

Championing Architecture

the arts
council
na chomhairle
ealaíon

Architecture Policy

The Arts Council agreed this policy at its plenary meeting of 17 June 2021.

The policy development process involved desk research and a two-stage sectoral consultation process and was followed by a period of further exploration and analysis.

The first phase of the consultation process was facilitated by M.CO on the Arts Council's behalf in February 2021 and involved four separate group conversations with forty-eight key individuals and representatives of organisations and agencies with an interest in architecture.¹ The conversations explored the Arts Council's role and remit in architecture and gave specific consideration to the artist, public engagement, an infrastructure for architecture culture as well as to advocacy and partnerships for architecture.

The second phase of the process involved additional discussions with experts in particular areas of strategic interest. This stage of the consultation process allowed for a further exploration of key areas. The consultation process informed the development of this Architecture Policy.

¹ Appendix Development Process Consultees (phases 1 and 2).

The Arts Council's vision is for an Ireland where the creative practice of architects is valued, where architecture culture is championed and where everyone experiences and benefits from high-quality architecture in their everyday lives.

2.1 Background

Architecture has been a designated artform in Ireland since the first Arts Act in 1951. This gives the Arts Council a unique statutory responsibility for the development of architecture as an artform.

Architecture, as a professional practice governed by legislation, is situated in a wide cultural, social, economic and political space. In this context, the Arts Council shares an interest in, and responsibility for, architecture with other agents of the State including the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (which has responsibility for devising and implementing the National Policy on Architecture),

the Office of Public Works, the Heritage Council as well as local authorities and the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, the professional body for architects.

Architecture is also influenced and affected by other legislative and national policy considerations such as Project Ireland 2040 and, in a European context, it is subject to compliance with EU directives and is central to the New European Bauhaus movement.²

² The New European Bauhaus movement is a European Commission initiative to design future ways of living. It is creative and interdisciplinary, situated between art, culture, social inclusion, science and technology. It is intended to be a driving force to bring the European Green Deal to life in an attractive, innovative and human-centred way and is based on sustainability, inclusiveness and aesthetics.

2.2 The Arts Council

With architecture's unique position as both an artform and a professional practice, the Arts Council was slow to prioritise, support and invest in it. It was only with the appointment of its first architecture consultant in the late 1990s that it began to do so in a serious and sustained way. Since then, its policy has been focused on supporting the creative practice of architects and, from the early 2000s, on developing public engagement with architecture culture. It is concerned with the work of the living, contemporary architect as artist and with supporting a diversity of forms of practice in architecture including material and spatial, building and curatorial, and socially engaged practices.

While over the last number of years the Arts Council's investment in architecture has increased significantly, funding for architecture remains at one of the lowest levels for any artform. This means that architecture remains under-resourced and underfunded in comparison with other artforms and arts practice areas. There are, therefore, deficits in provision and a lack of institutional supports which this policy seeks to address so as to further the development of architecture and architecture culture.

Architecture can be considered one of the most democratic of artforms. It is experienced by everyone in all aspects of their everyday lives. Architecture is about buildings, but it is more than that. It is about the design and use of space and place and how these have an impact on the lives of people. The ambition of this policy is to grow a critical awareness and a valuing of architecture and to work with others to ensure that everyone, everywhere, benefits from a culture of high-quality architecture in Ireland.

To do this the Arts Council must be a champion for architecture. It must continue to provide and enhance a space, outside of the architect-client relationship, for architects to develop their creative practice. It must offer opportunities for diverse publics to engage with architecture in their schools, in their communities and in a range of media.

The Arts Council must invest in those architecture organisations that further its ambitions to deliver opportunities to architects and the public. But it must do more than that: the Arts Council must clarify and communicate its role in order to reach more architects and a wider range of publics; it must be a voice that advocates a culture of high-quality architecture at government and local government levels; it must partner with others to promote architecture and to make it visible, accessible and understood by all.

