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Open Up: addressing the barriers facing Black and Black-Irish artists' access to funding and opportunities

Research Report
Prepared for The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon

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"Until people see that there's a pathway for them, they see people that look like them in this form, in this work, getting the funding, being celebrated having, you know, roots and success in this field. It's going to be a case of 'oh that's for them', [not me]." (Artist)

Executive Summary

The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon is the Irish government agency for developing the arts. It works in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policy makers, and others to build a place for the arts in Irish life. The Arts Council has policies that aim to ensure that all of its funding is spent strategically, all of its actions reflect the long-term interests of the public and that all decisions are transparent and fair.

Each year, the Arts Council publishes equality data on individuals applying for and receiving Arts Council funding, broken down by gender, disability and ethnicity. In its 2021 Awards Data Report, Black or Black Irish artists were found to be those most likely of any ethnic or racial group to have their applications deemed ineligible on assessment.

More than 900 ineligible applications across all funding programmes were analysed to identify patterns of eligibility and success, in particular how assessment criteria were applied. Research interviews were carried out with 17 Black and Black-Irish artists, and 4 people from arts organisations, including 1 Black and 3 White Irish participants.

The barriers faced by Black artists in Ireland in identifying and securing funding are numerous and interconnected. These barriers include a preference for more experienced artists, limited representation and opportunities, lack of mentors and support networks, insufficient training opportunities, biases in favour of familiar and accepted art forms, difficulties in accessing networks and joining groups, and reliance on connections for access to venues and opportunities.

Some of these barriers are shared with other marginalised artist groups, particularly where there are intersections of gender, migration history, and disability. Most of the remedial actions recommended in this report to address exclusionary factors will therefore benefit a much wider population than Black and Black-Irish artists. The cumulative impact on Black artists however warrants particular attention and continued monitoring as well as some specific actions targeting this artist population.

Summary of recommendations
1. Policy Development:
   - Full implementation of the Arts Council Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Policy & EDI Implementation Plan.
   - Explicit goals and strategies to address underrepresentation
   - Review funding and support programs
   - Allocate dedicated funding
2. Application Process:
   - Improve clarity and accessibility of application process
   - Enhance transparency in funding decision-making
   - Introduce mechanisms to monitor discriminatory outcomes
3. Professional Development:
   - Create mentorship programs to pair established and emerging artists

- Facilitate networking events, workshops, and platforms to encourage collaboration between racialised and migrant artists and artists of all ethnic backgrounds
- Introduce an ambassadorship scheme to amplify Black artists voices as leaders and advocates
- Offer targeted training programs and workshops for minority ethnic artists
- Improve training for selection panels to address intercultural competence and equity assessments

4. Capacity Building with Arts Organisations:
   - Establish partnerships with organisations leading on equity and diversity
   - Encourage and support diversity and inclusivity in artist selection
   - Encourage arts organisations to adopt inclusive and representative programming policies
   - Assess uptake of training and resources by funded arts organisations on diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency
   - Develop and support initiatives to specifically address discrimination

5. Community Engagement and Partnerships:
   - Facilitate collaborations and partnerships between government departments, arts organisations, ethnic communities, and mainstream artists
   - Support the establishment and operation of multicultural and minority-led arts organisations
   - Support capacity-building programmes on co-creation to reflect the interests and cultural identities of different communities.
   - Develop meaningful relationships with diverse community groups and minority cultural organisations, particularly in rural areas.

6. Research:
   - Develop and implement a programme of research to further understand the barriers faced by racialised and migrant artists
   - Regularly review and update policies and programs based on research findings and feedback from artists and arts organisations.

7. Evaluation
   - Establish a quarterly evaluation schedule for adopted recommendations
   - Conduct regular, bi-annual EDI evaluations of all substantive areas of Arts Council activities

Background

The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon is the Irish government agency for developing the arts. It works in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policy makers, and others to build a place for the arts in Irish life. The Arts Council has policies that aim to ensure that all of its funding is spent strategically, all of its actions reflect the long-term interests of the public and that all decisions are transparent and fair.

Each year, the Arts Council publishes equality data on individuals applying for and receiving Arts Council funding, broken down by gender, disability and ethnicity. In its 2021 Awards Data Report, the Arts Council published data which showed that Black or Black Irish artists made up 1.9% of applications, 1.5% of successful applications, 1.4% of unsuccessful applications, and 4.5% of applications deemed ineligible. The proportion of ineligible applications is higher than any other ethnic or racial group.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team at the Arts Council commissioned Lucy Michael Research Training and Consultancy to conduct an independent analysis of application data and to interview Black and Black-Irish artists regarding their experience of the application process.

A review and quantitative analysis of 919 ineligible applications across all relevant funding programmes, as well as the related award criteria and reasons for ineligibility, with specific reference to race and ethnicity, including a comparative analysis. The findings from the ineligibility data present three avenues for further investigation: (1) the low number of applications from female Black or Black-Irish artists, and (2) factors affecting the significant increase of applications from male Black or Black-Irish artists in the music sector, and (3) factors affecting the quality of those applications.

A literature review was undertaken on the barriers faced by minority ethnic and migrant artists as well as barriers faced in the Irish labour market by Black and Black-Irish people. The findings of this literature review showed a range of barriers which can illuminate the statistical data.

One-to-one consultations with artists were then undertaken to explore the issues identified in the literature review and statistical analysis. Participation in interviews was invited from all Black and Black-Irish artists who have applied for Arts Council funding in the previous five years. Research interviews were carried out with 21 interviewees, including 17 Black and Black-Irish artists, and 4 staff from arts organisations, including 1 Black and 3 White Irish participants. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and all participants were compensated in line with the Arts Council's Paying the Artist policy.

Literature Review

Barriers to Black and minority ethnic inclusion in the arts

In this first section, we set out the key literature on the arts sector, and in the second, we investigate further the local context shaping the experiences of Black and Black-Irish people particularly in relation to discrimination in employment. Much of the literature on arts inclusion emanates from the UK, particularly England, where there has been extended and significant political and legal pressure to address structural racism across public bodies and publicly funded activities. This literature sets out a number of key explanations for low participation in the arts from public engagement, to developing artistic careers, and to employment and leadership in the arts sector although there are still many gaps in knowledge about the barriers to Black and minority ethnic artistic careers and success.

Black and minority ethnic engagement with the arts

The expectation that minority artists bring diverse audiences is misplaced. If there is a failure to engage minority audiences, this is much more likely to be because of structural issues than a simple matter of interest or awareness. In Scotland, there has been considerable interest by minority ethnic communities in engaging in the arts, (Netto, 2008). The Arts Council of England (2018a) found Black and minority ethnic people were much more likely to say that arts, museums and libraries are important to them and their family (69%) compared to White respondents (59%). They are however significantly less likely to have visited a museum or gallery. Black, Asian and ethnically diverse audiences vary across artforms and disciplines, with a higher percentage in visual arts and lower levels in music and theatre.

The most common barriers to arts and cultural participation among Black and minority ethnic people in the UK are a lack of time, the cost of attending or participating, and concerns of feeling uncomfortable or out of place (Arts Council of England, 2018b). Other barriers impeding engagement with the arts include language, social barriers and irrelevance to one's own culture (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 2021). Living in an urban area facilitates greater access to some amenities and is associated with more educational visits, cultural outings, library visits, and so on. In Northern Ireland, a 2007 report on barriers to access to the arts and to intercultural arts engagement for Chinese and Indian communities identified were cost, locations, advertising, educational background, and time (Audiences NI, 2007). Further barriers included participants feeling 'it's not for me', lack of family-orientated arts activities, and a general lack of interest.

The context within which Black and minority ethnic people access and enjoy the arts therefore appears to be determined to a greater extent by structural factors than cultural preferences or simple awareness. In Ireland, the National Arts Engagement Survey carried out by the Arts Council Ireland has had no discussion of ethnic minorities in the past 5 years of reports (2018-2021). Overall, the literature suggests that the absence of minority artists from the arts sector has very little to do with the interest or awareness of minorities in the arts, and much more significant are the entry supports into arts careers and the ability to sustain arts careers.

Diverse representation in the arts workforce

Diversity in the workforce also impacts on the way in which new audiences and participants come to the arts (Arts Council of England, 2016). In England, research has shown that there is systematic under-representation of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse people in the workforce, leadership and governance of the arts and culture sector of England (Arts Council of England, 2022). Minority ethnic workers in the arts and cultural sector primarily occupy job roles such as 'artists' or 'specialist' professions, and are the most likely to be on short-term contracts. In Wales, racial bias in interview panel decision-making in the arts sector is well documented (Arts Council of Wales, 2021). For Black and minority ethnic young people starting out or considering a career in the sector, a lack of (paid) work experience opportunities and recruitment through informal networks were seen as key barriers (Thompson, 2013). Additionally, perceptions of arts and creative industries as having a predominately white workforce can play a role in discouraging minority ethnic and migrant people from seeking employment in the arts (Arts Council of England 2022).

Creative Scotland (2017) highlighted economic limitations as the largest barrier to diversity in the arts workforce. Financial precarity of arts careers is a deterrent for many people with low financial security, including first generation migrants and their families (Shtorn, 2020). Barriers to leadership positions include key appointments being made primarily through networks; bias and stereotyping in appointment processes; and new entrants to the profession not knowing enough about career pathways (Arts Council of England, 2018a). The lack of diversity in arts organisations creates an additional burden in the application process as applicants feel they need to explain the relationship between their cultural heritage and their work, even where it has no particular bearing (Arts Council of Wales, 2021).

There is currently no data available on the diversity of the arts workforce in Ireland. A report for Create Ireland highlighted the difficulty for many migrant artists of maintaining an adequate income from the arts (Shtorn, 2020). A recent Arts Council of Ireland survey (2021) revealed that 48% of all artists surveyed considered leaving arts careers entirely during the pandemic due to the financial pressures. Among migrants, their experience of discrimination was heightened due to language fluency or accent (Shtorn, 2020).

Discrimination and dominant values

Minority ethnic artists often encounter various barriers that impede their access to opportunities and funding within this sector. Key barriers to inclusion in the arts identified in the academic literature include socio-political context and recognition of culture, unequal support systems, limited career capitals, cultural barriers (including formal and institutional language), lack of networks and connections, limited access to resources and funding, lack of representation and underrepresentation, and erasure of cultural identities.

Racial discrimination has been widely acknowledged as a significant barrier faced by minority ethnic artists in the public arts sector. Studies have shown that discrimination based on ethnicity limits access to opportunities, resources, and funding (Le *et al.*, 2014; Saha, 2018, Malik and Shankley, 2020). Research indicates that networks play a critical role in accessing opportunities and funding (e.g. Bridgstock, 2005; Skaggs, 2023). However, minority ethnic artists often encounter limited access to these networks due to exclusionary practices and

lack of cultural capital. Gatekeeping mechanisms within the arts can be designed (consciously or unconsciously) to protect a limited range of resources for a select few, but they can also reflect a culture of social closure. Bergsgard and Vassenden (2015) argue the more institutionalized and dominated by gatekeeper logic a field or arena is, the higher the entry barriers, thus "in order to gain entry here, one must actually push someone else out".

