

# Making Great Art Work

Three-Year Plan

the arts  
council  
as chomhairle  
ealaíon

2023–2025

Beyond Islands  
Skerries, Vanessa Daws, 2019.  
Photo: Brian Cregan

**Making Great Art Work** sets out a framework for the development of the arts in Ireland from 2016 – 2025.

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**MÁM**  
Teac Damsa, Wellington, 2020.  
Photo: Matt Grace

## Introduction

Making Great Art Work sets out a framework for the development of the arts in Ireland from 2016 to 2025. Our first three-year plan - 2017 to 2019 - saw the Arts Council start the journey towards its implementation. In the second plan - 2020 to 2022 - we began to make deeper inroads when Covid-19 disrupted all of our lives. This was felt deeply by artists and arts organisations. This time demonstrated significant strength and agility. Yet there are still important challenges we all face, while also giving us new opportunities. This three-year plan is reflective of our vision and goals while embracing change and planning towards 2025 and beyond.

Throughout the last plan, our funding levels increased by 73% (€75m to €130m). Also, our workforce increased to make sure that at least 92% of this funding can benefit artists and the public. We will continue to enhance our capacity and capabilities towards transformative change. This will make sure that we can lead the development of the arts in Ireland.

Over the past three years, we have also published and implemented new artform policies and corporate policies, such as Paying the Artist, Place, Space and People Spatial policy and forthcoming cross-cutting policies on Climate Action and Environment, Digital Arts, Arts Participation, Children and Young People.

Along with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy, these are expertly informed and ambitious. They will be integrated into our activities while informing our development initiatives.

**Some of our achievements over the past three years include:**

- Investment into artists and organisations has increased by 91% from €57m in 2019 to €109m in 2022.
- Supporting capacity building for 712 applicants (between 2020 and 2022) to the value of €11.6m.
- Creating campaigns to encourage audiences back to the arts.
- Addressing the acute need for spaces and places for artists to work.
- Investing in 17 places that have previously not benefitted from sustained engagement in the arts.
- Transforming our business processes which will go live in the course of this new plan.
- Capturing data and insights to inform our decision-making and advocacy work.
- Expanding the range of organisations and public bodies with whom we partner.
- Building on existing policies, including equality, diversity and inclusion, to make sure they remain relevant.

During Covid-19, Making Great Art Work continued to demonstrate our desire to support artists. We also helped more people to enjoy high-quality arts experiences, no matter who they are or where they live.

In assessing what comprises excellent art work, we are guided by Francois Matarasso’s paper Weighing Poetry and his definition: ‘technically-excellent work which is both ambitious and original, connects to people and their concerns and leaves audiences changed in some lasting way’.

Entering the final three-year plan for Making Great Art Work, we are witnessing a shift in how artists make work and how and where people engage with the arts. Digital technology, the impact of climate and global uncertainties, and a rising and diverse population are hugely influential. Such trends, coupled with deep concerns about living and working conditions, mean that over the next three years, we must continue to develop our capacity for flexibility.

We will deepen our awareness and respond optimistically when supporting artists and public engagement in the arts. We are committed to working strategically and responsively with and for the arts sector in tackling issues and creating opportunities.

This new Three-Year Plan 2023 to 2025 will continue much of the work started over the last seven years. We know that barriers remain to people’s participation in the arts. Through our plan and our partnerships, we want to bring about radical change. In addition, the steps needed to further transform our organisation will happen over the coming years.

We are very much aware that more needs to be done to improve the living and working conditions of artists. Our commitment to artists continues as a priority in our plan. This commitment is informed by our policies. Also, it includes our work with other organisations to ensure opportunities, innovation and excellence in the arts.

We are committed to creating a transformative plan while being mindful of our strategy beyond 2025. Making Great Art Work has served us well in setting vital ambitions and goals. Yet, we must continue to think and respond in a way that brings inclusive, life-affirming, thought-provoking, joyful and brilliant art experiences to the people of Ireland.



