the arts council
an chomhairle ealaíon

Developing the Arts in Ireland

Arts Council Strategic Overview

2011 – 2013

Mission Statement

The mission of the Arts Council is to develop the arts

- *by supporting artists of all disciplines to make work of excellence*
- *by promoting public access, participation, and engagement in the arts*
- *by demonstrating and facilitating the important contribution the arts make to the social and economic well-being of Ireland.*

The Arts Council

Statutory Remit

The 1951 Arts Act established the Arts Council and charged it with stimulating public interest; promoting knowledge, appreciation and practice; and assisting in the improving of standards of the arts. The 1973 Act developed that role and created the structures for the achievements of the following decades, most especially increased public access to and engagement with the arts. The 2003 Arts Act reiterated the three key purposes of the Arts Council and re-calibrated the relationship between the Arts Council and government. It underlined the autonomy of the Council as the expert body appointed to fund the arts, steer their development, and offer advice on arts and cultural matters.

History

For over sixty years, since its foundation in 1951, the Arts Council has overseen the development of the arts through periods of significant social and economic change. In partnership with central and local government, and with artists and arts organisations, the Arts Council has helped to create an environment where artists are valued members of society and the arts are acknowledged as central to the lives of individuals and communities, as well as to Ireland's self-image and its reputation abroad.

Guiding Principles

A set of core principles guides the work of the Arts Council and informs all of its judgments from macro-policy to the smallest grant decision.
These include commitments to:

- The long-term development of the living arts, the work of contemporary artists, and their intellectual and artistic freedom
- Access to and engagement with the arts for all citizens and a determination to ensure that the returns on public investment in the arts benefit as many as possible
- Excellence, achieved or latent, in all aspects of the work of artists and arts organisations
- Diversity of practice within and across art forms; diversity of contexts and types of participation that constitute public engagement; social and cultural diversity
- Dialogue with the arts sector and partnership with public agencies and other organisations to the benefit of the arts and to the wider public good
- Processes and practices in the allocation of public funds that demonstrate integrity, accountability, transparency, and value for money

Preface

The Arts Council manages the state's investment in the arts and is responsible for the development of an aspect of Irish life in which there is widespread and justifiable pride. From local arts centres, through national cultural institutions, to stages, screens and bookshops in cities worldwide, Irish art and artists bring beauty, truth and meaning to people everywhere. They provide significant direct and indirect employment, they underpin a large and significant sector in the creative and cultural industries, and they are critical to cultural tourism. They also bring renown to Ireland as a country where innovation and creativity are strongly supported.

The past two decades have seen exceptional growth in public arts provision. Ireland now has a developed arts infrastructure of ensembles, organisations, festivals and dedicated buildings, as well as a cohort of exceptional artists, arts workers, and arts managers. We believe that protecting this investment should be a key priority of government.

The Arts Council publishes this strategic overview in a spirit of confidence, tempered by the realism required to plan and provide for the arts at a time of significant difficulty in the public finances. We set out in the following pages the strategic approach that will inform our decisions in the next few years and the range of actions we will take in addressing our remit and responsibilities. Some of those decisions may be difficult and have consequences far from what we would wish in ideal circumstances.

The role of the Arts Council is to plan and provide in good times and bad and we will make all our decisions with the long-term good of the arts as our principal goal.

Introduction

The Arts Council's strategic approach for 2011-2013 builds on previous plans. It has a dual focus on supporting artists and arts organisations and on seeking to increase public engagement and participation in the arts. The strategic directions outlined in this document are necessarily flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. The Arts Council will provide as much certainty as possible to artists and arts organisations so as to facilitate their planning and programming. Our newsletter and website – and in particular the pages on the individual art forms and areas of arts practice – will be especially important in terms of communicating any strategic changes or developments.

During 2011-2013 the Arts Council will provide financial support; act in partnership; provide information and expert advice on the arts; and advocate for the arts.

The range and focus of the actions to be taken in these areas are contingent on available resources.

- **Financial Support**
  We support and develop the arts by allocating grants and awards and by providing schemes and other opportunities. We also make interventions or take initiatives where there are critical deficits in provision or the potential for strategic actions to benefit the arts.

- **Partnership**
  We act in partnership with stakeholders in the field of arts and culture, and in other important areas of Irish society, so as to broaden the reach and deepen the impact of the arts.

- **Advice**
  We give advice as a statutory body whose expertise is vested in its membership, executive and processes. That expertise renews itself through shared experience, dialogue with the arts sector and our partners, the development actions we undertake, and evidence-based policy-making.

- **Advocacy**
  We advocate for the arts and for support for the arts from public funds. We do this in various ways, in a range of contexts, and always from a conviction about the intrinsic value of the arts, their singular contribution to Irish identity, and their importance for social and economic well-being.

