

Our Covid Response

The Arts Council's
response to the
Covid-19 crisis for
the **arts in Ireland**
2020/2021

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Introduction from the Director

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This report describes the Arts Council's ongoing response to the impact of Covid-19 on the arts. It contains new research on the pandemic's impacts on cultural organisations, artists and audiences. It reflects on the cessation of artistic activity, and the extensive resulting damage to the lives and livelihoods of so many artists and arts communities.

Beyond the pandemic's devastating immediate impacts, it is clear that Covid-19 will have profound long-term implications for the cultural sector, both for artists and for audiences, which could transform cultural practice as we know it. The report offers some reflections on the future for the arts landscape in Ireland, and suggests the most appropriate supports and interventions for this new scenario.

Throughout the last 16 months, cultural activity has enabled individuals and communities to express solidarity and to maintain a sense of collective wellbeing, despite the alienating effects of social distancing. Like never before, it is now acknowledged that artistic expression is urgent and essential and that Ireland's artists will make a major contribution to our national recovery and renewal.

Artists' livelihoods are particularly vulnerable due to the uncertain nature of their employment patterns and this report shows clearly that Covid-19 has exerted a particularly detrimental affect on the profession. Recent research from EY shows that 4 of 10 jobs would have been lost without state support. Findings also show that even with government supports, 39% of artists have experienced a 50% drop in income. The huge negative impact that commenced in March 2020 is continuing.

In 2020, there was a 90% increase in applications to the Arts Council with 54% of these being made by first time applicants. With increased investment, the Arts Council was able to approve funding to 129% more applications than in 2019. As the crisis continues, so too of course does the demand, and this report shows that sustained and increased investment is necessary to ensure that the arts landscape emerges intact from the pandemic.

Our key policies *Equality, Human Rights and Diversity* and *Paying the Artist* continue to underpin all our work. Shortly, we will be publishing our Spatial policy. This new policy focuses on people, places and spaces in every county and it seeks to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to create, engage with, participate in and enjoy the arts, regardless of who they are or where they live and work.

In 2021, public investment in the arts through the Arts Council has reached a historically high level of €130 million. This money is the means by which the Arts Council continues to protect jobs and livelihoods of artists, and to assist arts organisations through financial difficulties.

With our support and the support of the public, the core infrastructure of the arts in Ireland has survived. Artists and organisations continue to adapt and have found a myriad of thoughtful and imaginative ways to reach the public.

In the past, pandemics have changed the contours of human life. The shared existential threat of Covid-19 is stimulating and accelerating our understanding of how we can improve the world for future generations. The arts have truly shown how they benefit wider society, and they are now poised to recover and renew.

Maureen Kennelly
Director of the Arts Council

Introduction from the Chair

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The findings in this report show the huge negative impact of Covid-19 on the arts. The arts was one of the first sectors to be hit by the crisis and will be one of the last to recover.

Throughout the crisis, the Arts Council has been focused on protecting jobs and livelihoods of artists and arts workers, assisting arts organisations experiencing financial difficulties and working to encourage audiences to re-engage with in-person events in a safe environment.

The Arts Council has used increased public funding to help the sector survive and adapt in 2020 and again in 2021—and will continue to do so in the year to come. This time two years ago the Arts Council's annual budget was €75m; today is it €130m—a historic high. The political commitment to increase arts funding was made prior to the pandemic, and the impact of this funding will be truly felt when the Covid-19 crisis has passed.

Despite the crisis, the Arts Council remains committed to its current strategy and key policies. We continue to be guided by the principles in *Making Great Art Work (2016—2025)*, specifically, the role of the artist and public engagement with the arts. We also remain focused on delivery of key policies including *Equality, Human Rights and Diversity*, and *Paying the Artist*.

The Board and staff of the Arts Council will continue to work closely with government and our other partners so that jobs are protected and that high quality work is made and reaches the public.

Significantly, with ongoing public funding, the Arts Council will be empowered to help artists and arts organisations play a strong role in the national recovery from the current crisis.

Prof. Kevin Rafter
Chair

This report is being published in mid-2021 while some Covid restrictions remain in place and with uncertainty about the impact of the Delta variant. Outdoor events, festivals, online activities and livestreams are being produced, but it is clear that the damage to the sector overall runs very deep and that recovery is not inevitable.

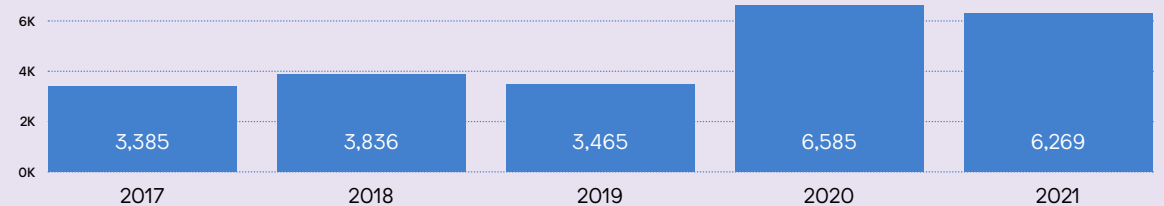
The crisis has had personal and emotional impacts on artists, arts workers and audiences and in planning for 2022, the sector finds itself torn between hope and optimism on the one hand, and the necessity in the next number of months to assess the structural damage which has been wrought by the crisis.

Major current challenges for the Arts Council include:

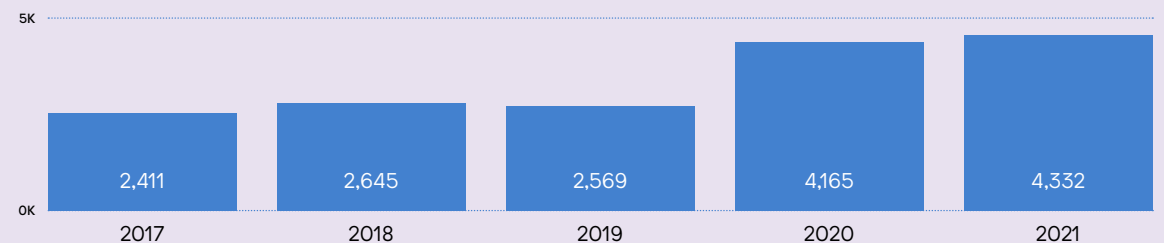
Ongoing demand for Arts Council funding

Demand for Arts Council support doubled in 2020 over 2019, and year-to-date figures (to July 7th 2021) show that the volume of support sought could double again in 2021, driven in part by a large increase in the number of individual artists and arts workers seeking support. The chart below sets out the number of applications, and applicants, as well as funding demand.

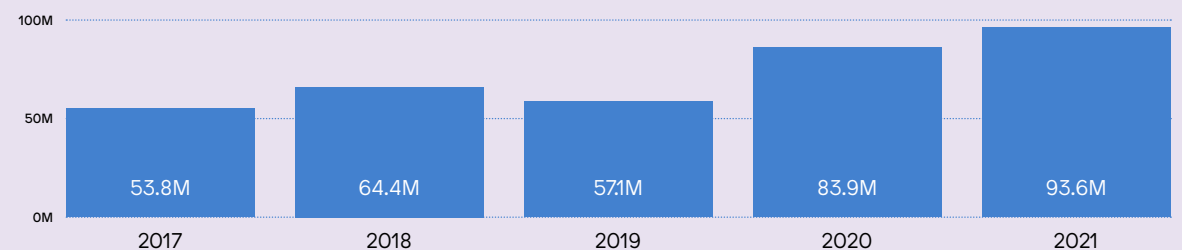
Applications by Year



Applicants by Year



Approved Amount by Year



Impact on artists

The Arts Council carried out an impact assessment survey with individual artists in May/June 2021¹ which clearly demonstrates the professional and financial impact of Covid-19 on artists.

Key insights from that survey include:

- 48% of artists reported the financial impact of Covid as severe.²
- Differences emerged between artforms, with those involved in music reporting more severe impacts than in 2020, reflecting the ongoing nature of the crisis.
- The percentage of income for professional artists from artistic activities decreased substantially.

