

I'd like to thank the committee for the invitation to address you today along with 3 of my colleagues, Noirin, Director of Arts Dev, Damian, Head of Drama and Literature and Gilly, Head of Community and Participatory Arts. Both Damian and Gilly will also contribute to this opening statement. Apologise to Deputy Chair for saying Dun Uladh is in her area.

In my written submission, I asked the question what did the arts sector that we fund look like pre covid in order to provide context for the Committee? And I have drawn out some key figures for you: namely nearly 7,500 individuals working for our annually funded clients, though only just over a thousand in a permanent capacity, the rest on a contractual basis, supported significantly by over 4,000 volunteers.

It generated £53million in income in 18/19 of which almost £25million came from ticket sales and other commercial activity – and that's an important figure because that's the income that has vanished overnight, leaving large and small organisations, be they venues or local festivals, those which deliver classes in their local community, scrambling for their very survival.

However, the sector entered into the pandemic **already** in a precarious and fragile state due to successive reductions in our ability to fund it over many years, with resources pared to the bone and higher than average rates of chronic mental health and well-being issues.

By way of illustration, I have given the committee figures on our revenue grant-in-aid in comparison to Wales which receives almost three times the amount for a population of £3.1m in comparison to ours of circa 1.9m. This is not a one-off, rather a sustained picture over time.

So that's a brief picture of what the sector looked like entering covid.

Our initial survey undertaken in its immediate aftermath revealed an average loss of projected income for artists to the end of this month to be just under £4,000, with free lancers working in the gig economy amongst some of the most vulnerable. People who can't avail of the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme because they don't meet the criteria. For organisations the average loss of earnings for the same period was around £38,000.

Damian and Gilly will put the human faces behind those figures in a moment.

So what's needed?

First, we welcome the announcement by the Minister of a £1m support programme with an initial £500,000 towards an Organisations' Emergency Programme which will complement the much oversubscribed Artists Emergency Programme.

This is a good start. However, we know more will be required if the sector is to survive this crisis and to emerge, albeit perhaps in a different shape, and continue to make the rich and innovative contribution it does to our society. We have just collated further information about the deficits our organisations are predicting to the end of the year and these conservatively estimate, AT THIS EARLY STAGE, a figure of almost £4million. And I have laid out some of the further support measures we would like to see which would help the sector re-calibrate itself, including preparing for re-opening, be it indoors or outdoors, so I won't repeat those.

What has become crystal clear is the funding model so carefully and painstakingly created over many years to support the ecosystem that is the arts is here is now broken. The prospect of recovering the catastrophic loss of earned income is minimal, even with moving to digital platforms, which won't be monetised to the degree needed, or putting on socially distanced performances outdoors and eventually indoors (although we are working to help organisations just do those very things where

they can.) Our arts sector here has been in the forefront of creating equality and access in ways which are the envy of other Arts Councils in these islands. Just like the health service many offer a huge variety of activities and services, free at the point of delivery. That must be sustained if some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community are to be supported to enjoy their rights to access the arts.

I'd like to hand over to Damian and Gilly to give some human examples of the impact our sector faces.