



Advancing Dance

The Arts Council adopted this policy at its plenary meeting of June 2022. The policy was developed using a broad consultative and iterative approach, engaging with the existing dance sector and those who could be part of it. This included desk-research, surveys, focus groups, interviews and analysis of international comparators in dance policy and development. This stakeholder-informed and comprehensive approach aimed to support access and reflect contemporary Ireland's energy, diversity and cultural dynamism.



Image: **Ballet Ireland — Giselle**
Photographer: **Ste Murray**

Our vision describes an Ireland where dance is recognised as an integral part of our cultural life. It is an artform that connects us to our bodies, imaginations and to each other. Dance can transcend linguistic barriers and celebrates cultures, traditions and commonality, thus fostering a shared artistic mode of expression within Ireland's evolving cultural landscape. This policy seeks to create a network of supports and opportunities that allows dance artists to have life-long sustainable careers and contribute to their communities and cultural ecology. It prioritises fostering excellence in dance by supporting cutting-edge and widely-celebrated performances by companies as well as individual artists. This policy also aims to create opportunities for audiences to engage with, and participate in, dance across a range of genres and contexts.



Image: **United Fall — Night Dances**
Photographer: **Sean Breithaupt**

Dance is a designated artform since the first Arts Act of 1951. This gives the Arts Council a unique statutory responsibility for the development of dance. The Arts Council shares an interest in, and responsibility for, the development of dance with other public agencies, including the Department of Education and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media as well as local authorities. The Arts Council is the development agency and principal funder for professional dance in Ireland.

Dance exists within a complex, dynamic and multifaceted milieu and is supported by a diverse range of artists and arts workers. There have been many significant developments within dance in recent decades, including how dance intersects with other artforms. This reflects the constantly-evolving nature of the artform and the agility of the artists and arts workers who create it. It also demonstrates the diversity of needs, engagement and views regarding the future of dance and how this might be achieved through Arts Council policy.

Dance has some of the highest engagement figures for participation yet lower figures for audience attendance, as detailed in the annual Arts Insight survey. This pattern of engagement has both a historical and an educational context. Though participation is high,

the lack of provision of dance education within the current Primary and Post-Primary curriculum creates barriers to engagement, understanding and appreciation of the artform. This contrasts with other artforms, such as literature, music and drama, where regular participation is developed within mainstream education. Currently, dance and dance training is primarily provided privately and is dependent on commercial teachers and dance schools. This creates economic and spatial barriers to accessing dance training.

Historically, dancers have had to leave Ireland to train professionally. Both this unstable environment and fluctuating investment have been challenging for dancers, choreographers and independent dance artists. The introduction of a BA in dance in Ireland¹

¹ University of Limerick

has opened new pathways for dancers in contemporary dance. However, there are significant economic barriers to training internationally for dancers of other genres or those wishing to undertake training with a particular institution.

The programming of dance is another area of concern for companies, festivals and venues. International comparator research concludes that it is difficult to build an audience and increased capacity for the artform if dance is programmed infrequently. Arts centres and venues that have developed meaningful and long-term engagement with dance tend to have strong audience numbers and show that the figures for participation can lead to audience engagement.

This consistent approach that engages artists and communities in dialogue over a longer period of time can build increased capacity for both audience and participation and is supported by the Arts Council's Arts Centre Policy 2019.

However, there are very few dance festivals in Ireland. Artists also find it challenging to present their work outside of a festival context. A healthy ecology needs a variety of opportunities for artists at different stages of their careers to create and present work.

Dance has continued to grow and develop over the past years and is now positioned for a step change that allows more people, whether as artists, participants or audiences, equitable access to dance. This policy seeks to connect the dance ecology so as to maximise opportunities for dance development in Ireland. It aims to support pathways from advanced pre-professional training to an improved infrastructure that supports sustainable careers in dance and increased opportunities for public engagement.

The policy prioritises fostering excellence in dance as an artform by creating pioneering and widely celebrated performances by companies and individual artists in Ireland and internationally. It also aims to create new opportunities for audiences to engage with, and participate in, dance in diverse forms and contexts.

