

OUTBURST ARTS FESTIVAL

DIRECTORS' REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

The directors present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charity's Memorandum and Articles of Association the Companies Act 2006 and "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)" (as amended for accounting periods commencing from 1 January 2019)

Objectives and activities

The company is established exclusively for charitable purposes, namely for the production of the annual Outburst Queer Arts Festival in Belfast.

Outburst Arts Festival (Outburst) is a charity organisation and community platform for sharing and exploring queer experiences stories and ideas and through theatre, film, music, writing, workshops, visual art and other creative disciplines. Our aim is to challenge, to entertain, to surprise, to support and develop new talent and raise awareness of queer experiences through the Arts in Northern Ireland. We are particularly interested in bold new ideas and engaging voices, offering a platform for innovative new work that is not available elsewhere.

The directors have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

Achievements and performance

2023/24 brought exciting new opportunities and developments both locally and internationally for Outburst Arts, supporting the organisation to successfully navigate the widespread challenges faced by arts many organisations in the region, especially in relation to income, sustainability and staffing. With a brand-new Strategic Plan (2023-25) and refreshed aims, significant new international partnerships enabled wider reach for our work, while securing a new part time Producer for the team significantly enhanced and supported the delivery of our creative outputs, operations and artist support.

Our international connections continued to grow and deepen and at home we expanded our non-festival programme to support artist career development. Our Salons at Bullitt Hotel continued to support audience development, while the expansion of the one-to-one Clinic+ service on-demand for artists, with almost 100 half-hour sessions delivered, this continued to ensure that our doors were open to queer artists needing advice, information and feedback.

We delivered a successful all-island four-date tour of Richard O'Leary's *Border Fairies*, which was our first full tour of an Outburst-commissioned work. Our artist development partnership with Jerwood Arts, *Tongue & Heart*, engaged four established and emerging artists to access mentoring, resources and support to make new works for the 2023 festival.

We won a significant tender from Belfast 2024 to partner with Kabosh and Paperxclips Bookshop on an ambitious new project, *Are You On the Bus*, that would be developed throughout 2024, including two new performance works, a publications series and satellite community engagement events through the year leading up to the festival.

In line with our strategic aim of resourcing of more new work in addition to our development programme works, we supported two new commissions, *It Was Paradise, Unfortunately* by Jordanian playwright Raphaël Amahl Khouri, and *The Headless Soldier*, an ambitious new opera by Conor Mitchell and Mark Ravenhill.

Further developing our established partnerships with QFT, Queen's University and Sunflower Bar, we developed a new partnership with Ulster University to deliver an exhibition by acclaimed New York photographer Alice O'Malley. We also reignited our Irish language partnership with Cultúrlann in West Belfast and expanded festival events to the East of the city with events at Portview Trade Centre and to North Belfast of the city with two events at Carlisle Memorial Church.

OUTBURST ARTS FESTIVAL

DIRECTORS' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

International Research, Development and Partnership

With newly developed support from Nebula Fund around narrative change and the arts, we partnered with International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA) to deliver Juntas, a global project spotlighting trans/ feminist solidarity and that connected activism with the arts. We co-delivered this two-part project in Brazil and at the festival in Belfast, with over 40 activists and artists from over 30 countries attending across the project. This significantly enhanced our network and profile and opened new possibilities for artist support.

Established British Council connections enabled research and development work in Argentina, Poland and Nepal. Our partnership work with Kaalo 101 in Kathmandu was ongoing through 2023-24, with Outburst in a mentoring and artist support role. British Council Turkey supported Outburst participation at the WOW, Women of the World, festival in Istanbul, with the visit also including queer artist research and a presentation of Outburst commission *It Was Paradise, Unfortunately* at Pera Museum.

We were successful in winning a significant grant from British Council France to work with Festival Transform! in Marseille as part of the UK/France Spotlight Season across 2024. We further developed our relationship with the Lithuanian Cultural Attaché to the UK/ Lithuanian Cultural Institute, with Lithuanian artists participating in the festival.

