

Ag fás leis na healaíona

Growing with the arts

Arts Council policy for
children and young
people's arts

the arts
council
= chomhairle
ealaíon

Cover Image

Image: **Bicycles Boomerangs and Blue Macaws**

Photographer: **Alf Harvey**

This policy is informed by consultations with children, young people and professional stakeholders. It is also informed by research about children and young people's participation in the arts, and by the Arts Council's engagement with key policy partners, artists and arts organisations. The background research and reports that have informed the policy are available [here](#).

Throughout the implementation of this policy, we will continue to welcome the views and insights of children and young people, artists, researchers and all relevant stakeholders.



Image: **Gesamtkunstwerk**
Photographer: **Pat Redmond**

Our vision is for an Ireland where children and young people's right to take part in the arts is respected and realised where they are living, growing and learning, and where the arts have a meaningful and transformative impact on their lives.

As part of this vision

Children and young people of all ages and backgrounds across Ireland can **make, share and enjoy** all kinds of art, and influence the development of the arts.

The arts provide a safe and inviting space for children and young people, where they

- feel happy, confident and included;
- have choice and agency, and their voices are heard;
- are creative as they develop their ideas, interests and skills;
- and are inspired and surprised by new experiences and possibilities.

A greater diversity of artists and arts organisations are supported to develop high-quality creative experiences with and for children and young people.



Image: **Telescope**
Photographer: **Ste Murray**

1.1 The Arts Council

The Arts Council is the Irish government agency for developing the arts. We work in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policymakers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life.

The Arts Council has a national legislative role and remit to promote and develop the arts; to stimulate public interest in the arts; to improve standards; and to provide advice to government and public bodies regarding the arts.

We set policy to ensure that all of our funding is spent strategically, that all of our actions reflect the long-term interests of the public, and that all of our decisions are transparent and fair. We aim to have policies that are current and relevant, and which reflect our role as an expert agency in the arts.

Our ten-year strategy *Making Great Art Work (2016–2025)* includes a key objective to plan and provide for children and young people. This is articulated under the ‘public engagement’ aspect of our strategy, but it is a cross-cutting objective, and is relevant across all areas of our work.

Alongside this policy for children and young people’s arts, cross-cutting policies and plans informing the Arts Council’s work include those concerning equality, diversity and inclusion; paying the artist; and our spatial policy. Current and emerging policies in the areas of climate, international arts, digital arts and the Irish language are also relevant across our work. In addition, the Arts Council has policies in relation to specific art forms and practices.

Our policy for children and young people’s arts informs the implementation of Arts Council policies in other areas, and is informed by them.

Further information on Arts Council policy and strategy is available [here](#).

1.2 Children and young people's rights

The Arts Council has an important role to play in ensuring that people of all backgrounds in Ireland have the opportunity to participate in the arts as a basic human right, as enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights (Article 27).

This right to participate freely in cultural life and the arts is set out in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Ireland became a signatory in 1992. The right to participate in the arts is part of an interconnected range of children's rights from which a range of policies and legislation in Ireland – and in the wider European Union – are derived.

All children's rights are guided by four general principles outlined in the UN Convention, as follows:

- that all the rights guaranteed by the Convention must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind (Article 2);
- that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (Article 3);
- that every child has the right to life, survival and development (Article 6);
- that the child's views must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting them (Article 12).

Policy areas concerning children and young people's rights require collaboration across government departments, national and local agencies or authorities, and civil society. The Arts Council's role to promote and support children and young people's participation in the arts intersects with that of a range of partners. Our partnerships, investment and initiatives span the spheres of early learning and care, education, youth work, local services and development, equality, disability and integration, and other areas of public policy that impact on how children and young people experience life in Ireland.

The Arts Council works with government to support better outcomes for children and young people through Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2023–

2028). Public provision for children and young people's arts is an important consideration in the context of addressing child poverty, and the impact of missed opportunities on children's well-being and development. The Arts Council is a partner with government in delivering the Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027.

More information about legislation, policy frameworks and national strategies concerning children and young people is available [here](#).

2.1 Introduction

This policy concerns children and young people from birth to age twenty-four. It applies to all teams and functions of the Arts Council; to artists, organisations and others seeking funding from the Arts Council; and will continue to guide our partnerships with local, national and international policymakers.

