



Making Great Art Work:

Theatre Policy & Strategy 2018

General Description and Context

Theatre has always been central to the arts in Ireland, with its National Theatre leading the cultural revolution nearly two decades before the establishment of the Irish Free State. A vibrant and diverse range of theatre practitioners have continued to maintain Irish theatre's unique position on the international stage, with particular recognition of the significant playwriting tradition.

The Arts Council supports non-commercial, professional theatre production in Ireland. It seeks to support artistic excellence both in the standard of practice and level of ambition. The Arts Council recognises the many and varied ways theatre artists work, and aims to support artists whose work seeks to engage in a meaningful way with audiences across Ireland and beyond by supporting the creation, development, production and dissemination of theatre.

The funding structures support theatre in its many forms, from the classical and literary to experimental and contemporary, and recognise the diverse means by which theatre performance is created and produced. The Arts Council does not fund stand-up comedy, commercial theatre or amateur theatre productions, but recognises the valuable contribution they make.

The Arts Council's investment in theatre production is primarily through [Strategic Funding](#), [Arts Grants Funding](#) and [Project Awards](#). These three mainstays are complemented by a series of specifically tailored schemes and a range of supports to individual artists. [Strategic Funding](#) supports the essential infrastructure required to sustain and develop theatre in Ireland. The quality of these organisations' work will be exemplary, will engage to a significant level with the people of Ireland, and will contribute significantly to the realisation of [Making Great Art Work](#) (MGAW) goals. [Arts Grants Funding](#) supports the artistic vision of artists and arts organisations to develop a programme of excellent arts activities over a defined period of time. [Project Awards](#) will continue to offer support on a once-off basis to new and established artists and companies.

Additionally, a significant proportion of the Touring Scheme budget, and funding to multi-disciplinary Arts (MDA) Venues, Festivals, Young People, Children and Education, and Arts Participation, is dedicated to the creation of theatre.

In *MGAW*, the Arts Council identifies two policy priority areas: [the artist](#) and [public engagement](#). In order to deliver on these priority areas in theatre, the Council will take the following approach over the next three years.

Theatre Artists

The Arts Council's primary interest is to support theatre artists at all stages of their careers to create work of excellence that engages widely and deeply with the public and that maintains the value of the arts at the centre of Irish life.

The Arts Council does this by supporting the development, production and dissemination of theatre through a range of funding mechanisms. In addition to ensuring that the National Theatre and other strategically funded organisations offer quality opportunities of employment and support for Irish artists, the Arts Council seeks to support ambitious and innovative ideas that contribute to the overall development of capacity within the sector.

The Arts Council also provides the opportunity for artists to develop their practice through individual artist supports such as [residencies](#), [bursaries](#), and [travel and training](#) awards. Additionally, the [Open Call Award](#) supports exceptional work of scale.

Furthermore, the Arts Council supports the presentation of theatre in partnership with MDA venues and festivals.

The Arts Council also funds theatre-specific and theatre-related resource organisations, whose remit is to provide training, services and information to artists aimed at advancing professional arts and business practices.

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

- Enhance opportunities for artists by promoting more diverse partnerships. The theatre sector will be encouraged through the introduction of tailored schemes to strengthen the infrastructure by pursuing opportunities of mentorship, co-production, co-presentation and co-curation to ensure more work achieves its artistic potential and reaches more of its public throughout Ireland and beyond.
- Enhance existing supports for individual artists at all stages of their careers, including the exploration of multi-annual bursaries and a new mentorship scheme to provide increasing levels of expert support.
- Continue to work with the sector to improve the working environment and professionalisation of artists in Ireland by assisting the sector in establishing robust policies on gender and diversity equality, and by disseminating information throughout the sector to promote best practice.

Public Engagement & Theatre

According to *The Arts in Irish Life* report, the percentage of the population attending theatre makes it one of the highest-attended artforms in the country.¹

A thriving theatre sector is dependent on expanding and diversifying its audience. It does this by growing and diversifying the offer of deeper and more challenging engagement. Addressing this issue in an informed and dynamic way is a priority for the Arts Council.

