

CRESCENT ARTS CENTRE

DIRECTORS' REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

The Trustees who are also directors of the charity for the purposes of the Companies Act 2006 present their report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2025. The trustees have adopted the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) "Accounting and Reporting by Charities", effective January 2015, and FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard Applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Our **Vision** is a society which actively values and promotes creativity and the arts for everyone.

Our **Mission** is to be a vibrant and welcoming hub where everyone can experience the power of the arts and develop their creativity.

The Crescent's purpose is to make a difference to everyday lives, through offering creative opportunities.

Our **Strategic Plan 2024 – 28** is centred around 4 Pillars.

Example milestones achieved 2024-25 are listed against each of the Pillars below.

Beneath that is a Summary of our Activities.

⇒ **Place/Neighbourhood:** The Crescent is a local landmark, a source of local pride, a home from home, a celebrator of cultures.

- South Belfast Partnerships: We developed relationships & worked in partnership with x2 South Belfast Primary Schools: Fane Street PS and Donegall Rd PS, with activity both in the schools, and at The Crescent Art Centre, including also for friends & families, with performance activity in Belfast Book Festival.
- South Belfast Partnerships: Belfast Book Festival: focussed on local relationships: partnered with Accidental Theatre, Queens' Next
- We opened our spaces for a variety of free, non-ticketed & informal experiences, including engagement in Late Night Art, monthly drop-in Stitch & Natter and Tech Tips, and installed a 'Free Little Library' in The Crescent's café area.

⇒ **People:** We create the conditions for staff, artists, companies, customers and customers to thrive.

- Staff: we maintained a high retention-rate amongst Part Time Customer Services Team.
- Staff: Expertise is recognised & celebrated: Communications Manager invited to speak at Ticketing Professionals Conference in partnership with thrive, in relation to x3 years of Pay What You Decide Model at Belfast Book Festival.
- Freelance: We directly engaged x85 freelance creative practitioners, in a variety of capacities: as Associates/Advisors (Belfast Book Festival, Courses & Workshop, Music Programme); as Facilitators delivering Courses & Workshops; as Administrative Support: Belfast Book Festival Administrator; as Artists (designs for Crescent Shop, Artist in Residence including Vasiliki Stasinaki).
- Access & Inclusion: The Crescent was invited by Open Arts, to share our journey in, and experience of Access & Inclusion, at a sequence of Belfast City Council Tourism events.

⇒ **Artistic Practice:** We offer professional facilities for rehearsal, development and performance; we bring audiences closer to the production process.

- 45% of Crescent spaces were used by artists/arts organisations, against a target of 40%. This included introducing a 'Time To' project for artists to book facilities at a particular time of the day/week, on a Pay What you Decide Model - Time to Dance, Time to Write & Time for Music.
- Artist in Residence, with Vasiliki Stasinaki: example of multi-month Residency that engaged building-wide: with staff, with public and legacy of artwork on display in the building and for sale in The Crescent's Shop.
- Stripped Down: Celebrating Northern Ireland musicians in cabaret-style gigs.

⇒ **Business Excellence:** We have a robust financial model that sustainably realises our potential.

- Maximising longstanding successful programmes: Courses & Workshops: year on year gradual increase in income.
- With sufficient research and support: trialling new income generation approaches: The Crescent's Shop is up and running, contributing to unrestricted income.

OUR ACTIVITIES

2024-25 was the third full year of in-person activity further to closures as related to the Covid-19 pandemic and saw a gradual increase in the volume of our activities.

Courses & Workshops:

Into its 33rd year, our Courses and Workshops programme continued to thrive, with activity delivered across six programme strands, across four Terms

Children & Family;

Dance & Wellbeing;

Music & Drama;

Visual Arts & Crafts;

Creative Writing & Reading;

Languages & Culture

We engaged 68 Tutors, who delivered 412 Courses and Workshops, to 3615 unique customers, with average capacity at 78%.

Our Take the Stage initiative is now embedded into our programme structure: at the end of each Term we invite Courses & Workshops participants to present their work, as individuals or classes, to an audience, in The Cube and the David Hill Studio. At the end of Autumn Term this was run in conjunction with a Christmas Craft Market (December).

We continued with our Associates Model (initiated in 2022). For this third year we engaged 4 creative practitioners from outside of Tutor network (for the previous year we engaged Tutors within the network), to advise us on our programming strategies and approach. Example outputs included welcoming a number of new Tutors delivering new activities; clarifying our approach to progression/development routes (eg Levels within Languages and Dance); a focus on innovation and expansion of activity in our Art Studio and Workshop 1 as a dedicated Arts & Craft space.