The Spectre Knight  
Wexford Festival Opera, 2022.  
Photo: Pádraig Grant



## Who we are

The Arts Council is the national agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts in Ireland. It was established by statute in 1951.

The Arts Act 2003 provides that the Arts Council stimulates public interest, promotes knowledge, appreciation and practice and assists in improving standards in the arts. The Arts Council is an autonomous expert body for funding and promoting the arts, steering its development, and offering advice on arts and cultural matters.

## Our Values

As a statutory public body, the Arts Council works within a framework of legal and regulatory obligations and codes of good practice. Also, we are guided by organisational values in our work with others. These include:

- **Freedom of thought and expression** which is essential to the development of new ideas and new work.
- **Commitment to excellence** in all aspects of our work and of that of artists, arts organisations, and others we support.

- **Integrity, accountability, and transparency** in all of our decision-making and especially in our investment of public monies.
- **Respect for diversity** of artistic practice, of public engagement and of social and cultural traditions.
- **Collegiality** in communicating and working respectfully with partners, stakeholders and the whole arts sector.

Our three-year plan will continue to be guided by these values.





Mr Kas.  
Waterford Walls, 2022.  
Photo: Gringo Pictures

## The Artist

Artists are supported to make excellent work that is enjoyed and valued.

We are witnessing new and exciting developments in how art is made, who makes it and how the public engages with it. We are embracing the evolution of multi-disciplinary artforms and practices. These are supported by our policies which are expertly informed through our close engagement with and knowledge of the arts sector.

Between 2020 and 2022 we have invested €42 million in bursaries to support artists. This helps to sustain and adapt their careers and we will continue to advocate for an increased level of investment. The Agility Award (820 new applicants) and the government's Basic Income for Artists pilot programme have significantly expanded the range of artists that are being supported in Ireland today.

This investment growth comes alongside social, economic and environmental challenges. There is more to do to secure places for artists to make work and to provide more professional development opportunities. Also, we need to work towards removing barriers experienced by some artists.

### **We will continue to work towards the objectives set out in our ten-year strategy:**

1. Ensure artists are supported at key stages in the life cycle of their careers.
2. Ensure a supportive working environment that addresses key points in the creative cycle by which art is made.
3. Advance the living and working conditions of artists.
4. Recognise the value of international practice and relationships and support those who pursue such opportunities.
5. Value and support artists working in a broad range of contexts.

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| <b>What we will continue to do</b> | – Invest in artists across all artforms and practices to create and develop work.  | – Support local authorities to identify and develop workspace opportunities regionally.  |
|                                    | – Invest in arts organisations to provide opportunities for artists and arts workers working in a range of evolving contexts.  | – Work in partnership with the government to support the learning and insights arising from the Basic Income for Artists pilot scheme. |
|                                    | – Be guided by our artform policies as well as Paying the Artist, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, International and Spatial policies. This will ensure investment in artists is evidence-based, fair and equitable. | – Action the Night Time Economy Taskforce report to support more artists.  |
|                                    | – Advance a pilot development of artists’ workspaces in partnership with the Dublin Port Company.  | – Champion the Safe to Create programme to make sure artists are treated with respect and dignity in their workplaces.                 |

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| <b>What we will do next</b> | 1. Support the needs and concerns of artists, arts practice and organisations to work together to meet government climate targets through our Climate Action and Environment policy. | 4. Take further action to address the infrastructural needs of artists, including artists’ workspaces and the development of an All Island Dance Company. |
|                             | 2. Create a coordinated approach, internally and externally, in advancing the supports, structures and services that enable sustainable production of the arts.                      | 5. Advance our support in the evolving and dynamic area of digital arts production and engagement.  |
|                             | 3. Work with the government to unlock the potential of the Per Cent for Arts Scheme. This will make sure a diverse group of artists can avail of public art opportunities.           |   |