2019	
Arts income	51%
Non arts income	49%

2020	
Arts income	24%
Non arts income	76%

When asked "What were the most challenging aspects of trying to maintain an artistic practice" the most frequently cited was "lack of work opportunities" reflecting the drop in productivity in the sector. The ranked answers are in the chart below.

Lack of work opportunities	1
Lack of access, engagement or connection to audiences or participants	2
Not being able to properly engage with collaborators and other artists	3
The constant uncertainty	4
Financial pressures	5
The disrupted access to services, facilities, resources, workspaces etc	6
Inability to think or focus	7
Lack of childcare or other family/domestic pressures	8
Other	9

- Almost half (48%) of professional artists have considered abandoning their career in the arts, with lack of income and financial pressures being cited by 70% of those as the main reason for considering this.

As the Arts Council supports the sector to transition to more fully-realised forms of expression, and audiences to adjust, a full assessment of the changed landscape will emerge.

What have we learnt from the Covid-19 crisis and what comes next?

Finance; Empower; Leverage Building a Flourishing and Sustainable Arts Sector

The Covid crisis brought about an abrupt and profound shift in focus for the Arts Council which sought to ensure that the sector, and individuals within it, were stabilised and supported through the crisis, through funding and grant awards (and of course many in the arts availed of the PUP/TWSS/EWSS). This stabilisation was undertaken to ensure that the arts sector could emerge from the crisis largely intact. **While no Arts Council-funded organisations have closed, it is as yet unclear how many individual artists have left to pursue careers in other sectors.**

A potential outcome of this crisis would be to have a large decrease in the number of artists, unaccounted for by employment statistics. We can see that the decrease of employment (15%) is a lot lower than the decrease of activity thanks to support from public stakeholders, including the Arts Council and its Survive, Adapt Renew Report.

In dispersing public funds, the Arts Council in its Covid response sought to stimulate education, training, creation of artwork and productive artistic activity by individuals or organisations. The Arts Council in its Covid response sustained and created work opportunities and organisational stability. This has reinforced the reality of the underlying condition at the heart of the arts; that the creative output which the Arts Council exists to support cannot work without an infrastructure and a set of values which invest in people and institutions.

Just as economic activity cannot be stimulated without building roads and bridges, the arts cannot fulfil their potential as agents of social and societal good without investment in people and organisations.

There are two key challenges; one is to create high quality, working lives for independent artists and arts workers and the second is to invest in arts organisations as engines of creativity, and generators of sustainable and rewarding employment and innovation.

The precarious nature and low pay of arts employment is one of the "underlying conditions" at the heart of the arts landscape. The arts and arts organisations rely on cohorts of freelance and independent personnel who routinely provide services for below market value, or free of charge, in planning, budgeting, creating proposals and in the realisation of plans and the creation of artworks. Creativity does not flourish in circumstances of want, only occasionally despite them. Ensuring that structural change happens, which embeds the principles of the Paying The Artist policy and promoting equity and diversity in artistic practice through investment of resources, are overarching priorities for the sector.

¹ Artists Survey 2021 Findings—The Arts Council

² 8–10 on a scale of 1–10 with 10 being the most severe

Creating a culture of respect for the time and expertise of all is a key challenge and one of the vital areas to be addressed if the arts sector is to flourish. Measures to effect change in the professional lives of independent artists and arts workers could include:

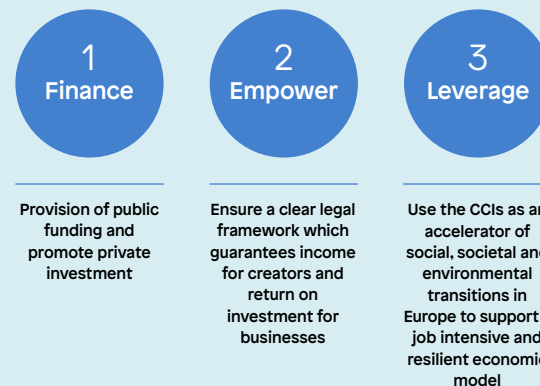
- *Local level structural changes, for example in creating local artistic “hubs” with an employment -type model based around arts centres, should be explored.*
- *Implementation of the Universal Basic Income for artists is essential.*
- *Stimulating and encouraging training, education and joint co-working for those whose creativity is the basis of the arts sector is also key and requires spaces and programmes which can meet the needs of those who are independent workers across the subsidised and commercial sectors.*
- *Ensuring children and young people have meaningful and sustained opportunities to develop their creative skills, through dynamic collaboration across the arts and education; as well as providing supports for professional artists to develop and push their practice.*
- *Sufficient resources for organisations to meet the obligations of equity and payment for work done is a key priority.*

Arts organisations are key to the production and dissemination of art and the Covid crisis has exposed structural weaknesses at sectoral and sub-sectoral level in organisations, where business models find it challenging to withstand much smaller shocks than the current crisis. Arts organisations resource, curate, produce and distribute art at scales which are only tenable at organisational level. Organisations have long had a culture of contraction and caution, reinforced by volatility in the funding environment. The Covid crisis brought into stark relief the lack of resilience in business models. Active organisations, functioning at a high level of effectiveness in their communities, whose reliance on box office, retail, catering and other sources of commercial income were unable to adapt their functions, even as others did. The model whereby the core artistic activities of an organisation are self-sustaining and the funding available covers only core costs stifles ambition, even in those areas where additional income could be generated. Lack of investment in artistic and technical areas and in others such as audience development, fundraising and sponsorship, complementary to public funding, across the arts have resulted in organisations with a static business model and no financial ability to invest even at a micro level beyond the current year. Investment is urgently required to create a sustainable and resilient sector, which is capable of nourishing the talents of diverse people and reaching out to diverse audiences. The Capacity Building Support Scheme and the development of the RAISE programme have demonstrated how empowering the development of business strategies and making modest investments within the arts can create new energy for change.

Considering the Arts as part of the Creative industries will be key to launch an ambitious recovery plan maximising the socio-economic potential of this sector

The damage which Covid-19 has caused the Arts sector in both Ireland and Europe is clear. Economic growth in the sector has plummeted, and artists and workers in the Arts sector are facing employment insecurity more so than in other sectors. Difficulties are prolonged as cultural events need to be planned in advance which is not possible at the moment given doubts around reopening dates.

Artists are often economically vulnerable, many of them are freelance and only working part-time in the Arts sector. A recovery plan also presents the opportunity to have a new approach to developing cohesive strategy in the sector, by investigating the trends and nuances of each subsector and identifying opportunities and synergies. The transfer of skills from one creative industry to the other will be key to maximise productivity and value-added of each job. By doing so, the sector will not only mitigate the impact of Covid-19, it will also be more resilient in the long-term. In terms of international benchmarks, the French Arts sector receives substantial fiscal aid and as a result the economic value created by each job is 35% higher. We suggest three pillars should be prioritised to support the recovery of Cultural and Creative Industries and to create new job opportunities.



1 Finance
Provision of public funding and promote private investment

2 Empower
Ensure a clear legal framework which guarantees income for creators and return on investment for businesses

3 Leverage
Use the CCIs as an accelerator of social, societal and environmental transitions in Europe to support a job intensive and resilient economic model

Digital

The degree to which digital and online platforming of the arts have grown in importance is clear and continues to evolve. How the landscape in relation to the production and dissemination of the arts online will develop, as part of a mixed or hybrid model of bringing work to audiences, remains unclear globally, as do engagement trends and behaviours once in-person events and arts provision returns. There is a strong, demonstrated need amongst organisations and individuals for support to develop and amplify their digital offering—307 of the 340 (90%) awards to organisations under Capacity Building included funding for digital supports in training, equipment and other elements.

