



Making Great Art Work:
Circus, Street Arts and Spectacle
(CSAS) Policy & Strategy 2018

General Description and Context

There are three distinct artforms in this portfolio: Circus, Street Arts and Spectacle (CSAS) – these are at different levels of development in Ireland. They are currently supported under the same Arts Council portfolio, as each artform shares overlapping needs in the areas of training, performance skills and infrastructural needs. Another common feature is that they are often presented as free outdoor events (parades, festivals, festive public celebrations) and attract large and varied audiences, some of which may not normally engage with the arts.

Spectacle is an artform of scale and impact primarily delivered through free outdoor events and often in a festive context. Street arts creative practice is primarily represented by the work of individual artists. Significantly, there is some crossover, with many of these artists at times working in partnership with spectacle organisations and others. These artists make vibrant work that enlivens many festivals throughout the country.

Circus can be sub-categorised in two areas of practice: traditional and contemporary. Traditional circus is still very much a thriving artform. Each tented show presents international and national performers in villages and towns throughout Ireland. Contemporary circus (presented both in theatres and outdoors) has been developing since the late 1990s, flourishing in a large and active sector that has seen a rapid expansion over the last two years.

The distinction between the two strands is reflected in the differences between the styles of presentation, artistic direction, modes of distribution, and histories of development within the country. As an artform, circus attracts high audience numbers each year, including many rural audiences and members of new communities. Youth circus activity is a growth area within Ireland.

The Arts Council supports both strands of circus, and, through direct support and strategic intervention, engages with the sector to assist individuals and organisations in developing high-quality performance and participatory work. While mindful of the need to preserve the integrity of both strands of circus, we also encourage practitioners to challenge the boundaries of work practices by exploring and developing opportunities across a range of arts disciplines.

In [Making Great Art Work](#) (MGAW) the Arts Council identifies two policy priority areas: **the artist** and **public engagement**. In order to deliver on these priority areas in CSAS, the Council will take the approach outlined below over the next three years. However, individual initiatives will depend on the procurement of additional project-management supports and the investment of appropriate financial resources.

CSAS Artists

One of the main issues affecting CSAS artists is the lack of training and professional-development opportunities in Ireland.

The Arts Council directly supports individual artists through a number of schemes: [Project Award, Bursary, Travel & Training, Touring, Festivals Investment Scheme, Open Call](#) and [Next Generation Bursary Award](#). Through its [Strategic Funding](#) the Arts Council supports the essential infrastructure required to sustain and develop CSAS practice in Ireland, and, together with [Arts Grants Funding](#), provides opportunities, resources and services to CSAS artists.

In further supporting artists, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Conduct an overall analysis of the sector to include the following actions:
 - A survey of the CSAS sector's needs in Ireland. This survey will aim to identify the main locations of professional artists' activity, the type of artistic practices in each location, and the level of resources currently available to sustain such practices.
 - Map the infrastructure needs (building based) in this area, with particular focus on the main urban/metropolitan areas.
- Enhance the professional-training opportunities available to both contemporary and traditional-circus artists. This will be scoped through the establishment of structured residencies working in partnership with organisations within the sector.

Public Engagement & CSAS

In the area of public engagement, the Arts Council's primary concern is to better understand the different behaviours of the public in relation to engaging with these artforms. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the contemporary-circus community currently represents the largest segment of this portfolio, with the broadest level of non-professional engagement, as evidenced by numerous voluntary organisations known to the Arts Council.

Current provision for public engagement in CSAS is addressed primarily through financial support such as [Strategic Funding](#) to CSAS organisations, and other awards to individual artists. The support is allocated on the basis of a formal application and assessment process that includes audience engagement as one of the prioritised criteria. Targeted partnerships with funded organisations and other agencies are also utilised as an additional mechanism to extend audience engagement.

In further developing public engagement, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Improve the understanding of CSAS audiences through the following actions:
 - Analyse audience data available in existing Arts Council documentation, reports and applications over a period of ten years.
 - Clearly differentiate between the various engagement patterns of CSAS, both in relation to audiences and active participants.
 - Pay particular attention to building knowledge about voluntary engagement in circus activity throughout the country.
 - Ensure CSAS is factored into any public surveys the Arts Council is conducting.

Specific CSAS Development Areas

As a still-developing area of practice in Ireland, the main issue for CSAS is the need to increase the diversity of services and opportunities available for artists. The resourcing of the practice will need to increase significantly in order to support its development and help it realise its full potential. As the initiatives detailed in this policy are scoped and prioritised, the resources necessary for implementation will be identified and secured.

To address this, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Support touring of work in CSAS.
- Encourage and incentivise cross-disciplinary collaborations through schemes such as Open Call.
- Encourage creative practice in traditional circus.
- Support mentoring programmes where resources and appropriate partners are available.
- Support capacity development in management practice.
- Maximise the use of shared data across the sector.

Other MGAW Areas of Strategic Interest for CSAS

The underdevelopment of youth practice is impacted by the absence of formal training programmes in Ireland for artists working in these artforms. Artists are either self-taught (often the case in Street Arts), taught by family members (often the case in traditional circus), or undertake training overseas (often the case in contemporary circus). Many artists and makers working in spectacle will have served an informal or formal apprenticeship within other companies here and abroad. Parallel to professional practice, the lack of dedicated spaces is another obvious impediment to the advancement of formal youth programmes.

In the area of young people, children & education (YPCE), over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Continue to develop CSAS policy in conjunction with those frameworks identified and set in place by the YPCE team.
- Continue to financially support youth activities that complement annual programmes delivered by professional CSAS companies and resource organisations.

Several street theatre and contemporary circus artists tour to international festivals and regularly maintain a high level of visibility abroad. Some present their work primarily outside of Ireland as they live overseas for most of the year, relying on international touring to make a living, particularly in mainland Europe.

In the area of International, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Work with the sector to explore new ways to support artists and organisations in the consolidation of professional networks with international partners.
- Continue to support CSAS organisations engaged in EU-funded initiatives.