This policy will guide the development of dance as an artform within the overarching framework provided by the Arts Council's *Making Great Art Work (MGAW)* strategy. The critical goals of this policy are to increase the visibility of dance, improve the existing ecology and enhance the artform's reach through action and investment.

This policy framework is informed by the Arts Council's ten-year strategy and builds on all five pillars of that strategy with particular emphasis on The Artist, Public Engagement and Developing Capacity.

4.1 The Artist

Sustaining a career trajectory in dance in Ireland has been very challenging, and the intermittent nature of the work creates an unstable financial environment for dancers, choreographers and dance artists. This has resulted in a 'dancing diaspora', a cohort of dancers who have trained internationally and who do not return to Ireland due to a lack of opportunities on a full-time basis. However, one of the great strengths of this international dance network is the cross-pollination and development of opportunities for dancers from Ireland to advance their practice, and for new opportunities of presenting work from Ireland on the International stage. This international dimension to the dance portfolio is one that we need to encourage and support through the new International Policy (2022) by creating stronger links with our diaspora and international presenting partners.

This policy seeks to develop initiatives that would create more stable work for artists and increase the reach of the artform. The canon of work created by established and mid-career choreographers and dance artists is rarely revived. This further diminishes the legacy of the work developed by some of the most celebrated Irish and Irish-based choreographers working today. The emphasis on new work has resulted in a culture that is challenging for both the creative artists and the resources that have been invested in its creation. It also deprives audiences of the opportunity to see, and gain familiarity, with excellent work by Irish artists funded by public resources.

Actions

Life-long sustainable Practice and Professional Development

- Research and development to lead to the creation of a full-time islandwide dance company with international reach.
- Increased investment in existing infrastructure across the country to ensure equitable professional development opportunities, especially those focused on high-quality professional training, mentoring and critical engagement.
- Research and development for Centres for Advanced Training to create pathways to professional practice for a diversity of talented young dancers.
- Strengthen and develop pathways for artists to create work of scale and ambition.

4.2 Public Engagement

Dance has some of the highest engagement figures for participation and yet some of the lowest figures for audience engagement. Research suggests larger-scale productions have higher audience attendance, demonstrating that there is an appetite on part of the public for large-scale dance works. However, the consultation process outlined challenges for dance productions touring outside of festival contexts and the varied nature of support for dance artists and audiences in venues across Ireland.

The lack of dance as an artform within mainstream education in schools also creates barriers for audiences, as this does not allow for the same level of familiarity with dance as with other curricular artform subjects. The private provision of paid dance education, though invaluable in the current training dance infrastructure,

also creates barriers to accessing dance training for young people. By creating actions that take a two-pronged approach focusing both on dance education and dance production, this policy seeks to address both reach of engagement within dance and educational impact.

Actions

- Research and development to lead to the creation of a full-time islandwide dance company with international reach.
- Pilot study of the Centres for Advanced Training.
- Facilitate actions for increased connection between venues, producers and festivals to ensure more touring and engagement opportunities for dance.

4.3 Developing Capacity

The policy consultation process highlighted the lack of a connected infrastructure for dance and the need to build networks and production supports for the development of work. By supporting engagement with arts centres and festivals, this policy will seek to develop greater integration of dance within the existing frameworks.

The need for an expanded infrastructure was also highlighted by a comparative data analysis from four Arts Councils (Scotland, England, New Zealand and Finland), which showed a relative level of underdevelopment in Ireland with regard to dance infrastructure. As well as the need for a spatially equitable spread of dance studios and artists workspaces, opportunities to make work of scale are impacted by limited theatre spaces. This is a priority domain for development.

Actions

- Establish an independent large-scale, year-round dance company which is committed to commissioning, dance production across all scales, the employment of dancers, as well as national, North/South and international touring, aligning dance with other artforms such as theatre and opera.
 - Work with existing infrastructure to create networks for the production and dissemination of dance performances.
 - Focus on working relationships within and beyond Ireland that will extend the reach and diversity of Arts Council interventions.
- Work with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media as well as local authorities, in particular within city and county development plans, to ensure any infrastructural cultural projects for theatres and/or studios include dance within development briefs whenever appropriate and possible.

