

Dear Sir/Madam,

Ofcom announcement and proposed cuts at UTV

I am writing on behalf of Queen's Film Theatre to express my concern at the recent Ofcom announcement and subsequent cuts which have been announced at UTV. These cutbacks include the proposed axing of UTV Life – the only consistent home for television arts features in Northern Ireland.

There is currently a dearth of arts programming in Northern Ireland and I strongly believe that far from downsizing their arts output, broadcasters here need to raise the profile of their arts coverage to reflect the wider contribution of the arts to mainstream social, cultural and economic activities.

At the moment, UTV Life is the only television programme in Northern Ireland to cover QFT events on a weekly basis. Film is a visual medium and without that regular television outlet to showcase the unique programme which QFT offers, our audiences will undoubtedly suffer.

Michael Wilson, head of television at UTV may respond to the committee's concerns by saying that UTV will be launching a weekly 30 minute lifestyle and culture programme and could hypothetically bring some arts coverage into the UTV Live news programme (which will continue). Our response to this is a) it is not enough and b) the new programme will be staffed by new, inexperienced staff with no affinity, training or experience in arts programming.

I am writing to ask Ofcom to use its authority and influence to do something about this vital issue. After all, what is the point in DCAL giving the arts sector a £7.55 million increase to continue to develop the great work we're doing if we allow the only consistent television arts coverage in Northern Ireland to be lost?

UTV Life has supported the arts sector for many years – it's time for us to support them.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Hughes
Queen's Film Theatre