

The Crescent Arts Centre

Strategic Plan 2018 – 2020

Introduction

The Crescent is a vibrant community arts centre, situated in South Belfast, which has served the population of the city and beyond with a very wide range of arts and cultural activities for over 40 years. Last year, more than 5,000 people engaged in the Crescent's cultural programmes, half of whom were active participants in creative courses and one-off workshops, the other half attended live events. That does not include those who participated in outreach programmes, came to non-ticketed activities, or used the café.

The Crescent is a four-storey listed building located at 2-4 University Road, originally established in 1873 as Victoria College for girls, founded by pioneer educationalist and suffragist, Margaret Byers. It was established as a cross-community arts centre in the midst of the "Troubles" in 1976. For the next two decades, despite the poor physical state of the building, The Crescent developed a wide range of arts programmes and events and provided crucial incubation space for a range of creative and youth organisations.

In September 2008, the Minister of Culture Arts and Leisure announced the awarding of capital funding to refurbish the site. The total cost was £7.2million, funded by The [Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure](#); the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI); the Heritage Lottery Fund; the Environment and Heritage Service; and the Crescent itself. The work was completed in 2010, enabling the Centre to offer a wide range of excellent facilities that could be accessed and enjoyed by the whole community.

Neutral Accessible Location

The neutral location of the building, within the Queen's Quarter but also close to the communities of Lower Ormeau, The Markets, Donegall Pass, Sandy Row and Donegall Road, and on several bus routes and close to Botanic Rail Station, encourages visitors and attendance from all communities, and has provided excellent opportunities for cross-community work.

Through funding from ACNI and Belfast City Council (BCC), the wide-ranging programmes and events have been a crucial provider of diverse arts activities. Many of those attending classes and workshops in the Crescent had their first encounter with a particular art form in the centre. These classes and workshops embrace many artforms including dance and movement, visual arts, creative writing, music of all kinds, theatre, drama, crafts, and languages. It also hosts a programme of activities and workshops for children and young people.

As a venue, the Crescent has been a vital part of the arts infrastructure in the city, playing host to public performances of modern dance, music of all genres, theatre, poetry and prose readings, circus and much more. The first floor gallery has also hosted a wide range of visual art exhibitions.

Outreach

The outreach programme has developed and grown, embracing new arts and cultural developments and creating new partnerships which has enabled our large bank of professional tutors to work with all ages and ranges of ability in all areas of the city.

Crescent Festivals

The Crescent has regularly run two key types of festival, the annual 'Belfast Book Festival' and 'CityDance'. The Crescent is also host to a wide range of other festivals in the City. These festivals help raise the profile of the centre and reach out to new audiences.

Creative Hub

Nine carefully selected arts organisations occupy space in the vibrant creative environment the Crescent provides. The current residents are: Open Arts, Tinderbox, Dumbworld, Belfast Trad, Lamb Films, John Morrison, Sestina, Belfast Music Society, and Bright Young Things.

The Crescent also hires space, for appropriate activities, to arts and cultural organisations and individuals, as well as for other meetings and conferences.

Unique Selling Points

In the range of consultation workshops we facilitated as part of the process for developing this strategic plan, the following unique selling points of the Crescent were mentioned again and again:

- A vibrant, friendly and welcoming environment
- Accessible and neutral location with good transport links
- Beautiful historic building with great facilities
- An incredible variety of artforms and activities
- A wide diversity of type and ages of participants
- Approachable, supportive staff
- Excellent tutors ensuring a high quality of classes and events

Facilities

Facilities in the Centre include:

- A Theatre space (The Cube)
- Two dance studios
- A visual art gallery
- A music room
- An art studio
- Five workshop spaces
- A boardroom
- A café
- Four permanent spaces hosting resident arts organisations

Activities

The main activities that take place in the Crescent include:

- A wide range of live music, theatre, poetry, dance and comedy events
- An extensive programme of over 200 creative and learning classes for a wide range of ages and interests
- The annual Belfast Book Festival
- 'Sing for Life' choir
- Crescent youth theatre
- Visual art exhibitions
- Community fun days
- City Dance
- A hub for a range of festivals
- External meetings and conferences
- Creative apprenticeships

External environment

In developing this new strategic plan, we are very conscious of the external environment in which we are operating. Some of the key issues that we reflected on are:

- Severe restrictions on public funding and cuts in the budget of ACNI
- The lack of an Executive at Stormont
- A lack of political commitment to the arts
- The development of new arts strategies by ACNI
- The Belfast Agenda and commitment of BCC to creating a culturally vibrant city

- The follow-up to the Capital of Culture bid 2023 with its emphasis on cultural belonging
- The commitment from BCC to create a Cultural Statement in 2021
- BCC's Culture Framework 2016-20 and their Festival and Events Report
- A move towards a more outcomes-based approach by government
- Increasing compliance requirements on organisations
- An increasing emphasis on collaboration and partnership
- The implications of Brexit
- Increasing numbers of tourists and the 2017 Tourism Strategy
- The increasing number of festivals in Belfast
- Increasing diversity of Northern Ireland, particularly so in south Belfast
- The increasing commitment to 'health and wellbeing' as a policy priority
- Rapid advances in technology and how people access information
- The development of the participatory offerings of other venues, such as Duncairn Arts in north Belfast, the Black Box in the Cathedral Quarter, the Strand in east Belfast, and Accidental Theatre in South Belfast.
- Belfast venues are relying more on attracting new customers to the venues to generate more sales

Strategic planning

This strategy has been developed through a series of consultation workshops and meetings involving participants, audience members, tutors, artists, staff and board members and a range of external stakeholders. We are very grateful for their input.

Strategic Challenges

We are very conscious that the Crescent is facing major financial challenges with cuts in its statutory funding and increasing costs. Much of the first year of this plan will involve actions, including generating income from a variety of sources to ensure that the Crescent is sustainable in the long-term.

The appointment of an Interim Director has provided the opportunity to reflect on the journey to date; where we now are in the changing ecology of arts organisations in the city; what the unique status and purpose of the Crescent is today; and what needs to happen to ensure it is fit-for-purpose moving forward. The appointment of a new permanent CEO by mid-2019 will provide the opportunity to lead the organisation into a new phase of its development.

Sense of Direction

The consultation process has helped clarify a sense of direction, in which the activities of the Centre are more integrated across wider themes and artforms, rather in the traditional categories of: Creative Learning (classes and workshops); Live events; Outreach; Organisations in our Creative Hub; and the Book Festival. However, achieving this integration will take some time and many conversations between the Crescent and all the artists, tutors and creative organisations.

For all these reasons, the board of the Crescent has decided to commit to this new strategic plan up to 31st March 2020 and will start work on developing the following strategy with the new CEO from September 2019 to be implemented from 1st April 2020.

Implementation

We are fully committed to the achievement of this strategy through the development, implementation and monitoring of annual operational plans with smart objectives.

Mission & Vision

Mission

To be a vibrant and welcoming hub where everyone can experience the power of the arts and develop their creativity.

Vision

A society which actively values and promotes creativity and the arts for everyone.

Values

The following values should underpin every aspect of the organisation's culture and activities:

The Power of the arts

We believe in the power of the arts to transform lives and promote personal and social wellbeing. We believe that everyone can benefit from engagement in the appropriate artform at the level that meets their needs and progress. Central to our work will be delivering high quality arts programmes and events, which help meet people's needs and aspirations.

Respect

We believe in the intrinsic worth and dignity of every person. We are committed to providing exceptional customer service, providing a friendly and welcoming environment and treating each individual with respect, seeking to promote their wellbeing, creative development and enjoyment.

Integrity

We recognise the importance of building honest relationships based on trust and transparency. We will say what we mean and mean what we say. We will be open and accountable in all dealings with participants, customers, stakeholders and each other.