The presence of homogenous networks and class-based structures within the public arts sector further exacerbates the barriers faced by minority ethnic artists. Shared tastes and cultural socialisation are crucial to individuals being viewed as the right 'sort' of creative worker (Koppman, 2016). Saha and van Lente (2022) highlight how diversity potentially disrupts the liberal sensibilities of the dominant culture, especially their sense of the genre or sector as meritocratic. Particularly in the public arts, artists from minority backgrounds may face exclusion and limited opportunities based on their perceived acquisition of European culture and lack of knowledge or reference to Western art. Dominant cultural practices and hierarchies can marginalize cultural diversity and favour certain artists over others. This takes institutional forms as well as being reflected in decision-making in, for example, funding or opportunities. Delhaye (2008) observed the failure of Dutch cultural policy to address the established art structure, "even reproducing the exclusionary structures of cultural valuation", and the reluctance of policymakers and experts to translate "all the threats and uncertainties associated with cultural diversity into matters of quality."

Networks

Access to networks in the arts sector has been found to be crucial in shaping knowledge about opportunities and funding. Studies suggest that minority ethnic artists face challenges in obtaining information, contacts, and mentoring that are necessary for professional growth and success. Limited access to networks acts as a moderator, constraining the available knowledge and resources for minority ethnic artists, thereby impacting their opportunities and funding prospects. Ethnic minority artists may face challenges in accumulating the kind of cultural capital needed in the arts sector due to stereotypes and a lack of connection between government departments, arts organisations, ethnic communities, and mainstream artists. Le et al (2014) observed that in Australia this lack of networks and connections had a significant impact on their career opportunities. As a result, ethnic minority artists may face isolation and a sense of exclusion due to inadequate knowledge of the wider artistic field, limited networking opportunities, and a lack of connection with mainstream artists. This lack of networks and unity further impacts their economic and social capital. The importance of knowing the right people will be reinforced precisely by the fact that fewer minority artists are active in the field.

Creative Scotland (2017) found that a lack of connections was the second most commonly cited barrier to working in the arts (68%) and artists were even more likely to cite it as a barrier to success (81%). This echoes a wide research literature indicating that the sector is heavily dependent on informal networks, and social and cultural capital. While networks and connections can promote strong relationships, close working, and trust, informal networks and recruitment processes can also have a negative impact on the diversity of a workforce. Access to careers in the creative industries is particularly reliant on social networks (Arts Council of England, 2016). The Arts Council of Wales report notes that there is a general

feeling that you need 'a way in' to Arts Council work in order to be successful at funding (2021). In Ireland, Shtorn (2020) has described a culture that feeds elitism in the sector, and fosters a feeling of alienation, and ultimately can put off those who already feel marginalized from making applications, as they assume that they will be rejected.

Diversity and risk

There are recurrent obstacles which require cultural or structural change driven by institutional commitment to equality and inclusion. For example, gatekeepers do not select or promote minority artists precisely because they have not been selected or promoted before. Minority artists' standing is often reliant on their ability to prove they can produce audience diversification. The UK Parliament report on Racism in the Theatre (2002) found a prevailing view amongst some key contributors that employment of Black and Asian people is a financial risk. Saha (2017) observes a common assumption in both policy and media studies of race that increasing the number of minorities in the media will automatically lead to more diverse content. Attempts to address racial inequalities in production and consumption solely by diversity in recruitment, however, reinforces rather than dismantles them. The structures and expectations which minority artists have to navigate in order to access mainstream spaces enforce a binary between assimilation and exoticism.

Changing the public arts sector to accommodate and embrace diversity is seen as both costly and risky, and minority artists are often blamed for their perceived failure to dominate either the mainstream or the cutting edge of their genre. There is a persistent issue in perceiving minority artists as being only of 'interest' and not of 'quality' (Delhaye, 2008). Projects led by ethnic minorities are often treated with a higher level of scrutiny, which results in less opportunities overall (Arts Council of Wales, 2021). Such scrutiny, it is suggested, is connected to a lack of wider cultural knowledge, resulting in dismissing an idea because White decision-makers cannot relate to it, or understand its wider significance.

The recognition and treatment of culture within the broader national context can impact minority ethnic communities' ability to claim interpretive space in the public arena. In the case of Scotland, for example, minority artists' opportunities for visibility and funding both are limited by the extent to which multiculturalism is entangled with issues of national self-definition (Netto, 2008). Brookes (2022) points to British cultural policy, as an example, as reinforcing a view of Black artists with a perceived deficit from which they have struggled to recover. The notion of 'diversity' acts as a form of racial governance but is also a source of anxiety for the dominant culture, so while publishers, for example, are convinced that both the moral and economic cases for diversity are aligned, they mostly have reductive outcomes for minoritised authors (Saha and van Lente, 2021). Lack of representation and limited support can contribute to their underrepresentation in the creative and cultural industries (Swyngedouw, 2022). As a result, entry to the arts is often easier in the commercial circuit (Bergsgard and Vassenden, 2015). This, however, does not circumvent the problems of entry to and success within the public arts sector.

Language skills, particularly proficiency in written English, can be a barrier for migrant artists, especially in terms of grant applications and written communication, impacting their ability to access funding, market themselves, and expand their networks in the artistic field. This is particularly aggravated even for those with fluent English where institutional language is

highly particular (Le et al., 2014). Caution is suggested here – language as an entry criterion in the arts sector does not only concern migrants, but also emerges from cultural and class difference amongst non-migrant artists. Thus, minority ethnic artists face difficulties across various genres due to factors such as formal education, diction, corrections of speech, emphasis on exoticism, and lack of opportunities to prove their skills and abilities (Bergsgard and Vassenden, 2015). Minority ethnic artists, particularly where gender, class, disability or other factors also play a role, and where cultural difference is perceived as more marked, may thus find themselves more frequently disregarded or corrected in the way in which they express themselves.

Factors affecting funding applications

The rate of applications to arts funding by Black and minority ethnic artists has been the subject of some investigation by public agencies in recent years. The Arts Council England report investigated why only 9% of its awards in 2015/16 were made to Black and minority ethnic applicants, and concluded that lack of awareness was a significant factor (2018b). Data collected by the Northern Ireland Arts Council (2021) showed that both the targeting of minority ethnic people (by arts organisations) and the number of successful minority ethnic applications was low in comparison to other recognised equality categories. Creative Scotland (2017) identified a number of barriers to career progression including those which are defined as protected characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, disability, religion and sexual orientation) and less tangible barriers such as social class, carer responsibilities, and geographic limitations. Minority ethnic and migrant participants in low-income groups, with disabilities, identifying as LGBTQIA+, or experiencing oppression relating to other parts of their identities, experience inaccessibility in a multilayered way. A Welsh Arts Council survey (2021) found that accessibility of funding and employment applications were common concerns across the arts sector. The survey highlighted how the applications process is viewed as inaccessible for a variety of reasons: the language used in applications, the heavy amount of administration involved, the lack of contacts readily available for support, and tick-box nature of applications. In Ireland, migrants face particular challenges with application processes due to the language barrier, making artistic jargon and explaining their projects more difficult (Shtorn, 2020).

The persistence of barriers

Swyngedouw (2022) explains the gap in cultural labour market representation between ethnic minorities and the white majority population by the persistence of structural and personal hurdles both on entry to and right throughout the careers of minority artists. Because of this, minority artists have to develop various strategies to overcome these barriers, not once, but repeatedly. Overcoming these barriers requires addressing systemic inequalities, promoting diversity and inclusion, providing equal opportunities, and fostering connections and networks within the artistic community. Based on the literature reviewed above, it is possible to summarise some of the main strategies that artists have adopted to navigate the barriers to inclusion in the arts.

1. Building networks and connections

Minority artists lack knowledge of where information is shared formally and informally about available assistance programs, funding schemes, and information sources, which hampers their ability to navigate the arts field and seek help. This is particularly influenced by the reliance of institutions on key gatekeepers for dissemination of information. Minority artists express a need for connections with mainstream artists to exchange artworks and expand their networks. Creating connections with arts managers and organisations can provide support, funding opportunities, promotion, and networking opportunities. These connections help artists gain visibility and legitimacy within the arts sector. Networks and contacts also increase an artist's intimacy with the codes and rules in a genre or sector, that is cultural capital.

2. Developing cultural capital and skills

Minority artists utilize technology and low-tech methods for self-promotion, marketing, and information gathering. This includes using social media platforms and embracing technological tools to enhance their cultural capital and reach broader audiences. Acquiring formal education, training, and recognized qualifications in the arts field enhances their cultural capital and increase their chances of accessing opportunities. For migrants, education includes overcoming language barriers by improving English language skills, particularly in written communication and grant applications. Minority ethnic citizens are less likely to identify language barriers despite its dominance in the literature.

3. Seeking support from arts organisations and funding bodies

Minority artists engage with arts organisations and peak bodies that support and provide opportunities for artists from minority backgrounds. These organisations can offer performance venues, funding application assistance, promotion, and networking connections. However many of these organisations delegate the functions which have most power to shape inclusion efforts. Advocacy by arts managers and organisations helps to legitimize and provide opportunities for artists with minority backgrounds. This includes promoting their work, helping with funding applications, and facilitating networking connections.

4. Overcoming stereotypes and biases:

Minority artists continually challenge stereotypes by showcasing their talent and skills through performances and exhibitions. By proving their abilities, artists aim to break down the barriers and preconceived notions that limit their opportunities. They push for diversity and inclusivity in casting decisions and challenging the perception that artists with minority backgrounds do not possess the qualifications to be included. This involves advocating for opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities. However they are limited in the extent to which they do that, cognisant of harm to their fragile professional networks.

Outreach

There are questions raised in the evidence bases as to whether cultural institutions are making enough efforts to reach out to ethnic minority communities to support their participation in arts and cultural activities. The Arts Council of England (2018b) noted that an issue of particular concern is the absence of visible minority ethnic role models, particularly in respect of decreasing numbers of funded Black and minority ethnic led organisations, low numbers of new applications and no funded Black and minority ethnic led Major Partner Museums.

English survey respondents shared that understanding the social and cultural context for different ethnic groups was key to delivering inclusive artistic activities, acknowledging the increasingly blended and diverse nature of ethnic identity, and the importance of avoiding "labelling" or tokenism (Arts Council of England, 2018b). Often ethnic minorities are assumed to only make work that is focused on their heritage / communities, or solely offered opportunities of this kind (Arts Council of Wales (2021). Ethnic minority artists are not homogenous, and while there is a need for measurable 'diversity' targets, where these are unsupported, uninformed and not adequately monitored, tokenistic efforts often result (Arts Council of Wales, 2021). Black artists have reported only being given commissions during Black History Month, despite applying to work on numerous occasions throughout the year. Applicants for funding in Wales reported feeling that if their work "didn't fit" a tick-box criteria, they would be unsuccessful.

Employment discrimination and migrants in Ireland

The Irish context requires that the international literature on ethnicity and employment in the arts is read alongside the particularities of the labour market, demographics and modes of social exclusion prevalent here. Discriminatory outcomes for minorities are persistent in the Irish education system and labour market, in wealth accumulation and class mobility. Minority ethnic artists are therefore impacted financially and socially both by their own reduced opportunities in the labour market and those of their families (past and future).

