



Election 2024: Manifesto

Introduction

Funding of the arts falls short of the EU average, despite increased Government investment in recent years. The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon was granted €140m in Budget 2025 and while this is the highest amount to date, the demand is such that there is an unprecedented level of unmet need.

The Arts Council invests in artists and arts organisations, as well as focusing on strategic priorities such as young people, places and spaces, and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). It is the development agency for the arts, investing in policy and infrastructural gaps, for example establishing Irish National Opera, Dance House and Luail – Ireland's National Dance Company. It is currently working on The Artist Campus, a proposed flagship workspace facility at Dublin Port.

The Government has invested directly via the pilot Basic Income Scheme, Per Cent for Art Scheme and capital projects.

Pressure points can be seen both in demand for funding and in gaps in facilities for the arts sector.

Without further focused investment in both on-going funding and capital supports, valuable opportunities for artists and audiences nationwide will be missed.

Key focus areas for the arts in 34th Dáil Éireann

- 1. Funding for the arts**
- 2. Arts infrastructure and planning**
- 3. Equal access**
- 4. Young people and children**

1. Funding for the arts

The last few years – the post-Covid years – could be described as recovery years for the arts sector. Increased Government investment ensured the sector was supported during Covid under the existing Programme for Government, but the recovery period is in fact, still ongoing.

There has been a huge increase in demand for Arts Council funding, which mirrors the extent of activity in the sector. However, this has resulted in a record shortfall in funding requests met. As a result, many arts organisations and projects are receiving ‘standstill funding’; which, in real economic terms, is a decrease in funding.

- **Record demand** for Arts Council supports
245% increase in demand for funding support between 2019 and 2023;
- **Record shortfall** in funding requests met
Just 51% of funding requests met in 2023 compared to 60% in 2019;
- **Escalating costs** for artists and arts organisations
High inflation and high costs of living, increasing salary costs, and high artist deprivation levels

Arts Council [annual audience research](#) shows arts audiences have not yet recovered to pre-Covid levels, habits have changed and younger audiences in particular struggle to connect. High inflation has resulted in rising costs for arts organisations with further expenditure increases to come such as auto-enrolment.

This struggle must be addressed to ensure a thriving sector. This means we must review, renew and refocus to move out of recovery mode and into a supported flourishing period.

Government investment

At present the Arts Council provides funding via grant schemes to 409 organisations, including at least one arts centre in every county, and to 1,911 individuals and 170 festivals.

The Arts Council also funds flagship programmes such as Aosdána, which makes available an annual grant to those eligible of the 250 elected artist members; the Creative Schools programme in partnership the Department of Education, which is now in one in every four schools in the country; Creative Places which is now in 19 local authorities across the country; and Culture Night which attracts 1.2 million participants across the country.

In addition, the Arts Council partners with local authorities on the development and funding of the arts in their local areas. The Arts Council is providing €3.1m to local authorities for this purpose in 2024. In addition to our local authority partnership, we also partner with a number of bodies to develop the arts within their communities. These partners included TG4, Ealaíon na Gaeltachta, Culture Ireland and several universities, in addition to funding an arts officer within Pavee Point. It is set to play a co-ordination role in the cross-Government Per Cent for Art Scheme as part of public art development. The Arts Council develops expertise and capacity in arts organisations through its training and development resources from climate and fundraising to audience mapping tools and audience insights.

For all artist awards, the Arts Council operates a peer decision making process, enabling an artist centred approach focused on transparency and robustness. Its unique oversight position is strengthened by its research and policy development programme. As such, increased Government investment can rely on an experienced and expert group of Public Servants to ensure appropriate development is assured.

Within its current budget the Arts Council cannot maintain pace with inflationary growth or provide sustainable development for the sector. Despite the Arts Council being granted an unprecedented €140m in funding for 2025, inflationary growth means that funding would need to be at €153.2m to even meet 2021 levels in real terms.

