

Dear Sir/Madam

I wish to express my dismay at the proposed arts settlement outlined in the Draft Budget and Priorities 2008-11. The settlement will only increase available Arts Council funding by £4.25million - which fails to cover the £4.5million raided from the arts lottery budget. This means that many organisations will face closure and new communities will be denied access to the arts.

The settlement falls short of raising Northern Ireland's per capita arts spend to £11.55 - a sum endorsed by the Northern Ireland Assembly on 9 October 2007 and means that Northern Ireland will fall further behind the rest of the UK and Ireland. Currently Northern Ireland invests £6.13 per person, in stark comparison to England (£8.39); Wales (£9.17); Scotland (£11.93) and the Republic of Ireland (£12.61).

The settlement is at odds with the draft priorities to develop the creative industries and cultural tourism. The creative industries already represent the fastest growing sector of the UK economy but this budget will hinder growth in Northern Ireland as we lose out through a creative brain-drain. It is also absurd to commit to developing cultural tourism in a budget that will actually reduce the region's creative output.

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.

Yours faithfully,

Helen and Chris Rocker