

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

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Dear Ms McGinnis

I wish to add my voice to those who have raised their concerns about the disappointingly low level of funding announced for the Arts in Northern Ireland in the Executive's draft Budget and draft Investment Strategy. Continued under-funding puts many years of achievement by a wide range of arts organizations at grave risk.

I am particularly concerned about the risk of damage being done to the Ulster Orchestra – the pre-eminent arts organization in the Province.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the Orchestra to the musical life of Northern Ireland. This is to be measured not only in the top-quality performances of a wide ranging repertoire at venues in Belfast and elsewhere, but in the work members of the Orchestra do in schools, and in the teaching made available to our young people by the pool of professional musicians who form the Orchestra. By its broadcasts, tours and recordings the Orchestra has done much to enhance the Northern Ireland's reputation throughout the world. Many cities larger than Belfast would be delighted to lay claim to such a musical undertaking as the Ulster Orchestra.

The Orchestra works hard to raise funding from a wide circle of supporters and sponsors, but there is no escaping the need for, and the obligation on, Government to provide sufficient funding. This is recognized throughout the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland where, as you will know, *per capita* funding for the arts is considerably higher than in NI.

Belfast is fortunate in having in the Ulster Hall, the Grand Opera House and the Waterfront Hall three of the finest performance venues in these islands. Yet so great is the harm which lack of proper funding is doing to local arts organizations that there is a very real risk that there will be nothing to put on in these places other than touring companies.

I urge the Minister to review the budget proposals and to begin the move towards proper funding for the arts to safeguard what has been achieved and allow further development.

Yours sincerely

Wesley McCann