4.4 Other Areas of Concern

In championing dance, the Arts Council will provide for the artist and the public while also delivering key corporate priorities of its MGAW strategy in a meaningful way (namely Paying the Artist; Equality, Human Rights and Diversity; and Young People, Children and Education). Furthermore, the Dance Policy will intersect with, and complement, other policy areas such as the Spatial Policy and the Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Policy, in order to deliver shared objectives.

Likewise, where the Arts Council as a prescribed planning body comments on matters of design in relation to new and existing infrastructure for the arts, we will endeavour to ensure that the specific requirements for dance are considered in the design and planning of theatres and art spaces.

In relation to climate change, The Arts Council will promote and encourage climate adaptation and mitigation measures in the work it supports in dance. The addition of a canon of work and the inclusion of existing works for creators means a shift in the culture of investment and creates more long-term sustainable actions.



Image: Irish Modern Dance Theatre — Evolutions
Photographer: Stefania Porcu

Advancing Dance

Implementation Plan
2022—2025



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Image: CoisCéim Dance Theatre – Uncle Ray
Photographer: Ros Kavanagh

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	Timeline
1.1	Sustain and develop the increased level of investment in dance since 2020 (30%). This increased investment has allowed for a greater investment in existing infrastructure and dance across a wide range of activities.	Increase in dance productions, production values and resources across the sector.	Growth of dance sector with more consistent employment for artists.	2022–2027
1.2	Offer support towards a year-round, independent dance company to provide an action of international importance and sustainable careers for dancers and choreographers on the island of Ireland. This will be provided out of a separate budget and will not decrease current investment levels in the dance portfolio.	Commission a feasibility study which will outline the appropriate governance, organisational structure, funding model, location, partnerships and engagement required. This study will shape the support mechanisms required of the Arts Council to facilitate this development, leading to a call for submissions in 2023.	Full-time islandwide dance company with international reach and identification of suitable partners for the delivery of possible revenue and capital supports required.	From 2023
1.3	Facilitate actions for increased connection between venues and producers, festivals to ensure more touring and engagement opportunities for dance.	Work with current stakeholders and networks to facilitate increased opportunities for production companies and independent and freelance artists.	Increased production support for dance and greater awareness of work currently being made on the island.	From 2023

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	Timeline
1.4	Enhance the online presence and profile of artists based in Ireland and facilitate peer engagement through digital technologies.	Ensure the effective integration of Dance on Screen in the development of the Arts Council's Digital Policy. Offer talks and seminars with leading experts on relevant topics.	Artists and organisations based in Ireland will improve their online presence. Qualitative improvement of digital material generated by artists.	2022 onwards
1.5	Develop existing pathways for emerging and mid-career artists to create work of scale and ambition.	Increased funding for Project Awards, and maintain current increase in funding for Bursary Awards and the Dance Artist in Residence Scheme.	Stimulate new and diverse genre artists within the dance portfolio. Support high-quality work of scale and ambition. Support sustainable careers in dance.	2023–2027



Image: Luke Murphy - Volcano
Photographer: Emilija Jefremova

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2. Public Engagement

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	Timeline
2.1	Deliver outcomes of the feasibility report for developing the Centres for Advanced Training across the island. Creating pathways to professional practice regardless of barriers to access.	Pilot scheme to measure best practice and sustainable organisational structures.	Create a dance network across the island similar to Music Generation in collaboration with the Dept. of Education, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Creative Youth and YPCE.	2022–2024
2.2	A full-time dance company with national, North/South and international reach will increase engagement with dance as an artform and bring a new action and visibility to dance.	Implementation of recommendations and consultation in collaboration with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Dept. of An Taoiseach and other national, North/South and international stakeholders as appropriate.	Full-time islandwide dance company with international reach.	From 2023
2.3	Expand opportunities to support international practice through existing funding programmes.	Review existing funding programmes to ensure a more coherent and explicit integration of international arts policy priorities. To be addressed as part of the forthcoming funding framework review.	Clear funding framework for the support of international activities. Greater awareness of the Arts Council's role in relation to International Arts.	2022–2027



