



PS² Paragon Studios
project space

Strategic Plan 2016 - 2020

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Introduction and Background



plant drawings, 2010

Introduction

This Strategic Plan has been produced by the Board of Paragon Studios (PS²), its members, its wider artist collective and through feedback from key stakeholders. This Strategic Plan sets in place a number of initiatives and commitments to deliver on our strategic direction.

This direction is twofold and ambitious; firstly we will provide studio- and workshop places for artists. Secondly we will initiate projects inside and outside our project space which allow the public to encounter art and participate in various forms. As an artist collective, we encourage experimentation, risk taking and social responsibility of art in society.

Background to PS²

Paragon Studios, founded in 1994, is a small artist-run collective with studios in the centre of Belfast. As a small, flexible and experimental space, PS² supports artist on their way to more extensive and broader projects, both in terms of space and audience. Members include Sharon Kelly, Paddy McCann, Peter Mutschler and Bill Saunders. Paragon Studios became a company limited by guarantee in 1995 and is recognised as a charity by the Inland Revenue NI00028.

As an extension of the studios and at the interface between public and the private, project space was initiated in 2004 on the ground floor, creating a temporary work-and exhibition space for artists and cultural workers, selected through proposals or by invitation. The arts programme in project space allows around 60 artists this year to experiment, produce and show new work, supported by project funding. This also includes a yearly curator in residence scheme with a dedicated research office. This tandem approach as artist run studios and curated projects (Paragon Studios / project space = PS²) further extends to projects and workshops at outside locations and long term programmes with communities (PEAS PARK, North Belfast and Ballykinler, Co.Down).

PS² is run on a voluntary, non-commercial base, supported by funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and other sources.



Paddy McCann

Vision/ Mission/ Values

The following section outlines our vision for the future, our mission statement which sets out how we will go about achieving it on the ground and our operational value base.

Vision

The vision of PS² is:

to facilitate the production and participation in art

We see this vision being achieved in the following ways:

- Putting artists at the core of PS² enabling them to take risks and experiment
- Making art accessible to everyone
- Showcasing art in new and exciting ways
- Creating a shared artistic space with an embedded common understanding
- Challenging individual perceptions through the medium of art
- Bringing art outside of a set space for the public to enjoy through places of encounter
- Using stepping stones to unlock people's creativity.

Mission

Our mission statement is:

embedding art into daily life.

Values

We have defined core values for the PS² and these will underpin all our activities internally and externally within the wider community, our artists and with our stakeholders. Members and those involved in any activities associated with PS² are also held accountable to these values.



What We Do

As an artist-led organisation, PS² fulfils two functions:

1. To provide good, affordable and longer-term studio spaces
2. To invite artists and cultural practitioners to produce and show new work either inside our project space, outside locations or close to neighbourhoods.

We have a strong belief in the relevance of art and its function in society, we aim to find profound and surprising ways to make art as open and accessible as we can imagine. This constant process of connecting art and people is tried out in different ways: through work with imaginative artists, workshops; long term projects with communities; relevant subjects; anti-elitism and stirring curiosity.

We describe our voluntary-run arts organisation as artist led, self-organised, experimental and restlessly committed to art and its function to delight, question and transform. We support artists, whose work is exciting, original and makes art relevant for many.

We see our position as a colourful building step for artists between start and midway through their working career. We provide an unrestricted and un-commercial playground for creative people and an experimental field for socially engaged art with communities. It is the artistic freedom and the drive to push for new forms and displays of art which often adds great value to artists and their progression into galleries and exhibitions with more capacity and reach. The same energy allows neighbourhoods to take part in art and creative actions which change their environment and understanding.



Up-Down, Ballykinler, 2011

What others think of us is reflected in the feedback we receive. As outlined below we are making a positive difference in the lives of artists, communities and within individuals:

“PS² is the most exciting art venue in the city. A small space with two big windows, where you never know what expects you next in the fast changing space.”

“For me PS² has great value and function as a space for experimentation, especially for artists at the early stages of their career. I visit PS² regularly to see new work and artists which occasionally led me to subsequently invite artists to Golden Thread Gallery. As a small, flexible and experimental space, PS² supports artist on their way to more extensive and broader projects, both in terms of space and audience.”

“Thanks by the way for letting us put this on, it's been a real help to try things out. I got some really good feedback from people and it's been a real help for my portfolio for the future.”

“Could never have done this in any normal art space.”

“We were not into art things before, but the workshops in our village were interesting and brought many villagers together. And the fair on the football pitch at the end was the best. Since then we organise a fair every year ourselves.”

“I liked the Mouseum thingy. I went every week. We made our own museum. Everything was colourful, even the floor. At the end all these people came and we said: you can't wear black, that's not a colour and they had to take off their shoes to look more funny.”