While Ireland has one of the most diverse labour markets in Europe in terms of the number of foreign born workers, it is well established that discrimination in both recruitment processes and workplace practices are common. Despite well-established anti-discrimination laws, immigrants consistently fare worse in employment. Among factors such as education, and language, skin colour appears to be a major barrier to entering the labour market (Joseph, 2018). Migrants from outside the EU experience significantly lower rates of employment than EU-born, with Muslim and Black respondents in particular recording very low employment (McGinnity et al, 2021). In 2016 the unemployment rate of migrants was 15.4% compared to 12.6% of Irish-born, and although unemployment was at a 10 year low in 2019, the positive turn in the economy only affected Ireland's white population (Joseph, 2019). Migrants of working age are more likely to hold a third level qualification compared to people born in Ireland (71% compared to 40%), but fewer migrants work in graduate occupations than non-migrants. Both Black Non-Irish and Black Irish groups are much less likely than White Irish or White Other groups to hold a managerial or professional job (McGinnity et al., 2018). In Ireland, Black African men were the least likely to receive a response for an application compared to applications with White and Polish sounding names (McGinnity and Lunn, 2011).

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The lack of recognition of qualifications and experience from the country of origin continues to impact on the recruitment and progression of migrant groups (MRCI, 2015). Discrimination in the workplace is commonly reported to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and to the Irish Network Against Racism (IHREC, 2020; Michael et al, 2023). Ethnic minority staff who are racially abused at work by customers or colleagues can feel they cannot respond to the abuse without raising concerns about their employment (Michael, 2015). At least 1-in-5 ethnic minority workers in Ireland report workplace discrimination (McGinnity et al, 2021; MRCI, 2020).

Black and Black Irish workers
The Black and Black Irish population of Ireland is a small but highly diverse group. In the 2022 Irish census the Black residents were 1.5% of the total population (76,245 persons), of which 88% were of African background (CSO, 2023). In the 2016 Census, one in three of those persons categorized as African background (38.6%) were born in Ireland, as were 31.3% of other Black backgrounds including mixed race individuals (CSO, 2016b). Those of "Any other Black background" were born in a range of countries including Brazil (17.4%), England and Wales (7.1%) and Mauritius (3.2%). These figures would be expected to rise in the 2022 census. Although it is quite common to think of racism against Africans as first emerging in the late 1990s, there is much evidence to disprove this position (Michael, 2015).

Being Black in the Irish labour market has been shown to be a strong indicator of unemployment and underemployment (Joseph, 2019). Less than 40 percent of African nationals in Ireland were employed in 2019, a starkly lower proportion compared to any other ethnic group in Ireland (O'Connell, 2019). This is a persistent pattern – in the previous decade, Black participants were nine times more likely to be unemployed compared to white Irish participants (O'Connell and McGinnity, 2008). People from the Black Irish group are twice as likely to experience discrimination seeking employment compared to White Irish, but Black non-Irish are five times more likely to experience discrimination (McGinnity et al, 2018). Stereotypes based on a perception of 'migrant deficit' are also influential (Joseph, 2019). Even when employed, Black Irish and Black non-Irish are between about three and eight times less likely to occupy a senior role (McGinnity et al, 2018). Various efforts to support their access to employment have dissolved under broader "diversity" agendas (Joseph, 2019).

Experiences of discrimination in the labour market generally is relevant to the arts sector for a variety of reasons. Firstly, although artists may be full time practicing artists, most have employment elsewhere and continue to be employed in a variety of roles for a variety of organisations, including in precarious freelance or contract roles. Experience and professional networks can shape the capacity of the applicants to access good advice, mentorship and feedback as needed. Finally, the employment experiences of minority groups impact on their confidence and relative power in the labour market and their likelihood of being able to invest in their own development.

Race and Gender
It is key to remember that discrimination is often intersectional with race, gender, religion, age, disability, socio-economic class, and geography all impacting on employment. These characteristics of an individual or group interact in certain ways to shape complex patterns of social inequality, rather than operating as mutually exclusive identities. The combination of

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several specific characteristics can lead to distinct forms of discrimination or disadvantage (McGinnity et al, 2021). Gender is one of the key factors that affect the different patterns of employment between ethnic groups (Zwysen et al, 2021). In order to tackle this discrimination ethnic minority women often have to demonstrate higher educational qualifications (Miaari et al, 2019). Lack of qualifications, failure to gain recognition for existing qualifications, and language proficiency are significant barriers to ethnic minority women participating in the labour market and sustaining an independent life (Turkman, 2019). These circumstantial barriers along with the structural barriers discussed previously affect women's participation, making it harder for ethnic minority women to join the labour market and integrate in the workplace (Finney et al, 2015). The ESRI notes in Ireland that the particular combination of an individual's characteristics and experiences mean that "the effectiveness of interventions to support individuals might differ for minority men and women, or for ethnic minority lone parents compared to married/cohabiting parents, or minority young people compared to older people" (McGinnity et al, 2021).

Lack of confidence is also a critical barrier to women seeking work and being able to progress in their careers (Turkman, 2019). Some underlying reasons for a lack of confidence can be gender stereotyping, unconscious bias, lack of support mechanisms such as mentoring, a lack of career advice, no role models, and no access to social networks. Ethnic minority women also experience racial inequalities. This may result in qualified ethnic minority women choosing not to apply for certain jobs, or potentially deterring them from the labour market generally.

Applications to the Arts Council

In the Arts Council's 2021 Awards Data Report, Black or Black Irish artists were found to be those most likely of any ethnic or racial group to have their applications deemed ineligible on initial assessment. The data showed that Black or Black Irish artists made up 1.9% of applications, 1.5% of successful applications, 1.4% of unsuccessful applications, and 4.5% of applications deemed ineligible.

In this research, 919 applications from artists of all ethnic backgrounds deemed ineligible for consideration by the Arts Council in 2021 were analysed for reason and award. Comparisons were then made between Black and Black-Irish artists and artists from other ethnic backgrounds to establish if there were patterns of marked difference in the reasons for ineligibility, and identify any specific areas for further investigation through qualitative work.

In this section we describe the statistical data, first in describing the representation of Black and Black-Irish in relation to reasons given for ineligibility and awards categories, and then exploring the relationship between ethnicity, gender and disability in the data.

Analysis of ineligible applications data

Ethnicity: all ineligible applications

White Irish	722	(78%)
Prefer not to say or Blank	41	(4.5%)
Black or Black Irish	41	(4.5%)
Mixed ethnic group	23	(2.5%)
Asian or Asian Irish	8	(1%)
Any other white	83	(9%)
Irish Traveller	3	(>1%)
Total	919	(100%)

Ineligibility: Over-representation in reasons for ineligibility

Reasons for ineligibility are recorded in the decision letter sent to applicants. All 919 decision letters were analysed and 12 categories developed and coded from the reasons provided. A further 8 sub-categories were developed to capture the nature of missing materials.

It is important to note that the research team have had no access to the applications in full, but only to the extracted text of the ineligibility letters sent by the Arts Council to the artists.

Black applicants are considered to be over-represented in any category where they exceed 4.5 percent of the total applicants in the category, the average ineligibility rate for Black artists in 2021.

The main reasons provided for ineligibility to all artists were:
1. Incomplete application forms
2. Non compliant application
3. Already received an award in the past year
4. Applications not suitable or does not fit the purpose of the award
5. Better suited to other grant/award
6. Proposals that have already been/are currently being assessed by the Arts Council
7. Missing Mandatory Supporting Material
    a) No list of Work in Progress
    b) No Examples or evidence of Work or not accepted format
    c) No Letters of Support
    d) No C.V. or biography
    e) No other CV or biography of named collaborators
    f) No Statement of Artistic Practice
    g) No Budget included or incomplete budget
    h) Unspecified missing material
8. Plan to purchase equipment or materials over 15% of total budget
9. Application includes International Travel
10. No separate statement of interest
11. Could be supported by other government/ public-agency
12. Unsuitable timeline

Fifty four percent of all ineligible applications were described as "missing mandatory supporting material". This was the largest single reason for ineligibility. This category was applied to any cases indicating any missing supporting material including; letters of support, examples of work, C.V. etc. Black applicants represented 6% of those ineligible for this reason and 53.6% of all ineligible Black applicants overall.

The category "Unspecified Missing Support Materials" was applied to cases where the response indicated there were missing materials but did not indicate which materials. Black applicants represented 12.7% of those ineligible for this reason and 17% of all ineligible Black applicants overall.

Award guidelines require a Separate Statement of Artistic Practice as supporting documentation. Nine percent of all ineligible applications were categorised as "No Statement

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of Artistic Practice". Black applicants represented 7.2% of those ineligible for this reason and 14.6% of all ineligible Black applicants overall.

"Non-compliant Applications" comprised 9.6% of all ineligible applications. This code was applied to decision letters stated the application was not in compliance with Art Council guidelines. Since no other detail is provided about how the application is non-compliant, there may be some overlap with other categories. Black applicants represented 7.9% of those ineligible for this reason and 17% of all ineligible Black applicants overall.

Black and Black-Irish artists are also over-represented in the following categories, but as numbers of applicants categorised as such were so low (less than 7% of all applicants across the 3 categories), caution is advised in interpreting these figures.
- Received an Award in the past year (9%)
- Better Suited to Another Award (10%)
- International Travel (8.3%)

Ineligibility: Rounds

Black or Black Irish were most likely to be excluded in any competitive award before Round 1. They made up 7.2 percent of all applicants excluded at this stage. There was no overrepresentation in awards with no separate rounds or in Rounds 2 or 3 of awards.

Ineligibility: Over-representation in awards

The most striking over-representation of Black and Black-Irish artists amongst ineligible applications is in the Agility Award for Music, where they represent 5.3% of ineligible applicants and only 1.5% of eligible applicants and in the Bursary Award for Music, where they represent 13.4% of ineligible applicants and 4.5% of eligible applicants.

Success rate by art forms

To understand the ineligibility rate better, the rate of success amongst eligible applications was also analysed. Considering only eligible applications, Black and Black-Irish artists were quite successful across a range of art forms. Black and Black-Irish artists overall were most successful in the areas of Dance. The lowest success rates for eligible applications were in Film and Music.

Comparing eligible and ineligible application data

The comparison of Black and Black-Irish artists in both the eligible applications and the ineligible applications gives us a better picture of the overall rate of success and likelihood of having an application deemed ineligible.

Career Stage

Black and Black-Irish artists are equally likely to be early stage/emerging artists both in the eligible and ineligible applications. The same is true of applicants as a whole. A larger proportion of Black and Black-Irish artists describe themselves as early stage/emerging artists (62%) than the general population of applicants (52%).

Black and Black-Irish artists make up a slightly higher proportion of eligible applications than ineligible applications if they are mid-career (23% to 19.5%), and a slightly lower proportion if they are established artists (8.8% to 12.2%).

First Time Applicants

A higher proportion of Black and Black-Irish artists with ineligible applications are first time applicants (63%) than the general population of artists with ineligible applications (47.2%).

Declared Disability

Disability was not significantly related to ineligibility overall or to ineligible applications from Black and Black-Irish artists. However the rate of declared disability amongst Black and Black-Irish artists is notably low.