The Arts Council has identified a clear requirement for investment, and partnerships with creative industries at sectoral level, to enable experimentation, shared learning, production practice and audience development. This will form an ongoing programme of work for the Arts Council and the sector. Creating sustainable models from an environmental as well as financial point of view will be key to the appropriate development of new digital models and any actions in this regard need to be cognisant of this. Part of the challenge will be to ensure that smaller and regional organisations are not excluded from digital transformation—there is positive evidence of regional spread of digital activity but also clear evidence that larger arts organisations, with more resources, were more active digitally in 2020 than smaller organisations, based on turnover.

Resources and frameworks for the arts sector

Fulfilling its remit as a development agency for the arts, the Covid crisis has accelerated the need for the arts sector to have tools and resources available in structured ways (similar to the Enterprise Ireland model) to enable its strategic development.

Some examples of resource provision during the Covid crisis in 2021 include:

- **Surviving or Thriving**—an online discussion and workshop series for artists and arts workers supporting wellbeing, developed by Waterford Healing Arts Trust.
- **Brightening Air**—a 10 day season of arts experiences from June 11–20 2021 www.brighteningair.com showcasing the imagination and social value of these experiences as we transition from Covid.
- **An awareness and public visibility campaign** with the aim of building engagement in all the arts experiences which will be available in summer 2021.
- **A Digital Toolbox for arts organisations.**
- **A refocused RAISE programme**, which supports organisations to build sources of engagement and skills in fundraising and development.

There is a demonstrated need for the Arts Council to build structures which support specific goals within the arts on an ongoing basis, allowing for scale which would not be possible for a single organisation. Arts organisations and individuals are focused on delivering their work and programmes and look to the Arts Council to provide strategic guidance and support. Embracing this opportunity will invest in and empower the arts sector.

Stakeholder Engagement

Focus group feedback from funded organisations on the response in relation to the role of the Arts Council focused on:

- The unequivocal nature of the Emergency Response in Phase 1 was referenced as a positive by all participants, providing stability and certainty in an uncertain landscape and enabling programming and planning. This underlines the chronic uncertainty of the arts sector.
- The nature of communication between funded organisations and individuals and the Arts Council, was universally perceived to be more extensive, informal, straightforward and supportive by both sides and a way should be found to integrate this into operations for the future.
- One of the characteristics of the Covid response in the arts sector has been the perception and realisation of a greater degree of co-operation and partnership between all governmental departments and agencies, and within the arts sector and its sub-sectors, including a higher degree of sharing of intelligence and information. The Arts Council sees an opportunity to foster greater co-operation between and among sectors based on new stakeholder relationships.
- The Arts Council and its partner agencies were seen to have played a full role in the society-wide response to Covid and this was warmly welcomed. The cross departmental nature of working demonstrated the relevance of the arts across all parts of Irish society.

The Covid crisis exposed structural weaknesses in the arts sector and fostered the responsiveness and flexibility which point towards long term solutions. Nationally significant arts organisations were saved from closure and greater investment enabled the sector to be stabilised and for it to play a full part in social and societal adaptation; it also created new opportunities for significant cohorts of previously under-represented artists. Investment in artists at the start of their careers and in the creation of additional artworks as a consequence of the crisis has led to a flourishing of creativity which will be manifest to the public for several years to come. The immense benefits of significant investment in the arts infrastructure and individuals are clear and are wider than the activities funded by the Arts Council, which has demonstrated however that it is the engine of change and growth in the sector.

Covid-19 has shown how essential the arts are in a time of crisis. Throughout the pandemic, the work of artists has enabled individuals and communities to maintain a sense of collective wellbeing despite the alienating effects of social distancing. Artists and organisations have been particularly noteworthy in responding to volatile circumstances and have been agile, imaginative and responsive. With significant investment, this sector is poised to recover and flourish and will play a central part in the renewal of Irish society.

At a Glance

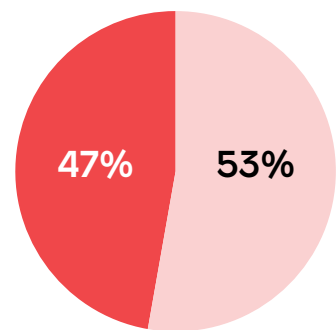
All Arts Council Funding 2020



Approved Applicants by Type

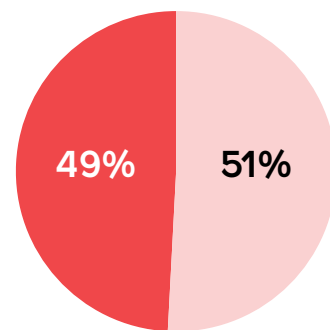


Applications



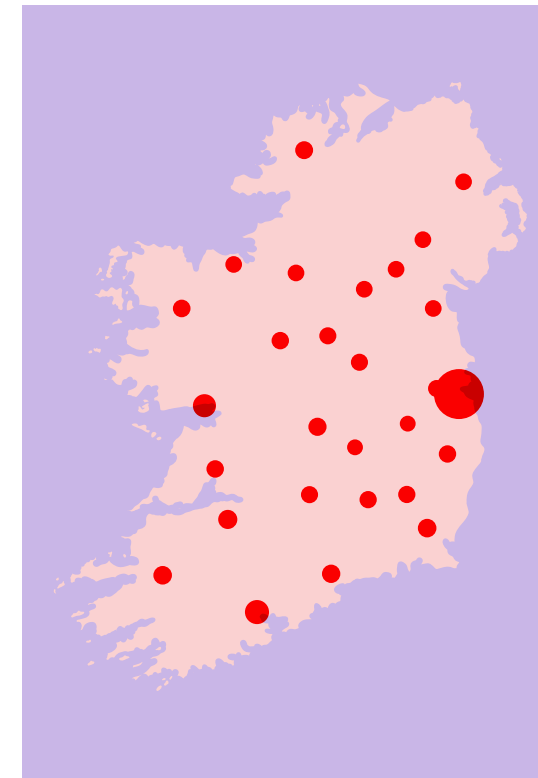
● Approved Application
● Unable to Fund

Amount

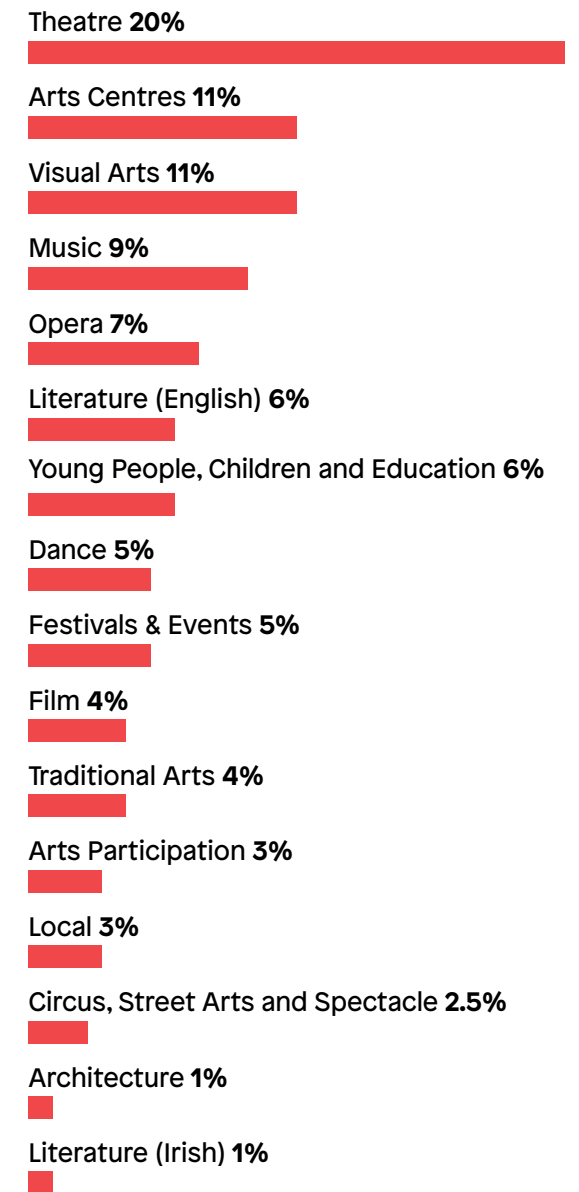


● Approved Amount
● Unable to Fund

Approved Amount by County



Approved Amount by Artform/Area



The Arts Council experienced a 90% increase in the number of applications in 2020 over 2019, and approved funding for 129% more applicants than in 2019.