Public-engagement strategies will become more embedded in funding agreements as *MGAW* progresses. The Arts Council will work in partnership with individual artists and companies in receipt of funding, but also with local authorities, venues, festivals and resource organisations to create a more in-depth understanding of the scope and potential that robust public-engagement strategies can bring to the sector.

¹ Kantar Media, *The Arts In Irish Life*, page 8, table 2.1, Attendance of Arts Events in Last Year.

Place and partnership perform important roles in nurturing ownership of the arts within specific communities. Additionally, the Arts Council recognises the importance of evidence-based strategies, including better use of comprehensive audience-data collection. By enabling the sector to make informed, bold and creative decisions, the Council will not only ensure growth and diversity of the theatre audience but also encourage both increased participation and deeper engagement with the artform.

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

- Create clear definitions and objectives, which are specific to theatre and aligned to *MGAW*, to enable all theatre artists create relevant and achievable public-engagement strategies.
- Dependent on the level of funding granted, require dynamic public-engagement strategies from our award recipients, which will set examples of excellence and leadership across the sector.
- Support the sector in growing and diversifying the audience for theatre but also to encourage greater participation and deeper engagement, including with young people and children.
- Encourage more co-production, co-presentation and partnership so that a wider diversity of theatre genres can be made more consistently available to audiences across the country, particularly outside of festival times.
- Work with the theatre sector and the public to promote advocacy for the arts. By recognising and working with the considerable network of voluntary-practice and amateur drama groups throughout the country, seek engagement and participation with the artform throughout the country.

Specific Theatre-development Areas

Demographic shifts, constrained resources and a transition in methods of production mean that a recalibration of supports to allow for proper growth and development of theatre in Ireland is required.

Of particular relevance to theatre is the recognised gap in quality production supports. To date, venues, some theatre companies and some theatre schemes have been successful in creating pockets of resource-sharing supports and theatre-development activities. To support the delivery of the new funding framework, it is now timely to evaluate these schemes to ensure robust supports for the sustainable growth of the sector.

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

- Develop the capacity in the sector to work consistently to self-defined standards of best-practice by undertaking an evaluation of data and information captured through the current reporting process. The analysis will concentrate on non-recurring awards and schemes.
- Informed by the above, and following a consultation with scheme recipients and sectoral specialists, pilot a best-practice model for the support of artists in the development, production and dissemination of their work. will be piloted.
- Pay particular attention to the development of new work and to the supports offered to playwrights.

- Encourage and design methods of apprenticeship, mentorship and cultural leadership to support the pursuit of excellence in creative, artistic and technical practice.

MGAW Priorities of Strategic Interest for Theatre

In the area of spatial & demographic, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Work with our strategic partners to create a network of initiatives that will optimise invested resources to collaborate, co-produce and co-present a more diverse range of work across the country.
- Champion new and flexible funding structures for the more regular production and provision of larger-scale theatre work of excellence, breadth and vision throughout Ireland.
- Work with our partners to develop people and place initiatives that will create an invested public who value and identify with arts provision in their local area.
- Develop supportive initiatives to recognise and interact with the voluntary and amateur sector towards the mutual goal of advocating for theatre and the arts in general.

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

- Work closely with the YPCE team and those working in the area of theatre for young audiences to create an invigorated policy on theatre for YPCE to ensure that the full scope of the commitment made in MGAW is achieved.
- Work closely with the YPCE team to ensure that YPCE-orientated theatre practitioners and theatre practitioners planning on embarking on work for young audiences are supported to achieve excellence in artistic and business practice, including child-protection compliance.

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

- Work with the international team to evolve a policy that recognises and supports Irish artists and companies who produce and disseminate work on an international basis. The policy will also enable more successful and widespread international co-production and dissemination of Irish work.
- Encourage exchange and mentorship of practice on an international basis.