

Arts Council Arts Centre Policy

There is a dynamic and vibrant network of arts centres across Ireland. In our towns and cities people create and engage with the arts because of and within these centres.

The artistic, social, economic, spatial and demographic context in which this infrastructure developed has changed radically in recent years.

The ability of these centres to grow and develop, to support and engage with their communities, has consistently been hampered by the absence of necessary resources: physical space, production expertise, human resources and funding for the production of work.

Recognising these factors, this policy sets forward an ambitious vision for the future development of arts centres. Supporting and partnering with these arts centres as they embed their work ever deeper into their places is vital to the development of the arts in Ireland.

Context

Recent decades have seen the development of a nationwide [infrastructure](#) of arts centres. Some are new developments designed as arts centres, most of which were built within the last thirty years, while others are repurposed older buildings.

Many arts centres were initiated and funded by [local authorities](#) and supported through central government [capital schemes](#). Support provided to these arts centres by local authorities is critical to ensuring that a stable and vibrant network can be maintained.

Arts centres were designed using a model that concentrated on the provision of gallery and auditorium spaces, and workshop spaces for educational programmes. Provision of working space for artists and artistic production was largely not considered. Despite this, many arts centres now directly support artists and the production of work, albeit within the limitations of their physical space.

Historical investment patterns, based on a number of factors, have led to a mixed funding ecology. Centres developed independently of local authorities tend to be more reliant on Arts Council funding. Arts centres built under the auspices of local government usually receive funding in excess of Arts Council funding from their local authorities.

A priority for the partnership between the Arts Council and the [County and City Management Association](#) (CCMA), identified in '[A Framework for Collaboration](#)' and an action in the Arts Councils [Making Great Art Work 3-Year Plan 2017-2020](#), was to develop a co-ordinated, spatially-informed strategy to support and develop the infrastructure for the arts. A Review of Arts Centres was jointly commissioned by the CCMA and the Arts Council in 2017. This review has informed this policy and strategy.

This is the adopted policy of the Arts Council which stands separate from any agreed future strategy with the CCMA.

Statement of Policy

To date our work has been described as support for Venues. It is now proposed to move to the term Arts Centre to be defined as follows:

Definition

Arts centres are full-time, public-facing, professionally-managed, building-based organisations. They support the creation, presentation and mediation of the arts across a range of art forms, and arts practices. They support professional, collaborative, voluntary and amateur arts practice.

Forging connection between the arts and the public is a defining characteristic of the work of Arts Council-supported arts centres.

We base our commitment to this sector on the understanding that if it is creatively, ambitiously and sustainably developed it can deliver on these objectives:

- Make a significant contribution to a range of artforms/arts practices, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, on a local and national basis
- Provide public access to a range of arts forms on a geographic basis
- Offer support to artists as creators, participants, collaborators and community members
- Increase production capacity
- Expand programming capacity, including increased technical capabilities, public engagement and marketing
- Enable the rights of every person living in Ireland to create, engage with, enjoy and participate in the arts, a priority further driven through the Arts Council [Equality, Human Right and Diversity Policy](#)
- Provide opportunities for dynamic, sustained engagement by communities of interest.

In order to support the achievement of these objectives the Arts Council will introduce a dedicated funding programme for Arts Centres, informed by this policy.

Partnership with Local Government

[‘A Framework for Collaboration’](#), the formal agreement between the Arts Council and the CCMA, sets out the following Statement of Common Purpose; ‘A central tenet of our shared vision for arts development is the citizen and her/his right to enjoy and participate in the arts. We share a conviction about the intrinsic value of the arts and culture in people’s lives and we acknowledge the distinctive and important contribution that artists and the arts make to society’. This purpose guides our partnership as we work to ensure that people in cities and towns throughout Ireland have access to the arts.

Local authority investment in the arts reaps artistic, civic, social and community benefits. They work to breach those educational, physical, geographic and socio-economic barriers that exclude people from the arts. They work with other sectors bringing artists and arts organisations into a wide range of settings. They support organisations and artists to make work of excellence through their own work, through funding, and through development programmes.

There are disparities in the level of funding offered by the Arts Council and individual local authorities to particular arts centres. Through a process of engagement and discussion, using the context of our national and individual local partnerships, we will work to address this issue together over the next three years.

Partnership is critical to well supported, strategically developed arts infrastructure. The more we work together the greater the impact our investment can have upon people and places.