Increased funding notwithstanding, the Arts Council funded less than half (47%) of the total amount requested.

“Getting a bursary means I am able to continue feeding my family for the first 6 months of 2021, as well as giving me the unquantifiable but equally important nourishment gained from being able to continue working and writing.”

—Michael West, Playwright

“This is a pivotal time in our lifetime. Now importantly with this award I have been able to work with the changing conditions of life due to the pandemic. This has given me huge pause for reflection on how I deliver workshops and create artworks. In my practice I came away with rich questions such as the role of digital, the power of receiving art in our homes, and how to connect with each other through art.”

—Artist Working with Young People and Children (Name Withheld)

Scope and Methodology of Interim Report

The scope of this report is the Arts Council’s Covid response measures in 2020 only. This has been taken to mean the specific measures and actions which were implemented by the Council in that calendar year in response to Covid. Pre-existing core Strategic and Arts Grants Funding and other schemes are considered here only insofar as they were adapted, mainly in respect of timing, in response to the Covid crisis.

The report focuses on new funding schemes and initiatives which were introduced in response to the crisis; and existing schemes such as the Projects or Commissioning schemes which were significantly enhanced to meet the objectives of the Council to respond. A full list of the measures considered is at Appendix 1.

The analysis of internal Arts Council application data is of grants and awards made in 2020, and it should be noted that funded activities will take place in 2021, and in future years, arising from these grants.

The inputs used in the compilation of the report were:

1. Internal Arts Council data from applications received in 2020 covering 9 funding schemes, including Diversity and Arts Council Awards annual data report 2020
2. Supplementary information received via survey from organisations and individuals
3. Mapping of Digital Artistic Activities of Arts Council-funded Individuals and Organisations 2019/2020 EY April 2021
4. Employment and Economic Impact Assessment of Covid-19 on the arts sector in Ireland EY March 2021
5. Arts During Covid-19—National Survey October 2020 B&A Research and Insight for the Arts Council
6. Arts Insights National Arts Engagement Survey 2020 B&A for the Arts Council
7. Focus group findings addressing questions of funding impact in 2020 and future needs:

The focus groups were held in April and May 2021 and included 24 participants representative of funded organisations and individuals, as well as one internal Arts Council focus group.

Survive, Adapt, Renew, June 2020

Analysis of Measures Undertaken

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This section contains detailed analysis of the calendar year to December 31st 2020. The Arts Council will analyse 2021 data at the end of this year.

The Arts Council's response to the crisis can be broadly categorised into two phases in 2020. These were:

Phase 1

Emergency response
(March–June 2020)

Phase 2

Funding schemes and measures, including Survive Adapt Renew report and measures
(June–December 2020)

In addition to the specific funding measures and schemes described here, the Arts Council also facilitated and initiated multiple non-financial and other initiatives at artform and sector level to guide and support the sector. These include;

- **survey research with individual artists, and with organisations in April and May 2020.**
- **convening of the “Supporting the Sector Together” group of resource organisations throughout 2020.**
- **funding and working with Theatre Forum to produce Covid guidelines for work practices in arts centres.**
- **producing guidelines for how to work with young people and children, and in a dance environment.**
- **fora for discussion set up at artform level by teams within the Arts Council.**
- **clinics, webinars and information sessions for artists and organisations.**
- **participation by personnel in committees set up by others including Fáilte Ireland, as well as participation in the governmental taskforce which produced the “Life Worth Living” report.**

All of these actions fed into and informed how the Arts Council adapted its funding models and the flexibility and responsiveness of these measures throughout the year.

Phase 1

Emergency Response

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In April 2020, the Arts Council announced two extensive funding measures:

a) A Grant Guarantee scheme.

This guaranteed the full amount of previously awarded funding for 2020 to those funded under certain strands: Strategic Funding; Arts Grant Funding; Arts Centre Funding; Festivals; Projects and other funding. This scheme guaranteed funding already committed and provided organisations with a facility to immediately draw down 90% of their total funding for the year. Mindful of the particular impact of Covid on the freelance sector, the Arts Council made it a condition that the funding would be used to meet existing contractual commitments to individual artists and producers of work.

174 organisations availed of the early drawdown scheme of whom 71, or 41%, were Strategically Funded organisations. 18,451,023 euro of previously committed funding was distributed through this scheme.

b) A Covid-19 Crisis Response Award.

“Open to Irish-based professional artists to provide access for the public to new and original art; to support the creation and dissemination of new artistic work either online, by broadcast or other virtual means, for the public benefit.”

—Guidance for applicants April 2020

334 individual artists received funding, from more than a thousand applications. The grant awarded was 3,000 euro and a total of 1m euro was awarded. 40% of artist applicants had never applied to the Arts Council before.

Outcomes and impacts

The Grant Guarantee scheme ensured that:

- arts organisations stabilised personal and organisational structures placing them in a financial position to meet existing commitments to their employees, individual artists, arts workers and others.
- In addition, guaranteed funding stabilised the operations of strategic and other arts organisations who operate under a mixed funding model and whose other sources of funding had been suspended.¹

The Covid-19 Crisis Response Award ensured that:

- Individual artists and arts workers, including new applicants to the Arts Council, received financial support. 160 (or 40% of the total number of awards) were to first time applicants to the Arts Council where other sources of work and income in that period were limited.
- The award stimulated and amplified the move towards digital dissemination and new modes of working.

Focus group feedback on the Emergency Response phase focused on impacts as follows:

- The swift actions of the Arts Council, particularly in relation to the Grant Guarantee scheme, provided much needed reassurance to organisations and those with whom they engage. Positive communication of this scheme fostered a partnership approach to the crisis between the Council and the sector.
- The Covid-19 Crisis Response Award elicited some negative reaction initially; focus groups feedback suggests that the amount of the award, at 3,000 euro, while significant for early stage or emerging artists was not suitable for mid-career or established artists; this feedback has been balanced by the very positive feedback from recipients.

¹ Survive, Adapt, Renew A response to the Covid-19 crisis for the Arts in Ireland.

Phase 2

Survive, Adapt, Renew and Related Measures

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The Arts Council convened an Expert Advisory Group in May 2020 and their recommendations were adopted by Council in June. Additional funding of 20 million euro over and above its allocation for 2020 was provided to the Arts Council by central government, also in June.²

The report recommended the creation of:

- an immediate €21.4m Survival Fund to allow the Arts Council deal with current challenges arising from the Covid-19 emergency.
- a €30m Sustainability Fund in 2021, to support the arts through the continuing impacts of the crisis.
- A number of measures were contained in the report, and in the second phase of its response, the Arts Council created new, and adapted and expanded some existing schemes to meet the objectives and achieve the outcomes set out in the report. A full analysis of how the measures were addressed is at Appendix 1.

The stated outcomes from its Covid response adopted by the Arts Council were:

- Stabilisation of the arts sector in 2020.
- New foundations for sustainability laid in 2020/2021 through the operation of the Sustainability Fund.
- Work and employment opportunities for artists and arts workers, and investment in organisations.
- Art and artworks will continue to be created through the period of adaptation, and those who participate in creative activities will be supported.
- The public will have continued, safe access to the arts, sometimes in new ways, as a source of solace, inspiration and communal solidarity.
- The arts landscape will become more reflective of the diversity and creative energy of contemporary Ireland.

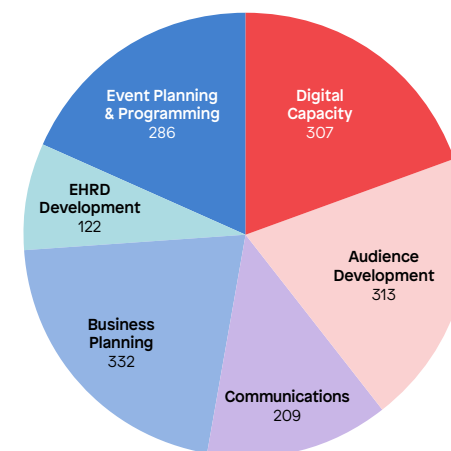
² Survive, Adapt, Renew A response to the Covid-19 crisis for the Arts in Ireland.