New courses included:

Children & Family; Toddler Ballet; Craft Workshops; Art Lounge (13-17year olds)

Dance & Wellbeing: Ballet for Adults; Burlesque Feather Fan Dancing; Argentine Folk Dancing

Music & Drama: Explore Songwriting; Fingerstyle Guitar

Visual Arts & Crafts: Perfecting Pastels, Crochet Decorative Edging; Frida Kahlo Brooch

Creative Writing & Reading: Writing Eco-Poetry; 'I'm a Fan!' (Fan Fiction)

Language & Culture: Saree Draping and Shringaar; The Eccentric World of Luisa Casati

Crescent Live

This is our Events platform, held mainly in our beautiful space 'The Cube'. We curate activity, we facilitate hires and we offer special Artist rates. We worked with partners to deliver Festivals.

Highlights included:

- **Stripped Down at The Crescent** is a series of gigs that brings together some of the most talented original acts currently working in Northern Ireland, and who perform stripped down versions of their songs. Stripped Down was programmed by The Crescent's Music Associate Donal Scullion who has been collaborating with our Technical Manager **Gareth Doran**, to curate a series of events. In 2024 the line up included Becky McNeice & Gemma Bradley, Jealous of the Birds & Acqua Tofana; Pinksips and Esmerelda Road; CHERYM & Monday's Child.
- **Bounce Festival:** Held annually in October, The Crescent is proud to be a key partner for Bounce Festival, organised by University of Atypical for Arts & Disability.
- **Imagine Festival of Ideas:** The Imagine! festival takes place in Belfast every March and presents a unique way of imagining the future of this great city — and the wider world. The Crescent hosted 25 Imagine events, including the ever-popular Democracy Days.

In 2024 we welcomed Vasiliki Stasinaki as Artist in Residence/

Belfast Book Festival (June 2024)

Our annual June festival celebrates bestselling authors, award-winning poetry and spoken word; and showcases the wealth of local talent that defines our thriving literary community.

We maintained the focus on access, reach and connectivity established in 2022, which included:

- Adopting, for a second year, a Pay What You Decide Model as our ticketing mechanism, in response to the cost of living crisis.
- Highlighting The Crescent Arts Centre as the Festival Hub; creating a range of new activities alongside our traditional Events model, many of them free to customers including exhibitions, residencies and multiple drop-in sessions.
- Collaborative and innovative approach to programming: we engaged 2 Associates to develop the programme.
- Popular events included Pathways to Publishing: a networking and social event for those interested in books and publishing.
- A celebration of Northern Ireland talent Deirdre Madden; a conversation on the Menopause featuring journalist Marie-Louise Connolly with fiction writer Ciara Geraghty; Seamus Heaney Centre Fellows Conor Mitchell, Kate Tempest and Roddy Doyle in conversation and Pulitzer Prize winner Richard Ford with Northern Ireland-based talent Michael Magee.

Our thanks to Festival Funders The Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Foundation, Johns Elliot Solicitors, alongside our principal funders Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Belfast City Council. Our thanks to hotel Partner Hastings, Festival Bookseller No Alibis and Partner Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's.

Mairtin Crawford Award 2024

2024 saw the continued trajectory of year-on year increase in submissions for both Awards. We welcomed new Judges in each category.

Poetry: For Poetry it was the 9th year of Award. Moyra Donaldson stepped back from Judging and joins us as Award Patron. The 2024 Judges were Kathleen McCracken and Dawn Watson. The Winner was Lianne O'Hara, who completed her Residency in Belfast (with in-kind support from Hastings Hotel, and time at The Crescent Arts Centre).

For **Short Story** it was the 7th year of the Award. Lucy Caldwell remained as Chair, and was joined by Wendy Erskine, with support from Riley Johnston. The Winner was Julie Cruickshank who completed her residency in Belfast (with in-kind support from Hastings Hotel, and time at The Crescent Arts Centre).

Crescent Arts Youth Theatre (CAYT)

Our Education and Talent Development Programme for 14-19-year-olds met 22 times for 3 hour sessions on Saturday afternoons in The Crescent and participated in the National Theatre's Connections Programme. They presented a Home Show at The Crescent and a Festival show at The Lyric Belfast.

Creative Hub

The Crescent is a home to professional arts companies (office space) and continued to offer its spaces for discounted creative activity – rehearsals, development, meetings.