Financial Support

Securing and Investing Financial Resources

- The Arts Council recognises that the environment in which public funds are now allocated is very competitive. We will continue to make a strong case to government to provide the arts with the core funding they require and to protect the significant investment already made.

- We will also seek to maximise public and private investment in the arts through maintaining and developing funding partnerships, through seeking new sources and new means of support – public, corporate, and philanthropic - and through encouraging arts organisations to broaden their income base where possible and appropriate.

Allocating Funding: Breadth and Balance

- In allocating government funding in 2011-2013 the Arts Council will seek to maintain balanced and sustainable arts provision. We will endeavour to secure meaningful levels of support to as many artists and to as much of the current arts infrastructure (buildings and organisations) as resources permit.

- We will strive to maintain breadth and balance by investing
  - across all artforms and areas of arts practice currently supported
  and
  - to the benefit of people in all parts of Ireland

- We will carefully balance the needs of individual artists and independent practitioners with those of arts organisations.

- Because different funding programmes address different needs and objectives, we will continue to offer a range of funding streams and other support mechanisms. These include annual grant-aid; awards; projects; schemes; initiatives; promotions; and key research and development actions.

- Our funding allocations will reflect our commitment to diversity: of the population; of the genres and practices within art forms; of the settings and contexts within which various kinds of arts engagement occur.

- We will seek to ensure that opportunities for new ideas, innovative practices, and emerging practitioners are secured, alongside support for more established artists and arts organisations demonstrating a continuous commitment to creative endeavour.

Funding Patterns and Relationships

- In supporting and developing the arts, the Arts Council takes account of national, regional and local needs. As the national arts agency, and especially at a time of scarce resources, we will

  (i) support arts work and infrastructure (buildings and organisations) of national significance, irrespective of location
  (ii) partner with other bodies and agencies in the resourcing of arts infrastructure, programmes and services that are more local or regional in their impact
  The focus of Arts Council support in such partnership funding will be arts programming.

- We will have regard for the different environments of the various artforms and for the extent to which the Arts Council is the key provider of support. In considering balance within or between different areas of arts practice, we may have to change existing patterns of funding. We may also have to alter or conclude some current funding relationships.

- In making funding decisions the Arts Council will have particular regard for value for money and sustainability, whether applied to a particular organisation, to a strand of work within an area of practice, or to a whole arts area. Value for money is determined according to a range of indicators. Some of these, such as audience numbers or the financial health of an organisation, lend themselves to relatively easy measurement. Others, such as quality of artistic direction or the significance of an organisation for provision in a particular art form, are no less important for being less amenable to measurement.

Initiatives to Increase Public Access and Participation

- The public are central to the remit and mission of the Arts Council. They are at the beginning and end of the cycle of publicly subsided arts. We will continue to invest in programmes directed at building capacity in the arts sector, especially in the fields of audience development and marketing. Audience development is understood to include growing the numbers and widening the demographic profile of arts audiences. It also involves increasing for the public the range and richness of their encounters with the arts. There is strong evidence of high levels of public awareness and participation, but we are also aware that the arts are not part of the lives of some sections of Irish society. All of these issues will continue to inform our work in the period 2011-2013.

- We are committed to investing in the touring and dissemination of high-quality work in all disciplines through the national network of arts centres and venues, both specialist and multi-disciplinary.

- Venues will be a particular focus of our partnership with local authorities nationwide. As the national arts agency, the Arts Council will be seeking to focus its funding and other supports for such venues on the provision of high-quality arts programmes.

- We will incentivise shared services, especially when directed at marketing and promotion. We will seek to ensure that the opportunities presented by new media and technologies are exploited to the benefit of public enjoyment of the arts.

- In 2011-2013 we will continue to provide for public engagement with the arts that occurs in the wider public realm: in virtual and real public spaces, in festivals and events, as well as in a wide range of social settings and contexts. Such locations often provide opportunities to participate in the arts for those who would not otherwise do so, and for artists to explore diverse ways of making work and of public engagement.

Information on Art Forms and Arts Practices

- The broad context for the work of the Arts Council is set out in this document. It is supplemented by details on all our grant programmes, awards, schemes and initiatives published on www.artscouncil.ie. Information on individual art forms and arts practices is also available on our website. Where significant strategic changes are made or new directions taken in an art form or arts practice in 2011-2013, these will occur after consultation with the relevant stakeholders, as appropriate, and will be published on our website and announced in our newsletter.

Partnership

Partnership with the Arts Sector and Beyond

- Partnership – characterised by common purpose and respect for distinct roles – will continue to define the relationship of the Arts Council with the arts sector and a range of other bodies. In partnership with an experienced and resourceful arts sector, with the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport, and with the wider framework of agencies and organisations in central and local government, the Arts Council will continue to act to the benefit of the arts and the wider public good.

