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For Immediate Release**

ALL FIVE UK AND IRELAND CULTURE MINISTERS PRAISE EPIC AWARDS WINNERS

The Government Culture Ministers in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were unanimous in their praise for the outstanding amateur arts groups honoured this week by the Epic Awards. The 2013 Epic Awards were presented at the vibrant Verbal Arts Centre in Derry~Londonderry, the UK City of Culture, on Thursday 31 January.

The **England Award** was won by Quilts 4 London who mobilised 15,000 people to make 17,000 pennants for participants in the Olympics and Paralympics as part of the Cultural Olympiad. Lovingly-crafted contributions were sent from all over the UK as well as from countries as far away as Australia, Bermuda and South Africa. The British Library now holds the Quilts 4 London website in their collection as a permanent record of the project.

City of Birmingham Choir were **England runners up** with their Equinox project based on the richness of West Midlands' cultural and musical life.

Fermanagh St. Patrick's Day Festival won the **Ireland Award** for their revival of a St. Patrick's Day parade in the Enniskillen community. The hugely-popular festival included a water parade, wakeboarding leprechauns, a local musical group using instruments recycled from old agricultural machinery and a range of local amateur and professional musicians.

Ireland runners up the Vent Collective Vent Collective created a 3km long chalk mural through the streets of Belfast for Culture Night 2012.

The **Scottish Award** was scooped by the Barra Bunting Project for their inspiring initiative to decorate their annual Barra and Vatersay Island Produce Show with bunting flags from people who have set foot on Barra and / or Vatersay. Each flag is unique to the person who made it, and many of the flags have arrived from afar with lovely stories and memories attached.

Scotland runners up The Crow's Nest Project showed how a community pulled together to design and create stunning mosaics to boost the look of the local environment.

The Welsh Basket Makers South Wales Group won the **Welsh Award** for their exhibition at the Basketmakers Association AGM at the National Botanical Gardens of Wales. The group created a large display of willow sunflowers,



Peter Stark (Voluntary Arts Chair), Councillor Kevin Campbell (Derry~Londonderry Mayor) and Minister Jonathan Bell (Office of the First and Deputy First Minister) presenting winners' awards to (clockwise from top left): Irene Heathcote (Quilts 4 London); Liz Stone (Welsh Basketmakers South Wales Group); Feargal Shannon (Fermanagh St Patrick's Day Festival) with Gerry Kindlon (Vice President of the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce); Sarah MacLean (Barra Bunting project).

snails and insects and taught visitors how to make small willow items like fish, stars and hearts. They also helped create a large wild boar willow sculpture measuring 10 metres long by 5 metres high which took over 3 days to complete. The boar is now permanently displayed on a hilltop at the Botanical Gardens.

Wales runners up Fishguard Arts Society created a community art exhibition based on a series of collages inspired by music and the landscape.

The Epic Awards winners' reception was a fantastic celebration of all that is wonderful about the amateur arts and crafts. The fun began with an Epic Party in the afternoon with local groups putting on special workshops, displays and performances. Then the winners received their prizes and accolades at an evening ceremony.

Government Ministers representing each of the countries sent special messages of congratulations to the winning groups (see below). Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, UK Government commended Quilts 4 London who won the England award saying:

"Quilts 4 London is an amazing story about people responding to the inspiration of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games with creativity, ambition and determination. The scale of their achievement is incredible - all the more so when you realise the project was developed and run entirely by volunteers. Thousands of people across the country were inspired to create a total of 17,000 pennants as gifts for the Olympic and Paralympic athletes. Many of these people were trying textile arts for the first time. Their story is a superb example of the ingenuity, resilience and excellence of voluntary arts activity. I congratulate Quilts 4 London on their well-deserved Epic Award."

As well as their awards, winners also received a stash of prizes including cash, vouchers for arts and craft supplies and membership of Arts Development UK.

Case studies featuring the winners, runners up and other entrants can be found here: www.epicawards.co.uk

-ENDS-

Editor's notes:

Quotes from Ministers

Carál Ní Chuilín

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Northern Ireland Executive

"I would like to congratulate the Fermanagh St Patrick's Day Festival, winners of the Epic Award, for a truly innovative and inclusive programme of activities. I would like to commend them, and all the nominated groups, for their enthusiasm and commitment in delivering high quality community arts based events. These voluntary arts groups contribute so much to local community, their passion for music and arts is infectious and their creative talents are invaluable in their society and to the local economy."

Jimmy Deenihan

Minister for the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Republic of Ireland Government

"Congratulations to all the voluntary arts groups that have won an Epic Award. I know that voluntary arts groups make a significant contribution to the social fabric of our communities. Bringing creativity, fun and an opportunity to people encouraging them to participate in local activities, to come together and enjoy themselves. Congratulations also to Fermanagh St Patrick's Day Festival for winning the Ireland award. Through the revival of the St Patrick's Day celebrations for the whole of Fermanagh you have ensured this element of our shared heritage is preserved."

Fiona Hyslop

Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Scottish Government

"I'd like to congratulate all those involved in the Barra Bunting Project on winning the Scotland Epic Award. Scotland is renowned for its warm people and its warm welcome. The project has embraced these principles by reaching out across continents to those who have poignant memories of their connections to Barra.