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Data from the sources set out on Page 2 of Section 1 of this report has been analysed against these desired outcomes. The findings are as follows:

Did we achieve the outcome we set ourselves of: **Stabilisation of the arts sector?**

- The Arts Council provided emergency funding through its Grant Guarantee schemes, and the Emergency Stabilisation scheme to 190 arts organisations, including 16 strategically important organisations who were facing imminent closure in mid-2020.
- The Arts Council received 6,585 applications in 2020, (90% more than in 2019) of which 54% were from new applicants. 3,096 applications were awarded funding. The Arts Council's role in supporting artists and arts organisations widened significantly in 2020 reflecting the urgent need for stabilising finance for those whose incomes depended on live performance, exhibition or mixed commercial models.
- The Arts Council provided 340 arts organisations with funding to increase adaptive capacity, through its Capacity Building Support scheme. Organisations applied Capacity Building Funds to various areas as set out below.



- 307, or 90% of organisations who availed of this scheme utilised the funding to build digital capacity in an extensive move to online production and dissemination during 2020 and 2021. 84% of organisations and 75% of individuals funded by the Arts Council carried out digital artistic activities in 2020.
- The strong public narrative of support for the arts in 2020, recognising as it did that support for the arts would “have the dual benefit of tangibly contributing to the Government’s commitment to sustaining our personal and collective wellbeing at this time, while also providing critical supports to the economy”³ had a galvanising impact on the arts sector, significantly reducing personal and organisational uncertainty, bolstering creativity and confidence and stabilising planning and operations throughout the sector. Participants in the focus groups repeatedly stressed this point. Communications and funding mechanisms from the Arts Council and the Department of Culture were referenced repeatedly as having been key to creating the conditions for stabilisation.

Conclusion: Despite significant contractions in output from the arts sector, a combination of state welfare supports in the form of the PUP and T/EWSS, and Arts Council interventions stabilised the organisational and individual structures. The transition period will require further stabilisation measures.

³ Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity Dept of Business Enterprise and Innovation May 2020

Did we achieve the outcome we set ourselves of: New foundations for sustainability laid in 2020/2021 through the operation of the Sustainability Fund?

Crucial work to build sustainability in the sector took place under a number of headings.

1. Capacity Building

The Arts Council provided 340 organisations and 633 individuals with funding to enable strategic planning and adaptive capacity through its Capacity Building Support Scheme for organisations, and Professional Development Award for individuals. 5,428,534 euro was provided to arts organisations through Capacity Building, providing vital additional resources to plan, purchase and adapt to changed circumstances. In addition, 1.39 million euro was provided to 633 individuals for their Professional Development.

2. Digital

Enabling the arts sector to become skilled at the production and dissemination of the arts digitally, and allowing the arts to participate fully, emerged as a priority for sustainability. There was a fourfold increase in the amounts expended by individuals and organisations in 2020 on digital artistic activities in 2020.⁴ 60% of digital artistic activities in 2020 were carried out by organisations and individuals based outside Dublin, highlighting the opportunities offered by digital to break down spatial and geographical barriers to engagement.⁵

An encouraging 64% of arts attenders who had engaged with the arts online in 2020 indicated that they would be willing to pay for arts content, rising to 71% amongst aficionados, (defined as those who attend an average of 20.6 arts events per year) and 72% of those aged under 34.⁶

3. Research

In addition to the introduction of specific funding schemes the Arts Council commissioned research to assist the arts sector in transitioning to a new phase of operation. This research includes the Mapping of Digital Artistic Activities in 2020, as well as two comprehensive surveys of the experience of individual artists in 2020 (one retrospective survey undertaken in 2021).

4. Resources

The Arts Council is committed to developing, directly or with partners, a suite of tools and resources for use by the sector. To date these have included:

- A Digital Toolbox which is an online skills resource for those engaged in digital.
- The Brightening Air series of events in June 2021.
- An awareness and visibility campaign to encourage engagement with the arts amongst those most concerned about re-engaging.⁷
- Surviving or Thriving, an online series of discussions and workshops devised by Waterford Healing Arts Trust designed to support the wellbeing of arts professionals.

Conclusion: It is anticipated that these measures taken together, and continued in various forms, will have a profound and lasting impact on the arts sector, reinforcing medium and longer term planning and helping to create a highly skilled workforce in the arts.

The impact of these schemes can give the Arts Council direction in dealing with the chronic structural issue of resource scarcity.

⁷ The high level of concern at attending live arts events continued in October 2020; as does the distinction between indoor and outdoor venues; however levels can show a slight decline since June. Levels of concern increase with age, being much lower among those under 24 years. Aficionados are again typically the most concerned with attending indoor venues.

Did we achieve the outcome we set ourselves of: Work and employment opportunities for artists and arts workers, and investment in organisations?

It has been well-established that the arts sector was severely impacted from an economic and employment perspective during the Covid-19 crisis.

The Irish Arts sector would have lost 4 jobs out of 10 without government support in 2020 as a result of Covid-19. There was a 54% reduction in GDP in the arts sector, and a 90% reduction in turnover in the performing arts in Europe.⁸

Jobs in the arts sector have been significantly disrupted, and were already among the lowest paid; EY estimates that approximately 57% of jobs in the arts sector were disrupted in 2020.⁹

⁸ Employment and Economic Impact Assessment of Covid-19 on the Arts Sector in Ireland, March 2021 EY
⁹ Ibid

A significant portion of jobs in the Arts sector are in a very precarious position at present, and it is likely that many of these jobs would be lost if government supports were to come to a sudden end. We estimate that 15% of pre-pandemic Arts jobs were lost in 2020, and a further 26% of jobs are directly depending on government support. We estimated that the core Arts sector was 10,300 corresponding to arts and entertainment activities. Data is only available at a sector level (e.g. arts, entertainment and recreation). In this sector, 26% of jobs depend on government support (PUP and EWSS), so we can assume that 2,400 jobs in the core Arts sector are relying on government support. This estimate could be considered conservative given the over-representation of performing arts in our core sector which has been more impacted than other creative industries (see overleaf for an analysis at a European level). However, this is counterbalanced by the fact that some organisations are Arts Council funded and more resilient to a drop in attendance levels.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid

⁴ Mapping of Digital Artistic Activities 2020 EY for the Arts Council March 2021

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Arts During Covid National Survey October 2020 B&A for the Arts Council

- Analysis carried out by EY for the Arts Council (attached at Appendix 2) analyses overall employment impacts, including those in receipt during 2020 of Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Employment Wage Subsidy payments and demonstrates the key role these payments have had in maintaining employment and ensuring sustainability of the sector.
- The Arts Council has measured the employment impacts of a number of its funding schemes, which are designed to support the creation of artistic work. In certain cases, such as the Bursaries scheme the priority in 2020 was identified as artists seeking mentoring, leading to greater employment impacts generally. Many of those funded under the schemes are primarily independent/self-employed/freelance artists and arts workers.
- The Emergency Stabilisation Fund supported the sustainability of approximately 245 jobs in the organisations stabilised.¹¹ The table below sets out some of the additional work supported by funding.

Name of Scheme	Artists/Arts Workers Employed 2020	Total days of employment
Capacity Building Support	3,247	15,789
Commissions	349 (artists only)	5,929
Projects awards	3,112	30,017
Bursaries	2,294	50,207
Professional Development	2,151	12,901
Next Generation	87	7741
Total	11,240	122,584

- This equates to support for 490 Full Time jobs in the year 2020.¹²
- It is important to note that employment supported by the Arts Council through its Strategic, Arts Grants and other core funding schemes is excluded from these figures and represents the largest number of those employed with Arts Council funding.
- Individual artists were and continue to be centrally affected. In a survey of over 700 artists undertaken in late May 2021:

39% of respondents reported that their income in 2020 had dropped by over 50%

49% reported receiving one of the pandemic related payments

71% expect their income in 2021 to be about the same or lower than 2020

Conclusion: While work and employment opportunities will continue to require support through the transition period out of the Covid crisis, Arts Council funding created significant work and employment opportunities for artists and arts workers.