As the national development agency for the arts with responsibility for architecture as an artform, the Arts Council's Architecture Policy speaks to: artists (architects and architecture graduates); those architecture organisations that the Arts Council invests in to support architects and public engagement with architecture; government; local government; public agencies; cultural institutions; professional bodies; other partners; and diverse publics.

4.1 The Artist

In the case of the artist, the Arts Council's primary interest is in creating an environment in which architects and architecture graduates are supported to develop their creative practice.

This policy commits to continue to make direct funding supports available to architects through the Arts Council's artists' awards and architecture schemes and to ensure that generic cross artform awards are open to, and suitable for, architecture. It will also ensure that Irish architects have an opportunity to create and show work at the most significant international exhibition of architecture - the International Architecture Exhibition, the Venice Biennale - and to make that work available to audiences in Ireland with a national tour.

Furthermore, the Arts Council will continue to support the individual architect indirectly through its investment in architecture organisations and others involved in supporting architects and the curation, programming, exhibition and preservation of their work.

One of the main issues for the Arts Council that affects architecture is that its own role and remit in architecture is not widely known or understood. This is because architecture is not always recognised as an artform, and the creative practice of architecture is often only viewed through the prism of the architect-client relationship. This lack of knowledge and understanding of the Arts Council's role also leads to misconceptions about how the Arts Council supports architects and the range of practice it is interested in supporting.

This policy will address this issue by clarifying, communicating and promoting the Arts Council's role in architecture and the breadth and depth of work it supports, so that the Arts Council can reach a wider diversity of architects and publics.

In order to ensure that there is a greater understanding of the Arts Council's role and supports for architecture amongst architects and architecture graduates, the Arts Council must 'show and tell' the outcome of its awards. This policy commits to documenting the work resulting from its awards in architecture and to make it available so that architects can see, understand, and learn from the diversity of practice supported.

While the Arts Council offers a range of awards to support architects, funding for artists' awards is at a relatively low level and can only support the making of built work in architecture to a very limited degree. The lack of a high-level opportunity for architects to develop their practice and design and build a work in a public space is a significant gap in Arts Council support for the artform³.

This policy will address this issue by developing strategic partnerships with local authorities and/or national cultural institutions and/or public agencies to deliver such an opportunity for early and mid-career architects.

In a broader context, an issue of concern for the creative practice of architecture is that many architects - often in small-scale studio-based practices -

find that, under current public procurement procedures, they cannot compete for, or be commissioned to make, work. This significantly limits the opportunities for a diverse range of architects to design and build work for the public sphere which, in turn, acts as a constraint on their own creative development while also limiting outcomes in the designed environment. Given its unique position outside of commercial or industry concerns, the Arts Council is committed to becoming a voice for architecture as an artform and to advocating that greater value be placed on quality within public commissioning processes so that opportunities are made available to a broader range of architects and architectural practices and consequently lead to better outcomes for the State.

³ The former Kevin Kieran Award, which was offered by the Arts Council in partnership with the OPW, was intended to offer time for an architect to develop his/her practice through reflection and research and then to build a work in a public space.

4.2 Public Engagement

In the area of public engagement, the Arts Council's interest is in providing diverse audiences with opportunities to experience, value and critically engage with the best of architecture and architecture culture.

This policy commits to enhancing the public's engagement with architecture by continuing to invest in those organisations that provide a range of publics with opportunities to participate in architecture and access architecture events, information and programming that would not otherwise be available at a local, regional or national level. It is through the work of these organisations that the Arts Council will be able to reach diverse publics.

The Arts Council believes that everyone should have access to, and experience, buildings and spaces of high architectural quality in their everyday lives. Given the issues associated with current public procurement practice, this policy commits to advocating that greater value be placed on quality within public commissioning processes as well as promoting a design-led approach to the development of public space, so that all individuals and publics are able to experience and benefit from high-quality architecture in their built environment.

