

The Arts Council / An Comhairle Ealaíon and the Arts Council of Northern  
Ireland

Joint Research Project into the Living and Working Conditions of  
Artists in Ireland

Context Paper

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## 1. Introduction

There is a deficit of data on professional artists in Ireland<sup>1</sup>. There is no comprehensive repository of data and the amount and quality of existing data varies considerably by region. An understanding of the current cohort of professional artists, their conditions of professional artistic practice and its impact on their work, is essential if effective measures for nurturing the growth of the arts throughout Ireland are to continue to be developed. The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland wish jointly to undertake research on the current living and working conditions of professional artists in Ireland, to begin to address data deficits and provide a baseline that can be systematically updated. The context for such a study is the focus of this paper. Its aim is to highlight the findings, priority development needs and strategic issues from previous related studies undertaken by the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and Arts Council of Northern Ireland [jointly or individually], and other research agents, together with known common sector development needs.

Review of secondary source material, and consultation with a selection of key informants were the main data collection methods used to prepare the context paper<sup>2</sup>. The context essay first addresses the issues of definition and rationale for the research. Existing data on artists in Ireland, and the regulatory and supports framework is then outlined, along with discussion of the changing environment for artists. International research findings and key research issues are then presented.

## 2. Definition of artist

A first research task in investigating the working and living conditions of artists is to define the research population and the research sample. UNESCO's (1980) formal definition of 'Artists' is widely quoted internationally. In this 'Artist' is taken to mean:

*any person who creates or gives creative expression to, or re-creates work of art, who considers his/her artistic creation to be an essential part of his/her life, who contributes in this way to the development of art and culture and who is or asks to be recognised as an artist, whether or not he/she is bound by any relations of employment or association.*

While this definition has the merit of being inclusive, it does not facilitate the definition of artists for research or other practical purposes.

There is no agreed definition of the category 'professional artist' in Ireland; this is not unique to Ireland. Working definitions of artists are often based on either the criteria or categories used by official data sources or independent studies. Many countries have no legal or fiscal definition of the term 'artist' despite having specific tax rules to deal with them. For example the artist's tax exemption scheme in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) bases its decisions regarding eligibility on the quality of the products and not the producer. Accordingly a definition of artist is not encountered.

In 2002 a professional artist was defined in Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon awards promotional literature as 'any arts practitioner working in the arts (listed as architecture, dance,

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper 'Ireland' is understood as the island of Ireland, North and South. Where content or data relates only to Northern Ireland (NI) or to the Republic of Ireland (ROI) this is specified.

<sup>2</sup> The direction and support provided by Emma Kelly, the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and Nick Livingston, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, in the development of this context paper are gratefully acknowledged. A list of those consulted and a bibliography are included in the Appendix.

drama, film, video and animation, literature, music and opera, visual arts and new media) be they creative or interpretative, who either makes or endeavours to make a living from their work (IFFICA, 2002). The 2008 awards brochure stipulates that applicants for the Bursary Award must be practising professional artists; these must identify themselves and be recognised by their peers as practising artists, although they may not necessarily earn income continuously from their arts practice<sup>3</sup>.

Currently the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon (2008) supports a range of artforms, arts organisations and cross artform practice. The specific artform areas supported are architecture; circus street art and spectacle; dance; film; literature(English language); literature (Irish language); music; opera; theatre; visual arts; and traditional arts. Support is also provided to arts organisations and a range of cross artform practice. The cross artform practices include arts and disability, arts and health, arts in schools, international arts, local arts, arts participation, public art, and young people, children, and the arts. The specific artforms supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (2008) are architecture, crafts, dance, drama, film and television, literature, music, traditional arts and visual arts; together with a range of cross artform areas such as public art, community and voluntary arts.

Criteria commonly used internationally to define the 'professional artist' population and to develop a sampling dataset are: the amount of time spent on artistic work, the amount of income earned from that work and membership of a professional artists' group or association. Research undertaken by Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the main data source on the living and working conditions of artists in the island of Ireland to date, has followed this direction. In these studies populations of artists have been defined pragmatically, and primarily on the basis of lists of membership of, or affiliation to, artists' associations, unions, and arts resource organisations, together with lists supplied by the Arts Councils of funded artists, based on funding selection criteria. In the absence of any other listing of the professional artist population this was and remains the only way to proceed.

### **Size of the artist population in Ireland**

There is no official agreement on the size of the professional artist population in Ireland. Published census occupational classifications that include artists are too broad. The census classifications in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) or Northern Ireland (NI) do not cover all artforms and related occupational categories within the remit of the Arts Councils. However the Census offices may accede to requests for more detailed counts if these are possible. The following information on awards and on membership of specific artform organizations provides some broadly indicative data on the current size of the professional artist population in Ireland:

- The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon provided support to over 1,100 individual artists, across a range of artforms in 2007<sup>4</sup>.
- One hundred and seventy seven individuals were awarded grants by The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) in 2007/08 to date; 592 artists were in receipt of Support for Individual Artist Programme (SIAP) funding from the ACNI from 2004-2007.
- Visual Arts Ireland, the representative organization for visual artists in Ireland has a current membership of 970 professional artists, and 426 associate members.
- A population of 880 active theatre artists (performers, directors, designers, choreographers and playwrights) in the ROI was estimated in 2005<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Support for Artists 2008, p.14. The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon

<sup>4</sup> Source: Arts Council/ An Comhairle Ealaíon; Awards to individual artists in 2007.

