

International Arts Policy



2022—2025

The value of cultural exchange has been one of the main driving principles in the development of the arts since ancient times. This positive evolutionary force has remained relevant within contemporary societies where the arts thrive on the cross-fertilisation of ideas, connections and collaborations that extend across national borders.

As an active participant in this global discourse, Ireland's distinctive identity is characterised by a welcoming openness to other countries and a predisposition to internationalism. In fact, Ireland is consistently rated as one of the most globalised nations in the world. This is evidenced both by the impact of its large global diaspora and the increasingly diverse cultural heritage of the resident population. Through this international 'connectedness', Irish-based artists are inspired to explore new aesthetic territories, to challenge established practices and to learn new skills.

The Irish public in turn benefits from these advancements through exposure to artistic excellence and by becoming part of a shared system of change that reflects the global interconnectedness of the Irish experience.

While internationalism is only one of the guiding forces behind the arts, its significance has been growing as a necessary response to increasingly globalised and technological societies. At its core we find values centred on both intangible and tangible benefits which are derived from the exchange of knowledge-based capital as well as the economic gains generated by an open access to broader art markets, new audiences and global resources. In particular, the scale, nature and professionalism of contemporary arts often require funding and infrastructures that are difficult to scope within exclusively national frameworks.

The current Making Great Art Work (MGAW) strategy explicitly acknowledges that a sustainable and vibrant national arts ecosystem requires open access to realities beyond its borders. The intrinsic openness of this vision is reflected in the intention of the International Arts Policy to:

- Stimulate greater awareness of ideas, opportunities and resources available beyond national borders;
- Promote a genuine culture of reciprocal exchange, dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders based abroad;
- Integrate the value of international arts practice within the national developmental scope of the Arts Council's primary remit.

2.1 Background

It is recognised that Irish-based artists and organisations have achieved a significant level of success internationally. There is a vast pool of world-renowned artists across all artforms who have made, and are making, an impact on the global stage.

While many of these achievements are primarily the result of the artists' own efforts and talents, national organisations often provide a supportive framework that channels and expands creative opportunities. Besides resource organisations funded by the Arts Council, there are other national bodies that support international arts initiatives. Two are of particular relevance to the Arts Council:

Culture Ireland

Culture Ireland promotes Irish arts worldwide. It creates and supports opportunities for Irish artists and companies to present and promote their work at strategic international festivals and venues. It develops platforms to showcase outstanding Irish work to international audiences at key global arts events. Culture Ireland currently represents the Arts Council's main partner in the support of internationally relevant arts activities.

Department of Foreign Affairs

The DFA is involved in a broad range of cultural activities aimed at raising awareness of Ireland overseas. Cultural diplomacy is an important part of the broader public diplomacy work of its Embassy network.

The DFA also promotes cultural relations through a number of initiatives aimed at showcasing Ireland's rich cultural heritage and enhancing Ireland's international reputation. Of particular note is the DFA's programme as part of 'Global Ireland', the Government's strategic initiative to double the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint by 2025. Culture, in addition to Communications and Commerce, represents a central component of the programme which, potentially, intersects with both the Arts Council's developmental role in the arts and its advisory remit.

The International Arts Policy 2022–2025 will build on past and current successful work in International Arts by the Arts Council and other national institutions. Examples include:

- Initiatives supported in specific artforms: Co-funding the Beyond Borders Scheme (music commissioning and touring); Laureate for Irish Fiction and Laureate na nÓg initiatives have a significant international dimension, etc.
- Creative Europe Desk: The Arts Council operates the Creative Europe Desk and provides a Co-Funding Award for successful Creative Europe Programme projects.
- Activities in collaboration with Culture Ireland (e.g. co-funding Ireland's representation at the Venice Biennale) or other national organisations.

2.2 The Arts Council

The Arts Council is the government agency for developing the arts in Ireland. We work in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policy makers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life. Within the boundaries of this national remit, the Arts Council is in a unique position to play a central role in the development of international arts intended as a continuum to artistic practice in the country. This role is primarily fulfilled through the close engagement that the Arts Council has with Irish-based artists and organisations as well as its specialised knowledge of individual sectors and artforms.