I'm delighted that Voluntary Arts Scotland's continuing support for groups like Barra Bunting is enabling even more people to get involved in creative activities and bringing communities together to show their individuality, their ingenuity and their imagination."

Huw Lewis

Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, Welsh Government

"The work of Voluntary Arts and here in Wales, Voluntary Arts Wales, in supporting and encouraging the voluntary art sector is fully acknowledged. They are to be commended in bringing forward the Epic awards to recognise the work and commitment of this sector. I am delighted that the Welsh winner this year is Welsh Basketmakers South Wales Group. It is encouraging that in our modern world, with all its digital technology, there is not only a place for traditional arts and crafts, but that the achievements of the group have been recognised. Not only are they producing work of the

highest quality, they are also ensuring that this ancient craft and artform continues, something that we should all celebrate."

Ed Vaizey

Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, UK Government

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High-quality images, logos and video footage are available from anne@vaengland.org.uk.

Epic Awards and Voluntary Arts

The Epic Awards are an initiative of Voluntary Arts and aim to identify and promote excellent art and craft practice that exists within the voluntary arts sector.

Voluntary Arts is the national development agency for arts participation. The organisation raises awareness of the contribution that the voluntary and amateur arts and crafts make to the well-being of communities, social inclusion, lifelong learning, active citizenship and volunteering.

Winners

More details about each winner can be found at www.epicawards.org.uk.

Individual websites are as follows:

Quilts 4 London – <http://www.quilts4london.org.uk/>

Fermanagh St. Patrick's Day Festival – <https://www.facebook.com/ProjectStPatrick>

Barra Bunting Project – <http://www.barrabunting.net/>

Welsh Basket Makers South Wales Group – <http://www.welshbasketmakers.co.uk/>

Runners up

Individual websites are as follows:

City of Birmingham Choir – <http://www.citychoir.org.uk/>

Vent Collective – <http://www.ventcollective.co.uk/>

Craw's Nest Project – <http://www.stonehavenhorizon.co.uk/index.asp?pageid=387475>

Fishguard Arts Society - <http://www.fishguardartssociety.org.uk/>

Prizes

There is a package of prizes which includes:

- £200 cash for each winner
- Annual membership of Arts Development UK (worth £165) for each winner
- GreatArt gift vouchers worth £250 for each winner
- GreatArt gift vouchers worth £100 for each runner-up
- £50 cash for each runner up
- National publicity for the winners and an invitation to a prestigious winners' reception
- A pair of tickets to attend Twisted Thread's textile craft show in Dublin
- A beautiful hand crafted wooden platter from the Association of Woodturners of Great Britain
- Plus training, mentoring and meeting space

Full details of prizes can be found on the Epic Awards website: www.epicawards.co.uk.

Sponsors

Audiences UK is the national network of Audience Development Agencies, organisations that specialise in understanding how to engage and develop audiences. Twelve core member agencies work collaboratively to develop and deliver programmes and services based on the needs of their regions. <http://www.audiencesuk.org/>

Arts Development UK is a professional association, with a membership drawn from local authorities and those working in the creative industries sector in England and Wales. Their objectives are to offer practical advice,

networking and support to the profession, and to advocate for the important contribution that the arts and creative industries make to today's crosscutting agendas, such as social inclusion. <http://artsdevelopmentuk.org>

GreatArt has the UK's largest range of art materials. Still very much a family business, GreatArt prides itself on the experience and expertise of its managers and staff whose specialist knowledge of the art supplies industry helps to ensure the efficient operation of Europe's most comprehensive and competitive one-stop shop for quality art materials. <http://www.greatart.co.uk/>

People's Voice Media's vision is to connect communities through the use of social media to support civil society and improve governance. A not for profit community development organisation that supports communities to have a voice, they empower individuals and groups to tell their own stories and develop their own solutions. <http://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk/>

The Association of Woodturners of Great Britain is an international non-profit making organisation dedicated to the advancement and promotion of woodturning. They have over 3000 individual members and provide a forum to encourage communication and an exchange of views amongst wood turners of all nations. <http://www.woodturners.co.uk>

Twisted Thread organise five exhibitions annually for creative, crafty people who appreciate textile art. Their shows offer a great visitor experience combining exhibitions, workshops, shopping, lectures and competitions. <http://www.twistedthread.com/>

Making Music is the UK's number one organisation for voluntary music. They thrive on encouraging all kinds of music groups and individuals to be part of a vibrant multi-cultural music scene and have over 3000 members. <http://www.makingmusic.org.uk/>

City Hotel Derry enjoys one of the most idyllic locations; perched on the banks of the River Foyle within 5 minutes walking distance of the historic Derry Walls. The 4 star City Hotel Derry offers 146 guestrooms, including superior rooms and suites. <http://www.cityhotelderry.com/>

Mailout.co is the home of information, sharing and networking for participatory arts in the UK and further afield. Their mission is to champion outstanding participatory arts in more places with more people and support a world leading community of professional practitioners. <http://mailout.co/>

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