Even though architecture is central to the lives of people as they work, rest and play, it is, paradoxically, in many ways 'invisible' as there is a lack of public discourse about it: not one national newspaper employs an architecture critic or gives dedicated space to architecture; the national broadcasters do not regularly screen work on architecture or report on it; architecture within local authorities is not public-facing; and there is no dedicated national centre or museum for architecture. The Arts Council is committed to developing strategic media and other partnerships to ensure that architecture is written about, discussed and seen, with the aim of increasing public awareness of, and engagement with, architecture.

While local authorities play a significant role in architecture individually and collectively, the Arts Council's relationship with them is conducted largely through their arts offices, and few local authority arts plans are concerned with architecture. Furthermore, the Arts Council does not have a direct formal relationship with local authority architects or with other public agencies with a strategic interest in architecture. This policy seeks to develop and expand the Arts Council's relationship with local authorities, state agencies and cultural institutions in the area of architecture, urban design and planning, and in doing so provide opportunities for wider and deeper public engagement with, and participation in, architecture.

4.3 Other Areas of Strategic Interest for Architecture

In championing architecture, the Arts Council will provide for the artist and the public while also delivering key corporate priorities of its strategy *Making Great Art Work* in a meaningful way: *Paying the Artist; Equality, Human Rights and Diversity; and Young People, Children and Education*. Furthermore, the Architecture Policy will intersect with, and complement, other policy areas such as the *Spatial and Demographic Policy* and the *Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Policy*, in order to deliver shared objectives.

With regard to spatial policy, there is a need for the Arts Council to make more of its role as a Prescribed Body under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, in relation to contemporary architecture, so that buildings of contemporary architectural significance are protected and brought to public attention. Likewise, the Arts Council needs to comment on matters of architecture and urban design in its submissions to local authority development plans.

In relation to climate change, high-quality architecture is sustainable as it is designed and built to last. The Arts Council will promote and encourage climate adaptation and mitigation measures in the work it supports in architecture.

This policy, and in particular its Implementation Plan 2021–2025, will form part of the annual workplan for architecture, and progress will be reviewed annually. A mid-term review of the Implementation Plan will take place in 2023 with a report to be considered by the Arts Council at a meeting of its Policy and Strategy Committee.

Championing Architecture

Implementation Plan
2021—2025

The Artist & Public Engagement



The following actions have been identified for implementation during the period 2021–2025:

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	MGAW Priority Area ¹	Timeline
1.1	Define, articulate and communicate the Arts Council's role and remit in architecture to architects and the public.	Enhanced communication and visibility of the Arts Council's role in architecture: in published materials; via the delivery of information meetings and funding clinics with the profession, schools of architecture and others; in attendance at, and involvement in, public events on architecture.	Increased awareness and a deeper understanding of the Arts Council's role and remit in architecture with a consequent increase in the number of architects applying for, and being supported by, Arts Council architecture and cross-artform awards.	The Artist	From Q3 2021
			Increased public awareness and understanding of architecture and the Arts Council's role and remit in architecture.	Public Engagement	

¹ Arts Council strategy Making Great Art Work 2016–2025

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	MGAW Priority Area	Timeline
1.2	Champion the creative practice of architects.	Active advocacy for the creative practice of architects with government, local government and other public bodies with a strategic interest in architecture.	Increased recognition of the importance of the creative practice of architects and increased opportunities for architects.	The Artist	From Q3 2021
			Better outcomes in the designed environment leading to increased public awareness and understanding of architecture and more opportunities for the public to experience buildings and spaces of high architectural quality in their everyday lives.	Public Engagement	