Project Ireland 2040

The Arts Council is aligned to [Project Ireland 2040](#) in its approach to development. [Project Ireland 2040](#) seeks to achieve strategic outcomes, building around the themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity. Those outcomes relevant to this policy are:

- Enhanced regional accessibility
- Strengthened rural economies and communities
- A strong economy, supported by enterprise, innovation and skills
- Enhanced amenity and heritage

These outcomes will be achieved by the implementation of national policy objectives. Those which are most relevant to this policy and strategy are detailed in Appendix 1.

The 'Hierarchy of Settlement and Related Infrastructure' within the '[National Planning Framework](#)' outlines the appropriate infrastructure based on the size of a town or city. This suggests that it is in towns with a population of over 10,000 that can expect to be served by an Arts & Culture Centre. The historic development of an arts centre does not align with this hierarchy. Cognisance will be taken when reviewing the impact and work of organisations of their reach into their hinterlands, their networks and outreach programmes will all be relevant.

Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford are recognised in [Project Ireland 2040](#) as a focus for investment to improve their collective 'offer'. The role played by Sligo in the North West and Athlone in the Midlands as regional centres is also recognised.

The ambition to improve the quality of life in urban locations and to enhance their ability to become regional leaders has the potential to impact upon the investment by the Arts Council. As our population grows, there may be a need to enhance existing arts centres and make new investments to ensure citizens have access to the arts in their own areas.

Further to this there is a concentration of artists in cities. Supporting increased productive capacity in these locations will help artists to make work using high quality facilities and resources. Many artists work on a project by project basis. Flexible expert support which recognises and organises around the needs of the artist as they make work, is a vital resource which arts centres, if resourced, can provide.

Balancing this is the understanding that approximately half of Ireland's population lives in rural areas, in small town, and villages. This is unique within Europe. People who live in rural Ireland are entitled to access the arts within their own places, or within a reasonable distance.

This distinctive settlement pattern has a valuable impact upon our society and the work of artists. We recognise the diverse nature of rural communities. We will ensure we support a network of arts centres which make it possible for artists and audiences to make and see work in rural and urban locations.

The production of work across art forms in a variety of locations, rather than largely concentrated in Dublin, is very desirable. Artists, participants and audiences are served better by the ability to make work in a range of places across Ireland, with regional nuance adding to recognition and ownership of work.

Our determination in this regard is a complex one which poses challenges, for the Arts Council, local authorities and other national funding agencies. Yet it is also an opportunity to ensure that the distinctive nature of our communities is respected, acknowledged and supported by our cultural infrastructure.

These considerations are set against a pattern of historic investment, both at national and local level. Future Arts Council investment will be based upon work of excellence within arts centres. This may be in facilities, artform or practice area expertise, in the scale and/or quality of participant and audience engagement, or in the production supports offered by the centre to artists.

Clusters/Networks

Larger arts centres will be encouraged to operate as cluster co-ordinators; they will be agents for the development, production and dissemination of work across a range of centres both locally and nationally. In order to do this support for their 'productive capacity' is needed to extend and intensify both audience engagement and artist support.

We will work with our partners, both the arts centres themselves and local authorities, as well partners within the broader cultural sector, libraries, national cultural institutions, etc., to promote innovation in ensuring connectivity, utilising new technologies, social innovation and partnership.

Developmental Supports

The developmental needs of individual arts centres and networks of arts centres are recognised. We will ensure that these are understood and responded to through a series of focused development initiatives targeting leadership, governance, diversity, inclusivity and engagement.

Conclusion

['Making Great Art Work'](#) sets forth a vision for an Ireland in which the arts are valued as central to civic life, as a hallmark of local and national identity, and as a sign and signature of our creativity as a nation. This encompasses the practice and enjoyment of the arts within communities and in dedicated venues and centres across the country. It embraces support for artists and practitioners of exceptional talent and commitment, so that they can have productive and rewarding careers. It supports and recognises the distinctive societal value of the arts, and provides for them accordingly. This vision includes the resourcing of the Arts Council so that it can address and realise this vision.

This Arts Centre Policy commits the Arts Council to developing its work with these organisations, with local authorities and with stakeholders both national and local so this vision can be realised. The realisation of this policy will require ambition, change and resources.

This policy will be implemented through a series of actions, ongoing activities and short, medium and long term objectives – which are outlined in the implementation plan which accompanies this policy.