In addition to these overarching partnerships, the Arts Council regularly supports international activities through its existing funding programmes. A selection of past applications include: artistic research and critical exchange, co-productions, partnerships and collaborations, networking, residencies and professional development.

These avenues of support are still currently in place and often represent the central pillar of international initiatives emanating from Ireland. Relevant programmes offered in 2021 included:

- Strategic & Arts Centre Funding
- Art Grants Funding
- Project Award
- Bursary Award
- Agility Award
- Artform Residency Schemes
- Small Festivals Scheme
- Open Call

Taking advantage of the positive environment set out above, there is an opportunity for greater leadership and impact on the global arts scene. In addition to raising the profile of Irish arts abroad as expressly supported by other national agencies, international practice is also a way to address a number of core challenges that still affect arts practice in Ireland, particularly in relation to limited public resources and the relatively small size of the Irish arts market. An integrated approach responsive to these distinctive national features is needed to affect positive change.

The opening statement of the MGAW Arts Council Strategy 2016–2025 explicitly commits to new generations of ambitious and innovative artists to strengthening Ireland’s international standing as a leader in the arts. The strategy aims to ‘recognise the value of international practice and relations and support those who pursue such opportunities’.

In practice, and as indicated in MGAW, this expanded International Arts Policy Framework sets out to deliver a more effective alignment of supports aimed at national and international activities delivered by Irish-based artists and organisations.

This policy acknowledges the reality that for many artists, work conducted in a local, national and international context is often part of a single eco-system and an integral part of a sustainable professional practice. In line with the Arts Council’s remit, the primary directive is centred on the development of the national arts sector and to the benefit of people living in Ireland. The policy is cognisant of the division of roles between, and competencies of, other State Agencies. It actively seeks to build on existing partnership initiatives and create new complementary synergies to maximise the impact of public investment in the arts.

MGAW identifies the artist and public engagement as its two main and interdependent priorities. The International Arts Policy 2022–2025 proposes a set of aims and objectives aligned with the broader MGAW framework.

In addition, the four-year policy framework includes developing capacity as an additional core area of intervention which will consolidate the foundations required for delivering both present and future initiatives.

All these elements are informed by the Arts Council’s ‘Equality, Human Rights & Diversity Policy & Strategy’ and ‘Paying the Artist Policy’ as complementary core policy areas.

4.1 The Artist

International arts practice provides opportunities for artists to extend the reach of their work and the resources available during the creation process in terms of ideas, collaborators, infrastructure and finances.

The Arts Council will continue to provide direct support towards professional opportunities available abroad. All supports will be guided by principles centred on encouraging sustainable practice in terms of working conditions, mobility and maximising the use of resources. As an extension to existing funding opportunities available to individual artists, the Arts Council will introduce complementary supports aimed at prioritising stable exchange frameworks over short-term one-off opportunities.

Aims

- Sustainable Practice:
Focus on the support of individual artists through international residencies and peer engagement as part of formal networks.
- Professional Development:
Focus on high-quality professional training, mentoring and critical engagement.

4.2 Public Engagement

International practice is an essential component in the provision of a diverse arts experience to the public and to ensure that more people enjoy high-quality artistic works. The Arts Council recognises the importance of sustaining a vibrant arts community that is both engaged with, and relevant to, the global critical discourse. It further recognises that international arts practice includes the presentation of international work to audiences in Ireland and that this work often enriches the programmes of festivals and arts centres available to national audiences.

Aims

- Artistic Excellence:
Focus on international partnerships leading to the creation of world-class artistic work that will inspire Irish audiences.
- Ambition of Scale:
Focus on transnational frameworks that will increase the capacity to fulfil large-scale ambitions and enhance the international critical influence of artists based in Ireland.

4.3 Developing Capacity

The ecology of international arts is complex and differs depending on artforms and arts practices. The Arts Council will seek to develop its capacity to engage effectively with this environment. An understanding of international arts must be embedded across all artforms and arts practices within the Arts Council and must be founded on cooperation with national and international stakeholders as well as on an open dialogue with artists and art organisations. The Arts Council's close relationship with the arts community in Ireland is recognised as a favourable condition for enhancing the organisation's own expertise by tapping into the wealth of international experience and connections already existing within the sector.