Innovation

We recognise that everyone has different needs, strengths and aspirations. We will listen to our participants and customers and continuously reflect on our programmes and be flexible and innovative in responding to changing needs and priorities.

Inclusion

We believe that a healthy and stable society needs to be built by people working and sharing together. We will be open to those of all ages, classes, faiths and cultures and celebrate the diversity of the society in which we live. We will actively seek to engage and support those who are under-represented in the arts. We will ensure that the Crescent is as accessible as possible and will oppose anything that excludes or marginalises people.

Aims

Creative Learning

Aim 1: Provide appropriate opportunities for people to enjoy, learn, develop and express their creative and artistic skills.

Live Events

Aim 2: Deliver a high-quality artistic events programme for people to experience and enjoy various art forms.

Integrated Arts Development

Aim 3: Promote the development of integrated arts programmes, which combine classes, workshops and live events.

Creative Hub

Aim 4: Develop the collaborative hub of creative organisations and individuals based in the Crescent.

Book Festival

Aim 5: Deliver a successful high-quality annual Belfast Book Festival.

Outreach

Aim 6: Promote the engagement of under-represented community-based groups in the arts and develop their artistic and creative interests and talents.

Quality

Aim 7: Ensure that all the Crescent's activities are delivered to the highest standard and continuously improve.

Communications and Marketing

Aim 8: Increase awareness of the organisation; effectively market its programmes and events; and ensure effective communication with the organisation's stakeholders.

Human Resources

Aim 9: Ensure there is the appropriate staff complement and structure to achieve agreed plans and staff are effectively managed and given the opportunity to develop.

Premises and physical resources

Aim 10: Ensure that the Centre and its facilities support the achievement of the Crescent's plans and are effectively and efficiently managed.

Financial management and reporting

Aim 11: Demonstrate best practice in effective financial planning, management and reporting and ensure sustainability and value for money.

Income generation

Aim 12: Ensure the organisation generates sufficient income to deliver its plans

Governance

Aim 13: Ensure the governance of the organisation complies with the requirements of the law and best practice.

Priorities

Creative Learning

Aim 1: Provide appropriate opportunities for people to enjoy, learn, develop and express their creative and artistic skills.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Continue to plan, implement and review a diverse programme of attractive creative classes and workshops in a wide range of artforms to all ages
- Ensure the programme of classes and workshops reflects the needs and aspirations of participants and potential participants and innovates
- Maximise the % occupancy in classes and ensure they are cost-effective
- Provide the opportunity for progression for participants from taster sessions, through beginners, intermediate and advanced classes, to early professional career development.

Success will be measured by:

- The number of creative classes and workshops
- The number of people participating in creative learning classes and workshops
- The level of satisfaction of people participating in creative learning classes
- The net income from creative learning classes and workshops
- The number of new participants
- The % retention rate between terms
- The % drop-off of participants during courses
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Live Events

Aim 2: Deliver a high quality artistic events programme for people to experience and enjoy various art forms.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Develop, implement and review an artistic policy to guide the programming of live events
- Expand, develop, implement and review an attractive, innovative, cost-effective artistic programme of live events in a range of artforms

- Expand the role of the Crescent as a host and partner in various arts festivals
- Develop strong relationships with promoters and organisations that promote and tour musical artists, comedians, groups and theatre productions
- Develop, implement and review an attractive cost-effective programme of exhibitions

Success will be measured by:

- The number of live events
- The number (and % of capacity) of people attending live events
- The % satisfaction of people attending live events
- The net surplus/deficit from live events
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Integrated Arts Development

