clear that any initiatives should be sincere and go beyond greenwashing or ticking a box. There was resistance to ACNI simply asking projects to measure their carbon emissions / trying to be more environmentally friendly without the proper funding and support to do so.</p>	<p>Reflecting on this outcome we have amended the wording following the discussions. It is clear that the sector has a role to play in using arts to help society engage with environmental issues and we believe the amended wording reflects that.</p> <p>Possible actions going forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To encourage and promote work that engages with climate change we will ensure it is a core theme in our investment so we can support and enable artists and organisations to respond to this and also capture and report the activity ● We will encourage sustainable policies and practice within all of our investment ● Invest in partnerships with organisations in GB and ROI that are working on the response of the arts sector to the climate emergency. ● Undertake an organisation-wide environmental review and publish a corporate climate policy and action plan on energy, water, waste and business travel reduction. ● We will represent NI on a four nations cross government group in relation to climate and share key policy learnings and evidence relevant to NI.

It was strongly endorsed that the arts sector can uniquely play an important role in articulating the issues/challenges that climate change presents, helping society to engage with this important issue, educating and raising awareness around it. It was also commented that climate anxiety is a growing issue amongst young people.

Detailed feedback

Specific ideas for how ACNI can help the sector to address the issue of climate change included:

- Support collaboration to share knowledge that is already available (e.g., Theatre Green Book / Julie's Bicycle / albert.com guidelines)
- Provide basic guidance on how to develop an environmental policy / how to start to think about these issues
- Encourage re-use, re-cycling and less wastage. For example, provide funding for the infrastructure that helps with the sharing of resources or provide funding for resources that can be shared (e.g., kit)
- Support projects with the climate friendly initiatives that they suggest they can deliver
- Encourage the use of local talent where possible (rather than people travelling here all the time)
- Highlight the things that the sector can do
- Learn from the activity undertaken under this banner in Southern Ireland e.g., they have key workers on sustainability. Project call Eco Boat

It was acknowledged the role that the wider NI Executive has to play in meeting this outcome.

- We will build a case for capital support for climate proofing.

Revised priority 7:

We will support the sector and act as a catalyst to drive awareness, engagement and positive change in response to climate change.

8. Consultation findings: Outcome 5

8.1 Feedback on Outcome 5: More people, regardless of background can access arts experiences

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>The importance of this outcome was underlined in the discussions acknowledging the barriers to accessing arts (more detail is provided under priority 8 below).</p> <p>There was some suggestion that the language was too basic, and that enjoyment is the aim with a quality experience not just access.</p> <p>Specific comments on language were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 'Regardless of background' – was considered to be too narrow / an outdated term although people understood what we were trying to achieve by this	<p>It is important for us to acknowledge that this outcome isn't only about more people enjoying arts experiences (i.e. more of the same people who currently do). Reflecting on the language 'regardless of background' is outdated and has been changed to 'people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences' which is what ACNI's strategic intention is.</p> <p>More detail is provided in the priority below.</p>

Revised outcome 5:

People from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences

8.2 Feedback on Priority 8: We will invest in arts and cultural projects that deepens, widens and diversifies audiences

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments Groups discussed the complexities of growing and diversifying audiences. They noted the tensions between seeking to develop new material (to attract new and different audiences) as well as the necessity to maintain income from ‘traditional’ audiences, as well as the issues around supporting audiences to deepen their engagement with art forms. This priority was considered to relate to outcome 2 and the importance of people from diverse backgrounds being able to see diversity represented in the arts workforce, as well as in content. It was noted that engaging with certain audiences can incur additional costs.</p> <p>Detailed feedback Discussions covered a wide range of themes that impact access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perception barriers i.e., those who are not inclined to attend an arts event as it is not something people from their background do / it is not something they have been brought up with - Financial barriers i.e., not being able to afford to take the whole family to the theatre, or to attend as an individual - Physical barriers within venues i.e., venues not being physically accessible or shows not being adapted to meet your needs 	<p>Reflecting on the discussion the wording of the outcome has been amended to remove the term culture.</p> <p>Some areas were discussed on how ACNI could meet this outcome. Areas to be explored are below:</p> <p>ACNI will continue to encourage access through all its project work by funding projects that reach groups for whom engagement with the arts is non-existent or limited, for example those based in rural areas.</p> <p>ACNI’s funding applications and guidance to make explicit the potential tension between outcomes around risk and innovation and audience engagement. Guidance documents should make it clear that ACNI does not expect applicants to deliver all outcomes.</p> <p>Possible actions going forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prioritise activities to specifically increase the engagement of children and young people, older people, and groups of people with low engagement in arts activities. ● Promote and raise awareness about arts projects across all media channels targeting under-represented groups.

