



Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company  
Waterside Theatre  
Glendermott Road  
Derry – Londonderry  
BT47 6BG

T/F: +44(0)28 71342266  
E: [info@echoechodance.com](mailto:info@echoechodance.com)

Melanie McGinnis  
Economic Policy Unit  
OFMDFM  
Rm E5.22  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast BT4 3SR

20th December 2007

Dear Melanie McGinnis

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

I am writing to urge the Executive to increase the amount of funding allocated to the arts in the draft Budget. It is an accepted principle in other places in the world that arts and cultural activity are vital components in social, economic and cultural regeneration, yet their contribution to building a new Northern Ireland is not adequately reflected in the proposed budget.

Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company exists to produce professional dance theatre productions and to promote interest, participation and education in dance and movement at all levels. Echo Echo has worked tirelessly for over ten years to promote dance and the value of the arts throughout Northern Ireland.

In the period 2003-07, Echo Echo has successfully delivered a quality dance skills and education programme throughout the province, with the support of ACNI and other high-calibre partner organisations, reaching over 2,000 new participants of all ages and abilities. Many participants were from New TSN designated wards and Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Without government funding, this project would not have taken place.

The benefits of dance, particularly to young people, are clear skills development, visibly increased confidence, exciting creative experiences and improved communication skills to name but a few. Echo Echo is a leading contributor to the only Dance Degree on this island based at University of Ulster at Magee and the company's youth dance participants have gone on to prestigious further education courses in Ireland and England – genuine career development opportunities.

Echo Echo's new work production has recently completed an extensive twelve-venue tour of Ireland, north and south, to critical acclaim. We know, through positive feedback received from venues and audience questionnaires, many people in Northern Ireland have directly benefited from working with inspiring local and European dance artists and experiencing innovative new performance work.

Dance is a developing art form in Northern Ireland and many successful dance performance and education projects, and excellent recent company development, would not have been possible without regular government and Lottery funding.

We know that this is a tight spending round, but the proposed allocation for the arts falls desperately short of DCAL's request, based on the Arts Council's assessment of need, for an additional £26 million over the three year period. In the grand scheme of the Executive budget, this tiny amount for the arts could deliver so much throughout the region.



Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company  
Waterside Theatre  
Glendermott Road  
Derry – Londonderry  
BT47 6BG

T/F: +44(0)28 71342266  
E: [info@echoecho.com](mailto:info@echoecho.com)

If the allocation is not increased, the arts in Northern Ireland will continue for the foreseeable future to be consigned to the bottom of the league table of funding in the UK and Republic of Ireland. Surely the people of Northern Ireland deserve the same cultural entitlements as our neighbours on these islands.

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. Without meaningful investment, it will not be possible for the arts to contribute fully to vital wider agendas and PfG priorities, such as health, social inclusion and education, or to capitalise fully on the great economic potential of cultural tourism and the Creative Industries.

For Echo Echo, and for the development of dance as an art form in Northern Ireland, government investment is absolutely essential to sustain the excellent progress of recent years. Dance is not a commercial art form and our organisation already delivers a tremendous number of projects on a very tight budget. Without funding for core costs and specific project costs, our organisation would not exist and many important projects would not take place.

Assembly members have already indicated their verbal support for the arts and the contribution it makes to the cultural and economic fabric of our society. Now we need action.

The arts impact on so many aspects of our lives, and should be something to celebrate, not stifle. I hope that the final budget will result in the level of public investment that will enable the arts to make their vital contribution to building a better, more dynamic and competitive Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely

Ailbe Beirne  
Company Manager