¹² Total days × 8 hours per day; divided by 40 per week; divided by 50 weeks.

¹¹ Arts Council survey of funded organisations and individuals April 2021

Did we achieve the outcome we set ourselves of: Art and artworks will continue to be created through the period of adaptation, and those who participate in creative activities will be supported?

A number of actions were undertaken to support the creation of art and artworks, and participation in activities.

- The Arts Council provided expanded funding in respect of Commissions in 2020 (in a second round of Commissions funding). The scheme invited organisations to apply for funding specifically for the purpose of commissioning independent artists. The purpose of the Commissions award was outlined as follows:

*to enable arts organisations to commission new work from independent artists. The finished work may be in a form capable of being presented, exhibited, published, performed and/or disseminated in its entirety at the point of completion, or it may be capable of being presented as a work-in-progress, either live or online. Alternatively, the completed work may be in a form that will require further funding in order to achieve presentation.*¹³

- The Arts Council provided funding to 94 commissions for new artworks under this scheme, involving 349 artists.
- In addition, the expanded Project Awards scheme funded the production of 206 new artworks. An additional 1m euro was invested in work for and with children and young people as part of this increased funding.
- The Arts Council provided 47 projects with Covid Completion funding in 2020; being funding to adapt

and bring to completion works which had been planned prior to the crisis. Theatre received the largest single number of awards (11), followed by Arts Participation, Film and Traditional Arts.

- Many recipients of funding under these schemes had their plans to share the work with an audience in 2020 disrupted with a majority of recipients (80% for Projects and 90% for Commissions) planning to share the work with an audience once the situation with Covid restrictions is clearer.

New art and artworks were created or distributed digitally in 2020.

- 84% of organisations and 75% of individuals funded carried out digital artistic activities in 2020.
- 4% of the total number of digital artistic activities were carried out under Collaborative Arts, suggesting that innovative ways were found to support those who participate in creative activities.
- Participation in creative activities increased in 2020¹⁴ with enjoyment, self-expression and wellbeing¹⁵ being cited as the most common motivations. Participatory activities adapted to blended models. 19% of adults also reported having participated in an online arts class/group/tutorial.¹⁶

Conclusion: Taken together with works made with funding from core Arts Council schemes, it is clear that supports from the Council, along with support for the amplification of work digitally, had an impact on the number of artworks, and the opportunities to engage in creative activities. The impact of this funding will be evident in years to come in having contributed to the creation of books, theatre, music, film and dance shows of the future. This must be balanced against the large drop in output in the arts generally in 2020. The transition period will bring challenges in providing sufficient platforms and showcases for work created.

¹³ Commissions award Guidelines the Arts Council 2020

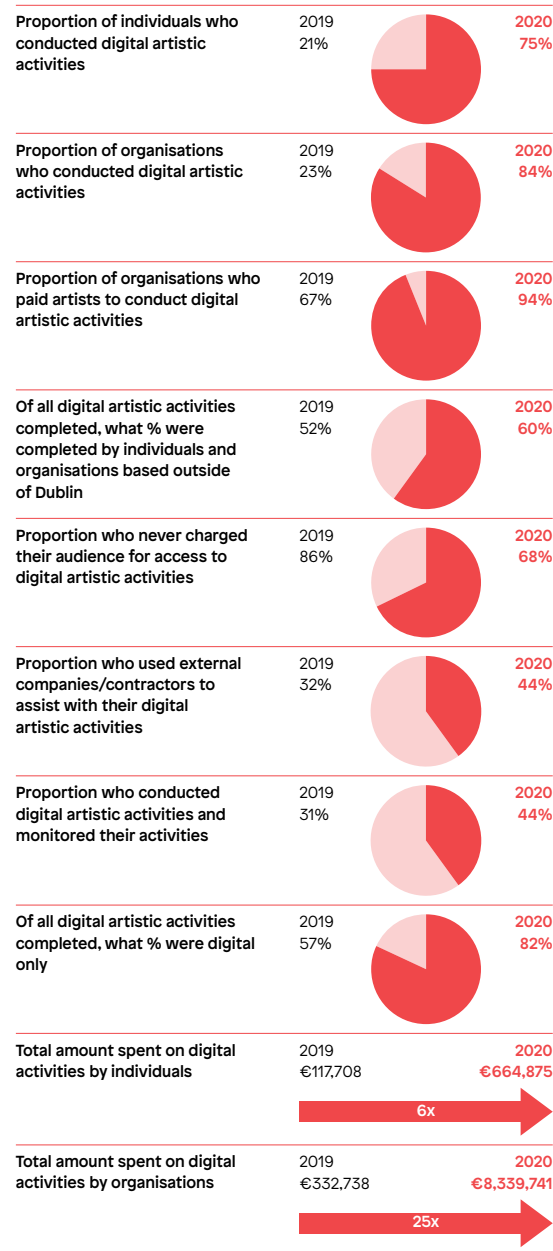
¹⁴ Arts Insights National Arts Engagement Survey 2020 B&A

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Arts During Covid B&A for the Arts Council October 2020

**Did we achieve the outcome we set ourselves of:
The public will have continued, safe access to the arts, sometimes in new ways, as a source of solace, inspiration and communal solidarity?**

- The Arts Council provided organisations funded under Strategic, Arts Grants, Projects, Festivals and other funding schemes with a Grant Guarantee in March 2020 in Phase 1 of the response. This guarantee mechanism provided organisations with the ability to re-imagine and reschedule programmes in the knowledge that their 2020 funding was secure.
- The percentage of organisational turnover represented by Arts Council funding is individual to the organisation, and to their area of operation. In Arts Centres, for example, with a high reliance on box office income, Arts Council funding represents between 4% and 60% of total turnover. The higher the level of reliance, for all organisations, on other sources of revenue, the less flexibility they had in respect of programmes. Constantly evolving Covid restrictions did mean that many organisations created multiple programmes for 2020 which had to be adapted and changed many times.
- Despite the difficulties, a majority of arts organisations adapted and continued to provide access to the arts for their audiences.
- Producing and disseminating work online became a focus of operations for a majority of funded organisations and individuals as shown in the following graphic:



- Arts organisations adapted rapidly to provide both off and online access to the arts for the public. Some examples of adaptation, replicated all around the country, include:

Case Study

Books Make Things Better, Childrens Books Ireland

For Culture Night 2020, Children’s Books Ireland was supported by the Arts Council to publish Books Make Things Better, a reading guide highlighting over 100 children’s books published in 2020 by Irish authors, illustrators and publishers. This campaign increased visibility of Irish children’s literature and supported bookshops as well as giving children access to the joy of reading: over 1,000 Irish-published illustrated books were gifted to children in DEIS schools, family hubs and direct provision centres. At Christmas, additional support from the Arts Council, KPMG and Toyota Ireland allowed Children’s Books Ireland to give 8,000 further books to children and young people, including children in the Travelling Community and those experiencing poverty, homelessness or in hospital. This gift connected them with an artform rich with stories, with vibrant and joyful illustration—and supported Irish artists and publishers by doing so.

