

KABOSH THEATRE

Suite 35 Imperial Buildings
72 High Street
BELFAST
BT1 2BE

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

3rd January 2008

Dear Melanie McGinnis

Re: Response to the Draft Budget 2008-2011

The advantages to be gained from meaningful investment in the arts have been recognised by Northern Ireland's main political parties; they gave their overwhelming support, in October 2007 to a Private Members' Motion, calling on the Executive *'to raise the level of arts funding to at least the United Kingdom average within the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.'* Regrettably, cross party ministerial support for the motion is not reflected in the Draft Budget which, if realised, will have devastating consequences for the arts sector and a negative impact on the economy as a whole.

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.

Founded in 1994, Kabosh is a Belfast-based independent theatre company committed to challenging the notion of what theatre is and where it takes place. It is the only theatre company in Northern Ireland that produces site-specific theatre. The company uses local stories and histories to create plays that chart the way Northern Ireland is evolving whilst animating public spaces. Kabosh is committed to providing quality stimulating, entertainment for everybody living in and visiting Northern Ireland as well as developing the indigenous creative industries and promoting its worth both nationally and internationally. In 2006.07 95 individuals worked with Kabosh (50% were local volunteers), and 7, 000 individuals attended Kabosh productions, 23% of this audience came from the top 10% most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. In 2007.08

the company has planned to work with 233 individuals for 14, 910 audience. The need and interest is there but investment is needed.

Cultural Tourism, widely regarded as the fastest growing and most sustainable aspects of the tourism industry, is central to local government's aim of increasing out-of-state visitors. Defined as the movement of people for essentially cultural motivations, cultural tourists will travel extensively to see a broad range of attractions, including study tours, performing arts, cultural tours, festivals, historic sites and monuments, and folklore. The cultural tourist is looking for things which are specifically indigenous and mark the destination out from others. They tend to spend more than regular tourists and now account for 37% of all world travel. National and international marketing activity has resulted in figures for 2006 showing 6.8 million visitor trips to Belfast and £324 million spend in the city's economy. This supports nearly 18,000 full-time jobs and has triggered over 300 million investment with additional hotels, accommodation facilities, restaurants and venues. Helped by more than 20 direct routes to Mainland Europe, 18 to Great Britain and three Trans-Atlantic connections, the city is welcoming a new breed of traveller who comes in search of a unique and memorable experience. Cultural Tourism has the potential to become a crucial economic generator for Belfast. It is Britain's 5th largest industry and brings 74 billion into the UK economy. Latest research from central Government, Universities, National and International Festivals and the Media are in agreement that the future of Cultural Tourism depends on the following: *'In order to have a successful, dynamic and sustainable Cultural Tourism Industry, a destination must develop and promote arts that are specifically indigenous, distinctive and authentic.'* Indigenous culture is a city's competitive advantage and marks a destination out from others. Research from European Festival Forum and AOIFE which proved that cities whose Festivals are indigenous and specific to their destination are those which have achieved sustainability. The 2007 Top 10 endorsement by the highly acclaimed Lonely Planet Travel Guide is a further boost for Belfast's cultural tourism potential - in addition Belfast is the gateway to Northern Ireland.

The productions that Kabosh programmes are unique, indigenous, high-quality responses to location, designed to make specific areas of culture, heritage and leisure more easily accessible to all attendees. In May 2007 Kabosh worked in association with the BCC Tourism Unit, Evening Economy, Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau and Belfast City Centre Management to create *'Henry & Harriet'* which took place in four working shops in Belfast city centre, this production will be revived for Sunday performances during July and August 2008. Feedback included: *'a charming and memorable way of making history live again, and it's a show that would fare well with the growing number of tourists to our city'*. (Belfast Telegraph: 10.05.07). The production is nominated for a 2008 Arts, Business & Brand Identity Award. The revival will build on previous partnerships and forge proactive links with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to ensure widespread international promotion. The creation, revival and promotion of such unique product requires long-term core investment but it reaps multiple economic benefits for the local tourism, business and creative industries.

