

**A Response to Arts Council Northern Ireland's
Consultation on:**

**"Development of a Drama Strategy
Summary Report and Screening Policy"**

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Introduction

Women's Support Network

The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is an infrastructural umbrella organisation, which provides support services to, and represents over 40 groups (see Appendix 1 for full member and associate member listing) including; community-based women's centres, women's projects and women's infrastructure groups.

WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network aims to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups and to promote and develop networking opportunities, to enable collective action and to impact upon policy and decision making processes. The WSN provides an accessible, feminist, relevant and high quality support service and resource for its member groups. The Network is also an important information resource on issues relevant to community-based women's organisations and for other infrastructure groups, nationally and internationally.

WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to a consultation on the Arts Council Northern Ireland's (ACNI) Drama Strategy and screening-out policy. WSN believes that equality of opportunity between men and women is beneficial to promoting a rich and diverse arts culture in Northern Ireland.

General Comments

WSN welcomes the publication of ACNI's summary report on Development of a Drama Strategy, which is well structured and accessible. However WSN notes that the report is gender neutral in composition and whilst there is a screening document accompanying the strategy, the document itself contains little, if any reference to the promotion of equality of opportunity. **WSN would recommend that the Strategy should make systematic reference to equality of opportunity and diversity throughout the document.**

Specific Comments

1 The Context of the Strategy

1.1 Process of developing the Strategy

The document sets out how the Strategy was developed, for example meetings were conducted by the Scottish Cultural Enterprise (SCE) with drama organisations, individuals and stakeholder bodies. SCE also conducted meetings with a further 202 people with an interest in the sector. **WSN would seek clarification from ACNI that, if there are women's drama groups, were they consulted in the process of developing its Drama Strategy.**

1.2 CSR and Government Priorities

The Strategy makes reference to ACNI's CSR submission and its aims to contribute to policy areas including children and young people; building confident and outward looking communities; cultural tourism; growing the arts economy; and support for the creative industries. WSN welcomes ACNI'S commitments to contribute to these areas but we are surprised that promoting equality of opportunity and diversity is not amongst these. **WSN would suggest that ACNI include the promotion of equality of opportunity amongst those policy areas identified.**

2 Screening out Process

WSN notes that the evidence used to screen out the Strategy was the 2007 General Population Survey. WSN would contend that reliance on this survey alone provides a limited source of information. **WSN would therefore recommend that when considering equality issues and screening out policies that a wider range of sources should be considered.**

WSN would also contend that given the limited nature of sources used in screening that it is not clear if an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is required.

Conclusions

WSN welcomes this opportunity to respond to this Consultation and has offered some constructive suggestions as to how the Drama Strategy can be improved. We hope that ACNI will take these into consideration. WSN would contend that these suggestions will further promote equality of opportunity between men and women and furthermore add to a richer and more diverse Arts culture in NI.

Appendix 1

WSN Member groups

Ardoyne Women's Group
ATLAS
Al Nisa Women's Group
Ballybeen Women's Centre
Ballymurphy Women's Group
Belfast Travelers' Support Group
Carrickfergus Women's Forum
Carew II Newtownards Road Women's Group
Causeway Women's Aid
Clan Mor Women's Group
Derry Women's Centre
Falls Women's Centre
First Steps Women's Group
Footprints Women's Centre
Foyle Women's Information Network
Greenway Women's Centre
Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
Lesbian Line
Lenadoon Women's Group
Ligoneil Family Centre
Markets Women's Group
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation
NIWEP (NI Women's European Platform)
Newry & Mourne Women
Older Women's Network
Shankill Women's Centre
Strabane & Lifford Women's Centre
Windsor Women's Centre
Women's Aid
Women's Aid Federation
Women into Politics
Women's Information Group
Women's News
Women's TEC
WRDA

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Ballymena Community Forum
EBCEC
Newtownabbey Community Voice
Parents Advice Centre
WEA
Rasharkin Women's Group