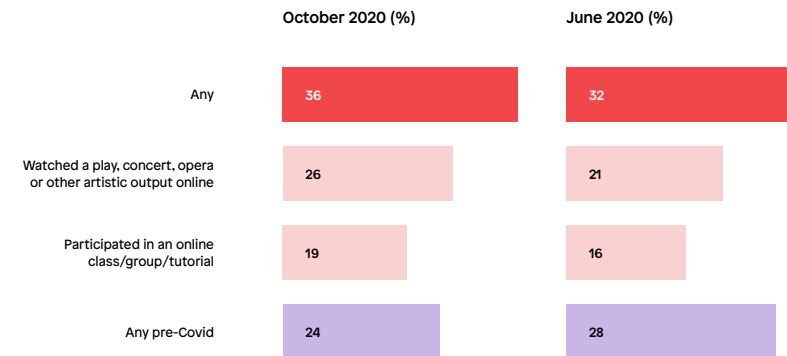
Case Study

Cork Midsummer Festival and Corcadorca

As part of our 2020 reimagined programme of events, Midsummer Moments, Corcadorca Theatre Company presented the theatre show *Contact*. It was one of if not the first live theatre performance to happen in Ireland post the March lockdown in 2020. *Contact* was a highly visual performance starring Eadaoin O'Donoghue and Cormac Mohally, designed to be performed on green spaces in the middle of housing estates, for local residents to experience a live, in-person performance that artistically reflected our new reality and the universally shared challenges around human contact. Arriving at the location by various means with props in tow, the set and lighting rig was assembled on site creating a sense of anticipation before the performers arrived. The piece was lit dramatically and the assembly and dismantling of the set was choreographed to form part of the overall performance. Hazmat suits, disinfectant sprays and social distancing — elements of our new reality — all became part of the theatricality of the show. The overall spectacle lasted for approximately 25 minutes in each location. So as not to encourage gathering, the locations of the performances were not advertised in advance. Instead, local residents were informed by letter two days in advance of the performance visiting their area. They were encouraged to watch from their windows, doorsteps and gardens. The show was completely silent, so it wouldn't disturb anyone who didn't want to attend or anyone who might be sleeping. It was experienced by audiences of all ages, some of whom told stewards they had never been to a professional theatre performance before.

Arts Engagement Online: During Covid

Base: All adults 16+ n=1,043



Q.4b And since the Irish government implemented physical distancing measures in response to the Covid-19 virus, have you done either of the following online/on the internet?

Engagement with the Arts online continues to rise, being 36% of all adults in October

→ Individual artists report that payment to them for digital content is not consistent; with over 50% saying they were not offered payment or were only offered in 'some' cases. In this evolving area, the sector is developing protocols for the payment of artists and the Arts Council will ensure that these are equitable and based in its "Pay the Artist" principle.

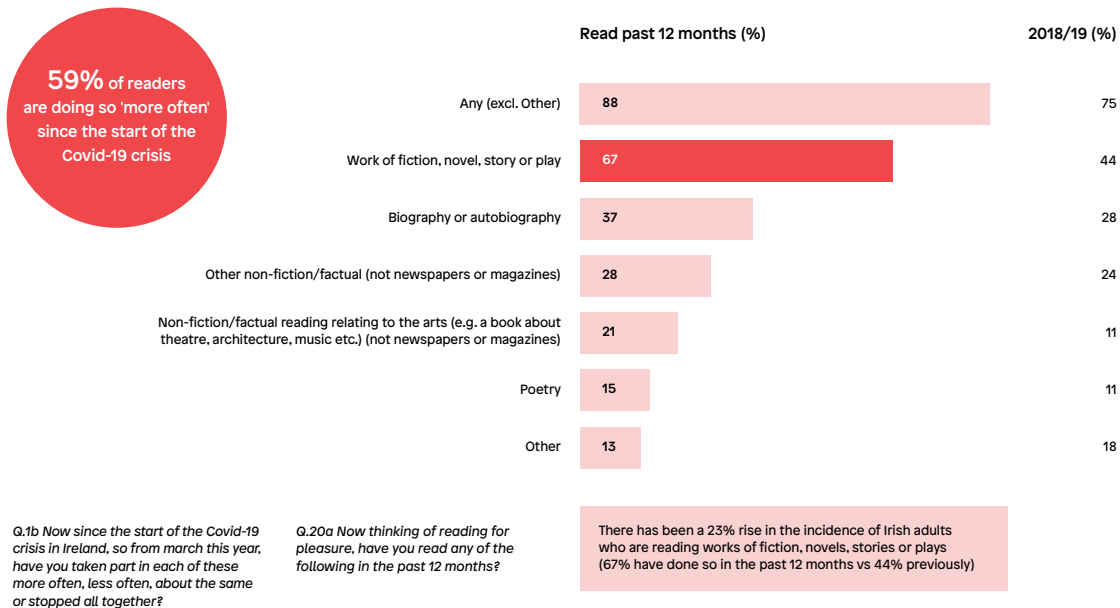
→ 36% of the adult population reported that they had engaged with the arts online by October 2020, a 4% increase on June 2020, showing a growing awareness and willingness to engage. This rises to 61% of those who are defined as "Aficionados".

→ Art continued to be made throughout 2020, and made available, in the absence of live arts events and in-person visits and engagement. There were striking increases in consumption of "Arts and Cultural Programmes on TV, radio and online" as well as striking increases in reading books.¹⁷

¹⁷ Arts Insights National Arts Engagement Survey 2020
B&A for The Arts Council

We are also reading more

Base: All adults 16+ n=1,262



Conclusion: The evidence points to continued engagement through 2020 with the arts among large sections of the population and increases in arts-related behaviours in some areas. A sharp decline in output and the absence of in-person events led to equally sharp declines in attendance. Digital inequality is assumed to have played a part in patterns of consumption of online arts and should form a part of the discussion in relation to provision in the future. High levels of reluctance were reported, particularly among the most frequent attenders, to return to live events and a transition strategy involving strict Covid compliance and communications should take account of this.

Did we achieve the outcome we set ourselves of: The arts landscape will become more reflective of the diversity and creative energy of contemporary Ireland?

The Arts Council's policy focus on Equality, Human Rights and Diversity was further embedded in the work of the Arts Council, including funding programmes Covid notwithstanding. The substantially increased number of applications allowed the collection of robust data about who applies for and receives funding. This formed the basis for a series of new targeted actions which have been developed to increase opportunities for those from under-represented groups to receive Arts Council support.

→ In 2020 the Arts Council initiated the collection and collation, via application forms, of information related to the diversity of applicants and those who received awards, in line with its policy focus on Equality, Human Rights and Diversity. Information is collated on Gender, Disability and Ethnicity and an annual analysis of data will be carried out. The data relates only to those specific schemes for individuals (such as Bursaries) and is not a full picture of Arts Council support for artists.

→ Findings include:

Gender

There is a higher proportion of female applicants (55%) than male (41%) or non-binary (1%). This is also the case among those who received funding, 59% female whilst only 37% were male and 2% non-binary.

Disability

Excluding the dedicated Arts & Disability Connect Award administered on our behalf by ADI, only 6% of applicants and 4% of recipients identified as having a disability. This is low against the population figures (14%) and is even low with the dedicated scheme factored in.

Ethnicity / Cultural background

The most prominent ethnicity / cultural background amongst applicants and recipients is White Irish, in line with the national population.

The success rate for awards is also highest among applicants from White or White Irish backgrounds, but noticeably lower amongst those from Black or Black Irish backgrounds.

The low level of applications from the Traveller community is particularly evident with no recipients in this category recorded.

→ 122 arts organisations who were awarded Capacity Building Support used the funding to carry out developmental work in the area of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. These organisations took the opportunity to reflect on their own practices and to undertake the necessary steps to develop new policy and receive training in relevant areas. This is sure to have an immensely positive impact on the arts landscape.

Case Study

Arts and Disability Connect 2020
(Arts and Disability Ireland)

The Arts and Disability Connect scheme supports artists with disabilities to develop their work and make connections within the arts. It offers artists the opportunity to be ambitious in scope and scale or engage in new learning experiences and present work to audiences. Artists are also offered information sessions, as well as one to one support. In 2020 the scheme doubled in size, offering 2 funding rounds supporting 26 artists with disabilities.

