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*21 December 2007*

Dear Ms McGinnis

**Re: Response to Draft Budget 2008-2011**

I wish to express my deep concern and dismay at the proposed arts settlement outlined in the Draft Budget and Priorities 2008-11 and to urge the Executive to increase the arts allocation to prevent a crisis in the sector.

The proposed settlement will only increase available Arts Council funding by £4.25million, a sum which fails even to cover the £4.5million raided from the arts lottery budget. The settlement also falls well short of raising Northern Ireland's per capita arts spend to £11.55, currently Northern Ireland invests just £6.13 per person, in stark contrast to England (£8.39); Wales (£9.17); Scotland (£11.93) and the Republic of Ireland (£12.61), and means that Northern Ireland will continue to fall further behind the rest of the UK and Ireland.

As the arts impact on all policy areas from health to education to social development, this budget represents a blow to all communities in Northern Ireland. I would urge you to secure the future of the arts by increasing the arts budget by £26million over the next three years.

The importance of financial stability for artists and arts organisations cannot be underestimated. This budget will leave many people working in the arts facing immediate difficulties. Their future is, at best, uncertain, and confidence is at an all time low. If the budget is not increased, not only will it be increasingly difficult for the region to foster new talent and innovation, but countless valuable cultural programmes and organisations will be forced to close, bringing creative activity in Northern Ireland to a standstill.

Northern Ireland has a wealth of creative talent; with sustained and meaningful investment, the arts can be central to building a dynamic, flourishing society for everyone.

Caragh O'Donnell

On Behalf of Array Studios