The Arts Council takes a rights-based approach to planning and providing for children and young people. All children and young people have the right to participate freely in the arts, to express themselves through the arts, and to have their say in the development of the arts. These rights form part of an interconnected range of rights, which must be respected and realised so that children and young people can live happy and healthy lives.

Our policy for children and young people's arts is a further expression of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy, which recognises the human right to engage with and participate in the arts, and the importance of taking a proactive and focused approach to guarantee this right for all.



Image: Piano photo
Photographer: Vanya Lambrecht Ward



Image: Rings of Fire
Photographer: Maria Teresa Goulart

2.1.1 What we mean by ‘the arts’

The arts are always changing, and are shaped by the people who make and take part in them.

The Arts Act 2003 has a very open definition and describes the arts as ‘any creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes, in particular, visual arts, theatre, literature, music, dance, opera, film, circus and architecture, and includes any medium when used for those purposes’.

The arts are an important part of our broader culture. The Arts Council supports traditional and contemporary arts. We are interested in the many ways in which people express themselves creatively and engage with and enjoy each other’s ideas, here and now, across different forms of art.

The arts can include dance, music, stories, poetry, film, animation, working with clay, putting on plays, going to shows, painting, making, building and much more.

The Arts Council will continue to take an open-minded and multidisciplinary approach to our understanding of the arts in children and young people’s lives.

2.1.2 What we mean by quality in children and young people's arts

Quality arts experiences are integral to children and young people's quality of life

The ways in which children and young people experience the arts are deeply connected with other aspects of their lives. Being safe and protected from harm; having time and space to play; having access to education; and knowing that their views will be listened to; are all essential to support children and young people's enjoyment of the arts. In turn, high-quality experiences in the arts have a positive impact on children and young people's lives, including how they connect with others and the world around them; their sense of agency, confidence and creativity; and their well-being, learning and development.

A wide range of factors and features can impact on the quality of an artistic process or experience for children and young people. It is important that these experiences are available to all children and young people, without discrimination; that children and young people are in a welcoming and safe environment; that they feel included to participate and enjoy themselves; and that they have opportunities to express themselves freely about the arts and through the arts, including taking creative risks and trying new things.

The Arts Council aims in particular to support and promote creative experiences that:

- connect with children and young people in a lasting way;
- are informed by children and young people's views;
- support children and young people to express themselves, and to develop their sense of agency, curiosity and adventure;
- are enjoyable, original and ambitious;
- are developed with people who are skilled in the arts, and skilled in supporting children and young people's participation.

2.2 How we plan and provide for children and young people

2.2.1 Arts Council strategy and children and young people's arts

Our commitment to children and young people's arts is delivered across all five pillars of Arts Council strategy – the artist; public engagement; spatial and demographic planning; investment; and developing capacity.

The manner in which our policy relates to each of these areas is set out in this section, with further details included in the accompanying **Plan for Children and Young People's Arts**.

Through our partnerships, initiatives and investments, we aim to ensure that children and young people's right to make, share and enjoy the arts is respected and realised wherever they are living, learning and growing.

We aim to support and promote inclusive, high-quality arts experiences with, for and by children and young people that are enjoyable, that support children and young people's well-being, and are resonant and reflective of the diversity of their lives.

In realising our vision for children and young people's arts, we wish to ensure that the arts provide a **safe and inviting space** for children and young people where they ...

- feel happy, confident and included;
- have choice and agency, and their voices are heard;
- can be creative as they develop their ideas, interests and skills;
- are inspired and surprised by new experiences and possibilities.

We recognise that there are inequities in how children and young people in different circumstances experience the arts. Multiple factors can and do intersect to amplify exclusion. We will continue to develop targeted actions and strategic partnerships in the context of ensuring equality for all.

We recognise the need to support children and young people's participation in the arts at **all ages**, from their earliest years and as they grow. We wish to **support pathways** for children and young people so that babies, and young children can continue their journey with the arts throughout their childhood and youth and on into their adult lives. As they get older, we recognise the need to support pathways for young people who wish to explore a career in the arts, as well as those who wish to continue to enjoy the arts in their free time.

2.2.2 The artist and public engagement

The ‘artist’ and ‘public engagement’ are at the centre of the Arts Council’s strategy. All aspects of our strategy, including these central themes, are interconnected.

When children and young people engage with the arts, they do so as young artists and makers, and also as participants, readers and audiences.

The Arts Council wishes to support and encourage all those who can enable children and young people to engage with the arts in Ireland. This includes children and young people, professional artists and organisations, and all others who can help children and young people to take part in the arts.

