



Subject:	NI Science Festival
Date:	12 October 2016
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Head of Economic Initiatives and International Development

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issue
1.1	The purpose of the report is to update Members on a request for sponsorship for the 2017 Northern Ireland Science Festival based on the success of the 2016 event.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the contents of this report and• Agree to sponsorship of £35,000 from existing budgets for the Northern Ireland Science Festival 2017.
3.0	Main report
3.1	The Northern Ireland Science Festival has been taking place annually since 2015. The 2016 event took place over 11 days in February and March 2016. It offered 134 events across a wide range of venues, presenting local and international work that focused on a wide range of themes including science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The daytime programme targeted children and young people with workshops, talks and interactive activities while in the evening the Festival presented an eclectic mix of science debates,

talks, theatre, comedy and music.

3.2

The event was organised by Science Festivals NI, a unique collaboration of major STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) outreach organisations in Northern Ireland. Belfast's exceptional higher level skills talent pool is the primary reason why investors choose the city. Events such as the NI Science Festival help grow collaborations between such organisations and individuals, showcasing Belfast in a positive light. Funding for the event was provided by a number of organisations including the then Department for Employment and Learning, the British Council, Queen's University and the Ulster University and Belfast City Council.

3.3

Science Festivals are a relatively new type of event that are growing in popularity worldwide, with cities such as New York, Edinburgh, San Francisco and Dubai hosting large scale events as part of their wider cultural frameworks. In 2015, the inaugural NI Science Festival joined this international group by becoming the largest festival of its kind on the island of Ireland and one of the largest in Europe. Since the first Festival in 2015, the event has continued to go from strength to strength.

3.4

Both the 2015 and 2016 Festivals were considered to be major successes, exceeding agreed targets and competing with other established science festivals. This included:

- Audience numbers of 60,000 significantly exceeded the 2016 target of 50,000 set out in the funding agreement
- Young people formed the majority of the audience (57%). The increased number of evening events for adults, teachers and parents resulted in a total audience share of 43%, up from 34% in 2015
- 132 events took place across a range of venues, with approximately 90% of activities taking place in Belfast
- 92% of attendees indicated that they would visit the Festival again, with 68% of survey respondents indicating that they were more likely to pursue or encourage others to pursue an career in STEM following the Festival
- The Festival acted as a catalyst for two significant conferences to come to Belfast. The Institute for Physics hosted their Spring Conference in the Hilton Hotel, whilst the British Council brought an international delegation from the Philippines, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Yemen, Jordan, Colombia, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, South Africa and India to discuss the future for STEM. Conference organisers chose to hold their events in Belfast to coincide with the Festival.

Proposed 2017 Programme

3.5

The 2017 Festival will take place from 16 - 26 February 2017. The core objective of the Festival continues to be a commitment to reaching a broad and diverse audience to increase the accessibility of science and to promote learning. This is in line with the ambitions set out within the Belfast Agenda to improve skills and employability, make the city an attractive location for investors and improve vibrancy and city animation. This will once again be achieved through a series of events and partnerships that link science into different areas of interest. The Programme themes include:

- Tech and Digital – linking with local companies and international experts, this theme consists of talks, debates and workshops on areas such as coding
- Engineering and robotics – highlighting the advances in engineering and robotics across Belfast, including some of the unique strengths of Belfast businesses in this field
- Food Science – attracting a new audience through events linking with local restaurants, cafes and venues such as St George’s Market
- Art and Science - a number of events will focus on the crossover between art and science. This theme is centred around an exhibition and workshops by the festival’s “artist in residence” as well as a celebration of Lillian Bland by the Ulster Orchestra
- The Festival will also host events on photography, invention, history and wildlife in addition to the core themes such as mathematics, physics and space

3.6

There are opportunities for a number of the Council’s services to engage with the Science Festival to promote their work in innovative ways, particularly to young audiences, and to engage more residents around key issues for the city. These may include the support programmes on education and skills, profiling Council’s business start-up and business growth programmes and profiling ‘investing in Belfast’. There may also be opportunities for community engagement activity, managing waste and food waste in particular, supporting active communities and promoting mobility and encouraging access to arts and culture for all residents. In addition, the innovative nature of many of the events – alongside the flagship events already lined up – will act as an attraction for people coming from outside of the city into Belfast, for the purpose of attending some of these specific events or associated activities. A postcode analysis for the Festival indicates that a large proportion of the previous Festivals’ audiences come from outside Belfast.

The success of the 2016 event has helped to secure international events with a high

3.7	<p>calibre of speakers for the 2017 programme. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Talks by international experts including Professor Alice Roberts, Jim Al-Khalili and Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell – One of Europe’s largest tech conferences aimed at teenagers to be held in Titanic Belfast – A partnership with the BBC around employability and skills, with opportunities to link to the Council work in this area – The annual Turing Lecture hosted in Belfast City Hall which will be delivered by Dr Guruduth Banavar, IBM Vice-President of Cognitive Computing and leader of the worldwide team creating Watson – A “artist in residence” programme in partnership with the British Council – An event focused on sustainable development with Catalyst Inc and the British Council featuring experts from 14 different countries – An opening night performance by the Ulster Orchestra and Dumbworld celebrating the life of Lillian Bland, the first woman to build and fly her own aircraft over Carnmoney Hill.
3.8	<p>The Festival has strong alignment with the city’s investment, education, skills and tourism priorities as outlined in the Belfast Agenda, the Integrated Tourism Strategy 2015-2020 and the City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy. In particular, this is achieved through an emphasis on skills and educational attainment, international profiling, city events and programming. The message is consistent with the emerging city positioning work which is attempting to create a new narrative for Belfast that is based on the quality of its talent, reflecting its rich industrial heritage and its emerging specialisms in new technologies.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The total budget for the Festival is estimated at £221,500. Funding of £83,000 has been secured from the Department for the Economy (this includes £50,000 of core funding), £5,000 from the British Council, £20,000 respectively from Queen’s University and Ulster University. A further £26,000 has been secured from Tourism NI alongside £7,500 from the Department of Communities. The Festival anticipates ticket sales to generate around £25,000. The amount of sponsorship requested from Belfast City Council is £35,000, in line with the awards made in 2015 and 2016. This funding is available within existing Departmental budget estimates.</p>

3.10	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> There are no specific equality or good relations considerations attached to this report
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
4.1	None