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| <b>What will we have achieved?</b> | <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> | Artists, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, civil or family status, religion, race, disability, membership of the Traveller community or socio-economic background, will gain more opportunities to develop their skills and careers. |
|                                    | <b>CONDITIONS</b>    | Artists will have better pay and working conditions in safe places and spaces to make and present their work.  |
|                                    | <b>RECOGNITION</b>   | Artists and the role of the arts in Irish life will be better understood and valued by policymakers and the public through our advocacy and communications.  |





Creative Places MacUilliam  
Tallaght, Trash Catchers Parade, 2022.  
Photo: Jonathan Stokes

# Public Engagement

More people will enjoy high-quality arts experiences.

How and where the public can encounter the arts remains core to our function. Following Covid-19, our insights show that people are attending events less often. Work is needed to reconnect with and grow audiences. Yet, there is a welcome and growing public interest in participating in artistic and creative activities. This is most often at a local level.

Our investment in artists and organisations is the main way the public engages with the arts. We are also aware that barriers persist in growing and diversifying audiences and participants. We are committed to development initiatives that continue to make sure this is addressed sustainably.

Children and young people remain a core priority as makers of art, audiences and participants.

**We will continue to work towards the objectives set out in our ten-year strategy:**

- 6. Promote and build good practices in audience development and public engagement.
- 7. Create opportunities for increased engagement in the arts by particular communities.
- 8. Plan and provide for children and young people.
- 9. Champion and encourage amateur and voluntary arts practice.



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| <b>What we will continue to do</b> | – Invest in and support artists, arts organisations and local authorities to reach more people.  | – Utilise and communicate our Arts Insights data to guide strategic planning and communications. This aims to increase public engagement and audience development.   |
|                                    | – Increase investment in children and young people. This includes a €3 million yearly investment into Creative Schools in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills. This has reached 831 schools and engages 80 creative associates to work in those schools. | – Work with the Night Time Economy Taskforce to advance opportunities for engagement in arts and culture for a wider audience and creative sector.   |
|                                    | – We have invested €5 million in expanding our Creative Places programme since 2021. This reaches people and places that have not benefitted from sustained investment in the arts in the past.  | – We are implementing and monitoring our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy. This will make sure that the arts sector and the Arts Council support a greater diversity of audiences, participants and artists. |
|                                    | – Invest in and develop Culture Night as an annual, joyful celebration of the growing diversity of arts and culture in Ireland.  |  |

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| <b>What we will do next</b> | 1. Be inventive, inclusive and inspirational in how and where we tell the story of the value of the arts to stimulate more opportunities for engagement.   | 4. We are advancing our Digital Arts policy. This will support artists and arts organisations to use digital technology to help more people to engage with the arts. |
|                             | 2. Reconnect with existing audiences and build new audiences and participants. As we continue to recover from the impacts of Covid-19, we will develop a new Public Engagement Development Plan.               |  |
|                             | 3. Sustain long-term investment in people and places by expanding and sharing our knowledge of Gaeltacht communities, Creative Places, young people and communities where there are barriers to participation. |  |
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| <b>What we will have achieved?</b> | <b>GROWTH</b>  | A measurable increase in public engagement and awareness of the arts.   |
|                                    | <b>REACH</b>   | More people to be engaged in the arts for the first time through targeted programmes.   |
|                                    | <b>SUPPORT</b> | More advice available in the arts sector to promote and develop good practices in audience development and public engagement. |
|                                    | <b>VALUE</b>   | Increased investment and recognition in the value of work of, by and for children and young people.                           |



## Investment Strategy

Public monies are invested effectively to realise Arts Council priorities.

Our budget of €130m helps us to achieve a lot and is reflective of the value of the arts in Irish life. However, we must increase this level of support and sustain the connections between our policy priorities, funding decisions, and outcomes.