Gender

Gender is significantly related to eligibility of applications from artists of all ethnic backgrounds. Males make up less than 40% of eligible applications, more than 50% of ineligible applications, and three-quarters of ineligible applications from Black and Black-Irish artists.

Female artists in general were seven times more likely to be eligible than ineligible. Female Black and Black-Irish artists were around two and a half times more likely to be eligible than ineligible. Male artists in general were just over 4 times more likely to be eligible as ineligible. Male Black and Black-Irish artists were about equally likely to be eligible as ineligible.

Of total 97 applications from Black and Black-Irish artists, 36 are female and 59 are male and 3 non-binary. Below we focus on male and female categories for comparison. Of the 41 applications from Black and Black-Irish artists deemed ineligible, only 11 are female (27%). Of the 56 applications from Black and Black-Irish artists deemed eligible, 25 are female (45%). Of the 30 applications from Black and Black-Irish artists approved, 16 are female (53%), 12 male, and 2 non-binary.

Male Black and Black-Irish artist applicants (eligible and ineligible) have a 39% chance of receiving an award once they apply, while female Black and Black-Irish artists applicants have 58% chance of receiving an award once they apply. By comparison, White Irish males have a 44% chance of success, and White Irish females have a 48% chance of success.

Black and Black-Irish artists: Gender, career stage and success
There appears to be no significant impact of career stage on the success rates of male or female Black or Black-Irish artists.

Black and Black-Irish artists: Gender, art form and success
The number of female Black and Black-Irish applicants is lower than male in almost all art forms, with the exception of Arts Participation and YPCE. Even in art forms which are heavily skewed female across the full range of applicants, such as dance, there are fewer female Black and Black-Irish applicants than male. The overall awards rate of female Black and Black-Irish artists in almost all art forms is impacted significantly by the numbers applying, whether they are deemed eligible or ineligible.

The proportion of female Black and Black-Irish applicants is low amongst those deemed ineligible, but also lower (though not as low) in the eligible applications. The number of female applicants are only equal to or higher than male applicants in those approved for funding.

The data on overall success rates shows that female Black and Black-Irish artists are significantly more likely to be successful in being deemed eligible and awarded funding than male Black and Black-Irish artists. This is not mediated significantly by the success rates in any particular art forms, once an artist has been deemed eligible.

How successful are Black and Black-Irish female artists compared to other female artists?
More than half of all applications to Arts Council awards are from female artists (55%). They make up a larger proportion of eligible applicants (57%), and an even larger proportion of those approved for funding (59%).

Female artists make up just 37% of Black and Black-Irish artists applying for funding. They make up a large, but not dominant, proportion of eligible Black and Black-Irish applicants (45%), but are more highly represented than male Black and Black-Irish artists amongst those approved for funding (53%).

How successful are Black and Black-Irish male artists compared to other male artists?
Forty-five percent of applications are from male artists overall, while male artists make up 61% of Black or Black-Irish artists applying. Male artists make up 55% of those deemed ineligible overall, but 73% of the Black or Black-Irish artists deemed ineligible. Amongst those male artists deemed eligible, the success rate for males overall is 41%, and 40% for Black and Black-Irish males.

There is a difference in award rate between Black or Black-Irish male artists and male artists overall, as the overall male conversion is a very slight decrease from eligible to approved of 43% to 41%, while the Black and Black-Irish male conversion from eligible to approved shows a decrease from 55% to 40% (a significant decrease of 15%). A second significant difference between Black or Black-Irish male artists and male artists overall is in the ineligibility rates, where there is an 18-point differential (55% to 73%).

Ineligibility Data 2021: Conclusion

The ineligibility data shows that the main reasons for being deemed ineligible are related to missing documents, including CVs, statements of practice, or evidence of work. On that basis, there is little evidence identifiable in the data of a consistent pattern of discrimination in the reasons given or practices likely to produce a coherent explanation for the high rate of ineligibility in the 2021 data.

There are a number of cases where the reason given is not sufficiently clear as to give good guidance to an artist deemed ineligible, and where there is a risk that lack of transparency may conceal patterns of bias. Reasons provided for ineligibility in Arts Council decision letters are very brief. In some cases, there are helpful additions, as in the following example:

> "Your application is considered to align more successfully with the purposes, etc., of the Music Bursary Award rather than with those of the Next Generation Artists Award".

However there is a significant proportion of decision letters which are not only without additional feedback, but also use terms that do not convey clearly the contravention. The Arts Council might consider reviewing the terms used in decision letters to avoid ambiguity and to provide clearer understanding of reasons for ineligibility, including, for example, those categorised as 'unspecified missing materials' or those described simply as 'non-compliant'. More than 20 percent of all ineligible applications were given such feedback. Black applicants are overrepresented in both those categories. The generic nature of feedback in particular may be a further obstacle for marginalised artists in securing funding in future, and as such should be considered for review.

While there was no clear pattern in the ineligibility data related to the reasons given for ineligibility which might have particularly affected Black or Black-Irish artists, the profile of the artists and awards appears to be more likely to have impacted the current statistics. The high rate of Black and Black-Irish artists in 2021 whose applications have been deemed ineligible have been demonstrated to be most likely male, and to apply in the Music sector. This art form alone produced the highest number and proportion of ineligible applications amongst Black or Black-Irish artists. There are several possible explanations for this. The most likely is that outreach in this sector to Black and Black-Irish artists has increased the diversity of applications, but has not ensured the quality of those applications (either in terms of preparation or knowledge of the process). This might in turn be because of a limited range of people in contact with this group who can advise applicants on their applications or help to review them.

However the low number of Black or Black-Irish female applicants is also cause for concern across a wide range of art forms, and warrants further investigation. The rate of success of

these applicants suggests that the quality of applications made is very high, and this might suggest that only the most visibly successful female artists are being encouraged or supported to apply for funding.

Drawing on the questions arising from the analysis of the statistical data available and the in-depth analysis of this data, a number of key questions are identified for further exploration. The qualitative interviews will explore primarily the factors affecting the quality of the applications made, and secondly, the factors affecting significant increase in applications from male Black or Black-Irish artists in the music sector, and continuing low rates of application from female Black or Black-Irish artists.

Artist perspectives

Seventeen Black or Black-Irish artists and 4 representatives of arts organisations were recruited for individual interview during February and March 2023.

The criteria for selection set out by the Arts Council required participants to have applied for Arts Council funding on at least one previous occasion. This excluded a large number of potential participants who might have commented on awareness of funding or their decision not to apply, but was deemed necessary to understand the challenges arising for artists in the application process.

Participants were recruited through social media accounts of the Arts Council and of Lucy Michael Research, and through established networks of Black Irish organisations by Lucy Michael Research. All participants were compensated for their time in line with the Arts Council *Paying the Artist* Policy.

The interviews particularly sought to explore:
- factors affecting the increase of applications from Black or Black-Irish artists in certain sectors, and underrepresentation overall of female Black artists
- factors affecting the quality of applications
- opportunities to increase awareness of Arts Council funding opportunities and supports available
- opportunities to develop funding application supports which would benefit this and other marginalised groups

The interview schedule and invitation text were approved by the Arts Council Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion before publication. The interviews were around one hour in length, and were recorded and transcribed by the research team. The sample included a mix of artists by gender, nationality, art form, career stage, age and migration status. Less than half of the participants' most recent application was successful (41%), regardless of funding history. The participants' identities are anonymised. The interview schedule is attached as an appendix.

Awareness of Arts Council and other funding

Most participants reported (59%) low awareness of the Arts Council before applying. Few knew about the range of services and events provided by the arts council or what art forms were included under its remit.

> *"I had no clue. Like, I didn't even know the Arts Council existed until I did that diversity project. Like, honestly, it's almost feels like if you're not in, you're not in like, if you don't, if you're not in, like artistic circles. It's not really that obvious." (Artist)*

Even amongst applicants who have made several applications, and who have been funded by other organisations, there is a shared view that the Arts Council is not well known amongst Black and Black-Irish artists generally and that the nature of Arts Council outreach and

promotion is not strategically placed to increase awareness of its activities amongst groups marginalized in the arts sector more broadly.

> *"It's like I was aware of the Arts Council, I didn't really know about funds made available for individuals in the kind of grants that were there. That wasn't something I was aware of." (Artist)*

> *"We weren't informed on that, like, you know, we're not, it's not really advertised or anything, because I think it's just a small selection of people that know about this, and keep it to themselves." (Artist)*

Three participants were mid-career before they became aware of the Arts Council or its funding schemes. Only a minority of the participants showed high awareness of the Arts Council (29%), mostly people who had made multiple applications. The awareness of the Arts Council among participants was assessed based on whether they indicated understanding of the organisation role and aims, and how long they had been aware of the Arts Council at the time of applying.

Nearly two-thirds of the participants (65%) indicated that they actively research funding opportunities by attending events and reading newsletters. The second most common means was via established networks of artists and friends (59%). Emerging Black artists benefit particularly from a small number of organisations invested in their support, such as through regular notifications of opportunities and promotion of networking opportunities. A third (35%) of participants found opportunities by speaking with other artists regularly, particularly across genres because this was less competitive. Less than a quarter (24%) of participants indicated typically finding funding through social media.

More than half (53%) had made only one application to the Arts Council while the rest (47%) had made more than one. The most applications by a single participant was 8. Among participants that had made previous applications, participants with a previously successful application were a minority (22%), but those with a past successful application had received an award more than once. Four successful applications were the highest number of awards received by any of the participants, over a 9 year period.

Reason for Applying

Over three-quarters (76%) of the participants became aware of the last funding opportunity they applied for through their professional networks in the arts. More than half (53%) had the funding opportunity shared with them through word of mouth, while socializing or at an event. Just under a quarter (24%) heard of the opportunity from another arts organisation. A minority (41%) of artists became aware of the Arts Council funding opportunity through an active funding search or subscription to Arts Council updates.

The most common primary reason for an application was to provide some income for the artist (41%), particularly where it would allow them to cut back from full-time work to allow time for their development. Over a third (35%) of the participants said the primary reason was being encouraged by someone else to apply. Participants who were encouraged by an arts organization to apply were also supported in making their application. In three cases participants said that without the significant impact of the recommendation and support,

they would not have applied otherwise. Most participants (72%) said that the awards criteria were off-putting and felt very constrained by these. One artist waited to apply until they had an Irish passport, as they had misunderstood the eligibility criteria. More than half of the participants commented on the lack of diversity amongst funded artists announced and found this a deterrent to application.

> *"Because I know many Black artists in Ireland, who actually do create music, who do good music. But then when it comes to funding their music, the last thing to think about – they don't even necessarily think about funding from government or from the Arts Council. So I will say that the communication needs to be better, probably they need to promote better in Black communities. And try to bring people who are similar to them. Because if I see someone who looks like me, who has gotten the award, it's kind of making me more confident to apply and probably more competent to talk with the person." (Artist)*

Application Challenges

The most common issues in completing Arts Council applications were the complexity of the application forms and supporting materials, as well as the unclear language used in the questions and guidance provided (both 71%). The length of the application (53%) was a challenge, and experienced participants noted the increasing length based on the award category. Although participants understood the rationale for longer applications, they found it excessive, often requiring one to two months to complete a single application.

