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28 November 2007

Dear MSMcGinnis,

Funding for the **Arts** in Northern Ireland

I am writing with disappointment that the Assembly's Draft Budget shows that, after three consecutive years of standstill funding, the arts stand to lose a further £1.3m over the next three-year funding period. With the impact of inflation this could reduce these funds by another £3m.

Currently Northern Ireland invests £6.13 per head of population in stark comparison to England (£8.39); Wales (£9.17); Scotland (£11.93) and the Republic of Ireland (£12.61). The gulf is set to widen with other regions looking to increase their arts expenditure. If funding is not increased to £11.55 per person in Northern Ireland, we can look forward to the closing of our most valued cultural institutions and programmes. This is not good enough.

If this Draft Budget is upheld the sector faces immediate financial problems. Independent theatre companies will be lost, many festivals that take place across the region will not happen, galleries and venues will close, music will no longer be heard, children will not be able to take part in arts activities in after-school clubs, youth clubs in their local communities or be inspired by visiting artists and companies. People who are ill, disabled or marginalised through old age or poverty will lose vital community arts facilities and activities. Tourists visiting our cities, towns and rural areas will have no cultural events to attend and will go back home with a poor impression of the arts in Northern Ireland.

I urge you and your fellow Ministers to rethink this Draft Budget to also protect jobs, to stimulate the economy and to provide equality with the rest of the UK by ensuring an increased investment in the arts is delivered.

Please ensure Northern Ireland continues to move forward with progress, innovation and creativity. I look forward to hearing from you on this matter

Yours sincerely



Victoria Vettese