- Our partnership with the arts sector is central to our work. Though the context for partnership now is very different to that of the previous decade, the need for it is even greater. The Arts Council continues to be informed by the outcomes of the consultation undertaken before and during the period of the previous strategy. The coming years will see formal and informal consultation as general arts provision, or aspects of it, are shaped in light of changed circumstances and emerging needs.

- In 2011-2013 we will continue to work in partnership with various government departments and with other agencies and organisations to ensure that the arts are embedded into the policies and programmes of a range of public services from health to education and from tourism to broadcasting.

Individual Artists

- Individual artists are central to our mission and work. We view our relationship with artists as a partnership. They make a unique contribution to society and our advocacy on their behalf is underpinned by a range of financial supports, direct and indirect. One of our constant concerns is to improve the living and working conditions of artists. All our partnerships are informed by our commitment to create local, national and international contexts in which Irish artists are supported to make work of excellence and to engage with as wide a public as possible.

Key Areas of Partnership

- **Local Authorities**
  As access and participation are central to our mission, our partnership with local authorities across the country is key. Our strategic focus in 2011-2013 will include engagement with local authorities in relation to arts provision within their areas so as to maximise coherence of planning and provision. The partnership will be based on a dialogue that respects the local remit and distinctive concerns of local authorities and the national remit and arts development concerns of the Arts Council.

- **Young People and Education**
  Provision of high quality arts experiences for young people in and out of school is an abiding concern of the Arts Council. The high proportion of young people in our population and their developmental significance carry weight in our funding decisions and in our partnerships in the fields of arts-in-education, youth arts, and professional arts provision for young audiences. During 2011-2013 we wish to build on the 2008 Report of the Special Committee on Arts and Education and to work with the Department of Education and Skills and other partners to advance the actions proposed in that report which have the potential to make the arts more present in the lives of nearly one million young people. Recognising the importance of rich and diverse arts experiences for young people in out-of-school settings and the wider public realm, we will seek to work closely with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the National Youth Council of Ireland.

- **Arts and Cultural Agencies**
  We work with arts councils in neighbouring countries and, through the International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies, with arts councils and agencies across the world. We work closely also with a range of national cultural institutions. We value especially our long-standing partnership with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) and will implement, as resources permit, our agreed programme of joint actions and activities. In 2011-2013 we will continue to develop our strong working relationship with Culture Ireland to the benefit of artists and arts organisations

- **Cultural Tourism**
  There is significant mutual benefit for the arts sector and for tourism in taking strategic actions to increase, improve, and promote the arts elements of the wider cultural tourism 'offer'. In the period 2011-2013 we will work closely with Fáilte Ireland and others to support initiatives to make the arts more central to the achievement of Ireland's tourism objectives. The provision and maintenance of high-quality arts infrastructure, festivals, and programmes of work across all arts disciplines will benefit both residents and tourists.

- **Creative and Cultural Industries**
  The Arts Council acknowledges the links between its mission to develop the arts and economic objectives relating to the creative and cultural industries. We will explore the establishment of a partnership framework to develop these links.

Advice

- The Arts Council possesses unique knowledge about the arts. This is informed by understanding
  - the professional realities of working artists
  - the distinctive nature of arts enterprises
  - the role and function of the arts within civil society
  - the policies, strategies and partnerships required for arts provision in the social, cultural, and economic environment of contemporary Ireland.

- The rate and nature of change in contemporary arts practice and public engagement are exceptional. In 2011-2013 the Arts Council will continue to provide expert advice across a wide range of arts and cultural issues. We will be both proactive and responsive within the policy, legislative and regulatory environment in Ireland, at EU level and in the wider international sphere.

- Developments in new media and technology and their significance for the arts underline the need for the Arts Council to be well-informed in these areas. Otherwise there is a risk of lost opportunities for both artists and public. The intersections of certain art form practices and the aesthetic dimensions of some cultural and industrial applications of new technologies will be a particular focus.

Advocacy

- Advocacy is a key function of the Arts Council. We recognise and welcome the fact that, in recent years especially, artists and arts organisations have advocated for the arts in a committed and concerted fashion. As a statutory agency the advocacy actions of the Arts Council derive from our remit and mission and especially from our responsibility to locate arts policy and provision within wider public policy and the public good.

- In a variety of contexts, but most of all in our relationship with government, both national and local, we will underline the many ways in which the arts have and create value. We will engage with a range of government departments and public bodies to advance common objectives.

- Evidence-based research and reliable current data on important aspects of the arts are crucial for persuasive advocacy. In 2011-2013 the Arts Council will work with the arts sector to improve the provision of data and other information on key aspects of arts practice and public engagement. We intend to build on current information to create and maintain a robust system for generating data on the production and presentation of the arts and on key indicators such as the working conditions of artists and trends in audience behaviours.

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