

IMAGINE BELFAST LTD TRUSTEES REPORT 2023/2024

The Trustees present their annual report together with the financial statements for the year ended 30 September 2024. The Trustees confirm that the Annual Report and financial statements of the company comply with the current statutory requirements, the requirements of the company's governing document and the provisions of Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019).

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Objectives

The company's objects as set out in its Memorandum of Understanding are as follows:

To promote the arts and culture, and to promote religious harmony and equality and to promote the benefit of the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland without distinction of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnic identity, political or religious opinion by associating the statutory authorities, community and voluntary organisations and the inhabitants and in particular:

- (a) to encourage appreciation for, the active participation, and to stimulate the artistic creativity of people, in the area of benefit.
- (b) to present, promote, organise, manage and produce talks, debates, comedy events, tours, exhibitions, cabaret, film screenings, seminars, conferences, workshops and street theatre.
- (c) to advance any other exclusively charitable purpose as the directors may, from time to time, decide in accordance with the law of charity.

Activities for achieving objectives.

The company exceeded all its targets in this reporting period having organised a successful festival in March 2024. In planning our activities, we have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit to ensure that our activities will help to achieve the charity's objectives and provide a benefit to our beneficiaries as detailed in the following sections.

The 10th Imagine! Belfast Festival proved to be a very successful project involving 130 events and 376 speakers & performers in 44 venues across Belfast during 18-24 March 2024 attracting an audience of 7,383 in-person attendees and estimated 12,300 online viewers. Most of the events (65%) were free as the festival rolled out an eclectic mix of film, humour, talks, music, poetry, podcasts, theatre, exhibitions, tours, discussions, and workshops. This year we featured keynote artists and speakers exploring a wide range of political themes

and they included: Paul Muldoon, Don Letts, Manchán Magan, Sarah Corbett, Eamonn Mallie, Noel Doran, Nuala McKeever and Louise Walsh with special performances from the Ulster Orchestra, Yard Act, Henry Normal & Nigel Planer, Enola Gay, Paddy Cullivan, Ursula Burns and the Colorado based theatre company TINTS, together with a host of other exciting arts, heritage and cultural events with many sold out or oversubscribed.

The festival explored the theme '*Top EnterBRAINment*' encouraging people to have some fun with politics and we programmed a greater number of events designed to engage younger people in our music events. This strand included a series of events examining the relationship between music and politics, particularly punk, and performances from the Sullivan family of traditional singers from the Ojibwe reservation in Wisconsin, USA. The festival also involved a number of tours, exhibitions, quizzes, live podcasts and talks from a range of experts exploring the big issues of our time.

Most of our events were suggested and created in collaboration with the public and long-standing partners. We held a public consultation in October 2023 to help develop the programme and we were delighted with such a high-quality response. In developing this festival, we hoped to deliver the following outcomes and we are pleased to confirm that we exceeded these projections:

1. A greater appreciation, understanding and exchange by people and communities in Northern Ireland and beyond of local and international political, cultural and reconciliation issues through the organisation of over 100 talks, debates, training workshops, performances and exhibitions.
2. Greater public support for reconciliation, cultural diversity, civic activism and deliberative politics in Belfast and Northern Ireland through our festival programme.
3. The promotion of good relations, cultural diversity and the participation of under-represented groups in civic society through the organisation of festival activities, public participation events, blogs, and workshops.
4. The greater facilitation of political and cultural discussion through the engagement of at least 200 keynote speakers and performers sharing perspectives and learning on a range of contentious and difficult issues such as dealing with the legacy of the past, diversity issues, the climate crisis, and other keynote issues.

We conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the festival through an audience survey involving 385 returns. Our survey found that 98% of respondents felt the festival satisfied their expectations. It was particularly pleasing to find that 50% of audience members were attending a festival event for the first time and 42% of the sample had never been to the

festival venue before, which confirms that we were able to reach new audiences and introduce them to new venues and partners. We also asked whether respondents considered themselves to be disadvantaged and found that 21% of the sample considered themselves to fall into this category which suggests we were able to significantly engage with vulnerable and less well-off sections of the community.

We also found that 13% of our sample were visiting Belfast/Northern Ireland with 6% stating they lived in Ireland, 4% came from GB, 2% from rest of Europe and 1% from rest of world. For these 'out of state' visitors, 18% said that attending the festival was the main reason for their visit to Belfast.

We are also delighted with the quality of the performances in our programme, confirmed by audience feedback and media reviews. We received record media coverage, and our speakers and performers were appreciative of the platform we were able to provide for them.

We are very appreciative of the funding provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Fund; VSB Foundation; the Arts Council for Northern Ireland; the National Lottery Awards for All Fund; Future Screens NI; Linen Quarter BID; Queen's University Belfast; Belfast City Council; Open University Northern Ireland; Ulster University and the Community Relations Council. We were pleased to attract a new funder this year in Linen Quarter BID and to increase our ticket income.

PUBLIC BENEFITS

The public benefits that flow from the promotion of religious harmony and equality through the organisation of our inclusive festivals are increased social cohesion, improved good relations and economic conditions. These benefits are evidenced by audience evaluations and box office returns from participating venues.

The public benefits that flow from promoting the benefit of the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland through the organisation of events at the Imagine Belfast Festival include improved recreational, social and economic conditions. These benefits are evidenced by our audience sampling and through the high public attendance at our events. There is no private benefit resulting from the activities of our organisation. The sole beneficiaries are our performers and audiences.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Financial position

Key financial performance indicators

The company continues to deliver a high number of events on a relatively modest income. Over 130 events were organised in 2024. Total income received in the year was £152,538. The surplus for the year was £15,816 after deducting expenditure of £136,722.

Going Concern

After making appropriate enquiries, the Trustees believe that the company has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. For this reason, they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements.

FUTURE PLANS

The Trustees are closely monitoring future plans in a difficult funding environment and have decided to run another festival during 24-30 March 2025.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Governing document

The company is registered as a charitable company limited by guarantee and is registered under the Companies Act 2006, as a private company, limited by guarantee (Company number N1614137). It is also registered with HMRC and the Charity Commission Northern Ireland (NIC101004).

Methods of appointment or election of Trustees

The management of the company is the responsibility of the Trustees who are elected and co-opted under the terms of the Trust deed. The company has taken the opportunity to develop a new strategic plan and refresh its risk assessment framework.

Organisational structure and decision making

The Trustees met six times during the year with a quorum of at least 4 members. All meetings were minuted with decisions recorded and reviewed at subsequent meetings.

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Registered company number

N1614137

Registered charity number

NIC101004

Registered office

46 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LB

Trustees

Mr Don Leeson, Chairperson

Mr Ian Fraser, Treasurer

Ms Julie Williams-Nash, Secretary

Mr Ciaran Hanna

Mr Martin Magee

Mr Paul Maxwell

Mr Paul Mulgrew

Ms Julianna Taylor

Company Secretary

Mr Peter O'Neill

Approved by the board of trustees on 18 February 2025 and signed on its behalf by Mr Don Lesson, chairperson.

Don Leeson

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D Leeson', with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.