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4th January 2007

Dear Melanie McGinnis

Re: Response to the 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. It is absurd that a key component to improving the health and wealth of our society is being undervalued to such an extent.

I have worked as a Belfast-based actress, director and producer for twenty years and during that time I have witnessed the power of the arts to transform individual's lives on many levels. I do not come from an artistic family but I was lucky enough to have enthusiastic teachers both in primary and secondary school that directed school plays, encouraged in-class performance and on occasions even took us to the theatre. My involvement in the arts transformed my life – as a child I had a severe speech impediment which meant I lacked confidence but artistic engagement gave me the ability to overcome this.

Throughout my career I have worked across many sectors of the arts from Belfast Community Circus to the Lyric Theatre to the Beat Initiative to Tinderbox Theatre Company to Belvoir Players Amateur Drama to Belon Puppet Theatre to the Riverside Theatre to Charabanc to Opera Northern Ireland to Dubbeljoint to the Arts Theatre to educational work in schools etc. Many of the organisations I was lucky enough to work with in the early stages of my career now no longer exist mainly due to historical under-funding: Opera Northern Ireland, Red Lead Arts, Charabanc, Dubbeljoint, Arts Theatre, Group Theatre to name but a few.

Here are some examples of how I witnessed the arts improving quality of life, educating, attracting visitors, generating revenue.

Lyric Theatre: as an actress since 1994, artistic director 2001-06

- I still remember my mum taking me in 1983 to see Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Teacup* and then going with the Ulster Youth Theatre to see *Joyriders* in 1985: both productions had a huge impact on me as young people my age, with my accent were

Rather than simply seeing arts as independent cross-departmental support is needed.

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.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate in contacting me on artisticdirector@kabosh.net.

Yours sincerely
Paula McFetridge