



Supporting the production and presentation of theatre

A new approach

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1 A new approach

In May 2009, the Arts Council published a discussion document, *Examining New Ways to Fund the Production and Presentation of Theatre*. This document formed the basis of consultation with the theatre community during the summer of 2009.¹ The purpose of this dialogue was to identify an approach to supporting the production and presentation of theatre that would allow for the holistic development of audiences, practitioners and repertoire. At the same time, the dialogue provided an opportunity to address the challenges facing both the theatre community and the Arts Council itself – in particular the reality of diminishing public sector resources.

The Arts Council's new approach – set out below – is informed by a careful consideration of the outcomes of this process, and is framed by the Council's existing policy for theatre, with particular reference to *Partnership for the Arts*.²

The Arts Council's objectives in supporting the production and presentation of theatre are:

- to create a well-resourced theatre infrastructure that is capable of supporting and developing the work and careers of independent theatre makers, ensembles, companies³ and groups of theatre artists; the infrastructure should be built around a sustainable number of production companies, venues, festivals and resource organisations
- to enable the creation, presentation and dissemination of excellent, engaging work which connects with audiences both at local and national level
- to support increased audience diversity via the development, production, presentation and dissemination of work which responds imaginatively to the needs of people of all ages, abilities and social and cultural backgrounds
- to support artistic diversity by enabling a variety of work to be made, ranging from existing repertoire and new writing to new ways of creating and presenting theatre
- to encourage fresh ideas and new talent by supporting initiatives which facilitate experimentation and innovation, enabling the Council to respond in a flexible way to new concepts and emerging talents
- to provide best-practice employment and training opportunities for theatre professionals

¹ This process included convening a number of meetings with theatre practitioners in various locations around the country and inviting written submissions in response to a discussion document.

² The Council's policy for theatre is broadly based and includes many elements that are deliberately not addressed within this document. These include supporting new writing; the need to address the living and working conditions of theatre practitioners; the role of resource organisations and other service providers; the extensive range of relationships between the subsidised theatre community, commercial theatre and other facets of the industry; and the Arts Council's role in supporting the Abbey as the national theatre.

³ In this context, the term 'companies' refers to other production companies, specifically those not in receipt of core funding.

2 Strategies and initiatives

The new approach envisages six complementary types of support for the production and presentation of theatre:

1. Core funding of producing organisations
2. Project funding
3. Shared administrative resources
4. Touring
5. Artists' supports
6. Development initiatives

These six types of support offer a number of alternatives to theatre makers, companies and groups of theatre artists, and are intended to be open to a broad range of theatre practitioners.

The overall intention is to increase the proportion of funding being directly used to make the art – supporting artistic ambition and artistic output – and consequently maximising the range and type of work available to audiences.

While we recognise that some artists might choose the production company model as the ideal vehicle through which to realise their artistic ambitions, the level of resources available to the Arts Council only permits a limited number of production companies to be fully supported. However, through the gradual introduction of the new initiatives and careful evaluation of their impact, the Council will seek to offer alternative funding opportunities. Overall, these will provide an integrated approach to supporting the production and presentation of theatre.

2.1 Core funding of producing organisations

The Council will continue to support a sustainable number of production companies. The intention is to maximise their effectiveness by offering funding at levels sufficient to enable them to maintain delivery of their activities.

The offer of core funding to a company will be based on (i) selection criteria and (ii) measurable outcomes, as follows.

2.1.1 Selection criteria for core funding

The criteria listed below will be used to identify which organisations will be offered core funding. Each organisation selected for continued core support will be expected to meet most of the following criteria:

- a proven track record in respect of (i) making high quality work and (ii) attracting audiences
- a national profile and/or a regionally significant dimension to its programme of work
- operation within one or more strategically important area of practice; examples of these areas of practice include new writing; providing training and mentoring; national touring; contemporary theatre practice; innovative use of technology in the creation of work; ensemble-based practice and/or repertoire renewal

- a sustainable business model including good governance, income-earning potential and strategies for audience generation
- provision of developmental opportunities within the company for a number of (external) artists
- presentation of work which is artistically significant

2.1.2 Measurable outcomes of core funding

Organisations in receipt of core funding will be expected to deliver in a number of ways that complement the Arts Council's strategic objectives. This reflects the responsibilities these organisations will be expected to carry within their sector. Each organisation identified for continued core support will be expected to deliver on most of the following:

- providing an agreed minimum number of new productions per year
- contributing to a programme of national touring
- having a strategy for generating income from a range of sources other than grant aid
- having a plan for succession and/or artistic renewal
- offering programmes for audience enhancement/engagement
- offering a range of training/mentoring, development and production opportunities for independent theatre artists
- offering supports and undertaking co-production arrangements with companies not in receipt of core-funding, and/or presenting work created by artists other than the company's founding/artistic director