Mouseum, 2014

Our Key Strengths and Opportunities for Development

The following table summarises our readiness to deliver on this Strategy. We are in a strong position to develop as a Studio and Project space and to maximise the positive impact we are achieving through arts within our community. Our key strength is that we enable and support artists to take risks. Our main opportunity in the next five years is to provide a space where the community can encounter fresh and unusual art which challenges perceptions.

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small and flexible space which allows risk taking and the exploration of art • Temporary uncertain existence and the nature of the building occupied, leads encourages risk taking and creativity • Strong identity (a small space and two large windows allowing external 24 hour viewing) • PS² has the ability and willingness to act on emerging opportunities • Strong Board with a wide skills base • Core volunteer who manages and develops the studio and project space: Peter Mutschler • Reputation of PS² and its ability to build social capital • Ability to support artists directly • Providing artists with freedom and opportunities for experimentation • Securing £20k annual funding • PS² does not have the commercial pressure of other organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling the public to encounter fresh and unusual art • Challenging perceptions which help integrate art into everyday life • Urban regeneration and preventing urban decline by bringing empty spaces into use • Redevelopment within the area and the opportunity for increased footfall • Developing partnerships with other organisations and broadening networks • Developing a volunteer base to support the work of PS² • Developing an agency function eg as an example the Household project • Developing wider social capital.



Bill Saunders

Areas for Improvement and Threats to Our Future

We also have some areas for improvement and threats to our organisational existence, but we also have ideas about how we can develop PS² further and how we can deal with the weaknesses and threats outlined in the following table:

Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on one funding source / lack of diversity across the funding spectrum • No paid staff or volunteer bank and an over reliance on one core volunteer to manage and develop project space • The high level of work and commitment required within PS² is not always recognised by stakeholders • Poor repair of building housing the Studio and project space • There is a threshold barrier for visitors to access PS² and its exhibitions • Studio member's art is not exhibited within the project space • Lack of clarity what PS² is offering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External perception that PS² has paid staff which run the organisation • Renovation / redevelopment of current building and potential for the current lease to end • Competition from other organisations for resources and audiences • Further government funding cuts to the arts and other sectors • Changes in funding structures and themes for funding.

beyond the studio space

- Insufficient publicity and communication of projects and programmes
 - Minimum financial reserves.
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The weaknesses and threats that we feel will have the greatest detrimental impact on our organisation is the over reliance on one funding source and on one core volunteer. To address these weaknesses and threats we will:

- Establish a core role / area of responsibility for Board members to share the workload
- Build a new volunteer structure and support base
- Showcasing and publicising our uniqueness, why we are different and the progressive effect that we have within art and within the community
- Focus our activities, not only on supporting innovative art, but on seeking funding to employ a paid member of staff
- Widening our fundraising strategy and our donor base.



Sharon Kelly

Strategic Direction

Our strategic direction has been informed by facilitated discussions with our Management Committee, our members, our artists, the general public and stakeholders. We have taken the information collated through this process, supplementing it with our knowledge and expertise within the field of visual arts and developed the strategic direction for PS².

PS²'s strategic plan has three main goals as follows:

1. Providing artists with a space that encourages risk taking and experimentation within the arts.



2. Creating opportunities in which the general public can encounter visual arts.



3. Adapt and secure the long term sustainability of PS² whilst maintaining our ethos.



Objectives for 2016 - 2020

We have taken our future strategic goals and transferred them into objectives for PS² which we plan to deliver on over the next four years. However the implementation of our full strategy will be dependent on funding and the support of our stakeholders.

- 1. Providing artists with a space that encourages risk taking and experimentation within visual arts**
 - a. Provide affordable studio space for a minimum of four artists annually (in line with current studio space but growing beyond when additional space becomes available)
 - b. Offer an exhibition space for 20 new emerging and established artists to experiment in annually
 - c. Provide a Curator developmental programme annually supporting at least one person.
- 2. Creating spaces in which the general public can encounter visual arts**
 - a. Deliver at least two community outreach programmes annually
 - b. Increase the number of externally curated exhibitions to four annually
 - c. Host one substantial project on a two yearly basis.

- 3. Adapt and secure the long term sustainability of PS2 whilst maintaining our ethos**
- a. Develop the Board and assign core roles to Board members by June 2016
 - b. Undertake an annual review of the Board and their skills
 - c. Develop a pool of volunteers by December 2016
 - d. Explore the options for alternative studio and project space and reaching a decision by March 2020
 - e. Explore options for succession of project manager, piloting at least two models, and implement a model of succession by March 2017
 - f. Maintain a high level of good governance annually
 - g. Continue to deliver on a communications and marketing strategy annually
 - h. Secure £21,000 funding by March 2017, £23,000 by March 2018 and £28,000 by March 2020.



Peter Mutschler