As well as providing ideal product for increased visitor footfall the arts has as equally an important role to play in improving the health of our society. Kabosh believes in the politics of theatre to transform lives and has recently been working with the Trauma Recovery Network in this area. The arts have presented new possibilities to many people across the north, allowing them to experience their own and other's histories in safe, communal environments. This provides society with the tools necessary to check the cycle of traumatic thinking and imagine an inclusive, tolerant future. Local government identifies the challenging targets still to be met within conflict resolution and improved social health the arts has a proven, proactive role to play in addressing this need.

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 - the equivalent of £11.55 per capita. This would be a modest increase in the context of the overall Northern Ireland budget - the Arts Council's current budget is less than one third of one per cent of the existing health budget; or two thirds of one per cent of the education budget. In the grand scheme of the Executive budget, this tiny amount for the arts could deliver so much throughout the region.

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 at the very least the people of Northern Ireland deserve the same cultural entitlements as our neighbours on these islands. The arts have been proven time and again, particularly within a divided society, to assist with community cohesion through breaking down perceived barriers to engagement, individual empowerment, mutual education, stimulating imaginations and so provoking informed discussion.

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. How can PfG hope to increase attendance and levels of participation in the arts by 2% or grow the Creative Industries by up to 15% by 2011 if the core product has another year of standstill funding?

Large-scale site-specific projects which involve numerous stakeholders from educational providers to community voices to local business to tourism and heritage units require transparent, long-term development to ensure full process ownership, quality product and guaranteed impact. Such investment of time needs financial investment and security.

Kabosh welcomes local government commitment to its key development strategies: skills, health, social, environment, productive and regional but it is important to emphasise the positive role the arts plays across each of these areas. We urge local government to promote the '% art scheme', an additional means of practitioner investment without additional outlay – why not consider a new piece of public art for every new road, a theatre-company-in-residence for every new school, a writer-in-residence for every new factory/office-base, a composer-in-residence for every new hotel, an artist-in-residence for every new housing complex etc. This in turn increases community pride, provides long-term artist employment, increases visitor footfall and so acts as an economic driver. Economic development alone will not develop society, it is imperative that people and their existing environment are invested in.

Kabosh welcomes the widespread inclusion of informal and formal arts education on the local curriculum as recommended under PfG but without local arts training for teachers how can demand be met? Without the support from a healthy, diverse, professional arts community how can high educational standards be guaranteed? The successful Creative Partnerships in England is the result of strong working relationships between the professional arts sector and the educational system. Ofsted inspectors reported that they had seen evidence of significant improvements in the basic learning skills of young people who had participated in Creative Partnerships activities: in literacy, particularly writing and speaking; developing and applying mathematical skills in context; an ability to use information and communications technology effectively to research, explore, develop and model ideas across different subjects; clear evidence of gains in self confidence and articulacy; an ability to improvise, take risks, show resilience and

collaborate with others; improved abilities to concentrate and participate outside of structured environments and projects; co operation, enthusiasm and pride.

In addition, if we instil a love for the arts in our young people where do they get to experience the live activity, witness talented and employed indigenous practitioners who can act as role models, if our levels of activity are reduced and the cream of local talent have travelled elsewhere for work? Artistic investment in our youth and young people is short-term if long-term investment is not forthcoming for the industry.

The arts impact on so many aspects of our lives from health to education to economics, and should be something to celebrate, not stifle. We 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.

If you require any additional information please do not hesitate in contacting us on 028 9024 3343 or artisticdirector@kabosh.net.

Yours sincerely

Full-time Kabosh Executive

Jo Egan, Creative Producer
Paula McFetridge, Artistic Director

Kabosh Board of Directors

Ciaran Mackle, Chair of Board:	Architect, Partner in Mackle and Doherty Architects
Alison McCrudden, Vice-Chair of Board:	FT Drama Lecturer at Belfast Metropolitan College / Freelance Theatre Director
Jenny Cooke, Board Member:	Director of Musical Theatre for Youth (MT4UTH) / Lay Magistrate
Mary Jordan, Board Member:	Drama Facilitator / Actress
Orla McKeagney, Board Member:	Drama Psychotherapist & Facilitator