Aims

- Expert Knowledge:
Focus on the Arts Council's ongoing renewal and development of expertise in international arts in order to retain a leadership role in this area of practice.
- Partnerships:
Focus on working relationships within and beyond Ireland that will extend the reach and diversity of the Arts Council's interventions.

Besides the core policy areas directly related to MGAW, a number of additional considerations will inform the Arts Council International Policy throughout the timeframe of its implementation.

These elements are presented as general propositions to be further defined in practice through direct engagement with the sector.

5.1 Geographic Focus

The International Arts Policy 2022–2025 adopts a neutral stance towards the geographic location of the activities initiated autonomously by artists and organisations based in Ireland. This stance recognises that arts practitioners are best positioned to exploit opportunities emerging in specific countries as relevant to their work, history and professional connections. In practice, the Arts Council will not seek to impose as part of the International Policy framework overarching geographic priorities to the scope of activities applied for by individual artists and/or organisations.

Within this context, and without restrictions to the above conditions, the Arts Council will aim to remain responsive to both opportunities emerging from specific world regions and developmental initiatives proposed by organisations based in other countries. In all circumstances, the Arts Council will continue to guide its direct international operations on the basis of the evolving needs of the national art sector as evidenced by existing data and direct engagement with Irish-based artists and organisations.

The effective rationalisation of national resources will be a complementary guiding principle that will help the Arts Council to navigate the enormous range of opportunities and actors present worldwide. This will be informed by the following aims:

- Map a strategic sphere of interventions based on sustainable time frames and available resources;
- Prioritise opportunities that will maximise the benefits to the arts sector in Ireland;
- Steer engagement with international stakeholders towards outcomes that are relevant to artists and art organisations based in Ireland;
- Incentivise transnational cooperation based on sustainable operational models.

5.2 Environmental Stance

There is significant evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about deep societal changes that have affected a wide range of human endeavours including the arts. While the full extent of its impact was still unclear in 2021, these global events, combined with the well-established knowledge of global warming and environmental sciences, call out for a timely reconsideration of international arts engagement from an environmental perspective.

The impetus for further engagement in this area is compounded by the broader three-year plan 2019–2022 of the Arts Council. Part of this strategy identified the need to ‘develop a climate change and environmental sustainability policy for the Arts Council, and support arts organisations in working towards a sustainable environmentally friendly society’.

Within this corporate framework and working with the Irish arts sector, the Arts Council will commit to develop an environmental stance that is specifically aimed at international arts practice. As already identified by the Arts Council’s strategic goals, the purpose of the international environmental stance will be to promote creative practices that adopt imaginative ways of responding to environmental challenges as envisioned by, and as relevant to, artists and art organisations.

To this end, the Arts Council will support the sector by conducting research into relevant models and initiatives already existing internationally. It will also seek to contribute to the public discourse on the main environmental challenges relevant to the arts, particularly in relation to low-impact models of international mobility, resource consumption, carbon emission, etc.

5.3 Digital Practices

A common practice in the arts is the use of digital platforms and technologies. While creative digital practices encompass a broad range of definitions subject to theoretical or personal interpretations, there is evidence that most artists currently make use of digital applications for shared aspects of their work extending beyond the creation process. Examples might include documenting, promoting and showcasing their art as well as enabling remote communication and non-localised partnerships.

Within an international context, digital practices are of particular relevance due to their capacity to provide access to global audiences, create flexible formats of engagement and enhance artistic experiences. In many ways, virtual freedom from physical constraints enables artists not only to experiment with new art languages but also to gain control of the way their work and communication unfolds in time and space.

Acknowledging the technologically evolving landscape, and as part of the MGAW corporate strategy (2016–2025), the Arts Council is committed to ensure that ‘the arts sector have the knowledge, skills and funding to support and sustain evolving digital artistic activity in Ireland, and that digital arts practitioners are supported to make excellent work which is enjoyed and valued both nationally and internationally so that more people can enjoy high-quality arts experiences.’

Working within the Arts Council’s broader strategic framework, the International Arts Policy will address the particular significance of digital practices in an international context and contribute to building digital capacity in the arts sector.

International Arts Policy

Implementation Plan
2022—2025

The Artist

1

The following Implementation Plan sets out how the Arts Council will enact the International Arts Policy in practice.

