



*Making Great Art Work:*  
Dance Policy & Strategy

## General Description and Context

The Arts Council's role in dance is central to the provision of a national infrastructure for dance in Ireland. It also supports dance artists in the creation of works, thus providing for, and developing public engagement with, the artform for both audiences and active participants.

Dance plays a significant role in the Irish cultural landscape. In addition to the vibrancy of works produced by professional artists and companies supported by the Arts Council, its popularity and potential for future development are also evident in the myriad of amateur activities, youth groups, recreational classes and dancing in a social context. Given that the range of participants includes people from different social backgrounds, ages, abilities and experience, dance can be regarded as one of the most widely practised and socially inclusive artforms in this country.

The dance landscape encompasses a wide variety of forms – from street dance to ballroom dance, and from ballet to modern techniques.

While the Arts Council does not specifically prioritise one area of practice over another, and is equally committed to the development of dance in all its various manifestations, historical patterns of support have been primarily focused on classical ballet and contemporary dance.

The Arts Council differentiates between professional and community-based dance practice, although it is understood that these additional areas of practice form a continuum and are often interrelated with the work of professional companies/artists supported by the Arts Council.

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 dance, 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.

## Dance Artists

In terms of dance artists, the Arts Council is concerned with ensuring the necessary structures and systems are in place to allow them meaningful developmental opportunities as artists. This includes the provision of specialised studio spaces, greater dissemination of dance shows across the country, and by ensuring a broad range of professional supports are made available for individual artists and production companies.

Dance artists can avail of direct supports through the Arts Council's [Projects Awards](#), [Artists' Awards](#) and [Residency Schemes](#), which ultimately aim to provide a stable background for dance practice in a broad range of formats.

The Arts Council supports the essential infrastructure required to sustain and develop dance in Ireland through its [Strategic Funding](#) of key organisations, and, together with [Arts Grant Funding](#), provides opportunities, resources and services to dance artists.

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

- Work in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including funded organisations, in the development of a new, shared strategy that fosters the development of dance in Ireland over a period of five years. Consultation with the professional dance community will be a core part of this process. The areas proposed for consideration are:
  - The range and nature of supports offered by resource and service organisations funded by the Arts Council.
  - Support for the core choreographic base of expertise.
  - Sustainable and equitable models for the support of dance artists at different stages of their careers, including consideration of policy/advocacy support for postgraduate training opportunities.
- Review existing artists' supports in the context of *MGAW* and of the needs of the dance sector.

## Public Engagement & Dance

In the area of public engagement, the Arts Council's interest is in better understanding the nature and scale of public participation in, and attendance at, dance.

There is currently no effective system that collects comprehensive, reliable audience data pertaining to public engagement in dance. In recent years the main source of statistics has been the *Arts Attendances in Ireland 2013* report and the *Arts in Irish Life* reports (2014, 2015, 2016), which draw upon data collected from the annual Target Group Index survey. While there is some information about contemporary dance and ballet in these documents, its scope is rather limited and solely focused on the notion of 'spectating audiences' rather than on a broader definition of public engagement.

Organisations supported through [Strategic Funding](#) are directly engaged in a range of public-engagement strategies through programming, participation, commissioning and creation. This work provides people across the country and in a range of contexts with the opportunity to engage in work where it would not otherwise be possible.

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

- Commission a study aimed at forming a better understanding of audiences for, and public engagement with, dance in respect of publicly funded activities. This will include:
  - An analysis of audience data available within existing Arts Council documentation, reports and applications over a period of ten years.
  - A clearer differentiation between dance areas of practice (e.g. ballet, dance theatre, etc.) and forms of public engagement (e.g. classes, shows, workshops, etc.) and public engagement within the different practice areas.

- Continue to provide direct financial support towards those public-engagement activities delivered by both individuals and organisations funded through existing funding programmes.

## Specific Dance Development Areas

There are a number of other issues that it is important that the Arts Council addresses so as to sustain and continue the development of the artform and of specific genres.

Ballet continues to represent a policy area of interest. Given its significance and popularity, ballet remains an extraordinarily underdeveloped artform in Ireland. A key weakness of the sector is that future development of ballet provision remains fundamentally uncertain and is still overly dependent on the personal and professional commitment of a few individuals.

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

- Secure a fund aimed at nurturing new choreographers. These supports will be delivered through a partnership with an existing organisation. This partnership initiative will allow the development of new creative talent in ballet and cultivate audience diversity.

### ***In the area of young people, children & education, over the next three years the Arts Council will:***

- Continue to financially support youth activities that complement annual programmes delivered by professional dance companies and resource organisations.
- Advocate in partnership with the dance sector for the removal of dance from the physical-education curriculum and to establish it as a separate subject of study.

### ***In the area of international, over the next three years the Arts Council will:***

- Continue to incentivise international co-productions and exchange within the funding priorities set in the Dance Project Award.
- Continue to support international residencies and professional development opportunities through the Travel and Training Award.
- Continue to support dance organisations engaged in EU-funded projects.