Aim 3: Promote the development of integrated arts programmes, which combine classes, workshops and live events.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Develop, implement and review co-ordinated arts programmes around key themes (e.g. theatre; literature; language & culture; visual arts; music; etc.), in partnership where appropriate, and seek funding to support their development
- Develop as a base for dance in Belfast, creating a visible presence and profile for dance in the city and act as a hub for Belfast-based companies
- Develop, implement and review age appropriate and family-friendly programmes
- Develop, implement and review distinctive programmes that reflect the Crescent's unique educational, women's development, literary, architectural and historical heritage and location in the Queen's Quarter
- Develop, implement and review a co-ordinated arts programme around the theme of wellbeing, in partnership where appropriate, and seek funding to support its development
- Support organisations and classes based in the Crescent and outreach partners to put on live events and exhibitions showcasing their work
- Arrange for visiting artists, theatre companies, etc. to put on workshops, in the Crescent or in the community
- Develop a programme to reflect the Crescent's UNESCO 'Man and the Biosphere' Urban Wildlife Award for Excellence for its support for a colony of swifts

- Develop programmes that respond to the needs of the increasing number of tourists in Belfast
- Collaborate with arts organisations hosted in the Crescent in putting on workshops, classes and events.

Success will be measured by:

- The number of integrated arts programmes
- The number (and % of capacity) of people attending/participating in integrated arts programme events
- The number of tourists attending Crescent events
- The % satisfaction of people attending integrated arts programme events
- The net surplus/deficit from integrated arts programmes
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Creative Hub

Aim 4: Develop the collaborative hub of creative organisations and individuals based in the Crescent.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Strive to ensure that the facilities provided by the Crescent meet the needs of the organisations in the Creative Hub
- Ensure effective communication between the Crescent and organisations in the Creative Hub
- Provide the opportunity for organisations in the Creative Hub to meet together and develop collaborate work
- Support and encourage organisations in the Creative Hub to contribute to the Crescents programming of Live Events and Creative Learning programmes.

Success will be measured by:

- The % satisfaction of organisations which are part of the Creative Hub

Book Festival

Aim 5: Deliver a successful high quality annual Belfast Book Festival.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Develop, implement and review a strategy for the growth and development of the Book Festival Plan and deliver a successful Belfast Book Festival each year
- Build the relationships with relevant publishers, authors, arts and literary festivals, arts organisations, Queen's University, etc.
- Effectively promote the Book Festival and increase the number of people attending
- Ensure the Book Festival website is fit for purpose
- Develop a programme of literary events during the year
- Develop a programme of workshops that feed into the Book Festival
- Evaluate each Book Festival and agree lessons for the following year.

Success will be measured by:

- The number of people attending Book Festival events (and the % of capacity)
- The % satisfaction of people attending Book Festival events
- The % satisfaction of writers and artists speaking at the Festival
- The net surplus/deficit from Book Festival events
- The traditional and media coverage of the Book Festival
- Social media interest in the Book Festival
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Outreach

Aim 6: Promote the engagement of under-represented community-based groups in the arts and develop their artistic and creative interests and talents.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Develop, implement and review an outreach strategy
- Build strong relationships with a wide range of community-based groups in disadvantaged areas of Belfast
- Encourage and support under-represented groups to access the range of programmes and events in the Crescent
- Contribute to the development of appropriate programmes in the Crescent to attract under-represented groups
- Support community-based and BAME groups in Belfast, who are under-represented in the arts, to develop arts programmes
- Encourage and facilitate current and visiting artists to deliver workshops in the community (as well as in the Centre)

- Develop the inclusive City Dance Festival in partnership with community groups
- Develop the Crescent Arts Youth Theatre

Success will be measured by:

- The number of outreach events and classes in community venues
- The number of people participating in outreach events and classes in community venues
- The number and % of people from disadvantaged wards/super output areas attending events in the Crescent
- The number and % of people from Section 75 groups¹ attending events in the Crescent
- The level of satisfaction of people participating in outreach classes and events
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Quality

Aim 7: Ensure that all the Crescent's activities are delivered to the highest standard and continuously improve.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Develop, implement, audit and review standards and procedures to ensure that all the Crescent's activities are delivered to a consistently excellent standard
- Demonstrate how the Crescent helps government meet its desired outcomes and the specific aims and priorities of the Department for Communities, Arts Council for NI, Belfast City Council, and local area plans
- Meet the agreed targets and requirements of funders/contractors
- Develop and resource processes for promoting continuous quality improvement and innovation across the organisation
- Regularly assess the Crescent's customer service and continuously improve
- Develop and support appropriate structures and systems to hear, and learn from, the views of participants and customers (inc. complaints) to assess and ensure quality
- Develop and test the desired outcomes of the Crescent's programmes on the lives of participants