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	MGAW Priority Area	Timeline
1.3	Advocate with national and local government that greater value be placed on quality within the public procurement process for buildings and spaces.	The development of processes to engage with government and provide expert advice to those involved in the public commissioning of buildings and spaces leading to better outcomes for the State.	Increased opportunities for a greater range of architects to compete for and be commissioned to design and make public buildings and spaces.	The Artist	From Q2 2022
			More opportunities for the public to experience buildings and spaces of high architectural quality in their everyday lives leading to the development of a greater awareness, understanding and valuing of architecture and the designed environment.	Public Engagement	
1.4	Formally engage with local authorities, government departments and public agencies to promote the creative practice of architects and public engagement with, and participation in, architecture.	A survey of local authority support for the creative practice of architects (via Arts Plans etc.) and advocacy for the development of further supports for architecture as an artform. The establishment, with others, of an architecture forum for those responsible for architecture and the designed environment within government, local authorities and the wider public sector.	Increased opportunities to support the creative practice of architects at a local, regional and national level.	The Artist	From Q2 2022
			Sharing of information to support increased opportunities for enhanced public engagement with, and participation in, architecture and place-making throughout the country.	Public Engagement	

1. The Artist & Public Engagement

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	MGAW Priority Area	Timeline
1.5	Research and develop a new award in architecture in partnership with another public agency/cultural institution/local authority to involve the research, design and building of an ambitious work in a public space.	The introduction of a high-level award to support an architect of promise at an early or mid-career stage to develop his/her creative practice and create, design and build in a public space.	Opportunities for architects of promise to be supported to develop their creative practice through the research, design and building of ambitious work in a public space.	The Artist	Research and development from Q2 2022 Implementation from 2023
			The public get to experience work of high architectural value.	Public Engagement	
1.6	Create a public-facing digital repository to document and record the outcome of Arts Council awards in architecture.	The creation of a digital repository linked to the Arts Council website that documents and records the outcome of Arts Council awards in architecture.	The opportunity for architects to develop their practice by learning from precedent and the work of others.	The Artist	Research and development from Q1 2022 Implementation from 2023
			Increased public awareness of, and engagement with, the range and depth of creative practice in architecture supported by the Arts Council.	Public Engagement	

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	MGAW Priority Area	Timeline
1.7	In partnership with key stakeholders, research the feasibility of developing a process to document Irish buildings and spaces of contemporary architectural significance.	The development of a publicly available resource that documents buildings and spaces of contemporary architectural significance.	Works of contemporary architectural significance are brought to public attention leading to a greater understanding and valuing of architecture and an enhancing of architecture culture.	Public Engagement	Research and development from Q1 2022 Implementation from 2023
1.8	Explore the development of partnerships with mainstream media to provide opportunities for public discourse on architecture and issues associated with architecture.	The development of media partnerships to support the commissioning of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A series of regular articles (and associated digital assets) from new and diverse voices on architecture and issues relating to architecture. – Documentary works on contemporary Irish architecture for broadcast and digital dissemination. 	Increased public awareness of, and engagement with, architecture and increased public discourse on architecture culture.	Public Engagement	Research and development from Q1 2022 Implementation from 2023
1.9	Further engage children and young people with architecture within formal education settings.	The commissioning of research to identify gaps at primary and secondary level and the development of approaches to address any deficits in order to enhance and grow existing programmes and to embed architecture within education.	More young people and children everywhere have an opportunity to engage with architecture and the designed environment and to develop an understanding of its importance in their everyday lives.	Public Engagement	From Q3 2022

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	MGAW Priority Area	Timeline
1.10	Advocate the development of a national architecture centre or museum to promote architecture culture and architecture's place in society.	The support of efforts and plans for the development of an Irish architecture centre.	Increased and enhanced public engagement with architecture and architecture culture.	Public Engagement	From Q3 2021

Other Areas of Strategic Interest for Architecture

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2. Other Areas of Strategic Interest for Architecture

The following actions have been identified for implementation during the period 2021–2025:

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	MGAW Priority Area	Timeline
2.1	Maximise the Arts Council's role as a Prescribed Body under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, in relation to contemporary architecture.	The development of a process for identifying planning applications regarding buildings of contemporary architectural significance and the making of contributions to Arts Council submissions on those applications.	Buildings of contemporary architectural significance are protected and brought to public attention.	Spatial	From Q1 2022
2.2	Make contributions on architecture and the designed environment in Arts Council submissions to national Development Plan Guidelines (under the National Planning Framework) and to all local authority development plans.	The development of criteria for commenting on architecture and the designed environment in local authority development plans and the making of contributions to Arts Council submissions on those plans.	Buildings of contemporary architectural significance are protected and brought to public attention and the public get to experience buildings and spaces of high architectural quality in their everyday lives.	Spatial	From Q3 2021
2.3	Implement the Arts Council's policy for Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability as it pertains to architecture.	Active advocacy for a culture of high quality architecture.	Further the development of high-quality architecture that is sustainable in the long term.	Climate Change	From 2022

Championing Architecture

CHRISTOPH ANTIPAS
Antipas Jones Architects

DERMOT BANNON
Dermot Bannon Architects

KEVIN BATES
Scott Tallon Walker Architects

NOREILE BREEN
Architect

DENIS BYRNE
Denis Byrne Architects and Darc Space

PETER CARROLL
A2 Architects

ANDREW CLANCY
Clancy Moore Architects

ELIZABETH CLYNE
Noji Architects

PETER CODY
Boyd Cody Architects

LOUISE COTTER
Carr Cotter Naessens Architects

TOM DE PAOR
dePaor

AILISH DRAKE
Drake Hourigan Architecture

CHARLES DUGGAN
Heritage Officer, Dublin City Council

MARWA EL MUBARK
Architectural Review

YVONNE FARRELL
Grafton Architects

CIARÁN FERRIE
Ciarán Ferrie Architects

ANNIE FLETCHER
Director, Irish Museum of Modern Art

PÁDRAIG FLYNN
Self Organised Architecture

EMMA GEOGHEGAN
School of Architecture, TU Dublin

ALI GREHAN
Dublin City Architect, Dublin City Council

GRAINNE HASSETT
Hassett Ducatez Architects

MAIRE HENRY
DHB Architects

LIVIA HURLEY
Design Fellow, UCD School of Architecture

TARA KENNEDY
John McLaughlin Architects

RYAN KENNIHAN
Ryan W. Kennihan Architects

SARAH LAPPIN
Head of Architecture, QUB

JANE LARMOUR
Arigho Larmour Wheeler Architects

DIARMUID LAWLOR
Associate Director, Scottish Futures Trust

KIERAN LONG
Director, ArkDes

ROSIE LYNCH
Callan Workhouse Union

PETER MCGOVERN

Henry J Lyons Architecture

MARY MCCARTHY

Director, Crawford Art Gallery

ALAN MEE

Alan Mee Architects

RUTH MORROW

School of Architecture, Newcastle University

ORLA MURPHY

School of Architecture, UCD

EMMA LUCY O'BRIEN

Director, Visual Carlow

TOM O'BRIEN

TOB Architect

SANDRA O'CONNELL

Director of Architecture and Communications, RIAI

CIARÁN O'CONNOR

State Architect, Office of Public Works & President RIAI

RUTH O'HERLIHY

McCullough Mulvin Architects

ORLA O'KANE

President, Architectural Association of Ireland

ANDREW Ó MURCHÚ

BothAnd Group

COLUM O'RIORDAN

CEO, Irish Architectural Archive

SHANE O'TOOLE

Architect and architecture critic

BLAITHÍN QUINN

Curator of Learning, Irish Architecture Foundation

NESSA ROCHE

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

RAY RYAN

Curator of Architecture, Carnegie Museum of Art

EMMETT SCANLON

Architect

GRÁINNE SHAFFREY

Shaffrey Architects

CONOR SREENAN

Grangegorman Development Agency

LIAM TUITE

RIAI

JOHN TUOMEY

O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects

GIULIA VALLONE

Senior Architect, Cork County Council

NATHALIE WEADICK

Director, Irish Architecture Foundation

The Arts Council

70 Merrion Square
Dublin 2, Ireland

artscouncil.ie

facebook.com/artscouncilireland
twitter.com/artscouncil_ie

T +353 1 618 0200

F +353 1 676 1302

Callsave 1850 392 492

