



LAUREATE FOR IRISH FICTION

2021 onwards

This is a summary of an update given to the Arts Council in relation to the future of the Laureate for Irish Fiction. It was presented and agreed at Council's 18 November Plenary meeting.

Laureate for Irish Fiction: Update and third Laureate

1. *Update on Current Laureate 2018 – 2021*

Sebastian Barry is now in the third year of his term as Laureate for Irish Fiction. As a result of the Covid-19 crisis, the Laureate Lifelines series – to take place in Irish prisons over the summer – was postponed and is now being rolled out via Zoom. In addition to this, a digital programme was developed to provide inspiration to writers and readers. It included films of the Laureate reading, as well as a series of filmed book recommendations from the Laureate and others. This was augmented and enhanced by podcasts of previously recorded Laureate events, i.e. interviews and short stories, along with the release of additional Laureate podcasts.

Sebastian Barry's term was due to conclude in January 2021. Given the exceptional circumstances, he has agreed to remain as Laureate into the Spring of 2021, at which stage he will deliver his final Laureate lecture. This will be followed by the publication of the three lectures later in 2021.

2. *Laureate for Irish Fiction: 2021 – 2024*

2.1 Role and Programme

It is proposed to commence the process of selecting the third Laureate for Irish Fiction in June 2021, with a view to announcing the third Laureate for Irish Fiction in November.

Following an internal review, a number of improvements are proposed in relation to the Laureate's role and programme.

The experience of two Laureates, coupled with the findings from the review of Laureate na nÓg, makes a strong case for the role and programme to be more structured from the outset. The laureate should occupy a leadership role, and both the public and teaching programmes should be designed and focused to reflect this.

(a) Leadership

In terms of the Laureate's leadership role, the Laureate will continue to:

- Write and deliver an original annual lecture.
- Publish the resulting three lectures in a volume.

The Laureate will also agree to undertake a small number (2-3) of high profile media appearances (radio, television, print) in each year of their term. While this has happened on an informal basis to date, there is a need to be more selective and deliberate from the outset, in order to gain maximum impact.

(b) Public Programme

In terms of the public programme, it has been agreed that a more formal relationship with the library and bookshop network should be established, and an event/readership programme developed with same. This will be structured and less time intensive for the Laureate, but with greater reach and impact. It is proposed that the Laureate will:

- Curate a series of readings or events in public libraries (3 per year) that work to promote contemporary Irish fiction. These will be designed to shine a light on the diversity and breadth of contemporary Irish prose fiction and will involve other writers, as well as the Laureate in a leadership/curatorial role.
- Curate a series of readings or events in bookshops (2 per year) that work to promote contemporary Irish fiction. Again, these will be designed to shine a light on the diversity and breadth of contemporary Irish prose fiction and will involve other writers, as well as the Laureate in a leadership/ curatorial role.
- Ensure that the programme is inclusive of the voices and cultures that make up Ireland today, in line with the EHRD policy and strategy

(c) Teaching

While teaching in UCD and NYU has been beneficial to a small number of students, the impact remains small and it is a significant commitment from the artist. There is scope to make the Laureate's student engagement less onerous, more meaningful and more geographically democratic. In this context, it is proposed:

- Over their three year term, the Laureate will deliver a craft talk aimed at MA and undergraduate students in each of the Irish universities with a creative writing programme.
- In one year of their term, the Laureate will undertake a shorter period of travel abroad, linking in with a number of universities and institutions, in order to extend the reach of the Laureate and promote Irish literature abroad. This will involve the delivery of a craft talk at a select number of universities, alongside the delivery of the lecture abroad.

2.2 Selection Process

It is proposed that the selection process proceeds following the same pattern as was applied in 2017, with a small number of improvements. The process is described in Appendix I. It should be noted that the process can be undertaken /digitally in every instance, in the event that social distancing and travel restrictions are in place at any given stage of the process.

It is proposed that a member of Council will chair the international selection panel for the Laureate for Irish Fiction, 2021 – 2024.

As with the previous selection panels, the Arts Council convenes the panel with a view to including expertise from a range of different perspectives. It is proposed to diversify the selection process for the Laureate, in line with EHRD policy and strategy, along the lines as proposed below:

- an internationally recognised critic or commentator of literary fiction
- a children's author of international reputation
- a poet of international reputation
- an Anglophone writer of fiction or creative non-fiction
- a non-Anglophone writer or literary translator of international reputation

The criteria for shortlisting and selection are proposed as follows:

- quality and scale of body of work
- contribution to prose fiction in Ireland and internationally
- commitment to connecting with readers
- track record in engaging with public, the media and the wider arts sector

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Appendix I

Step in process	What/who's involved	Timeline
Nomination window	AC to invite nominations for the Laureate for Irish Fiction 2021/24 (based on the published criteria) from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arts Council funded organisations with a literary interest - Libraries Ireland - The Libraries Association of Ireland - The Irish Booksellers Association - national cultural institutions 	June 2021
Expert shortlisting	- A member of the Arts Council will chair an expert panel to establish a shortlist of approximately eight names, on the basis of the criteria	July 2021
Liaising with nominated writers	- AC to write to all shortlisted writers, outlining key aspects of the honour and associated responsibilities, seeking confirmation whether or not they would accept the position if offered. If so, name will proceed to the selection phase	July 2021
Selection of Laureate for Irish Fiction	- The final selection of the Laureate for Irish Fiction will be made by an international selection panel based on the published criteria for selection.	September 2021
Planning for Laureateship	- Head of Literature, Project Manager and the selected Laureate will spend time planning the initial engagements of the Laureate's term	September 2021 – October 2021
Announcement of Laureate	- Venue and nature of events to be confirmed.	November 2021

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- quality and scale of body of work
- contribution to prose fiction in Ireland and internationally
- commitment to connecting with readers
- track record in engaging with public, the media and the wider arts sector