¹ There are nine Section 75 equality categories in the Northern Ireland Act following the Good Friday Agreement: persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without. The second duty, the Good Relations duty,

- Develop ways of demonstrating, measuring and reporting on the impact of the Crescent's work

Success will be measured by:

- The satisfaction of customers with the quality of the Crescent's services and activities
- Outcomes for Crescent participants
- The number of complaints
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Communications and Marketing

Aim 8: Increase awareness of the organisation; effectively market its programmes and events to relevant audiences; and ensure effective communication with its stakeholders.

Priorities for 2018 – 2020:

- Develop, implement and review a Marketing and Communications plan
- Increase public awareness of the Crescent
- Effectively analyse and develop the Crescent's audiences
- Effectively and accessibly market the Crescent's programmes and events
- Build strong relationships with relevant journalists and people in the media
- Build strong communications and relationships with organisations and companies in the Queen's Quarter
- Build strong relationships with other venues and arts organisations and networks
- Protect and promote the Crescent's brand and sub-brands
- Make effective use of technological developments (inc. the website and social media) to promote communications
- Ensure effective internal communication sideways between different parts of the organisation and up and down

Success will be measured by:

- Awareness of the Crescent by the public (unprompted and prompted)
- Number of brochures disseminated
- Mentions and value of the Crescent in the mainstream media
- Hits on the Crescent website (Google analytics)
- Social media interest
- The % satisfaction of staff with internal communication
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Human Resources

Aim 9: Ensure there is the appropriate staff complement and structure to achieve agreed plans and staff are effectively managed and given the opportunity to develop.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Ensure the Crescent is an employer of choice and staff terms and conditions of employment support recruitment and retention and comply with the requirements of the law and, within the resources available, good practice.
- Ensure the Crescent has the appropriate number and structure of appropriately skilled and experienced staff to achieve its aims and objectives
- Ensure staff are effectively inducted, managed, supported and appraised and their learning and development needs regularly assessed and addressed
- Promote effective teamwork and employee feedback and engagement
- Ensure that the Crescent complies with its legal responsibilities and good practice in relation to employment, equality and diversity
- Expand the engagement of volunteers in the Crescent and ensure their effective recruitment, retention, engagement and development.
- Effectively recruit, select, retain and engage high quality tutors in the creative learning programme
- Effectively utilise appropriate apprenticeships and placement opportunities

Success will be measured by:

- The % satisfaction of staff with term and conditions
- The % satisfaction of staff with management, support and appraisal
- The % satisfaction of staff with training and development opportunities
- The % satisfaction of staff with their workload
- The % satisfaction of staff with teamwork
- The % satisfaction of staff with the Crescent's approach to equality and diversity
- The number of grievances
- The % absenteeism
- The number of volunteer hours
- The % satisfaction of volunteers
- The % satisfaction of tutors
- The level of retention of tutors
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Premises and physical resources

Aim 10: Ensure that the Centre and its facilities support the achievement of the Crescent's plans and are effectively and efficiently managed.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Ensure the Centre has an effective planned and reactive maintenance and cleaning programme to provide a welcoming, inspiring, productive and clean environment for service-users, staff, volunteers and visitors
- Ensure the Crescent has the appropriate equipment and other physical resources to support the delivery its work and these are effectively and efficiently managed and maintained/serviced
- Ensure workshop spaces are multi-functional and meet the needs of the Creative Learning programme
- Capitalise on the built heritage of the building
- Increase the renting of rooms and regularly report on % usage of all rooms
- Ensure the provision of food and refreshments meets the needs of the Crescent
- Ensure effective compliance with responsibilities for health and safety
- Develop, implement and review an ICT strategy (inc. hardware, software, training, policies, support, trouble-shooting and maintenance) to ensure that technology supports the Crescent to achieve its aims and staff to do their jobs effectively
- Ensure the Crescent is as accessible and responsive as possible to the needs of disabled people
- Ensure the Crescent fulfills its responsibilities towards the environment

