



Making Great Art Work:

Traditional Arts Policy & Strategy 2018

General Description and Context

The traditional arts in Ireland comprise music, song, dance and the oral arts, which includes storytelling and distinctive Gaelic forms such as *agallamh beirte* and *lúibíní*. These artforms have been orally transmitted for generations, and thus have continuity with past artistic practice and repertoire.

The Arts Council recognises the traditional arts as a living tradition characterised by contemporary creative-arts practice. The Arts Council's role in traditional arts is to invest in its continuity and evolution as it takes new and fresh directions in composition, fostering technique and repertoire and adapting creatively to new artistic environments and influences.

The Arts Council endeavours to ensure that every child and adult has access to quality traditional arts experiences, and that they have opportunities to practice and appreciate the traditional arts, with the ultimate aim of ensuring the unique regional diversity that exists within the artform is preserved and promoted for future generations.

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 the traditional arts, the Council will take the following approach over the next three years.

Traditional Artists

The Arts Council distinguishes between the needs of the solo traditional artist and those of traditional groups; it views the individual traditional artist as the cornerstone of the traditional arts. The primary concern with individual traditional artists is that they get the relevant support to develop and progress their careers as artists.

There is a need for traditional arts practitioners to have the space and opportunity to develop their artistic practice in areas such as composition practice, creative collaboration with other traditional artists, collaborative production/co-production, interdisciplinary collaboration with other artforms, and production of works of scale.

The short-term nature of career planning associated with the gigging economy for traditional artists presents challenges. Some of the key factors currently inhibiting traditional artists from having more ambitious and long-term career development relate to parental commitments/plans, career management, marketing and promotion, and the use of new technologies.

The Arts Council supports traditional artists individually and as instigators and leaders of creative projects. Traditional artists can avail of direct supports through [Artists' Awards and Schemes](#) that are designed to allow individual artists to explore and develop their own distinctive practice. [The Traditional Artist in Residence](#) partnership with University College, Cork gives individual artists the opportunity to develop their own practices and engage with a wider community. [The Touring Scheme](#), [Projects Awards](#) and [Arts Grant Funding](#) are designed to support artist-led initiatives that result in new artistic works for audiences, exploration and exposure of important repertoire, and interesting

methods of transmission. Artistic research is an important and ongoing element of traditional artists' creative work, and the Arts Council supports this through its [Strategic Funding](#) investment in archival resources and archival recording of contemporary practice. The Arts Council also invests in recording and publication initiatives, as well as aspects of the arts infrastructure that are essential for traditional artists to present their work, such as dedicated arts venues and festivals.

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

- Develop a new mentorship programme for emerging traditional artists to be supported in their development by artists with exceptional expertise and recognition in their field.
- Provide opportunities to share experiences and learning from working collaboratively.
- Provide mechanisms that support the development phase of large-scale projects.
- Commission research into the professional-development and career-progression needs of traditional artists (including issues of gender balance and transference of knowledge and skills).

Public Engagement & Traditional Arts

There is a high value placed within the traditional arts on transmission, the acknowledgement of source, and the enjoyment of sharing repertoire, skills and learning. Many professional traditional artists are committed to the artistic life of their home place, and work to promote knowledge of their respective regional traditions.

There is significant voluntary community involvement, particularly in rural areas, in organising seasonal schools and festival events that often focus on public participation in performance. However, attention also needs to be given to developing the listening audience for the traditional arts, particularly in engaging with the work of exceptional solo artists.

Through its [Strategic Funding](#) the Arts Council supports the essential infrastructure required to sustain and develop the traditional arts in Ireland.

Through [Projects, Arts Grant Funding](#) and the [Festival Investment Scheme](#) the Arts Council directly supports dedicated arts festivals and other initiatives that enable high-quality public participation and audience enjoyment of the traditional arts. It also works with colleges to run traditional artists' residency programmes that provide traditional arts experiences for third-level students and opportunities for artists to develop their own practice.

The Arts Council is committed to widening and diversifying the audience for traditional arts, from the appreciative listener to the participant and practitioner.

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

- Commission research into the gap created by different levels of immersion, knowledge and exposure to the traditional arts (from early exposure to new entrants).
- Create a strategy to develop the listening audience, understanding and appreciation of the traditional arts.

- Invest in activity that has a regional impact and that contributes to the creation of artistic hubs that help sustain year-round opportunities to participate in and appreciate the traditional arts.
- Incentivise inter-regional artistic co-operation to address participation opportunities and challenges experienced by different artistic communities.

Specific Traditional Art-development Areas

Other issues of particular strategic relevance to traditional arts have an impact on the wider ecology for traditional artists and audiences.

There is a resurgence of interest and practice in the harp in Ireland. Research has shown a burgeoning national network of highly creative harping professionals, many of whom have strong pedagogic skills and interests, and are committed to public engagement. This presents a unique opportunity to strengthen the development and survival of the harp for the future.

Given this, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Address recommendations in the *Report on the Harping Tradition in Ireland* and the *Report on Harp Making in Ireland*.
- Invest in projects that enable transmission of repertoire in harp playing, and those that support newly composed works and high-quality professional and participative opportunities.

Artistic styles, nuances and repertoire specific to a particular location or region are an important and unique characteristic of the traditional arts, and need to be nurtured.

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

- Commission research to identify appropriate supports and initiatives to preserve the diversity of styles, nuances and repertoire (including identifying fragile areas of practice in need of attention within the traditional arts).

The emergence of traditional dance artists who are exploring other dance forms in the context of their own work presents an opportunity to address and review artistic experimentation, transmission, career progression and audience engagement/development.

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

- Commission research and work in partnership with existing dance-resource organisations and infrastructure to explore the challenges and opportunities facing traditional dancers in the wider dance environment.

Other *MGAW* Areas of Strategic Interest for Traditional Arts

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

- Work with the YPCE team to review current traditional arts provision for children and young people.
- Promote and incentivise the creation and dissemination of traditional arts work for children and young people.

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

- Assist artists in building networks and collaborations abroad by investing in project-feasibility exploration before embarking on project delivery.
- Work closely with Culture Ireland in attracting international promoters to see traditional artists in Ireland and assist artists with the international artistic exchange, collaboration and promotion of their work.
- Explore the possibility of collaboration with the Celtic nations and other arts councils to establish structured support.