The artist	Public engagement
Children and young people are artists and creators	and also participants, readers, audiences
Artists make and share work with and for children and young people, and help children and young people to develop and share their work	Artists play a key role in nurturing and supporting children and young people’s engagement with the arts
Artists and arts organisations work in partnership with a range of players	Partners include parents, early-years educators, teachers, librarians and youth workers

Through our funding and partnerships, we seek to ensure children and young people have opportunities to make, share and enjoy different kinds of art.

We are committed to investing in a greater diversity of artists and organisations – supporting them to develop their work, to collaborate, and to deliver high-quality creative experiences that have a meaningful and transformative impact on children and young people's lives.

We seek to prioritise partnerships that can support children and young people to participate in the arts as they grow, at different ages and across a range of contexts.

Our understanding of the arts will continue to be informed by children and young people's views and experiences.

We recognise that children and young people's participation in the arts can be influenced by a number of factors, including the value that peers, parents, teachers and others place on the arts; the availability of high-quality opportunities that are inclusive, welcoming and enjoyable; and their awareness of these opportunities.

We will therefore seek to ensure children and young people's right to take part in the arts is widely recognised, valued and supported, and is highly visible across our public communications.

2.2.3 Spatial and demographic planning

The Arts Council is committed to working in partnership with others to ensure children and young people across Ireland can take part in the arts in the places where they are living, learning and growing.

We will continue to contribute to the development and implementation of cross-government and local strategies for children and young people, and for the arts, culture and creativity, in line with our vision for children and young people's arts, and in accordance with our remit to provide advice and information to government regarding the arts.

We will continue to work with local government and local arts infrastructure, and to support partnerships in the areas of early childhood arts, education and youth arts, which support our vision for children and young people's arts.

We will continue to lead out on the development and delivery of Scoileanna Ildánacha/Creative Schools in partnership with the Department of Education and other government partners.

Further details about these partnerships are included in Section 3.4 below.



Image: Galway Community Circus - highwire
Photographer: Emilija Jefremova

2.2.4 Investment

The Arts Council's commitment to plan and provide for children and young people will be evident across the full range of our investments in the arts. We will continue to ensure targeted budgetary provision to support children and young people's engagement with the arts.

We will seek to better measure our investment in children and young people across different art forms and practices, and across all areas of our work, with a view to ensuring that the scale and nature of our investment in children and young people's arts is appropriate and reflective of their needs. We will continue to engage in strategic partnerships and initiatives that broaden the reach and impact of our investments. We will explore the wider social impact of investment in children and young people's arts and how it connects to the government's national Well-being Framework.

We will ensure that our funding programmes, guidelines and criteria for assessment reflect this policy and support us to achieve our vision for children and young people's arts. As we review our funding programmes and partnerships, we will seek children and young people's views, as well as the views of artists and other partners, to ensure that our supports for children and young people's arts are effective.

Across all of our investments, we will champion high-quality arts experiences and the ways in which these experiences support the quality of children and young people's lives.

2.2.5 Developing capacity

We are committed to supporting artists and arts organisations to collaborate with others as they develop their knowledge, confidence and skills to support children's engagement with the arts. We will encourage them to learn

from others and to share their insights and experience with others, as they continuously develop their practice.

We will seek to continue to develop our understanding of children's participation in the arts, and to make decisions that are informed by children's views and by relevant research and evidence.

We will advocate for and support initiatives that help children and young people to develop their skills in the arts, and to improve pathways for children and young people to continue their journey with the arts into adulthood.

We will ensure the Arts Council is properly resourced as an organisation to deliver this policy by engaging more people with relevant expertise and by ensuring appropriate allocation of staff and adviser time and by the provision of relevant training.

3. Scope of Policy

The implementation of the policy requires collaboration and partnership: internally in how we work within the Arts Council; externally through our strategic partnerships; and across the work of artists and organisations that we fund and support. The various stakeholders and players with a role in this policy are described in more detail below.



Image: **Baby & Mirror**
Photographer: **Neil Harrison**

3.1 Children and young people

The policy relates to children from birth to age eighteen and young people up to the age of twenty-four.

3.2 The Arts Council – an organisation-wide approach

This policy is intended to inform the Arts Council's decision-making across all areas of our work that are relevant to how children and young people engage with the arts. It guides how we agree and develop partnerships; how we set guidelines and criteria for funding and decision-making; and how we develop new initiatives and undertake research.