Image: Irish Modern Dance Theatre – Evolutions
Photographer: Luca Truffarelli

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3. Developing Capacity

	Policy Action	Deliverables/KPIs	Desired Outcomes	Timeline
3.1	A year-round dance company with national, North/South and international reach.	Implement recommendations from research and consultation phase.	Delivery of a world-class full-time dance company.	From 2023
3.2	Work with existing infrastructure to create networks for the production and dissemination of dance performances.	Greater access to venue network and supports for the dissemination of work.	Greater ease for touring and festival programming.	From 2022
3.3	To work with our parent department, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to ensure that any infrastructural cultural projects for theatres and studios include dance in the conversation to expand the reach of dance.	Access to stages for large-scale dance work.	Any new infrastructure for theatres includes provision for the needs of dance as appropriate.	Ongoing

Advancing Dance

In Alphabetical Order

AINE STAPLETON

Independent dance artist

ANGELIKI SMALIS

Independent dance artist

ANICA LOUW

Director of LD Dance Shawbrook

ANNE MAHER

Artistic Director Ballet Ireland

AOIFE MCGRATH

Senior Lecturer Queen's University, Belfast

BENJAMIN PERCHET

Director & Chief Executive Officer Carlow Arts Festival

BRIAN O'REGAN

Director Arts Leaders

BRIDGET WEBSTER

Executive Producer/Chief Executive
Officer CoisCéim Dance Theatre

CARINA MCGRAIL

Executive Director Dublin Dance Festival

CATHERINE YOUNG

Artistic Director Catherine Young Dance

CATHY COUGHLAN

Project Potential Coordinator Project Arts Centre

COLIN DUNNE

Independent dance artist

DAVID BOLGER

Artistic Director CoisCéim Dance Theatre

ELLA CLARKE

Dance academic and independent dance artist

EMMA MARTIN

Artistic Director United Fall

FINOLA CRONIN

Emeritus Lecturer University College Dublin
and independent dance artist

GAYE TANHAM

Researcher Trinity College Dublin

GWEN VAN SPÏK

Independent producer

JAZMIN CHIODI

Artistic Director Dublin Dance Festival

JENNY ROCHE

Senior Lecturer University of Limerick
and independent dance artist

JENNY TRAYNOR

Director Dance Limerick

JILL MURRAY

Executive Director Galway Dance Project
and independent producer

JOHN O'REILLY

Executive Director Macnas

JOHN SCOTT

Artistic Director Irish Modern Dance Theatre

KATHERINE O'MALLEY

Independent dancer and dance artist in
residence at The Visual, Carlow

LINDA FEARON

Co-Artistic Director Croi Glan Integrated Dance Company

LIV O'DONOGHUE

Independent dance artist and actor,
National Campaign for the Arts

LIZ ROCHE

Artistic Director Liz Roche Company

LUCIA KICKHAM

Independent dance artist

MARGUERITE DONLON

Director of Dance Company Osnabrück, Germany

MARIA NILSSON WALLER

Independent dance artist

MARION CRONIN

Independent dance artist

MAURA O'KEEFFE

Director Once Off Productions

MARY WYCHERLEY

Co-Founder and Curator of Light Moves Festival of Screendance

MEGAN KENNEDY

Co-Artistic Director Junk Ensemble

MICHELLE CAHILL

Independent producer and dance artist

MINTESINOT WOLDE

Independent dance artist

MUFUTAU YUSUF

Independent dance artist

MUIRNE BLOOMER

Independent dance artist

ROBYN BYRNE

Independent dance artist

RÓISÍN WHELAN

Independent dance artist and Artistic
Director of Róisín Whelan Dance

RUAIRÍ Ó DONNABHÁIN

Independent dance artist

SHEILA CREEVEY

Chief Executive Officer Dance Ireland

SIOBHÁN NÍ DHUINNÍN

Independent dance artist

STEPHANIE DUFRESNE

Independent dance artist

TOBI OMOTESO

Independent dance artist

ZOË ASHE-BROWNE

Independent Dance Artist



Artist: **Jessie Thompson**
Photographer: **Jacek Snochowski**

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