



# AHRC Creative Communities

## Belonging & Civic Identity | Northern Ireland

### Policy Contexts

The [Northern Ireland Executive](#) is responsible for the devolved portfolio including communities, enterprise, trade and investment, agriculture and rural development, education, health, policing and justice, environment and regional development.

The UK Government [Northern Ireland Office](#) is responsible for overseeing the Northern Ireland devolution settlement and represents Northern Ireland interests at UK Government level and UK Government interests in Northern Ireland.

### Levelling Up

Pride in Place is one of twelve Focus Areas of the UK Government's 2022 [Levelling Up White Paper](#), with the Mission that "By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing."

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' policy paper on the [Levelling Up Missions](#) (2024) has further guidance on Pride in Place, including definition and metrics following consultation with stakeholders. Pride in Place is defined as: an emotion people feel towards the physical community that they identify with and feel a sense of attachment, belonging and deep-rooted contentedness towards. It is underpinned by their sense of safety and security, their participation and connections within the community, their engagement with local culture, heritage and sport and their satisfaction with local high streets, green and blue spaces, and physical infrastructure. It will be measured through four key headline metrics:

- Percentage of people who perceive Anti-Social Behaviour is a problem in their local area
- Percentage of people that agree/ disagree that their local area is attractive
- Social Fabric Index (Adapted Relationship thread)
- Percentage of the local population engaged with cultural, heritage and sport activities.

Survey-based measures for Pride in Place have been in development since the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport runs the Community Life Survey, which has been expanded to include measures related to Pride in Place and this will provide data for the headline metrics for local area attractiveness and engagement in cultural, heritage and sporting activities.

## Northern Ireland

The Levelling Up White Paper, [Delivering for All Parts of the UK](#), demonstrates how Northern Ireland is benefiting from investments to boost living standards, spread opportunity, restore local pride and empower local leaders. Towns and cities across Northern Ireland will see £617m of investment through four City and Growth Deals; the Levelling Up Fund is investing £49m in 11 projects across Northern Ireland; UK Government has guaranteed £400m for the New Deal for Northern Ireland. In addition, UK Government has taken action to level up Northern Ireland through funding to empower local leaders and communities; grow the private sector and boosting living standards; spread opportunity and improve public services; and restore local pride.

A wide range of civic society organisations came together ahead of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in 2023, to roll out the new participatory [Civic Initiative](#), to facilitate communities in identifying and asserting priorities to strengthen civic voice, and make proposals on policy positions that advance peace, reconciliation, and wellbeing in Northern Ireland.

The Department for Communities is developing an [Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy and Irish Language Strategy](#), to set long-term goals for the languages in Northern Ireland over the next 20 years. Expert panels have produced recommendation reports for what should be included in each language strategy.

The Government of Ireland's [Shared Island initiative](#) aims to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future, working with the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government to address strategic challenges. The Shared Island Fund was announced in Budget 2021, with €500m in capital funding available between 2021-25, ring-fenced for investment in collaborative North/South projects.

## Arts and Culture

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland's (ACNI)'s public consultation on its proposed new [10-year Strategy](#) runs to April 2024, with publication expected in spring 2024. Its vision is: "A society where all people can experience a thriving arts sector that is recognised as essential to creativity, wellbeing and social and economic prosperity". ACNI's current [Strategic Framework 2019 – 24](#) shows that participation in the arts can help build cohesive communities, make communities feel safer and reduce social exclusion and isolation: 51% of the funding invested by ACNI goes to the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland, helping to deliver social change, economic prosperity and build a strong and shared community.

[Public investment](#) in the arts has fallen from £14.1m to £10.1m over the last decade and Northern Ireland has the lowest levels of per capita Government spending on the arts in the UK: based on the most recent budgets, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland received £5.07 per capita (2023/24), compared to Wales at £10.51 (2023/24) and the Republic of Ireland at £21.90 (2022). ACNI has asked for a [doubling of their 2023/24 budget](#) to realign with Wales, their nearest comparator. The [Investing in Creative Delivery](#)

report was produced by the Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy Taskforce in 2023, with recommendations to the Department of Communities for a sectoral development and investment strategy. The [sector has still not fully returned to pre-covid levels](#), with core running costs for organisations increasing by 16% compared to the previous 12 months and now 43% higher than before the pandemic, along with rising rent, rates, salary and wider operating costs. However, some arts organisations have successfully leveraged investment from new sources, with income from trusts and foundations growing by 20% year-on-year.

In 2023 [five new all-island arts investment projects](#) were announced by the Government of Ireland, brought forward by the Arts Council of Ireland and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, with a total allocation of €7.4m from the Shared Island Fund. The two Councils frequently work together to co-fund arts programming on the island and the Shared Island Fund allocations will support this cooperation. The Shared Island dimension of the Creative Ireland programme, '[Creative Communities on a Shared Island](#)', seeks to build on the experience and expertise of local authorities' existing strategic north-south and east-west (Ireland-Britain) ambitions and transform them into a collaborative network. A total of €2.25 million is provided under the fund for initiatives running between 2023-25.

## Creative Economy

The creative industries are one of the fastest growing sectors in Northern Ireland worth [£1.3bn GVA](#), from [film and television productions](#) such as Game of Thrones, Derry Girls and the Line of Duty, to the thriving digital games sector. The [GVA for the creative industries](#) increased by 12.1% between 2018-19, compared to a 2.7% increase for total GVA, and has generally increased over the trend period from 2010-19. The creative industries employ 33,000 people, 3.9% of total employment in Northern Ireland.

Responding to industry needs, [Future Screens Northern Ireland](#) – one of AHRC's [Creative Industries Clusters](#) – delivers expert technical skills, opportunity and growth across film and broadcast, animation, games and immersive technologies. It enables [industry and researchers to collaborate](#) to develop new products and experiences, delivering new jobs and a £400 million increase in GVA to boost the local economy. Future Screens NI comprises two higher education institutions (Ulster University and QUB) and key industrial partners including NI Screen, BBC, Belfast City Council, Belfast Harbour, Causeway Enterprise Agency, Digital Catapult, Catalyst Inc., RTE, Games NI, Kainos, Invest NI, Techstart NI, Matrix and Tourism NI. The Partnership has developed a working model for the creative industries which is focused on participation, cultural and economic growth, and social and economic regeneration