- Disparities in venues, rehearsal spaces and resources across Northern Ireland e.g., rural areas lacking venues or not being able to fill venues
- Transport barriers i.e., public transport being unavailable or limited

Suggestions for ways that ACNI could help to deepen, widen and diversify audiences included:

- Greater partnership working and co-promotion of events across the sector if they are related/in same area/in same time period
- There is a need to look at marketing more seriously across the sector, the sector lacks a clear engagement strategy
- ACNI could provide support / advice re language and arts engagement, demystifying arts language especially in relation to visual arts
- Provide case studies on how to engage new audiences / particular audiences
- Encouragement of audiences to support local, less well-known artists
- Need to maintain and extend support to enable organisations to reach D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people
- Provide a central point for providing information on accessibility / provide disability training across the sector
- Arts Council Collection needs more exposure through schools and colleges so that younger audiences have a 'benchmark'
- Enable everyday access to the ACNI collection – digitally and physically

Other themes discussed included:

- Support the Arts Council NI Collection, the leading public contemporary art collection for NI, to reach more people.
- Develop local, national and international opportunities for arts organisations and artists.
- Commission the General Population Survey of participation and attendance to arts and cultural events yearly.
- Collect national statistics about the activities and outputs of arts organisations.
- Support areas such as the Rural engagement, Arts and Older people, and Creative Schools Partnership through the new lottery programme.
- Work with the UK/Ireland Arts Councils on launching the UK wide Access Scheme 'All In' supporting venues to ensure d/Deaf, neurodiverse and disabled audiences have access to arts experiences
- Value marketing and audience development activities in investment decisions as equally as other areas
- Ensure venues we support share audience data
- Work within DfC CAH strategy to deploy technology and innovation to reach and build audiences

- ACNI 'premium payments', how they are administered and whether they achieve what they set out to achieve
- Use of streaming during the pandemic was raised as a way of helping with access but it was noted that it seems to have fallen away
- The complexities that can occur trying to get data from ticketing / venues etc.

The idea of seeking to introduce new measures of diversity (e.g., socio-economic) was welcomed.

Specific feedback on the wording of this outcome was to remove the word culture as some felt best to focus on the arts.

Revised priority 8:

We will invest in the arts sector to deepen, widen and diversify audiences.

9. Consultation findings: Outcome 6

9.1 Feedback on Outcome 6: A sector that is more valued across all government departments

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>It was strongly suggested that society should be added to this statement as members of the public in NI should be encouraged to support / realise the benefits of the arts and they are mentioned in priority 9 so should feature in the outcome.</p> <p>It was noted that ACNI should work through the new cross government structures proposed in the Arts and Heritage strategy.</p>	<p>It is clear this outcome was highly important across the majority of engagement sessions and was mentioned in nearly every other outcome. There was acknowledgement here that advocacy is not only the role of ACNI but of the entire sector and the public and that working together on this goal is of vital importance.</p> <p>We have added 'valued across society and government' to reflect the comments groups made about the people of NI valuing artists and art work.</p>

Revised outcome 6:

A sector that is more valued across society and government.

9.2 Feedback on Priority 9: We will continue to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and people in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts on society

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments</p> <p>This priority was discussed regularly through each of the other outcomes, as it was acknowledged as very important. There was some frustration at the difficulties of influencing government departments and local politicians to support the arts. Some groups wanted ACNI to do more to lobby and campaign for the sector. Some acknowledged that ACNI, as an arms-length body, can only do so much but there was a suggestion that ACNI could do more to help the sector to lobby for itself. Suggestions included providing information in relation to how to lobby local MP's, bringing the sector together to connect and collaborate with one another and using compliance data to illustrate the work and impact of the sector. Some noted the work that ACNI does to champion artists through hosting showcasing events, undertaking case studies, featuring artists / projects on social media etc. This was all welcomed and considered helpful.</p> <p>There was also extensive discussion of the range of value that the arts bring to society. This covered themes such as: impact on the economy, on culture, on society and on individual wellbeing.</p> <p>Some wanted to know more about the advocacy work that ACNI currently undertakes and were keen to see the sector develop ways to support this work and build on it.</p>	<p>The wording of this outcome has been amended to reflect the joint role we have to play in advocating in partnership with the sector to raise awareness and demonstrate the positive role of the arts in society.</p> <p>Activities on how to meet this goal were discussed and some areas that could be explored are:</p> <p>ACNI shares more of the policy activity that it does in an update on newsletter and in webinars.</p> <p>ACNI reviewing our evidence section in the website so evidence is more thematic based i.e., the economic case for the arts, the role that the arts play in wellbeing.</p> <p>ACNI and sector strategic campaign - roles across arts sector (Freelancer, tech, set design, artist etc).</p> <p>ACNI to facilitate engagement sessions once a year focused on particular themes - cross art form.</p> <p>ACNI to share advocacy work and messaging with the sector.</p>