In the context of the challenges and demand as stated above, it is clear greater investment and security is required to better develop the organisational arts infrastructure that supports artists to create and audiences to participate and benefit from the arts, underscoring our reputation as a country that supports and values the arts and its artists.

EU comparison

While Government investment has significantly increased in recent years, in comparison to other EU countries, there is still a need for development.

General Government expenditure on cultural services was at 0.2% of GDP in 2022 (ref. Eurostat), below the EU average of 0.5% of GDP and well below the countries with highest spend, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Malta.

Paying the artist

The Arts Council's [Paying the Artist Policy](#) on the fair and equitable remuneration and contracting of artists, was launched in 2020. The Policy aims to achieve an environment in which artists can make work of ambition and quality, be remunerated appropriately while it also builds on work regarding dignity and respect in the workplace and the Arts Council's [Equality, Human Rights and Diversity Policy](#).

In relation to the *Basic Income for the Arts* pilot scheme, initial research results are encouraging. While we cannot speculate on later outcomes at this stage, the Arts Council strongly supports the continued investment and commitment to make the arts a viable career for those with ambition and commitment whatever their social or demographic background.

We anticipate that the scheme will allow and encourage entrepreneurship, facilitate risk-taking and experimentation allowing artists to develop and hone their skills, consequently increasing the quality of artistic output and public engagement. We envisage that participants will experience increased levels of self-esteem and career contentment, as well as reducing their levels of stress and improving mental health and well-being.

1. Funding the Arts Actions

- **Increase funding support for the Arts Council, considering EU averages.**
- **Provide a multi-annual funding commitment to the Arts Council to ensure security and stability for the arts sector.**
- **Commit to continuing the *Basic Income for the Arts* scheme beyond its pilot phase.**

2. Arts infrastructure and planning

Arts Infrastructure

One of the aims of the Arts Council's Spatial Policy, *Place, Space and People*, is to promote better socio-spatial equity in arts access and provision across Ireland, including the provision of an appropriate infrastructure for both artists and audiences. In fact, arts infrastructure suffers from a severe shortage of studios and workspaces for artists to create and make.

Although a network of public facing arts centres were built or developed across Ireland in the 1990s and 2000s, there has been little strategic capital investment in facilities for art creation and production. Just as with sport capital investment, artists and creatives require specialised facilities to produce their work. Ireland must now invest in a solid national network of creative hubs where artists work and engage with their city and local communities. This investment will impact on the regeneration of our communities and cities in line with the ambitions set out in Project Ireland 2040. This is a serious issue and requires strategic intervention and capital funding.

The Arts Council has developed strategic arts infrastructure nationally such as the Irish National Opera and Luail, the national dance company which launched just this year. Although the Arts Council has made significant investment in these organisations, it is not in

a position to provide capital support towards their facilities or a 'home' as it does not have a capital funding role.

An example of the Arts Council increasing its pro-active role in capital investment is its current work with Dublin Port on the redevelopment of the historic and abandoned Flour Mills site at Dublin Port to create a unique Artist Campus of national and international significance. It is the most ambitious art-related Irish infrastructure project in recent memory and has the potential to enhance the understanding and perceptions of artists working in Irish society, and to promote the role of artists and Irish art to national and global audiences. The Preliminary Business Case under the Government's Infrastructure Guidelines is currently under review with Government.

This project is seen as a flagship and exemplar project that will stimulate other local authorities, particularly in the five cities, to shift their level of ambition towards building an arts infrastructure in their cities in line with Project Ireland 2040.

The Arts Council seeks to work in strategic partnership with DTCAGSM regarding a planned arts infrastructure for Ireland.

Architectural Quality and Planning

The Arts Council has a keen interest in any development that may impact either positively or negatively on arts and culture, including contemporary architecture, as outlined in our Arts Council Architecture Policy, [*Championing Architecture*](#).

The Arts Council is a prescribed body for planning purposes under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended). We have set out in several policies, including our [*Spatial Policy*](#) and our [*Architecture Policy*](#) that we wish to maximise our potential as a prescribed body to influence both the creation and maintenance of arts places and space, and contemporary architectural culture across Ireland.