Emerging artists commonly faced challenges related to their understanding of funding constraints and the application process. These challenges included comprehending application requirements, navigating online forms, and seeking assistance with proposal development and editing. As a result, artists often needed to contact the Arts Council multiple times for clarification. However, they expressed a lack of awareness about the availability of support, which led to uncertainty about the impact of repeated information requests on their application's success. To address these issues and support applicants, particularly first-time applicants, there is a need for improved clarity, guidance, and accessibility.

> *"It could just be a huge endeavour and look, that can be very daunting. And maybe that's part of the process to turn people off of the experience. But if you're asking working artists to take the time to do this unpaid work, that becomes a bit of an issue." (Artist)*

Confusion surrounding fund restrictions and a lack of clarity regarding timelines for award notifications, fund disbursement, and project completion were additional sources of frustration. The application format itself proved less suitable for artists in certain genres, as it focused heavily on written communication, which did not align with their preferred style of expression. Artists working in music, photography, and dance struggled to convey the essence of their work through writing and often sought external consultation to navigate supporting materials. One artist pointed out that for many marginalised artists the format of applications is severely restricting, and much more aligned with arts management than the reality of solo artists trying to fund their professional development.

"Can someone make a video? Can you do a treatment presentation? Can someone record themselves presenting the idea, and that be submitted? So it's more open to how the Arts Council receive it? If you let someone do something the way that they intend to do it, you're going to actually see this is what we're going to get." (Artist)

An equal share of the participants said guidance was useful as not. Most participants who said it was useful had made multiple applications and therefore were more familiar with the guidance. Experienced applicants however still commented on the complexity of the guidance. Among those who said it was not useful, the main issues included the dated nature of the website and the video guides available online, and in terms of the written guidance alongside the application the complexity and length of the guidance.

The complexity and unclear language used in the application questions and guidance further exacerbated the difficulties faced by artists. Participants frequently found themselves unsure about the intended meaning of the questions, and the guidance sometimes appeared contradictory, adding to the confusion. It was a common sentiment among participants that the guidance could be made simpler or more brief, with one participant commenting that they felt the sheer length of guidance was designed to purposely intimidate applicants.

Problems with the Arts Council's online application system presented particular challenges for first-time applicants and those working full-time, as they did not anticipate the issues nor did they have guidance on these, since most guidance they sought or received from their networks were on the content of their proposal. System issues included incompatibility with MAC/Apple computer software, and reliance on OpenOffice software, system crashes and application lockouts. A participant was unable to continue their application despite providing the Arts Council with a one-week notice of the issue. Participants described the system as outdated and expressed doubts about the prompt resolution of these issues by the Arts Council staff. Difficulties in providing supporting materials were mentioned by only 5 participants, and these were particularly challenging to collate in certain artforms, including theatre and visual arts. Confirming venues and collaborators and securing letters of support were common challenges which Black artists faced under time pressure.

For mid-career and established artists, the application process remains challenging. The primary difficulties lie in unclear language and minimal guidance when it comes to selecting appropriate funding opportunities and creating compelling proposals. Advice from experienced applicants can help address this problem, but limited networks and mentorship opportunities disproportionately affect Black artists. Supports suggested included sample applications, more thorough feedback, and interactive days for applications being developed.

Seeking help

More of the participants were confident they understood the award criteria (59%) than not (41%). Participants that had only made one application were more likely to report they were not confident they understood the application criteria, particularly those who lacked support. Most participants (59%) contacted the Arts Council for support with their application or to clarify some details about the application. One artist highlighted that being in contact with the Arts Council regularly over multiple applications had built a rapport and they yielded

better support over time. However the feeling amongst others was divided between those who believed that contact would help to get their name known, and those who felt it might reflect poorly on their application. The remainder (41%) did not contact the Arts Council at all.

> *"I don't know what they would say. Especially if you're still like, ah, how to put this into words. And then you're speaking to the people that you're applying to it feels almost like failing before you start"* (Artist)

Participants that contacted the Arts Council were slightly more likely to call (55%) than email (45%), however regardless of the means they contacted the Arts Council, there were common issues raised around the difficulty in contacting the Arts Council and slow response. In one case a participant waited over 3 months for a response to an email, even with support from more experienced people in the sector contacting the team to ask for information.

Participants felt they did not receive the answers they needed, and 2 participants recounted how when they attended the workshops provided by the Arts Council to explain application guidelines, they did not get to ask questions and the few questions answered received broad responses. In fact they felt the workshop was a waste of their time.

Participants in the area of music particularly described 'poor communication' as one of the biggest deterrents to applying to the Arts Council, both in terms of pre-application information and feedback. This artist observed that the issue of responsiveness has to be seen from the point of view of artists who are consistently marginalised in the sector as a whole.

> *"The fear, you know, once you get rejected once, twice, three times, it's like, I don't know if they're going to see my email. Am I just another number in the emails that they get every day?"*

Three-quarters (75%) of participants used some form of support outside the Arts Council. Most often this support came from their personal network or peers in the same sector. Three participants received expert advice from members of other arts organisations via their management. It was common for participants to get support from other artists, particularly those who had previously completed applications to the arts council, but the most likely to succeed received support from artists who had previously won an award. One participant managed to get in contact with a previous winner of the award they were applying for leading to a successful application. The most useful support was helping the applicant with the language of the application and framing their responses. Two early career artists believed that the regulations prohibited them from getting assistance in completing the application form.

Having an experienced professional in the arts sector assist with the application was the best guarantee of getting support from the Arts Council. Three participants described 'being known' by the Arts Council as crucial to getting information to ensure their application met the necessary criteria to qualify.

> *"He definitely spoke to them over the phone multiple times, and all through the process of filing this in, it took at least a month, maybe 2 months. And lots of back and forth between him and the Arts Council and between me and him. We had multiple meetings about it to check things…"*

"So the fact that you could call someone, I would only know that because [of him], I never knew that. And so I had a few friends also who were applying. And they didn't call anyone until I told them" (Artist)

Support for First Time Applicants

Participants unanimously expressed the view that insufficient support is provided for first-time applicants. Even those who found the provided guidance useful believed that the Arts Council alone did not offer enough support for a first-time applicant to have a high likelihood of success.

Participants emphasized the value of individualized assistance and the role of networks and expert advice in improving their chances of success. The most common recommendation put forth by participants was the need for personalized, one-on-one support. They felt that without someone to guide them, there were many aspects of the application process they would not have understood. Successful applicants attributed their achievements to the support received from their networks and expert consultations. One participant however expressed very low confidence in future success, since application was unsuccessful despite having extensive support from a team with extensive experience in writing Arts Council applications, as well as seeking support from the Arts Council directly.

"It feels like the application process works in favour of those with more experience, but highlights that Black artists are at a disadvantage getting that experience. Also there's unequal access to endorsement. It feels there is bias in the selection process [toward] those who are Irish, have connections, fit the norm." (Artist)

Short time frames between first hearing of an award opportunity and the deadline affected the capacity of most first-time applicants to plan and execute a detailed proposal. This was particularly the case for the majority who were working full-time and relied on newsletters from arts organisations to get news of funding opportunities, such as this first-time applicant:

"I didn't find out about it early enough. When you found out we're like a day or two before. It was about to close. Like I didn't hear about it from anywhere. On their website, they wrote something about contacting them like days before. So, at that time, it would have been too late to contact them." (Artist)

One response to this is to consider outreach to first-time applicants outside of the awards calendar, highlighting the function of the Arts Council, showcasing available supports and encouraging early engagement with funding calls.

"I think if it was more visible, but you could speak to them, and that would be good" (Artist)

Other suggestions particularly for first-time applicants included sample applications or templates for elements such as budgets, and advice on timeline planning, securing venues and reference letters, and other relevant materials.

There was a common perception that the Arts Council would never approve a first-time applicant. Some participants expressed a view they had heard from more established artists that first-time applications are automatically rejected.

> *"They were like, look, the thing about the Arts Council is you need to get rejected a couple of times - which is a big, big belief - you're going to get at least one 'no', probably two 'no's for a 'yes'." (Artist)*

For artists who had already received funding from other organisations, such as the speaker above, this felt like an arbitrary barrier. This also caused frustration when artists were advised to incrementally increase the value of their applications over time. They were keen to get on the "bottom rung of the ladder" as quickly as possible.

> *"It feels like the Arts Council getting to know you is part of the process of applying for bigger awards." (Artist)*

Increasing the confidence of potential first-time applicants in their own capacity to secure funding, and mitigating against perceptions that first time application are arbitrarily dismissed will be important to ensuring the necessary increase of Black artists who are eligible for and who are awarded funding.

Confidence in the Arts Council

Four factors determined the level of confidence in the fairness of the process: the artists' own history of success in applications, poor or no feedback on the application, lack of ethnic diversity amongst funded artists, and concerns of bias within the selection committee.

The quality of feedback from the Arts Council was a significant point of frustration for the artists interviewed. Like the findings of the research team in section 1, artists expressed surprise at the generic nature of the feedback on their applications and the ambiguity contained in the standard wordings used. One artist, who felt he had a very strong application, and excellent letters of reference, particularly felt that more detailed comments would be crucial to his confidence in making a future application. But this was also true for artists who were successful.

> *"A clear response will be fair as a start. So you know, if you're unsuccessful, you know why you weren't successful. And if you're successful, you know why you're successful." (Artist)*

Generic feedback, above many other factors, raised concerns that their application may not have been considered on an equal basis with other applicants.

Although no participant said outright they did not trust the Arts Council process, all 17 artists expressed some doubts based on their experience of systemic exclusion and discrimination in the arts sector.

> *"The arts sector is run by straight old white males, that is off-putting because it does not represent the people who live in Ireland, and work in the arts. It makes others feel like an afterthought. This feeling is added to the*

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fact the Arts Council is seen to do the same things year after year, same events, same groups." (Artist)

"I don't fully trust any institution period. But I think I have more of a sense that the intention to do the work is there. It falls down on the panel, because the Arts Council doesn't make these decisions unilaterally. Ireland has made a commitment to amplifying female voices, but they tend to be white, Irish female voices. But they've made that commitment. And you see it how the Arts Council has funded organizations strategically. And it's trying to get that same groundswell of support from Ireland with Black artists." (Artist)

Only a minority (13%) of the participants felt confident they could trust the fairness of the Arts Council process. Those who were confident were more likely to have had a previously successful Arts Council application. Artists who have been involved in mentoring and supporting emerging artists offered a particular insight into the benefits of diversity amongst support and selection teams. Particularly having representation of artists from marginalised groups means they can "*point out blind spots where they exist, where some people were holding a very different standard of criteria for one artist and then another.*" (Artist)

"I think it helps to have a more diverse panel of people looking at these applications [to be] instrumental in helping fund artists of colour. Acknowledge that the work they want to do was of value. And that though the language skills might not be what other people are looking for, the work itself is of value." (Artist)

"If the Arts Council could acknowledge that a lot of decisions are based on networking, name dropping, who you know, what level of prestige you can bring to this project. Some people have great ideas and don't have the prestige behind it, or the names of people, you know what I mean? And that's problematic." (Artist)

Despite the reservations expressed by the majority, nearly all (88%) of the applicants anticipate applying again in the future. Reasons included believing their next application was more likely to be successful, having a successful application, or lack of other options for funding.