→ The Arts Council committed itself to equity in its Covid response and maintains records of geographical distribution of funding. In the schemes within the scope of this report the breakdown of funding awarded overall by county is as follows:

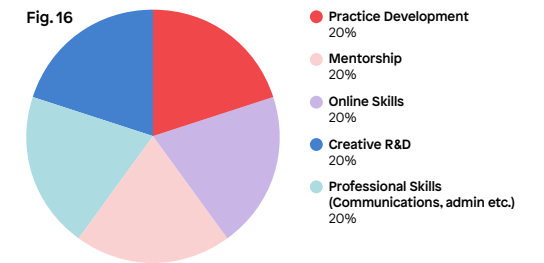
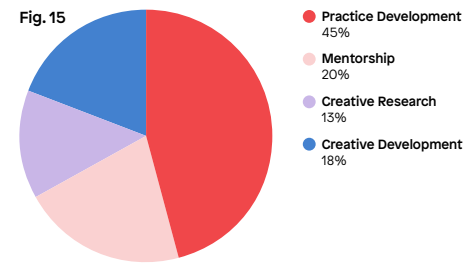
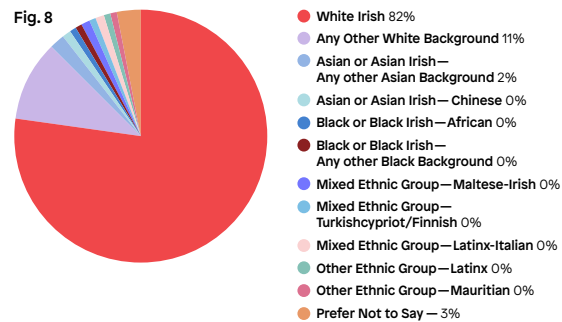
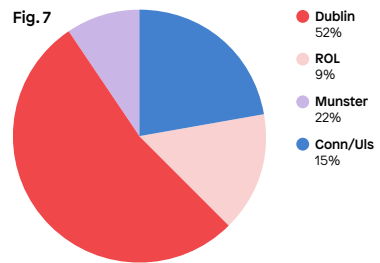
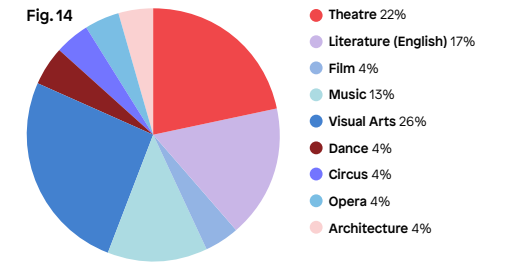
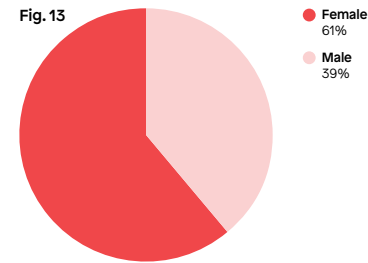
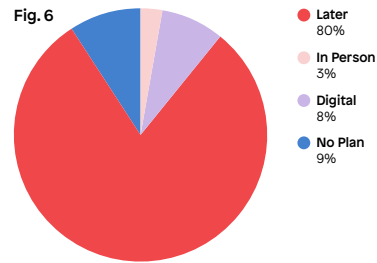
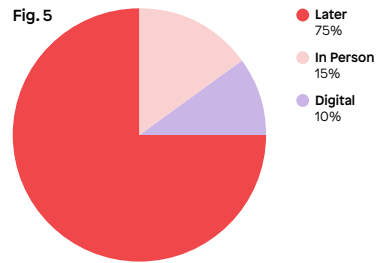
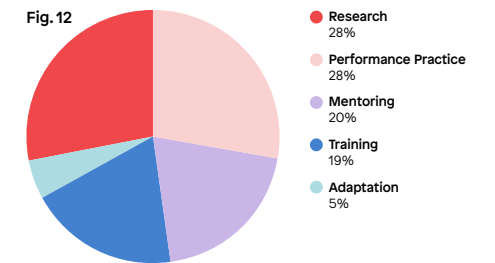
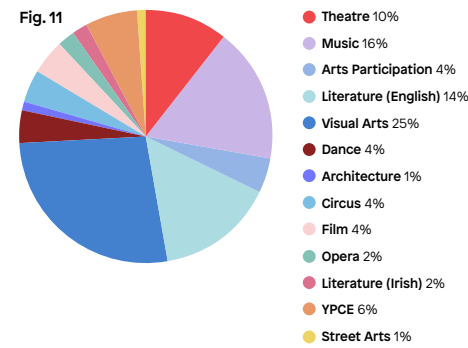
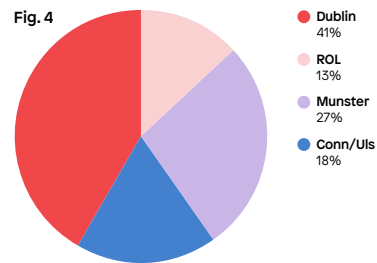
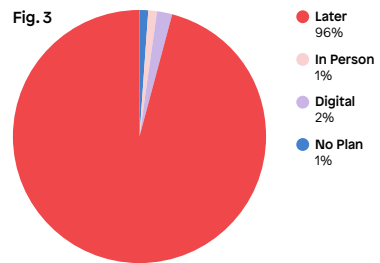
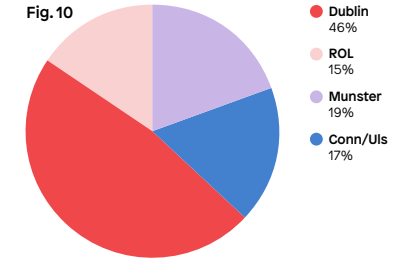
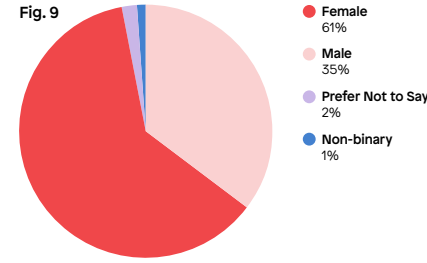
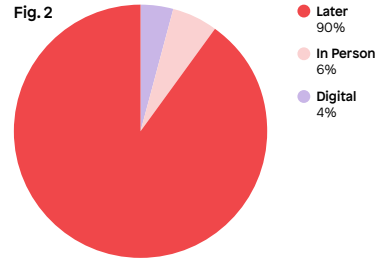
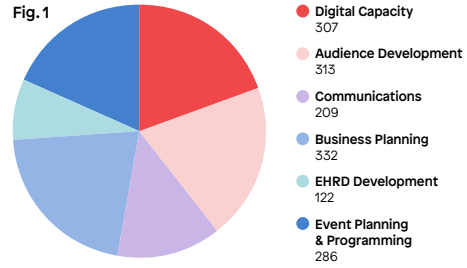
Funding Awarded Overall by County			
Antrim	13,500	Leitrim	229,842
Armagh	15,000	Limerick	742,463
Belfast	12,800	Longford	81,097
Carlow	182,387	Louth	262,463
Cavan	38,078	Mayo	290,113
Clare	362,249	Meath	336,959
Cork	3,414,048	Monaghan	394,006
Derry	10,000	Offaly	181,371
Donegal	375,180	Roscommon	89,672
Dublin	11,725,250	Sligo	304,003
Galway	2,176,105	Tipperary	229,213
International	357,307	Waterford	477,971
Kerry	637,881	Westmeath	188,337
Kildare	502,953	Wexford	420,299
Kilkenny	216,987	Wicklow	555,253
Laois	89,573	No Address	90,449

Conclusion: Significant funding in respect of Covid response measures was distributed throughout each of the 26 counties, as well as smaller amounts to Irish artists residing in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Dublin (with 28% of the population) received just under 50% of all Covid response funding; the Arts Council will continue to address questions of equity in geographical and spatial

distribution of funds. Significant data collection in 2020 has facilitated the creation of new measures to address clearly identified inequalities. The Arts Council has identified a particular need to communicate with artists from groups which were underrepresented in 2020. The commitment to equity is being carried through into all aspects of funding and support.

Appendix 1

Outcomes Framework 2020 Breakdown of Covid Response Funding and Schemes



Appendix 2

Employment and Economic Impact Assessment of Covid-19 on the arts Sector in Ireland

EY March 2021

[Click here to download report](#)

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