Success will be measured by:

- The % satisfaction of customers with the premises and facilities
- The % satisfaction of disabled customers with the premises and facilities
- The % satisfaction of staff with ICT arrangements
- The % usage of rooms
- Net income from room hire
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Financial management and reporting

Aim 11: Demonstrate best practice in effective financial planning, management and reporting and ensure sustainability and value for money.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Effectively plan organisational finances through thorough transparent budgeting and cashflow forecasting
- Effectively manage and monitor organisational finances through regular variance reporting
- Ensure the Board and relevant staff have the financial information they require to make good financial decisions
- Ensure robust finance policies and procedures promote good financial management and protect the organisation from theft and fraud and these are effectively implemented and regularly reviewed
- Comply with all the financial monitoring requirements and restrictions of funders and contractors
- Continuously improve the quality of financial information/reporting
- Effectively budget in detail for all events, classes and projects and report afterwards on the financial outcome (income and expenditure)
- Regularly review pricing strategies/structures
- Promote good stewardship and continuously review the potential for reducing costs and improving efficiency.

Success will be measured by:

- Unqualified accounts
- End of year out-turn (surplus/deficit)
- Satisfaction of staff and directors/trustees with the quality of financial information
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Income generation

Aim 12: Ensure the organisation generates sufficient income to deliver its plans

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Develop, implement and regularly review a fundraising strategy
- Maximise funding and contract income from statutory sources
- Maximise income from trusts and foundations
- Maximise net income from sponsorship from appropriate businesses
- Maximise net charitable income from individuals (donations, legacies, etc)
- Optimise net income from room and facilities rental
- Optimise net income from the sales of food and refreshments

- Ensure an appropriate pricing structure for events, classes and licences
- Regularly review and report on the detailed financial implications of all events, classes, room hire, outreach programmes, etc.
- Ensure compliance with relevant fundraising legislation and standards.

Success will be measured by:

- Income from all sources (£)
- Net earned income (£ and %)
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved

Governance

Aim 13: Ensure the governance of the organisation complies with the requirements of the law and best practice.

Priorities for 2018-2020:

- Ensure the Board has the appropriate up-to-date skills and experience and allows for succession planning; and board members induction and training needs are regularly assessed and addressed.
- Ensure there is a clear code of practice and statement of the responsibilities of the Board, individual Board members, and office-bearer roles, which are regularly reviewed
- Ensure there is an appropriate and effective governance structure (e.g. effective sub-committees with clear terms of reference and reporting arrangements)
- Ensure the board is aware of all aspects of the Crescent's work and effectively promotes organisational excellence
- Ensure the Crescent complies with the requirements of company and charity law and its governing instrument
- Ensure the Crescent identifies and manages risk effectively and complies with all its legal responsibilities in relation to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, and health and safety.
- Ensure the Crescent has appropriate strategic and operational plans, which are effectively implemented, and progress regularly monitored by the Board
- Ensure compliance with employment law and best practice; promote positive staff – board relations; and ensure there is clear delegated responsibility to staff
- Ensure the finances of the organisation are effectively planned and monitored by the board to promote effective decision-making; and internally and externally audited;

and there are the appropriate financial policies and procedures which the board ensures are effectively implemented and regularly reviewed

- Regularly review the Board's governance performance and develop, implement and review a governance action plan

Success will be measured by:

- The satisfaction level of the directors/trustees
- Staff satisfaction with the performance of the board
- Extent of on-time reporting to the Charity Commission, Companies House, ACNI and BCC
- % attendance at board meetings
- The % of smart objectives under this aim in the operational plan which are achieved