"I'm never going to tell anyone not to go for it, like it's a good opportunity. But it's catch-22. They are the only body in Ireland that does give people the funding they need to create the things they need." (Artist)

Confidence to apply would be assisted by seeing increased efforts by the Arts Council to better support all applicants and targeted supports for minority applicants. There is also a belief among some participants that Black artists are compelled to choose between exaggerating their Irishness to fit in or emphasizing their ethnic and cultural background to stand out.

"There is human bias involved that can never really allow it to be objective, there's always an agenda for what they find interesting. It feels like you have to mention Ireland a lot." (Artist)

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> *"If they were smart, they'd have a line that says something like, we do not discriminate against grounds of ethnicity, race, gender, religion, sexuality. … That's quite different to saying we welcome applications."* (Artist)

The importance of seeing diverse representation amongst Arts Council award recipients, partners and staff cannot be underestimated. This was one of the most common sentiments expressed by participants, regardless of artform, gender, age or career stage.

> *"The more people I hear are actually getting it like, like the more I'd be encouraged to apply"* (Artist)

> *"I would say that the Arts Council, when you see anything to do with these people, do I see any representations of people like me? On the board? Or their staff? No, right? And that's what needs to change."* (Artist)

> *"It needs to be a thing where everybody can access it, everybody can have some sort of guidance, it can be a fair game. I know somebody that's gotten it, like, two years in a row. And I'm just like, Okay, that's quite biased."* (Artist)

> *"I would be interested in knowing how many first-time Black applicants are successful. … I'd say I think the process might be fair for certain people in certain sectors, I don't think it's fair in music."* (Artist)

Amongst younger Black applicants, the intersectional nature of their marginalisation by ethnicity, age and socioeconomic background was contrary in all respects in their perception of 'typical' Arts Council award recipients.

> *"It would be good to see more local artists, more Black artists, even white artists from here getting that kind of funding because I feel like it really is the same heads that really do get money."* (Artist)

> *"I'm saying it's just the feeling, of not being included. I don't know if that makes sense. But you can't feel it. It's kind of like colour, they already have their people that they would give money to. Okay, let's give everybody a chance to also get it. But they already had the top 10 or top 20. You know, done."* (Artist)

All participants expressed their willingness to promote the Arts Council and encourage others to apply for awards, irrespective of their own application outcomes and personal experiences. Even those who had faced challenges and setbacks in their own applications acknowledged the importance of Black artists applying for funding. They exhibited a strong commitment to promoting the Arts Council, encouraging others to apply for awards, and assisting fellow applicants.

> *"I'm already actively encouraging others to apply"* (Artist)

> *"The Arts Council need to actively tackle the assumption amongst Black artists that the Arts Council isn't for them, and deal with perceptions that they will be rejected if their name and nationality isn't Irish."* (Artist

> *"I feel like if more and more people were more open with each other and collaborated more, and actually were more aware of these things, and actually even put it out there. Workshops [with Black artists] will be a great idea, even announcements on different socials and stuff like that, putting it out there on radio, putting out in different platforms, even getting people that have successfully received their awards to actually talk about it even more." (Artist)*

While the level of confidence varied among participants regarding how much support they could offer, they all expressed a readiness to provide whatever assistance they could to other Black artists. Notably, participants who had received support with their own applications were more inclined to recognize the value of helping others navigate the application process and understood the potential impact of such support.

> *"Until people see that there's a pathway for them, they see people that look like them in this form, in this work, getting the funding, being celebrated having, you know, roots and success in this field. It's going to be a case of 'oh that's for them', [not me]." (Artist)*

Their experiences and insights underscored the importance of fostering a supportive and collaborative environment within the arts community, where individuals are encouraged to share knowledge, offer guidance, and collectively strive for success.

Challenges Experienced

The most common challenge reported by participants was finding opportunities for work and networking (71%), with significant difficulties finding someone willing to hire them and particularly meeting requirements that they perform for free or for a low amount that kept their growth limited. Access to services and venues was the second most common challenge identified (59%), with participants stating that they felt they were ignored or not welcome. This was not only an issue for finding venues for performance but also experiences of groups, studios and galleries declining to help support, display, or promote their work. Two-thirds of participants felt that their ethnicity affected their opportunities and success as an artist overall, and half (53%) believed that differential treatment based on their ethnicity was a significant factor in the obstacles they faced.

Differential treatment for Black or migrant artists

Artists' organisations and venues were observed by these artists to be more likely to 'take risks' on White Irish peers who were seen as promising, while Black artists were commonly seen as unlikely to draw audiences and to be understood by White Irish audiences. The failure of the sector to engage with the diversity of new audiences (particularly those who share an ethnic background with the artist) was a particular challenge for emerging artists in securing platforms for their work. The demand, particularly for migrant artists or emerging artists, to 'bring' an engaged audience was a hurdle that white Irish peers seemed to be better able to jump.

Almost all of the participants expressed caution in assigning racial discrimination as a factor affecting their careers, but the repeated and shared experiences with other Black artists

present a sound evidential basis for doing so. Just under two-thirds of the participants felt their ethnicity had some significant impact on the barriers they experienced as artists. Only a small portion (6%) of participants felt their ethnicity had not impacted their opportunities at all, but highlighted that in their arts sector, dance, racial diversity and collaboration across many factors was common.

> *"In this country they say there are no high profile black artists, but when they apply there is gatekeeping stopping them from having the experiences that would lead to them becoming successful." (Artist)*

The artists were able to share a wide range of examples from professional disrespect and exclusion to explicit discrimination and even harassment in the course of their work from venue owners, events teams, promoters and directors. Direct comparison with white artists at the same career stage is the most common way in which participants understood their experiences of discrimination in cases where there was no explicit discriminatory language. Participants also commonly referred to the need to present excellence compared to their White Irish peers in order to be considered for even the most basic roles and opportunities.

> *"In my experience, White artists got more opportunities, even less experienced groups with the right Irish look were put forward for high profile international gigs. This gave those less experienced performers more opportunities overall in the long term. It feels Black artists are almost used as props on stage." (Artist)*

> *"I've received all this funding from the Arts Council and have been relatively successful and pretty well known in the field, but I still have a very hard time in Ireland. So if I am having those barriers to access in the arts, I can't imagine, you know, what it's like for others." (Artist)*

Just under half (47%) of the participants indicated they had no or little support starting out as artists and this was a barrier to their progression. Artists who came through an art school or college were less likely to report this issue but they too reported having access to a smaller professional network than their White Irish peers once they had left that environment.

> *"We used to have meetups, we used to have mixer events, we used to have gigs, they used to try to make us talk to each other. So it helped me expand my network. And we used to have tutorials, you could literally book a tutorial with any lecturer…in fact, in one of the tutorials I actually heard about the Arts Council, because the lecturer told me about the whole thing and it might be useful to check them out. I met also musicians who didn't study in the school, but like, someone knows someone else and recommends you. So I got loads of recommendations from people I met." (Artist)*

Access to networks in the sector was seen as the primary mitigating factor against the marginality of Black artists. But sustaining a network, particularly without funding to participate in common activities or remain of interest to other artists was challenging. Black artists felt their network relied on their success, as much as their success relied on their network.

> *"In this industry, it is good to have a certain skill set. But it's also good to know somebody. The more people I started knowing the more opportunity started coming my way. Like, it was hard enough, being a Black artist in Ireland trying to find opportunities, but then being friendly with people networking, like getting to know them on a more personal level as well. It just became easier to just get opportunities, you know." (Artist)*

Having a network that provided a wide range of opportunities is key for Black artists, as they felt they are more likely to be judged by deficit than positive attribute, as in other sectors. To counter this, they needed not only excellence, but a wide range of experience so that they could not be found lacking in any area. This puts a huge amount of psychological and financial pressure on emerging and mid-career artists.

> *"They already had that support. They had people that knew what to say and what to do. And they've already gotten that support. But as I say, for us, we have had to look for that support for a long time." (Artist)*

> *"Experience and track record is a big thing. And we're not being given the space to get all these bits of experience or it's more difficult, it seems." (Artist)*

> *"The other artist I know who seems to get loads of stuff, she's got a CV as long as her arm, but you've got to often have exhibited in lots of different places and had exhibitions. Well I'm not an Irish artist in a lot of galleries' eyes. So that's not going to happen. I feel very excluded."(Artist)*

Artists who came to Ireland as migrants or who were artists as a second career felt this issue of connection scarcity more prominently. Those with poor networks felt this greatly impacted their progression as artists as they felt Ireland is a country where social connections are important, and feel those who have built up better networks are at a clear advantage. There were examples of clear racial discrimination in the experiences of Black artists trying to expand or deepen their professional networks.

> *"The more of us that apply, the greater the chances of one of us getting success within numbers. Black artists have to look at that. Those that applied have already made the leap … we're the ones that applying, so we're already kind of got over that hurdle, and we're applying, how many are not?" (Artist)*

Additional factors affecting Black artists

The discussion of additional factors affecting Black artists opportunities and success highlight systemic issues of institutional racism in the arts sector in Ireland, particularly concerning the devaluation of Black genres, underrepresentation of Black artists, unrealistic expectations, and the socioeconomic challenges faced by migrants and second-generation individuals.

The lack of diverse representation in selection committees of arts organisations was highlighted as a problem, with participants expressing concerns that committee members were less likely to be familiar with different cultures, including Black arts. The underrepresentation of Black artists in Ireland further limited opportunities for committee

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members to be exposed to Black culture and appreciate the value of Black artists. A stigma associated with Black genres, particularly rap and urban-style music led to a devaluation of Black artists' work compared to similar White artists.

> *"The current belief is that there are no black artists at standard in this country to do this sort of work. And that is a fallacy. And it spits in the face of all the great black artists that exist in this country and the ones who have emigrated or who are abroad. They bring white British people over all the time to do the work all the time. They have no problem justifying bringing white people from all over the world to do artistic work, then they should have no problem bringing black people of artistic merit. If they don't, if they can't find them in Ireland, bring them from elsewhere and start developing that pool of artists because the reality is representation matters." (Artist)*

There is a shared perception that novelty and innovation are valued only within a framework that centres white Irish cultural elements, and this reinforces selective cohorts receiving funding, opportunities, promotion, representation, connections. This is reflected in the lack of promotion of Black or minority ethnic local performers in Irish media and performance spaces. Black artists report feeling a particular pressure to adapt their ideas to fit the expectations of a 'mainstream' audience which centres white Irishness, which they learn from key 'gatekeepers' in the sector. This heightens the challenges faced by Black artists.

> *"I also think that there's something in the translation of ideas, as I said, where it feels like we have to be Ireland, Ireland, Ireland, Ireland, it feels like whatever it is a certain type of art has to fit into a known shape and you know, even just like the way of applications, it's like they're looking for specific words or phrases, and people don't know." (Artist)*

The centring of Irish whiteness in the arts sector generally means that there are few opportunities to experience Black artists' art on its own terms, and the artists interviewed acknowledge their contribution to that landscape, observing astutely that financial necessity means that art 'on our own terms' is likely to be marginalised (even if it is celebrated as part of a separate scheme, festival or platform) or unfunded.