Detailed feedback

Ideas for ways to demonstrate the impact of the sector included:

- Develop the economic arguments around the arts, consider social return on investment
- Emphasise key messages e.g., Connection of arts to positive mental health, intrinsic role that arts play in modern life, important role that arts play in tourism
- General strengthening the ACNI evidence base
- Support the sector to lobby for itself
- Look at the longer-term impact of funding organisations and individuals
- Welcome opportunities for organisations to come together as 'matchmaking' events to share programmes and collaborate where appropriate - welcome ACNI to facilitate and organise as they have the whole picture
- Bringing politicians and civil servants to key events to experience the arts
- Use case studies, data, surveys etc to make the case
- Consider messages used by other wealthy nations
- Set up a sector group for advocacy
- Set up annual forum for sharing data
- Make impact data as easy to read and digest as possible
- Making good use of social media
- Design data monitoring so that it captures return on investment, that can then be used

It was also considered important to encourage members of the public to appreciate the arts and to not expect it to be free but to put a value on arts experiences.

Specific comments on language were:

Possible actions going forward:

- Commission and undertake research and evaluation projects and share results widely.
- Monitor and evaluate our investment programmes focusing on the short term and medium-term outcomes of arts organisations.
- Provide guidance and support to capture and use stronger administrative and evaluation data.
- Develop an advocacy strategy and advocacy page on the website as a sector resource
- Share case studies and promote projects across media channels.
- Commission the General Population Survey yearly.
- Run engagement events once a year focused on key themes
- Work with the sector on joint advocacy messaging
- Invest in strategic longitudinal research projects.
- Invest in collaborative research projects across the UK and Ireland
- Explore specific campaigns to showcase arts

<p>- It was suggested that there is no need for the word continue as it looks defensive</p>	
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Revised priority 9:
We will work in partnership with the sector to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and peoples in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts.

9.3 Feedback on Priority 10: We will continue to work as an effective and efficient organisation

Consultation feedback	ACNI response
<p>General comments There was not very much discussion of this priority, however this does not mean that it was not accepted as important. In general, the consultation discussions were positive and well received. People welcomed the opportunity to engage with ACNI and wanted to know more about its work. Some wanted ACNI to engage more with the sector, they wanted an ongoing conversation and regular engagement in the future with feedback e.g., on progress delivering the strategy.</p> <p>Detailed feedback There was some awareness of the limited resources that ACNI have access to and a few suggested that ACNI should perhaps review whether it can deliver what it aims to deliver with its existing resources and organisational structure. There was also some comment that ACNI should raise awareness of their methods,</p>	<p>The wording of the outcome has not been amended as the majority of people agreed with this. It was acknowledged this is an operational/internal goal but the importance of getting this right to support delivery.</p> <p>Some areas on how ACNI could meet this goal were discussed and could be explored:</p> <p>ACNI to review data and information held / streamline data capture</p> <p>Implement recommendations from a review of grants process and systems.</p> <p>Streamline lottery programmes into one open rolling programme.</p>

processes and structures, ensure transparency of decision making and ensure they have artists/arts community involved in decision making.

Specific comments on language were:

- It was suggested that there is no need for the word continue as it looks defensive

An annual independent staff survey with results shared internally and an action plan developed.

Possible actions going forward:

- Ensure we are accountable and transparent to the public through effective operations that promote best value for money.
- Foster a skilled, agile and diverse workforce.
- Work in an efficient and timely manner.
- Model diversity, equity and accessibility through all of our activities.
- Invest in our technology for processing applications, monitoring and evaluation activities, and streamlining data end to end (application – assessment – impact).
- Develop a staff training programme
- Collect data on perceptions and satisfaction of our work from our partners
- Commission an annual staff engagement survey and develop action plans
- Explore a suitable premises to support agile working

Revised priority 10:

We will work as an effective and efficient organisation

10. Summary Revisions

Mission: To develop and champion the arts in Northern Ireland through investment and advocacy.

