

# OUTBURST ARTS FESTIVAL

## DIRECTORS' REPORT

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

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The directors present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2025.

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, with related activities and development initiatives throughout the year.

Outburst Arts Festival (Outburst) is a charity organisation and a platform for sharing and exploring intersectional queer experiences, stories and ideas and through stage performance, film, music, literature, workshops, visual art and other creative disciplines. Our aim is to challenge, to entertain, to surprise, to support exciting and relevant discourse, to develop opportunities for artists and raise awareness of queer experiences through the Arts in Northern Ireland. We are particularly interested in making space for new ideas and engaging voices, offering resources and a platform for innovative new work that is not available elsewhere and making space for open and generous creative exchanges.

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

#### **Achievements and performance**

2024/25 was a landmark year for Outburst Arts, with advancements in partnership development and ambitious programming, along with significant new investment. The year also brought new challenges around changing team structure and external challenges via socio-political factors impacting across the sector.

Our programming was bolstered significantly through Belfast City Council's Belfast 2024 initiative, supporting us to develop a multi-event project, 'Are You on The Bus?', in partnership with Kabosh and Papexclips. In addition to a new site-specific commission by Kabosh and a pop-up event with Belfast's LGBTQ community choir, Quire, the project enabled us to partner with Papexclips queer bookshop to move their premises from West Belfast to North Street, making it the first visibly queer business in Belfast City Centre. It also supported us in producing an innovative new audio commission, 'Disco Dykes', by acclaimed screenwriter Stacey Gregg, which reached online audiences across 18 countries.

In addition to the launch of issue four of our globally distributed new writing periodical, catflap, we also commissioned and published a series of essay pamphlets, Tails of the City, including an Irish language work that was added to the curriculum at Dublin City University.

Through our international connections and established partnerships, we supported new opportunities for NI artists to tour their work, including The Belfast Ensemble's participation in Festival de Marseille with The Doppler Effect and emerging artists Colm McCready and Fergus Wachala-Kelly's Shame Show at Edinburgh Fringe. Our ongoing free online support service for artists, Clinic+, continue to be exceptionally popular, with over 80 artists supported through one-to-one online sessions and follow up support, while our Salon series created intimate space for interactive discussions on queer art and ideas.

We continued our established festival partnerships with QFT, Queen's University, Ulster Museum and Sunflower Bar, while our partnership with Ulster University enabled us to co-deliver events by Turner nominated visual artist Phil Collins as part of their Belfast School of Art 175 Celebrations. We also developed new partnerships and events with Fringe Society, Household and Brink!

# OUTBURST ARTS FESTIVAL

## DIRECTORS' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

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#### **International Research, Development and Partnership**

Established British Council connections supported a successful bid to continue our work with Kaalo 101 in Kathmandu, delivering small grants for new work to queer artists there and to offer mentoring and feedback support online for awardees. We were also successful in developing partnership support with British Council Literature, with groundwork to develop events and a literature delegation for our 2025 festival.

As part of the Goethe Institute London initiated Imagining Futures group, we attended Real Dance festival for a symposium in Hannover, while our partnership with Festival Transform in France led to Outburst-supported touring opportunities for The Doppler Effect and It Was Paradise, Unfortunately.

We continued our decade-long supportive partnership with British Council Northern Ireland, who along with British Council Europe supported our tenth international delegation to the festival. We also developed a new relationship with Finnish Institute to support Finnish artist involvement in the festival.

2024 festival saw international artist participation and international delegates from Finland, Egypt, Brazil, Greece, Turkey, Lithuania, USA, Republic of Ireland, Syria, Iran, Germany and Jordan.

#### **Organisational Development and Wider Participation**

2025 was an important year for the organisation in strengthening our sustainability and building the resilience needed in a precarious and rapidly changing arts funding and investment landscape.

Due to unsuccessful results in the first half of the year with multi-annual funding bids and anticipated support from private trusts, we discontinued the Executive Director post in September 2024, as from its inception the budget for this role depended on multi-annual funding pursuit which had been unfruitful over two years. We engaged reserve funds to cover some essential team salary costs not already covered by our established streams, while strategically prioritising new fundraising and income generation approaches.

Separately, we were successful at the end of 2024 in our multi-annual application to Paul Hamlyn Foundation for their Art Fund, securing £250k in primarily core support across three years. This stabilised the core team and supported the organisation to have breathing space to look at a sustainable business strategy moving forward in a challenging climate.

In addition to increased core funding from Ireland Funds, and from Ulster University for our work with artist Phil Collins, we were successful in a grant of £20k from NI Screen to Executive Produce a new short film with Out of Orbit.

With team capacity focused on the added community outputs leading up to our landmark Belfast 2024 project in November, we reduced our usually busy participation in external initiatives this year, though team members did participate in industry panels at Queen's University and at two festivals in France. We also developed events with Rainbow Refugees NI and Thrive.

# OUTBURST ARTS FESTIVAL

## DIRECTORS' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

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#### 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 26. The charity returned net incoming resources of £7,919 (2024 - £36,235) of which there were net outgoing unrestricted resources of £34,105 (2024 - £19,320 net incoming) and net incoming restricted resources of £42,024 (2024 - £16,915). At 31 March 2025 the balance of unrestricted reserves were £58,289 (2024 - £92,394) and restricted reserves of £125,450 (2024 - £83,426).

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 2025/26 with a reduced but strong core team, a finely tuned programming strategy and new approach and energy to our business planning that will place the organisation in a strong position for both the challenges and opportunities ahead.

#### 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

(Resigned 10 April 2025)

Ms C McCusker

(Resigned 10 April 2025)

Ms C Campbell

Ms F Carolan

Mr D Codling

Mr E Dara

Mr C Snow

(Appointed 28 January 2026)

#### 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 2025**

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#### **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: 5 March 2026