> *"Nobody has seen Black Irish excellence on these stages, maybe a lone artist. But not more. It's not a regular occurrence. And this is what I mean about unconscious bias." (Artist)*

> *"What often is the case with people of colour and Black artists particularly is that in order to even get on the stage, you have to have had such a huge demonstration of excellence, just to get the bare minimum. Whereas promotion of regular everyday decent artists, a white artist, it's easy. But to be a Black artist, you have to be better than good to justify them giving you an opportunity." (Artist)*

Unique looks, sounds, styles, and presentations often receive pushback as they challenge expectations, reinforcing systemic barriers and maintaining a lack of cultural diversity within the industry. The lack of a vibrant urban music scene deprives a number of Black musicians of essential venues and performance opportunities. Networking and accessing opportunities often necessitate personal connections, perpetuating systemic exclusion and favouritism

within the arts sector. Labels and representation often exploit emerging Black artists, restricting their potential and perpetuating systemic inequalities.

Across all artforms, the lack of available training and experience opportunities exacerbates the systemic gap, requiring Black artists to invest more time catching up with their White Irish peers. Mid-career artists particularly highlighted challenges faced by marginalized arts in Ireland. Emerging art forms that deviate from the traditional styles encounter bias and limited recognition, making it difficult to secure funding. Frustration was expressed over the lack of understanding and support from the Arts Council, with participants feeling that their art forms were not fully appreciated.

The participants also expressed frustration with the expectations placed on Black artists to produce or shape content in particular ways because of their ethnicity. Due to the low representation of Black artists, there were few points of reference for comparison. As a result, the few known Black artists were seen as experienced and highly trained professionals, creating unrealistic expectations for other Black artists. This pressure to exceed expectations extended to their applications to the Arts Council, where participants felt they had to emphasize their ethnicity and heritage to increase their chances of receiving funding. They felt compelled to create projects focused on teaching people about their culture rather than sharing their own unique perspective. Additionally, there was a perceived preference by the Arts Council for projects rooted in traditional Irish culture, making it more challenging for artists with less familiar backgrounds.

> *"Stop expecting minorities to educate other people about racism, let people tell their own stories, art is not meant to be controlled." (Artist)*

> *"Having advocates on the panels is where the work really has to begin. First and foremost people who are really aware and believe in creating a diverse artistic landscape that promotes Black work and Black art in Ireland. It shouldn't be relegated to the fringe. And that's what it has become. At the Fringe Festivals, we see people of colour, we see Black people, but in Arts Council funded works and projects, they're not there, whether as applicants or as participants." (Artist)*

Accountability and distrust were major concerns amongst mid-career artists. Participants felt the need to demonstrate higher levels of accomplishment compared to less experienced White Irish artists in order to be considered for awards. Inconsistent decision-making and lack of transparency in funding allocations added to their feelings of frustration and mistrust.

Participants with refugee or migrant backgrounds, whether first or second generation, faced socioeconomic challenges that affected their personal and professional networks. These individuals and their parents often encountered difficulties related to job security, language barriers, and limited opportunities for establishing long-term social connections. Consequently, they had weaker access to social and economic resources necessary to support a creative career compared to their White Irish counterparts. This lack of resources and support placed them at a higher risk when starting their careers, and even those who had been involved in the arts sector for years still felt they lagged behind their White Irish peers. In addition, they found themselves more likely to be directed towards integration-based

funding for community groups, and less towards arts sector opportunities. Moreover, the community sector provided little opportunity for development and often does not cover the costs of the work developed.

> *"Migrant groups are constantly asked to put on cultural events for free and it actually costs us money to do it. We can't afford to keep doing that".*
> *(Artist*

These barriers hindered opportunities for Black artists to thrive and limited their access to networks and resources necessary for a successful career in the arts.

Arts organisations perspectives

In addition to the 17 artists interviewed, 4 staff in arts organisations specifically supporting Black artists were interviewed. These participants offer a valuable perspective as individuals who have supported artists in identifying and applying for funding, and who have also made efforts to increase networking opportunities for emerging artists.

A number of recurring themes were visited here, reinforcing the evidence from artists about their experiences in the arts sector and in the obstacles to funding success.
- Networks
- Awareness
- Second career
- Preference for certain genres
- Deterrent effect of language in funding schemes
- Tokenism
- Lack of targeted supports for Black and minority artists
- Niche language creates additional obstacle, especially but not only, for speakers of English as a second language.

Three types of barriers facing Black artists were identified by representatives of arts organisations, largely reflecting the issues already raised by them. Firstly, there is a significant challenge in accessing networks, including those of similar artists, artists in other sectors for collaboration, labels, representations, and networks that provide information about funding opportunities. Many minority artists lack personal or family networks within the industry, putting them at a disadvantage compared to their White Irish counterparts. This issue starts from early on as many minorities do not have personal/family networks that would give them connections within the industry as many are only first or second generation. This limited access to networks has a greater impact on art forms that require collaboration, such as theatre and dance. Secondly, there is a lack of representation for Black artists, both due to poor access to networks and a biased perception within the arts sector against the unfamiliar. This creates a cycle where Black artists have fewer opportunities, leading to limited exposure to representation professionals and further hindering their inclusion. The arts sector still has bias against certain genres of arts, seeing traditional Irish arts as better and seeing arts associated with the Black communities as lesser. This would be particularly true for the likes of rap music which is still heavily associated with Black culture. And this difference can be seen in the difference in promotion of Black musicians in Ireland compared to England or the United States. In the arts sector there can often be an emphasis on culture, with artists often

being asked the highlight the Irish aspect of their work or highlight how their ethnicity influences their work.

Thirdly, Ireland lags behind in terms of racial inclusion, as evidenced by the support and opportunities offered to emerging and professional artists from minoritised backgrounds. Participants have witnessed less experienced or less suited White artists being given opportunities that were not even considered for Black artists. This lack of diversity is prevalent in positions of leadership, management, and decision-making within the arts sector. There is a continuing issue of tokenism in representation, where one Black or minority artist is championed as a success, but often only one. This is limited diversity being promoted, which can make some minorities feel the arts sector only has spaces for a small number of minorities to be successful. This limited promotion of diversity makes some artists feel they should not apply as they are not seeing themselves in who is successful.

Other notable barriers include limited awareness of opportunities in the arts sectors, inadequate guidance and advertising, the need for Black artists to balance their art with other work due to financial constraints, concerns over bias in policies, bias against certain genres of art associated with Black communities, emphasis on cultural aspects of art that may require artists to highlight their ethnicity, tokenism in representation, and the use of complicated language and jargon in the arts sector, which creates confusion and disadvantages artists who are not familiar or confident in using such language. Three of the four participants from arts organisations agreed that these barriers are much more significant for Black artists.

There was significant agreement between these four participants about the extent to which barriers are specific to, and deeply impact the success of, Black artists in Ireland. Racial discrimination, closed professional networks, lack of mentorship and marginalization into niche platforms create the context for low awareness of funding opportunities and other opportunities and inadequate understanding of requirements for funding. Once an artist seeks to apply for funding, a number of other obstacles have a significant impact: the framing of funding award schemes, the language used in application forms and guidance, the lack of available feedback in preparation, and the poor feedback given to artists after a decision.

Conclusion

The barriers faced by Black artists in Ireland are multifaceted and interconnected. They include a preference for more experienced artists, limited representation and opportunities, lack of mentors and support networks, insufficient training opportunities, biases favouring familiar art forms, difficulties in accessing networks and joining groups, and reliance on connections for access to venues and opportunities. Overcoming these challenges is crucial to creating a more inclusive and equitable arts sector that embraces and supports the diverse talents and voices of Black artists in Ireland.

Early career artists, in particular, struggle to obtain financial support, equipment, and opportunities as they often find themselves overshadowed by more experienced artists. The arts sector tends to prioritize established artists, perpetuating a cycle where opportunities are more readily given to those who have already had exposure or are associated with well-known names or brands. This preference for familiarity and existing networks hampers the chances of early career artists, hindering their access to funding and limiting their growth prospects. A lack of representation and visibility in the arts sector often leads to the voices and perspectives of Black artists being marginalized, and resulting biases manifest in forms such as preconceived notions about the type of art that Black artists do or should create and, importantly for funding success, doubts about their ability to produce high-quality work. This marginalisation makes it challenging for Black artists to access funding opportunities, as the selection processes may be implicitly or explicitly biased towards more mainstream and/or established artists. It results in a systemic form of racial discrimination which reproduces a small number of funded Black artists.

In many respects, the issues of representation and access to networks reflect the problems faced by Black workers in other sectors of the labour market. But the extensive impact of professional networks, the nature of freelance work, the lack of transparency in hiring, support and funding of artists across the sector and the necessity of access to informal communications and personal relationships to learn and mimic the discourse and culture of the sector amplify the opportunity for repeated and persistent marginalisation of certain groups.

The absence of mentors or support networks tailored to the unique experiences and challenges faced by Black artists in Ireland further compounds the issue. Mentors play a crucial role in providing guidance, advice, and connections to help artists navigate the complex arts landscape. However, Black artists often struggle to find mentors who share similar backgrounds and perspectives, exacerbating the systemic barriers that hinder their progress in the industry. The lack of mentorship not only deprives artists of crucial guidance but also perpetuates the cycle of exclusion, limiting their access to valuable resources and opportunities. Black female artists in this study were more successful in general because of their embeddedness within established arts organisations, but the lower numbers of application from Black women highlight their distance from arts networks and the necessary guidance for funding applications, and they highlighted this as a major challenge particularly affecting them because of this intersection of race and gender.

Additionally, there is a lack of training opportunities for Black artists, further hindering their advancement in the arts sector. While they are expected to possess a high level of understanding and proficiency in their craft, the necessary training and development opportunities to meet those expectations are often lacking. This disparity places Black artists at a disadvantage, as they may be unfairly judged against their peers who have had access to formal training and educational resources. Without proper training opportunities, Black artists face additional hurdles in honing their skills, expanding their artistic horizons, and reaching their full potential.

Confidence in selection processes is an important factor for the Arts Council to consider, given the experience of Black artists in the arts sector generally of discrimination and marginalisation, particularly amplified by gender, age and disability. The low number of Black applicants who declared a disability vis-à-vis other groups in 2022 highlights the particular marginalisation of this group, and particular work will need to be undertaken to address their absence (or invisibility) in the applicant pool.[1] Transparency of selection processes, starting with improved feedback to applicants, and outreach targeted towards racialised and migrant groups (acknowledging the internal diversity of those groups by gender, age and disability as well as other equality-related characteristics including socioeconomic background), will go some way towards improving confidence in the process overall and increase the investment which Black artists are already prepared to make in promoting the Arts Council amongst their peers. The collection and analysis of data in the annual equality reports of the Arts Council, as well as the investigation undertaken in this report, lend to an increased confidence, and are examples of best practice in fulfilment of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty which should be maintained and expanded upon. Positive action for under-represented groups, as permitted by law under the EU Racial Equality Directive, are supported by the regular collection and publication of equality data.