The 2024 festival saw artist participation and delegates from Greece, Turkey, Lithuania, Ghana, South Africa, France, USA, Argentina, Republic of Ireland, Germany and Jordan.

Organisational Development and Wider Participation

The most significant element of our organisational development in 2023/24 was the implementation of a new Strategic Plan that had been two years in development with the team and Board. The plan confidently honed our ambitions to centre artist development, audience development and commissioning of new work, building on our international connections while advocating for increased support and recognition for the arts and artists at home.

Welcoming a new Producer, Caleb Roberts, to the team in June 2023 hugely supported the Artistic Director in delivering the development programme and producing of the festival. With the Executive Director role now established, we also had the capacity to participate and engage more in events and opportunities with organisations such as Arts & Business, Thrive and Festivals Forum. In other staffing developments, Mícheál McCann joined us as part time Head of Literature Development for a fixed period of one year.

In addition to established support from statutory funders, Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Belfast City Council, we received new support from Nebula Fund and Belfast 2024, as well as Ireland Funds and NI Screen.

As part of our financial procedures review, the Board elected to move our organisational banking services to Danske Bank, enabling better walk-in business services, dual authorisation on payments for more robust security, and more flexible online banking. The new account was set up in this financial period and, to enable smooth operations, the established account will be phased out by the end of the financial year 2024/25.

It was a busy year for wider participation beyond Outburst's own work, with participation as a delegate at Arts Council England's Horizon showcase at the Edinburgh Festivals, artists partnership work in Berlin and at Berlinale and non-festival film introductions at QFT, as well as participation on other panels and in talks.

OUTBURST ARTS FESTIVAL

DIRECTORS' REPORT (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Financial review

The directors consider that the unrestricted funds of the charity have sufficient resources and assets available which are adequate to fulfil their obligations.

The results for the period are as set out on pages 11 to 25. The charity returned net incoming resources of £36,235 (2023 - net outgoing resources of £86,741) of which there were net incoming unrestricted resources of £19,320 (2023 - net outgoing resources of £446) and net incoming restricted resources of £16,915 (2023 - net outgoing resources of £86,295). At 31 March 2024 the balance of unrestricted reserves were £92,394 (2023 - £73,074) and restricted reserves of £83,426 (2023 - £66,511).

It is the policy of the charity that unrestricted funds which have not been designated for a specific use should be maintained at a level equivalent to between three and six month's expenditure. The directors consider that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, they will be able to continue the charity's current activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised. This level of reserves has been maintained throughout the year.

The directors have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to the major risks.

We move forward into 2024/25 in a strong position in terms of support, outputs, governance and profile, while also preparing for the challenges ahead in securing new multiannual core funding that will support and strengthen the sustainability for Outburst in an increasingly turbulent funding climate for arts organisations.

Structure, governance and management

The charity is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity for tax purposes.

The directors who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Ms K McAleese
Mr M Eaglesham
Ms C McCusker
Ms C Campbell
Ms F Carolan
Mr D Codling
Mr E Dara

Key Management Personnel Remuneration

The Board consider the board of directors and the artistic director as comprising the key management personnel of the charity in charge of directing and controlling the charity and running and operating the charity on a day to day basis. All board members give of their time freely and no board remuneration was paid in the year. Board members are required to disclose all relevant conflict of interests and register them at each monthly board meeting and in accordance with the charity's policy withdraw from decisions where a conflict of interest arises.

OUTBURST ARTS FESTIVAL

DIRECTORS' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Statement of directors' responsibilities

The directors, who also act as trustees for the charitable activities of Outburst Arts Festival, are responsible for preparing the Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company Law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that year.

In preparing these financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP 2019 (FRS 102)
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Disclosure of information to auditor

Each of the directors has confirmed that there is no information of which they are aware which is relevant to the audit, but of which the auditor is unaware. They have further confirmed that they have taken appropriate steps to identify such relevant information and to establish that the auditor is aware of such information.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies entitled to the small companies' exemption.

The directors' report was approved by the Board of Directors.

Mr D Codling

Director

Dated: 23 October 2024