We will direct our investment towards supporting high-quality art and excellent arts experiences. This will be balanced with advancing public engagement in the arts while demonstrating flexibility in how we invest in and increase an appetite for the arts.

In tandem, we will develop our processes and work with others to better measure the effects of our investment. This will lead to a better understanding of its outcomes and impacts.

**We will continue to work towards the objectives set out in our ten-year strategy:**

10. Make clear the principles and criteria that guide our investment strategy and funding decisions.
11. Focus our investment on artistic activity.
12. Support the work of independent artists and incentivise experiment
13. Establish funding agreements with organisations and partners.
14. Improve measurement of the outcomes of our investment.



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| <b>What we will continue to do</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Invest at least 90% of funding in supporting artists and arts organisations.</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Work with the government to make sure that a suitable level of funding is made available to the Arts Council. This, along with other partnerships and opportunities, will enable our arts and cultural sector to thrive.</li></ul> |
|                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Make transformative organisational change through the rollout of a new accessible online grant application process.</li><li>– Trial new models of application and investment.</li><li>– Use our research and measurement expertise to identify, commission, understand and communicate new learnings and impacts.</li><li>– Explore the wider social impact of investment in the arts and how it connects to the government’s national Well-Being Framework.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Progress the RAISE programme to support organisations to achieve philanthropic investment.</li><li>– Invest in and develop a responsive and expert workforce to achieve these goals.</li></ul>                                     |

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| <b>What we will do next</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Deliver a new funding framework. This will make sure we are achieving our priorities as a development agency in supporting work of excellence through easier application, assessment and decision making processes.</li><li>2. Make sure that the Arts Council has premises - including any regional hubs - which are fully accessible and environmentally sustainable. This will increase the effectiveness of our work.</li><li>3. Conduct and share research to understand the impact on artists and organisations of increased investment in the arts in recent years.</li></ol> |
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| <b>What we will have achieved</b> | <b>ACCESSIBILITY</b>   | Applicants will find it easier to apply for funding and report on their work.        |
|                                   | <b>WELCOMING</b>       | New accessible premises for all who interact with the Arts Council.                  |
|                                   | <b>FLEXIBILITY</b>     | Improved flexibility in how we invest in the arts and public engagement in the arts. |
|                                   | <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> | Published data and narratives that show the unique value of investment in the arts.  |



Threshold,  
Keashcorran, 2021.  
Photo: Tommy Weir

## Spatial and Demographic Planning

Well-planned arts provision benefits people across Ireland.

We have made bold steps forward in reaching this goal. We have done so through the publication of our Spatial policy - Place, Space and People - and in the implementation of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.

We have developed a strategic approach to our statutory role as a prescribed body in the planning process. Using our influence, we are embedding arts and culture in the planning and development process.

Our longstanding partnership with local government will celebrate 40 years in 2025. It continues to be critical as we work strategically together. Our evidence and data gathering tells us there is more to do in this space to provide a robust, evidence base for our planning, partnerships and investments. This means that more people will benefit from a vibrant cultural life, no matter who they are or where they live.

**We will continue to work towards the objectives set out in our ten-year strategy:**

- 15. Ensure our policies are informed by the National Planning Framework and by good spatial and demographic analysis.
- 16. Develop our strategic partnership with local government.
- 17. Ensure investment in arts infrastructure is strategic and sustainable.
- 18. Advise and advocate to ensure that national, regional and local capital provisions are co-ordinated and sustainable.