Vision: A society where all people can experience a thriving arts sector that is recognised as essential to creativity, well-being and social and economic prosperity.

Values

Expertise: We use our experience and expertise to support the arts sector in NI through investing, advocating and evidencing the impact of our sector

Inclusion: We recognise the importance of diversity in the arts sector and are committed to being inclusive and accessible to all.

Collaboration: We value our strong relationships with partners, and their ability to enhance arts programmes across NI and beyond.

Integrity: We are open, transparent, and fair in how we distribute public funding.

Outcomes for the Arts sector

Outcomes	Outcome 1: A more financially stable arts sector.	Outcome 2: A sector that develops, looks after its people and is more inclusive.	Outcome 3: A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation.
Priorities	1. We will generate more income for the arts. 2. We will pursue an approach to investment in the arts that is long term and outcomes based.	3. We will create the conditions to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce. 4. We will ensure that the arts sector in Northern Ireland is inclusive and reflects society.	5. We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector.

Outcomes for society

Outcomes	Outcome 4: A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment	Outcome 5: More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences	Outcome 6: A sector that is more valued across society and government.
Priorities	<p>6. We will support arts projects that address contemporary societal challenges.</p> <p>7. We will support the sector and act as a catalyst to drive awareness, engagement and positive change in response to climate change.</p>	<p>8. We will invest in the arts sector to deepen, widen and diversify audiences.</p>	<p>9. We will work in partnership with the sector to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and peoples in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts.</p> <p>10. We will work as an effective and efficient organisation.</p>

Appendix 1 List of engagement sessions

Worksh op	Who organised it?	Sector/Group	Date	Venue	Attendance (ex project team)
1	Community Arts Partnership and strategy team	Community arts	11th August	CAP offices	10
2	Arts and Business and strategy team	Businesses	23rd August	MAC	17
3	Craft NI and strategy team	Crafts	10th August	Clotworthy House, Antrim	14
4	University of Atypical and strategy team	Artists with disabilities and D/deaf	28th July	Ledger Studio, UoA	20
5	Theatre and Dance, Olwen Dawe and strategy team	Performing arts / freelancers	2nd August	Crescent Arts Centre	16
6	Visual Arts Ireland and strategy team	Visual arts	25th July	109 - 113 Royal Avenue, Belfast	9
7	Young at Art and strategy team	Children	10th September	MAC	28

8	Youth Action and strategy team	Adolescents	2nd August	Youth Action Building College Square North	30
9	Rural Deliberative Forum, Nigel McKinney and strategy team	Organisations and artists in rural settings	25th July	Online	5
10	ME Forum, Alf Desire and strategy team	ME organisations and artists	25th July	Online	4
11	RFA and Strategy team	Session 1 Medium to large arts organisations	17th July	Cultúrlann, 216 Falls Road, Belfast	14
12	RFA and Strategy team	Session 2 Medium to large arts organisations	17th July	Cultúrlann, 216 Falls Road, Belfast	5
13	RFA and Strategy team	Session 3 Medium to large arts organisations	20th July	The Millenium Forum, Derry/Londonderry	11
14	RFA and Strategy team	Session 4 Medium to large arts organisations	24th July	Grand Opera House, Belfast	12
15	RFA and Strategy team	Session 5 Small to medium organisations	2nd August	Online	6

16	RFA and Strategy team	Session 1 Individuals / organisations involved with key Lottery funded projects	31st July	Online	7
17	RFA and Strategy team	Session 2 Individuals / organisations involved with key Lottery funded projects	3th August	Online	4
18	RFA and Strategy team	Session 3 Individuals / organisations involved with key Lottery funded projects	4th August	Online	10
19	RFA and Strategy team	Session 4 Individuals / organisations involved with key Lottery funded projects	8th August	Online	5
20	RFA and Strategy team	Creative Industries	24th July	Grand Opera House, Belfast	8
21	RFA and Strategy team	Local Authorities Art managers	8th August	Online	5
22	RFA and Strategy team	Voluntary sector, arts and education, universities, amateur artists and organisations	1st August	Online	10

23	RFA and Strategy team	Freelance artists who could not attend their sector-specific sessions with resource organisations	19th July	Seamus Heaney Homeplace, Bellaghy	3
24	RFA and Strategy team	Freelance artists who could not attend their sector-specific sessions with resource organisations	20th July	The Millenium Forum, Derry/Londonderry	9

Update sessions:

Webinar/Update	Who organised it?	Sector/Group	Date	Venue	Attendance (ex project team)
1	Arts Council NI	Mixed artists and organisations	16/11/2023	Online	23
2	Arts Council NI	Mixed artists and organisations	17/11/2023	Online	16
3	Arts Council NI	Mixed artists and organisations	20/11/2023	Online	11
4	Arts Council NI	Mixed artists and organisations	22/11/2023	Online	27

Appendix 2: Key themes across different engagement groups

In each of these discussions key themes included the following:

Theatre and Dance NI

- There needs to be more consideration and funding for individual artists. There is an over reliance on funding venues.
- The nature of the arts often being interdisciplinary needs to be clearly articulated. Working across artforms is hugely important but also challenging.
- Artists are well-versed in working on socially-minded projects. Their expertise should be documented and supported.
- We need to change the public perception of the arts. People need to know that is vital and a viable career option.

University of Atypical

- Remove the ableist viewpoint of art and artists. More access to engagement and support makes artists with disabilities thrive.
- The language of the arts might feel exclusive and attainable to some. Emphasis needs to be on creatives or creativity.
- 22% of NI has disabilities, however only 3% of freelancers employed in ACNI AFP orgs have disabilities. Only 5% are in permanent roles. Only 5% are in Board positions. Therefore, there is a lack of representation in employment and governing bodies.

Arts and Business

- The arts are key to making Northern Ireland a place where people want to work, live and invest.
- The arts seem to be pushed aside when competing for funds, despite their importance to social and economic wellbeing.
- ACNI's vision needs to talk about the value of the arts and be more ambitious in its language. ACNI's strategy needs to support pathways into the arts sector and to retain and develop the current workforce. This includes apprenticeships and leadership programmes.

Rural Deliberative Forum

- It is important to be clear about what ACNI will be doing differently. Also, articulate what would happen without this funding?

- Support for 3 years funding. This was offered before. This is a positive for audience development. It is also a positive for workforce development. It ensures that the money reaches the right people.
- There are many opportunities to support climate change. It is important for artists to engage in this issue. Could this issue go further?

Minority and Ethnic Minority Deliberative Forum

- There is support for the 3 years funding strategy - present the strategy in terms of how more funding creates more impact. Not in terms of less funding would be detrimental.
- Support for more research on the working and living conditions of artists.
- Innovation is heavily weighted towards digital and new technology. Group unsure about how ACNI understands innovation. What is innovation for ACNI? Would this lead to issues about representation? Who has access to resources to be innovative?

Visual Arts Ireland

- Questions about how best to engage and advocate, fostering more engaged politicians. Sentiment that the public should not be advocated towards as they are only interested in education and hospital beds. Can ACNI increase lobbying/advocacy and spend resources to ensure artists' voices are heard using the terminology the executive wants to hear?
- Sentiment that "Experimentation" is woolly. Needs something more specific e.g. Support for the creation of creative hubs where businesses and individuals appreciate what the arts brings to them.
- Feeling that ACNI should do more than just distribution of funding. E.g. Hands on mentoring, communication and recognition from ACNI officers as part of the grant.

Youth Action

- Relevant rates of pay are needed to retain and encourage people to work in the arts, be they artists, actors, technicians, front of house staff, directors and administrators.
- Formal education does not promote or encourage the arts as a career option.
- Technology is useful but cannot replace live, face to face real time experiences as a performer or audience member. Issue based theatre /artistic practice enables young people to be heard and issues addressed in a creative non-threatening manner with their peers and with the wider community.

- The importance of arts groups where young people can meet each other and make friendships as well as build confidence.
- Increased opportunities for Public Spaces being used to showcase/promote the arts free of charge. The Arts require more formal recognition in relation to the positive impacts they make.

Craft NI

- More emphasis on funding for people to go outside of Ireland for exhibitions or fairs etc., reaching global markets, bringing revenue back, circulating their name, looking more outwards.
- Need to revisit old strategies that worked, where is the support for early career/emerging makers starting out, reference to 'LEDU' initiatives – these would have included apprenticeships with makers; some supported space (formerly Ormeau Avenue with table space, sewing machines).
- Need to shift perspectives of having an economically viable career in arts at a young level, needs for educating government, education curriculums and parents.