To ensure any development positively impacts on arts and culture, the Arts Council must be consulted on national and local development plans. This role needs to be strengthened so that opportunities to develop an arts-for-all approach are taken, and this can be achieved through providing greater clarity in the amended planning legislation.

2. Arts Infrastructure and Planning Actions

- **Partner with the Arts Council to develop a national arts infrastructure strategy.**
- **Provide significant capital funding to The Artist Campus at Dublin Port.**
- **Develop creative hubs for artists within the five cities to link with Dublin Port Artist Campus, in line with ambitions in Project Ireland 2040.**

- **Strengthen the Arts Council's role under planning and development legislation.**
- **Expand the 5% for community/cultural use that is in the Dublin City Development Plan to other city development plans.**

3. Equal Access

The Arts Council's aim, via our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan 2023–2028](#) is to promote existing good practice and build on areas for improvement to ensure that the arts in Ireland truly become open to all.

The Arts Council is committed to ensuring equality across its work, striving to ensure that all artists, regardless of ethnicity, have equal access to opportunities and that everyone who lives in Ireland has the opportunity to engage with and participate in the arts as a basic human right. It is informed by its Public Sector Duty in addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which provides for the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life through unfettered access to cultural materials, activities and spaces. It also provides for the right of persons with disabilities to develop and utilise their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society.

Annual Arts Council application data has highlighted disparities in success rates among different ethnic groups, with black males being the least successful applicants. Research commissioned to understand this found that artists often rely on smaller networks for information, feeling socially outside wider networks. Research findings recommended greater support and information for this group.

The Arts Council has already increased access costs for artists to support them to carry out their work, awarding €545k in requested access costs so far in 2024, which is more than double the costs awarded in 2023. Our grant funding to disabled artists increased by 85% from 2020 to 2022. We recently celebrated the ten-year anniversary of the arts and disability connect scheme managed by Arts and Disability Ireland on our behalf. Under that scheme €597,686 has been granted to 128 artists via 168 awards.

Access to venues

The Arts Council has begun work on a key project, which it proposed under the new National Disability Inclusion Strategy, called *All In* and is led by disabled people. The Arts Council will join with Arts Councils across the UK in developing this audience access

scheme which has been described as a ‘game changer’ by disability groups. It will place Ireland, and Ireland’s arts venues, at the centre of a scheme that will showcase leadership internationally. This scheme provides for a central system where prospective audience members can register their needs. Venues who join the scheme are alerted to the relevant requirement when that audience member books directly with them. To fully realise the ambitions of this scheme and ensure full access, venues will require upgrading.

Access to funding

Currently, artists with disabilities in receipt of welfare supports face the threat of losing those benefits if they apply for, and receive funding from, the Arts Council or other grant providers. This has the impact of limiting the rights of artists with disabilities to have professional careers in the arts.

The issues relating to the removal or diminution of Department of Social Protection (DSP) supports upon receipt of grant funding are complex, technical and multi-faceted. The issues include reduced welfare supports for disabled artists if they accept an Arts Council grant as a result of means testing, a lack of clear information and an apparent arbitrary application of these rules and a cooling effect on disabled artists applying for arts grants.

All of the above have the impact of reducing or limiting the rights of artists with disabilities to engage in cultural production and participation. It also seriously jeopardises the ability of the Arts Council to offer meaningful support to artists with disabilities on the same grounds as offered to non-disabled artists. Consequently, it undermines the Council’s ability to comply with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, preventing us from upholding the rights of all our service users regardless of the characteristics they share.

3. Equal Access Actions

- **Establish a capital fund to support venue upgrades and adaptation across the range of accessibility and Universal Design requirements to ensure right of access.**
- **Collaborate with the Arts Council to develop and implement a clear policy to ensure the rights of artists with disabilities to access funding are upheld.**
- **Fund the Arts Council to support inclusion for all in the arts.**

4. Young people and children

Taking a rights-based approach informed by the *UN Convention of the Rights of the Child*, the Arts Council seeks to ensure that the right of all children and young people to participate freely in the arts, to express themselves through the arts and to have their say in the development of the arts is upheld. 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.