The policy pertains to all of the teams and functions of the Arts Council.

These functions include our work in strategic development, such as how we gather data and insights, and how we evaluate the impact of our work; our partnerships with local authorities; our work with local arts centres, festivals,

participatory arts and other cross-disciplinary areas of practice; our art-form-specific funding and initiatives; Creative Schools; and all targeted partnerships, investments and initiatives that support children and young people's engagement with the arts.

The policy will be led by a team dedicated to supporting children and young people's engagement with the arts, together with a working group made up of representatives from all relevant departments, and will be delivered by the organisation as a whole.

3.3 Artists, arts organisations and others in receipt of Arts Council funding

This policy is intended to inform the work of the artists and arts organisations who apply to the Arts Council for funding. It pertains to artists and arts organisations that work exclusively to support children and young people's engagement with the arts. It equally pertains to all artists and organisations that engage the wider public with the arts, and who engage with children, young people and families in that context. In summary, the policy is relevant to all individuals, groups, organisations and partners in receipt of Arts Council funding or support and who have a role in developing children and young people's engagement with the arts.

3.4 National and local government and public-policy partners

We recognise the importance of working in partnership with others, and of supporting children and young people to engage with the arts across a range of contexts and settings.

Our partners at local and national levels are guided by their own strategies, and yet we share a remit to uphold children's rights and to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people. This policy clarifies the Arts Council's approach. It aims to align with Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, and to guide our participation in cross-departmental and cross-agency initiatives.

3.4.1 The arts and education

The Arts Council reaffirms its commitment to lead out on the development and delivery of Scoileanna Ildánacha/ Creative Schools in partnership with the Department of Education and other government partners. Through this initiative we will continue to support children and young people in education settings across Ireland to engage with the arts and to be creative.

We reaffirm our commitment to support quality arts-in-education initiatives led and delivered by artists and arts organisations in collaboration with their education partners.

We encourage artists and arts organisations to work in partnership with teachers and early-years educators in the design and delivery of arts programmes in education settings that are aligned

with our policy and with the curriculum frameworks for those settings.

We acknowledge the significant opportunities presented by curriculum developments from Aistear through to the new Primary Curriculum Framework, the Framework for Junior Cycle and the review of senior cycle. These increasingly emphasise key skills and competencies that can be enhanced through engagement with the arts.

We recognise the particular importance of children's experiences of the arts in early childhood, including the impact this has across a range of child outcomes, and on future patterns of engagement. We will continue to work with our partners to develop and support principles for engaging with the arts in early learning and care in line with Aistear and Síolta and in support of the First Five Strategy.

Across all areas of the arts in education, we advocate for learning that is enjoyable and that supports children and young people's well-being alongside the development of a range of skills; that enables them to be creative and to express themselves through the arts; and can assist in challenging and extending the contemporary practice of the arts in Ireland.

In the realm of arts education, we will continue to act as an advocate and partner where appropriate to improve equitable access for children and young people to develop their skills in the arts.

3.4.2 Youth arts

We will continue to invest in artists, organisations and strategic local and national partnerships that support children and young people's engagement with the arts outside of school. In particular, we will highlight and promote high-quality practices that are in line with the vision for this policy, recognising the excellent youth-arts practice that has developed in Ireland in recent decades and that continues to influence the development of the arts with children and young people's voices and inclusion to the fore.

We will continue to support youth-arts practices that are focused on ages ten to twenty-four and, in particular, we will seek to address the decline in participation in the arts as young people grow. In addition, we will work in partnership with local and national partners to explore more equitable opportunities for children to take part in the arts after school and in the summer months, with an emphasis on ensuring that children's right to participate in the arts is supported at all ages as they grow.

This policy will be implemented through the accompanying Plan for Children and Young People's Arts. An internal working group made up of representatives from all relevant departments, including the Arts Departments, Strategic Development Department, Creative Schools, Communications and Investment Services will be convened to agree and ensure delivery of the plan in tandem with the Arts Council's three-year plan. Progress will be reviewed annually by our Policy and Strategy Committee.

The Arts Council will continue to seek and listen to the views of children and young people throughout the implementation of this policy and plan, with reference to the National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making. We will engage personnel

with relevant expertise and ensure appropriate allocation of resources to support the Arts Council in this work.

We will continue to engage with the views and insights of artists and organisations and of all partners who can help us improve our work.



Image: Children Performing
Photographer: Neil Harrison