Community Arts Partnership

- It is necessary for the arts to be explicitly promoted as a “enabler” to well-being, increased visibility and promotion is required. Assistance is required in relation to “how to sell” the arts.
- Increased private sector investment is required. Increased presence / space within the Business World is necessary, a platform at business conferences needs to be escalated and sustained.
- There is a need for increased advocacy from ACNI. ACNI needs to have an increased brokerage role within and between other Government Departments.
- Some support for the idea that the duration of the new Strategy needs to be longer than 5 years as this will allow for a “longer lens” “vision” to be worked towards while capturing the associated “generational change(s)” during the operational period of the strategy there will be reviews and if necessary required changes to priorities.
- Innovation is not only about digital. One person raised concerns about the ownership of digital processes. The artists put in all the efforts, but are compensated poorly. This is likely to make living conditions for artists worse.

Creative industries

- The importance of ACNI / ACNI activities remains relevant and modernising - digital, AI and the role of arts (digital capacity of the sector a challenge).
- ACNI's role in demonstrating economic impact and selling success is important.
- Collaboration and partnerships are important and alignment with other government departments (e.g. DfE, Tourism NI).
- Showing the importance of the arts role in the broader Creative Industries pipeline and shared success is important.

Local Authority

- Underlined the importance of collective discussion and engagement on areas of joint interest. It was agreed that ACNI and Local Authorities need to meet at least twice a year.
- Local Authorities face challenges in relation to taking risks with new programming/products without the appropriate marketing/audience development.
- Match funding opportunities are important as they make it easier for Local Authorities to engage with key decision makers on these opportunities (REAP mentioned as a great opportunity).
- Noted the importance of knowledge sharing and data sharing across Local Authorities and ACNI to support key strategic messaging (e.g. open to ACNI leadership direction on pay rates).
- Local Authorities are open to opportunities around exploring residency opportunities across local venues.

Young at art

- Children acknowledged that certain art might not be for everyone, and that is okay. There was also a sense that 'art' is seen as a hobby, or something extra that you do, like a sport as opposed to something that is woven into their educational lives. They were very astute in recognizing that many people may not know where to go to access art – i.e. galleries, theatres, etc. It was also very clear that the children who attended this session had several activities on, and thus sometimes were not participating in certain art activities because they did not have time. It became clear in the session that many children associate art with being fun and exciting – especially drama, while others can find it stressful or difficult – particularly referencing visual art or art they do in school. But overall, the feedback

suggested that from a child's point of view art is a hobby or extra activity, it is not something they get to do or learn much about in school, and for it to become a career you have to become someone famous.

- Parents thought that providing access to schools to engage with art more frequently will increase its 'excitement'. Currently schools do not have the resources to take their classes on more than one trip a year, generally speaking, and so this is rarely an artistic or cultural trip unless it is funded elsewhere. This, in combination with the lack of importance placed on the arts in schools makes it secondary, and not very exciting or appealing to young people unless it is already an interest of theirs or they have been provided access to it outside of their school environment, which is not an opportunity every child has.

Voluntary organisations

- Acknowledgement that government investment in arts is declining and focus should be on dedicated artists and arts organisations (e.g. of REAP, AOP as good examples of collaboration).
- How can voluntary organisations/third sector support the advocacy message of arts (e.g. AOP community development)?
- Good practice in community development, how it can be applied in arts (e.g. funding for new/small organisations/individuals that have never applied before?)?
- The role of volunteers and amateur organisations in the broader ecosystem could be acknowledged even if investment is not there to support it.

Appendix 3: Summary of key themes across all engagement - consensus and debate

Key areas of consensus:

- Support for the 6 outcomes, with some comments about making the wording clearer and sharper.
- Support for ACNI arriving at an ambitious vision and mission.
- Consensus on the collective role of ACNI and the sector to raise awareness about the value of the arts.
- Support for a multi-year funding cycle. This in turn will have a positive impact on the other outcomes.
- Concerns about outcomes and the monitoring and evaluation efforts needed to measure them.

Key areas of debate:

- Does the Arts Council have the right balance between funding for organisations and artists?
- What does the Arts Council mean by innovation? Is it skewed towards digital technology?
- Can the Arts Council do more than just providing funding? What type of development services should it offer?
- What can the Arts Council do to support climate change? Whilst there was clear consensus that the arts sector should be involved in this agenda, the sessions did not provide clear answers as to what that involvement should be.
- Whilst there was support for audience development, there were concerns about whether some of the other outcomes would conflict with trying to engage with wider audiences. How to best find that balance?
- What is the role of ACNI to support workforce development? Whilst there was a clear understanding that ACNI is not a regulator, some of the participants felt it could play a stronger role in enforcing pay rates for artists. Some organisations did not agree with this role as this could affect their cost schedules.