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| <b>What we will continue to do</b> | – Invest in every city and county. We do so through local authorities, arts centres, festivals, artists and arts organisations that are delivering high standards in artistic excellence and public engagement. | – Build upon our relationships with government departments. This will make sure that the arts are central to all aspects of capital development, policy formation and decision-making. Also, it will make sure that increased investment in arts and culture has a strategic impact. |
|                                    | – Contribute to national policies and local development plans. This will help us to make the case for the real benefits of planning for arts and culture.   | – Ensure that the Framework for Collaboration agreement between the Arts Council and the County and City Management Association is delivered.  |

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| <b>What we will do next</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Share our knowledge and expertise in spatial and demographic data with our partners.</li><li>2. Use our social-impact measuring data to expand our knowledge of how to support sustained long-term investment in particular communities.</li><li>3. Publish a guide for planning authorities to highlight the benefits of planning for arts and culture.</li><li>4. Carry out a feasibility study to see how best the Arts Council could have a presence regionally.</li></ol> |
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| <b>What we will have achieved</b> | <b>EQUITY</b>        | Spatial distribution of our funding across the country will be fair and equitable.   |
|                                   | <b>KNOWLEDGE</b>     | An accessible national resource for spatial and demographic expertise in the arts will be developed.                               |
|                                   | <b>COLLABORATION</b> | Stronger relationships will exist with our public sector partners in governance, strategy and implementation.                      |
|                                   | <b>SPACES</b>        | Better infrastructural places for artists will be developed in partnership with the government, local government and stakeholders. |

Dance film *The Homecoming*,  
Dancer in Residence Catherine Young  
and The Welcoming Project, Kerry.  
Presented online for Culture Night, 2021.  
Photo: Shane Ó Ceallaigh



## Developing Capacity

The Arts Council and the arts sector have the knowledge, skills and inventiveness to realise this strategy.

Recent years have shown the need for flexibility in the arts to adapt in the face of uncertainty. This is as true for the Arts Council as it is for the arts sector. Therefore, we too are advancing transformational organisational change. This means we can continue to respond with confidence and agility to both opportunity and uncertainty.

We will all face known and as yet unknown changes. For example, adapting to climate change, a growing and diverse population and digital technologies. These will manifest in new models of making and presenting the arts while offering new possibilities for public engagement.

**We will continue to work towards the objectives set out in our ten-year strategy:**

19. Ensure the Arts Council delivers this strategy expertly, effectively and efficiently.
20. Ensure the Arts Council is active and inventive in the promotion of the arts.
21. Ensure the arts sector is skilled, resourceful and committed to its own renewal.



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| <b>What we will continue to do</b> | – Work alongside artists, arts organisations and partners to develop and strengthen capacity building. This supports professional development, innovation and adaptability. | – Build our organisational capacity, competency, planning, and resourcing to deliver our organisational goals with consistency. |
|                                    | – Support arts organisations to broaden their income through our RAISE programme.   | – Hold national and regional gatherings to develop our capacity to work better together.  |
|                                    | – Broaden and share our understanding through research and insights about how the arts are relevant to peoples' lives and civic society.                                    | – Advance capabilities to support growth and development in digital arts production and consumption.                            |

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| <b>What we will do next</b> | 1. Launch our new online platform for grants and awards. This will make it easier and clearer for applicants to apply for funding.                    |
|                             | 2. Advance and refresh our role and core purpose as a development agency with clarity and motivation through our organisational culture.              |
|                             | 3. Improve the integration, coherence and communication of our corporate policies to support their greater implementation.                            |
|                             | 4. Work with others to increase our understanding of how to address future challenges and opportunities in climate, digital and demographic contexts. |

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| <b>What we will have achieved</b> | <b>EASE</b>           | Easier application processes for funding and reporting.   |
|                                   | <b>CONFIDENCE</b>     | Arts sector confidence in its capacity to adapt and renew.  |
|                                   | <b>RESPONSIVENESS</b> | Timely and strategic solutions to external change and opportunities in support of the arts sector.  |
|                                   | <b>AWARENESS</b>      | Greater visibility for the arts and a better understanding of its distinctive value and importance. |
|                                   | <b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>  | Reinforced partnerships and alliances between the arts and wider society.                           |

Blank Canvas  
Fidget Feet, 2018.  
Photo by: Jym Daly





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