2.2 Project funding

Project funding will represent a key element within the range of alternative funding programmes. It will enable theatre artists to develop and present projects that engage with and connect to audiences. Funding will be offered on an activity-specific basis and will be available within a competitive context. Project funding is intended to:

- enable artists to work on projects of a varied nature in terms of scale and form
- provide opportunities for individual artists and companies, other than those in receipt of core funding, to create work within the existing infrastructure. This type of funding is intended to enable and actively incentivise organisations – in particular venues, festivals and networks – to produce work in partnership with those individual artists and companies
- offer audiences a broader range of excellent and engaging theatre presentations

2.3 Shared administrative resources

Resource sharing forms another part of a balanced ecology of provision for the production and presentation of theatre. The intention is that, operating as an alternative to the core-funded company model, this approach will link well with the Council's other initiatives, such as project funding and touring schemes.

In this context, the term 'production hub' can be used to refer to an administrative function which facilitates producing and presenting the work of more than one artist (or 'producing entity'). It can play a valid role as part of a balanced theatre ecology by virtue of the fact that

it is more cost effective to provide funding for administrative resources that are shared, thereby supporting the work of more than one artist (or producing entity) at a time.

The Council recognises that a number of de facto production hubs are already operating within Ireland, albeit under various names.⁴ Furthermore, the evidence to date supports the view that they are efficient, on the basis that they can facilitate a number of artists (or producing entities) to create their work at the same time, without each individual feeling it is necessary to set up a company limited by guarantee. Venues and festivals are likely to have a vital role to play in the development of production hubs, in that they already exist as institutions and have access to their own audiences. Similarly, production companies may also wish to take on a role in facilitating others to make work.

A significant body of experience already exists on how to operate resource sharing initiatives of various kinds. Building on this, the Council will consult further to learn how best to roll out the various models in which this concept might work. The Council will also invite additional proposals on this and respond to ideas. Subsequently, organisations and/or other interested parties will be invited to apply for funding to run, manage and monitor such programmes. The intention is to allow for the effectiveness of this approach to be tested.

2.4 Touring

The Arts Council published its new *Touring Policy* in July 2009. A series of measures will be introduced to implement this new policy. They include a scheme to support the touring and dissemination of Work in 2010, which will primarily support activity taking place during the latter half of that year, operating across a number of artforms. This will be followed by the announcement of a series of touring schemes and other supports intended to support touring activity during the period 2011–2015.

2.5 Artists' supports

The Council will also increase the proportion of theatre funding it allocates to artists' supports and, in parallel, will develop the current range of awards. Three types of awards will be available. One of these, the Theatre Artist in Residence scheme, is an entirely new initiative. While the other two types of award – Travel and Training and Bursaries – are already in existence, these will be adapted to better reflect current policy priorities and the needs of theatre practitioners.

2.5.1 Theatre Artist in Residence scheme

This award will be offered in conjunction with local authorities and locally based venues and/or other arts organisations. Broadly speaking, it has a twofold purpose: (i) to enable a theatre artist (or producing entity) to develop his/her practice over time while working within a theatre venue; and (ii) to support the delivery of programmes intended to enhance audience engagement with professional theatre.

⁴ Examples of this kind of 'shared resource' approach are evident in recent initiatives such as Project Brand New, Project Arts Centre's Associate Artist programme, Dublin Fringe Festival, Cork Midsummer Festival, Galway Theatre Festival and the Limerick Theatre Hub.

2.5.2 Travel and Training scheme

The current Travel and Training scheme for theatre will adopt a more targeted approach, reflecting the different stages of the careers of the artists who might wish to apply. There are three strands to this scheme:

- Training Abroad: as per the current Travel and Training award, the purpose of this strand is to support individuals who wish to avail of professional training opportunities abroad, where the focus is on the development of the individual's own arts practice.
- Inbound: to support individuals or organisations who wish to invite specialists from abroad to deliver high-level training or mentoring for the professional development of artists and others working professionally within the arts in Ireland.
- Go See: to allow artists to experience international work – for instance, to enable artists to travel to international festivals to acquaint themselves with contemporary international theatre practice.

2.5.3 Bursaries

The purpose of bursary awards will be to provide theatre artists with the time, freedom and resources to develop their practice.

2.6 Development initiatives

The Council will also introduce funding for theatre development initiatives. This funding will be offered on a competitive basis to organisations – production companies, venues, festivals and resource organisations – seeking support to offer programmes that develop the work of a number of independent artists. (Such programmes and any related funding will be additional to activities for which Arts Council funding has already been offered). These initiatives are likely to be developmental in nature, in respect of overall existing theatre practice. The types of activities supported might include initiatives offering training opportunities, production services or dramaturgical supports.

Recent initiatives of this type have already demonstrated the potential of diverse organisations to engage in nurturing and mentoring relationships with groups of independent artists to help them develop their practice. In addition, these initiatives have proven cost effective, by ensuring that the often well-developed managerial and administrative resources of a particular organisation are made available for the benefit of a number of theatre artists.