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	Timeline
1.1	Provide support for formal residencies that will aid the professional development of individual artists and create opportunities for transnational exchange and cooperation across all artforms.	Deliver a new pilot funding programme aimed at facilitating formal residency initiatives that involve partnerships with organisations based abroad.	Creation of new opportunities for international cooperation across all artforms. Qualitative improvements of support structures for both inward and outward artist residencies.	Q1 2022
1.2	Facilitate access to professional development opportunities abroad and foster the consolidation of international relationships.	Continue the support of professional development opportunities through existing funding programmes. Deliver information clinics to artists on formal international networks across all artforms.	Increased levels of engagement with peers based abroad. Sustainable access to professional development opportunities abroad.	Ongoing

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	Timeline
1.3	Enhance the online presence and profile of artists based in Ireland and facilitate peer engagement through digital technologies.	<p>Ensure the effective integration of international arts practice as part of the development of the Arts Council's Digital Policy.</p> <p>Deliver a new initiative developed in partnership with others focused on the improvement of artists' online and digital practice.</p> <p>Continue digital enhancement supports to organisations and artists under Capacity Building and Agility Awards respectively.</p> <p>Offer talks and seminars with leading experts on related topics.</p>	<p>Artists and organisations based in Ireland will improve their online presence.</p> <p>Qualitative improvement of digital material generated by artists.</p>	2022 Onwards

Public Engagement

2

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	Timeline
2.1	Deliver a funding programme aimed at co-production and large-scale commissioning in partnership with international organisations.	Review the Open Call with a view to improve its effectiveness to support ambitious international co-productions.	Irish organisations better positioned to act as viable partners in the international arts milieu. Increase of high-quality ambitious art work being created and presented to Irish audiences.	2022
2.2	Expand opportunities to support international practice through existing funding programmes.	Review existing funding programmes to ensure a more coherent and explicit integration of International Arts Policy priorities. Review and update the Memorandum of Understanding with Culture Ireland.	Clear funding framework for the support of international activities. Greater clarity and awareness of the distinctive roles of the Arts Council and Culture Ireland in relation to international arts.	2022
2.3	Continue supports to enable organisations to devise project applications for the Creative Europe Programme.	Continue to offer the Arts Council Co-funding Award. Offer information clinics on funding opportunities available within the EU.	Increase Irish presence and leadership within Creative Europe programmes. Increase awareness of opportunities available within EU resource frameworks.	Ongoing

Developing Capacity

3

3. Developing Capacity

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	Timeline
3.1	Develop the Arts Council's capacity to conduct research and gather data on how national organisations and audiences interact with international arts practice.	Set up IT structures required to capture information on international activities conducted by Irish-based artists and organisations.	Development of dynamic databases related to international arts practice. Increased research outputs in this area.	Phase 1 2022 Yearly reviews
3.2	Build expert knowledge on international practice, policy and funding opportunities available abroad by working in partnership with other organisations.	Set up/join work groups involving colleagues working for national organisations based abroad. Join membership of main international art networks.	Easier access to relevant policy information and developments taking place in other countries. Increased Arts Council leadership role within international networks.	2023 Onwards
3.3	Ensure that Arts Council staff members are supported to develop their knowledge and understanding of international arts as appropriate to their artform or arts practice area.	Share data and information with other teams related to specific artforms. Deliver presentations and seminars about key topics to relevant staff. Deliver public forums for the presentation and discussion of key international topics aimed at harvesting the expertise and experience of artists and art organisations.	Increased awareness within each team of main international stakeholders and opportunities in their area. Increased opportunities for both the sector and the Arts Council to learn from the direct experience of art practitioners.	Ongoing Yearly events from 2023

3. Developing Capacity

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	Timeline
3.4	In partnership with others deliver a range of initiatives aimed at the upskilling and professional development of the arts sector.	<p>Engage with other Irish national agencies, particularly Culture Ireland and the DFA to explore relevant partnerships.</p> <p>Engage with selected national agencies based abroad (see point 5.1) to develop new capacity-building opportunities for the sector.</p>	<p>Establishment of stable work relationships with other agencies in Ireland.</p> <p>Increased access to international opportunities/re-sources for the national sector.</p>	Ongoing

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