The Arts Council Policy [*Aq fás leis na healaíona / Growing with the arts*](#), published in 2023 and informed by consultation with young people, provides a leadership approach to ensuring that children and young people of all ages and backgrounds across Ireland can make, share and enjoy all kinds of arts and influence the development of the arts. Over the lifetime of the Arts Council's organisational strategy [*Making Great Art Work 2016 -2025*](#), €5m more has been invested in young people bringing the total amount invested to €8.1m in 2023.

Access to and participation in the arts is an essential part of childhood. Research shows that it improves all aspects of children's lives including attainment in education and personal well-being. The arts provide a safe and inviting space for children and young people, where they feel happy, confident and included, have choice and agency, are creative as they develop their ideas, interests and skills and are inspired and surprised by new experiences and possibilities.

Partnership

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)*. We are working with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to establish our active support for the *National Programme on Child Poverty and Wellbeing* in our plans for future years. The Arts Council is also a partner with government in delivering the *Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027* and 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.

Our Partnership with Local Government (*Framework for Collaboration 2016 to 2025*) includes a shared priority to invest in children's and young people's rights to participate in the arts. In 2023, enabled by our financial support, every local authority provided for local youth arts programmes, most often reaching children who experience barriers to accessing the arts.

Arts in Education

The Creative Schools programme is now in one in every four schools in the country and in one in three special schools. It was established as a pilot in 2018 in partnership with the Department of Education and, at current funding levels, by 2027 one in every two schools will be part of the Creative Schools programme. Independent evaluation of Creative Schools has shown that it has had a transformative impact on participating schools.

The Arts Council advises other education partners on the place of the arts in education and advocates for increasing provision within all stages of education. This includes work with the National Council of Curriculum and assessment on the development of arts curricula at primary and post-primary level. We also support arts in education initiatives such as Writers in Schools and Architects in Schools working in partnership with organisations such as Poetry Ireland and the Irish Architecture Foundation.

4. Young People and Children Actions

- **Continue to expand Creative Schools to reach every school in Ireland by 2027 to ensure that every child's right to tuition and participation in art, music and drama is met.**
- **Fund the Arts Council to support artists and organisations who make work for, by and with children and young people to expand the opportunities they provide to realise work of ambition and scale.**

Key Action areas for the arts in 34th Dáil Éireann

1. Funding the Arts Actions

- Increase funding support for the Arts Council, considering EU averages.
- Provide a multi-annual funding commitment to the Arts Council to ensure security and stability for the arts sector.
- Commit to continuing the *Basic Income for the Arts* scheme beyond its pilot phase.

2. Arts Infrastructure and Planning Actions

- Partner with the Arts Council to develop a national arts infrastructure strategy.
- Provide significant capital funding to The Artist Campus at Dublin Port.
- Develop creative hubs for artists within the five cities to link with Dublin Port Artist Campus, in line with ambitions in Project Ireland 2040.
- Strengthen the Arts Council's role under planning and development legislation.
- Expand the 5% for community/cultural use that is in the Dublin City Development Plan to other city development plans.

3. Equal Access Actions

- Establish a capital fund to support venue upgrades and adaptation across the range of accessibility and Universal Design requirements to ensure right of access.
- Collaborate with the Arts Council to develop and implement a clear policy to ensure the rights of artists with disabilities are upheld.
- Fund the Arts Council to support inclusion for all in the arts.

4. Young People and Children Actions

- Continue to expand Creative Schools to reach every school in Ireland by 2027 to ensure that every child's right to tuition and participation in art, music and drama is met.
- Fund the Arts Council to support artists and organisations who make work for, by and with children and young people to expand the opportunities they provide to realise work of ambition and scale.