The interview data particularly illuminated the reasons why Black male artists were more likely to struggle with meeting the application criteria in recent awards rounds, especially as first-time applicants and the actions that can be undertaken by the Arts Council to create more equitable outcomes in respect of eligibility rates. More work is necessary to identify the particular issues producing Black female artists low rate of application overall and to develop appropriate interventions to create more equitable outcomes in this respect. It is common in other sectors to find that women candidates are more attuned to potential failure than male candidates and thus apply less frequently for positions where they perceive that they do not meet all of the essential *and* desirable criteria. If this is also the case in respect of arts funding, appropriate interventions would include increasing information about the selection process, increasing transparency about selection decisions (including improving feedback), and highlighting the commitment of the organisation to fairness and sensitivity to gender and racial bias. In other words, similar interventions may produce more equitable outcomes for both male and female Black applicants, but evaluation will be necessary to explore their effectiveness across race and gender.

In order to foster a more inclusive and equitable arts sector, it is crucial to address the gaps in representation, mentorship, and training opportunities for Black artists in Ireland, as well

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[1] Arts Council of Ireland Equality Data 2022 provided to author

as a proven commitment to non-discrimination in the Arts Council and the arts sector as a whole. Creating platforms and initiatives that promote diverse voices and perspectives can help break down barriers and increase opportunities for Black artists to showcase their work. Establishing mentorship programs specifically tailored to the needs of Black artists can provide crucial guidance, support, and networks to navigate the industry. Additionally, investing in training programs and educational resources that target underrepresented communities can help bridge the gap and provide Black artists with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in their artistic pursuits.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed for the Arts Council of Ireland to address the barriers faced by Black artists and promote a more inclusive and equitable arts sector.

1. **Policy Development:**
    -   Fully implement the Arts Council Equality, Human Rights & Diversity Policy & Strategy, including active monitoring of outcomes for marginalised groups in line with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.
    -   Establish explicit goals and strategies to address the underrepresentation of minority ethnic artists in each genre.
    -   Ensure that funding and support programs explicitly address the needs and challenges faced by racialised artists, considering their unique perspectives and artistic practices.
    -   Allocate dedicated funding specifically targeted at supporting minority ethnic artists and arts organisations. This funding should be easily accessible, well-publicized, and accompanied by guidance and support for grant applications.

2. **Application Process:**
    -   Improve clarity and accessibility of the application process, providing detailed guidelines and support materials to assist artists in understanding requirements and navigating online forms.
    -   Enhance transparency in funding decision-making by providing clearer feedback to applicants, outlining the reasons behind funding decisions.
    -   Introduce mechanisms to monitor discriminatory outcomes in the application assessment process.

3. **Professional Development:**
    -   Create mentorship programs that pair emerging racialised and migrant artists with established artists (of all backgrounds) in their respective fields, fostering guidance, networking, and career development.
    -   Facilitate networking events, workshops, and platforms that encourage collaboration between racialised and migrant artists and artists of all ethnic backgrounds, fostering creative exchange and development of professional networks.
    -   Introduce an ambassadorship scheme that supports Black artists as ambassadors, promoting their work and advocating for greater inclusion and representation within the arts sector, to provide leadership as role models, mentors, and advocates for emerging Black artists, helping to amplify their voices and facilitate connections.
    -   Offer targeted training programs and workshops for minority ethnic artists to develop their skills, including language skills, grant writing, marketing, self-promotion, and other areas necessary for career advancement. This could be delivered through community services, arts organisations, or partnerships with educational institutions.

- Improve training for selection panels to address intercultural competence and equity assessments, addressing higher burdens experienced by minority artists in quality and risk assessments as well as expectations of cultural specificity.

4. **Capacity Building with Arts Organisations:**
   - Establish partnerships with other organisations and initiatives leading on equity and diversity in the arts sector, leveraging collective efforts and resources.
   - Encourage and support diversity and inclusivity in artist selection across different art forms. This involves challenging biases and stereotypes and ensuring that artists with minority ethnic backgrounds have equal opportunities to audition and perform or exhibit their work.
   - Encourage arts institutions and organisations to adopt inclusive and representative programming policies that actively seek out and showcase the work of minority ethnic artists. This could be incentivized through funding criteria or recognition programs.
   - Assess the uptake of training and resources by funded arts organisations on diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency, enabling them to better understand and respond specifically to the needs of Black artists.
   - Develop and support artist networks, residencies or other programs which are specifically targeted at groups experiencing discrimination in the arts, and which particularly address the issues of exclusion from venues, events and programming.

5. **Community Engagement and Partnerships:**
   - Facilitate collaborations and partnerships between government departments, arts organisations, ethnic communities, and mainstream artists. This can be achieved through networking events, artist exchanges, joint exhibitions, and projects that encourage dialogue, exchange of ideas, and mutual recognition.
   - Support the establishment and operation of multicultural and minority-led arts organisations that can advocate for the interests of minority ethnic artists, provide resources, mentorship, and facilitate connections with the broader arts sector.
   - Support capacity-building programmes for arts organisations and minoritised artists on co-creating events, workshops, and exhibitions that reflect the interests and cultural identities of different communities.
   - Develop meaningful relationships and partnerships between the Arts Council and diverse community groups and minority cultural organisations, particularly in rural areas, for the promotion of the arts, arts education and opportunities for advancement by minority artists.

6. **Research:**
   - Develop and implement a programme of research to further understand the barriers faced by racialised and migrant artists in the arts sector in general and develop actionable recommendations for the Arts Council, its partners and the wider arts sector.

- Regularly review and update policies and programs based on research findings and feedback from artists and arts organisations.
- Conduct regular EDI evaluations of all substantive areas of Arts Council activities including outreach, funding, and promotion and hiring, including statistical and experiential evidence.

7. **Evaluation**
   - Establish an evaluation schedule for adopted recommendations, including quantitative and qualitative measures and indicators, with dedicated staff and funding appropriate to the scale of activity and timeline.
   - Conduct regular EDI evaluations of all substantive areas of Arts Council activities to inform assessment of performance in line with obligations under Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

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Appendix: Interview Schedules

Interview Schedule

We are a small independent research firm working on equality, with 20 years experience working in the area of race equality. As we said in our invitation email, we have been asked by the Arts Council to carry out research on their behalf.

This interview is about experiences of applying for Arts Council funding. We want to hear from artists about two key things: experiences of applying for funding, and other barriers for Black artists in Ireland.

We have a series of questions to take you through, but you can stop anytime you want to add anything extra, and we will provide a space at the end for you to add anything further. When we write the report, we will not use your name or details about you which would identify you. All experiences of opinions in the report will be presented together. Your name or other identifying information will not be shared in any way with the Arts Council.

We will now review the consent form. Are you happy to start the recording now? Please let me know if you want to stop at any time for a break.

[Interview Questions - ARTIST](#)
[Interview Questions - ARTS ORGANISATION](#)

<u>Interview Questions - ARTIST</u>

1. Can you tell me briefly about your career as an artist, and some of the highlights of that?
2. What were the main challenges for you starting out as an artist in Ireland?
3. Do you think that any of those barriers were more significant because you are a Black artist?

Let me now ask you specifically about the last time you applied to the Arts Council for funding.

4. When did you last apply to the Arts Council for an award?
   a. What was the award for?
   b. Can you tell me a bit about the project you proposed, the budget and the timeline?
5. How did you hear about that funding opportunity?
   a. what made you decide to apply for that particular Arts Council award?
   b. Did you know anything previously about the Arts Council when you applied?
   c. How do you typically find out about or look for funding opportunities?
6. What was the outcome of the award?
   a. If not successful, did you get feedback on why it was not successful?
7. What were the main challenges you found with completing the application for that award?
   a. How useful was the guidance they provided?
   b. Did you think about contacting anyone in the Arts Council for further help?
   c. Did you ask anyone else you know for help? What did they do to help you?
8. Was that the first time you had applied?
   a. If not, please tell me about previous applications you made.
9. Do you think that adequate support is given by the Arts Council for artists applying for awards for the first time?
   a. What supports have you used?
   b. What supports would you like to see provided?
10. How confident are you that you understand the criteria applied by the Arts Council for an award?
11. How confident are you that you can trust in the fairness of the process?
    a. What most affects your trust in the selection process?
12. What would encourage you to apply to the Arts Council for funding again?
    a. Is there anything that is currently discouraging you from applying with the Arts Council again?
13. Had you been funded by any other organisations previously? Can you give me some examples? *(up to 3)*

14. What are the key challenges that Black and Black-Irish artists face <u>specifically</u> with getting funding, do you think?
    a. How do you think that those funding challenges can be addressed by the Arts Council and other arts organisations?
    b. Are there other barriers that are facing Black artists in Ireland which need to be addressed to create a more equal arts environment?
    c. What do you think the Arts Council could do to increase the success of Black and Black-Irish artists applications for funding?
15. Would you encourage other Black artists now to apply for funding with the Arts Council?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

<u>Interview Questions - ARTS ORGANISATION</u>
1. Can you tell me briefly about your organisation and what you do?
2. Tell me about the journey to where you are now - how you have come to specifically support Black artists in Ireland?
3. What are the main challenges for Black artists starting out in Ireland?
4. Do you think that any of those barriers are more significant because they are Black artists?
5. What are the main supports you provide to Black artists?
6. Do you think that there are other supports, informally, that Black artists find working with you?
7. How do you typically find out about or look for funding opportunities for your organisation?

Let me now ask you specifically about the last time you applied as an **organisation** to the Arts Council for funding. <u>I'll ask about individual artists in a moment.</u>
[If never applied for funding for organisation, go to question 14
8. When did you <u>last</u> apply to the Arts Council for funding for your organisation relating to the work of Black artists?
    a. What was the award for?
    b. Can you tell me a bit about the project you proposed, the budget and the timeline?
    c. Did you ask the Arts Council for help or guidance at any stage - and was that helpful?
    d. What was the outcome of the award?
    e. If not successful, did you get feedback on why it was not successful?
9. How did you hear about that funding opportunity?
    a. what made you decide to apply for that particular Arts Council award?
    b. Had you applied previously to the Arts Council?
10. What were the main challenges you found with putting together the application for that award?
11. How confident are you that you understand the criteria applied by the Arts Council for an award when you apply as an <u>organisation</u>?
12. How confident are you that you can trust in the fairness of the process when you apply as an <u>organisation</u>?
13. What would encourage you to apply as an organisation to the Arts Council for funding again?
    a. Is there anything that is currently discouraging you from applying with the Arts Council again?
14. *If never applied for AC funding* - How have you worked with the Arts Council directly or indirectly?
Now, thinking about the **artists you work with**…. Could we just think about one or maybe two Black artists who you know have applied for Arts Council funding?
15. Were you involved with helping in their application in any way? Tell me about that.
16. When did they **last** apply to the Arts Council for an award?
    a. What was the award for?
    b. What was the outcome of the award?
    c. How did they hear about that funding opportunity?
    d. Had they applied to the Arts Council previously?
    e. How do they typically find out about or look for funding opportunities?
17. What were the main challenges they found with completing the application for that award?
    a. Did they approach you or anyone else for help?
    b. Were they able to get expert help with their application?
18. Do you think that adequate support is given by the Arts Council for artists applying for awards for the first time?

      a.   What supports would you like to see provided?

19. How confident are you that you can trust in the fairness of the process when an individual Black artist applies?
20. Are there other organisations than the Arts Council who are funding Black artists working with you?
21. What do you think the Arts Council could do to increase the success of Black and Black-Irish artists applications for funding?
22. Would you encourage other Black artists now to apply for funding with the Arts Council?
23. Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?