- 300 individuals were identified as involved in the writing and publication of high quality literature in 2006<sup>6</sup>
- 138 practitioners were identified for survey in the Contemporary Music Sector in 2005<sup>7</sup>
- The Northern Ireland Music Industry Commission has 1,568 members
- In 2004 1,970 people claimed the artists' tax exemption in the ROI (an increase of 270 from 2003); creative artists only would be included in this number.

In 1979 it was estimated that the ROI had a professional artist population of 1,451 (Arts Council / An Chomhairle, 1979). This number was based on a range of Membership lists (e.g. Equity, Federation of Music) or names of Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon funded applicants (playwrights, painters, sculptors, authors). Over two-thirds (72%) of this population was considered to be 'interpretive' artists (music and drama) and under one-third (28%), approximately 400, was classified as 'creative' (painting, sculpture, literature) artists. If this latter group of 400 is comparable with the group claiming artists tax exemption in 2004 (1,970) it would suggest a substantial increase in the number of professional artists over the 25 years.

### 3. Research rationale

The absence of any detailed information about the circumstances, living standards and working conditions of artists living in the ROI led to the commissioning by the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon of a major study in 1978. Such information was deemed important to the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and to other bodies involved in the arts, in terms of deciding and executing future policies. No comparable national study has been undertaken since, although aspects of living and working conditions of artists were addressed in a joint Arts Councils study (Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 2000), and in the socio-economic study of theatre practitioners in the Republic of Ireland (Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 2005).

The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland wish to improve the quality of data currently available to them on the living and working conditions of artists. Up to date evidence based data is required for the following reasons: to determine the current living and working conditions of artists; to measure and track trends and changes over time; to facilitate international comparison, and to inform effective interventions for their improvement<sup>8</sup>.

Both Arts Councils acknowledge that, within the island of Ireland, the environment in which the artist makes and exhibits his or her work varies considerably by artform and regionally. An accurate assessment of the issues related to the living and working conditions of artists is therefore a pre-requisite for developing responsive supports.

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<sup>5</sup> The Socio-Economic Conditions of Theatre Practitioners in Ireland, , Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon (2005);

<sup>6</sup> As yet unpublished research findings of 'Literary Ireland Abroad: Promoting And Marketing Irish Literature In English-Language Markets' Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon;

<sup>7</sup> Sounds New, Review of supports to contemporary music in Ireland, Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon (2006);

<sup>8</sup> Derived from the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and Arts Council of Northern Ireland Requirements Specification: Refinement of RFT (July 2007) and Research Protocol (Oct. 2007) for Research into the Living and Working Conditions of Artists in the Island of Ireland.

## **The Arts Councils' policy commitment**

The goals of The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon policies for support of the arts and artists have most recently been elaborated in the Partnership for the Arts 2006 – 2010 (Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 2006 ). While increased support for the arts is acknowledged, it is noted that artists' incomes in the Republic of Ireland remain low and arts organisations struggle to survive. Innovative types of investment are thought to be necessary to address this; 'flexible funding programmes to respond to new ideas and developments, and funding mechanisms that provide greater security and stability'. Assisting artists in realising their artistic ambition is one of five keys goals for the Council for the above period. To achieve this goal the Council commits to improving its range of practical supports; supporting artists in reaching their audiences and improving artists' living and working conditions. It is within this context that the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon commits to undertake a major study of living and working conditions of artists in Ireland, with international comparisons, and respond appropriately.

Likewise, strengthening the arts is a core goal of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, as outlined in its five year strategic plan 'Creative Connections 2007-2012' (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 2007). The Council indicates its commitment to the continued development and support of all its artists to ensure that artistic excellence and the highest standards are pursued in all artforms. It notes that in order to be able to continue with their work in the long-term, some artists are also taking on other jobs and careers. A need to better understand the conditions in which artists live and work and the kind of career and business choices they make is acknowledged. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland commits itself to carrying out a full survey of the working conditions of artists in Northern Ireland to ensure that the systems for supporting artists are relevant, focused and effective.

## **4. Existing data on artists in Ireland**

In order to identify changes and trends in artists living and working conditions, the findings from the planned research should be benchmarked against the findings from previous studies. Measures used should also where possible be clearly comparable with standard measures used in the wider economy and society; e.g. house ownership rates or clearly defined occupational groups that can be tracked over time. Account should be taken of such relevant and potentially mediating variables as age and education.

### **Focus of previous research**

The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon (1979) research on living and working conditions is the most comprehensive study to date in terms of the range of artists and artforms studied. The research assessed income levels from arts and non-arts employment, working patterns, place and conditions of work, participation in trade unions and professional bodies, incidences of unemployment and access to social welfare, and attitudes to state provision for the arts. Living conditions were addressed in terms of home and car ownership and access to pensions. The joint Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and Arts Council of Northern Ireland research into support for the individual artist included a focus on the main sources of artists' income and the different types of employment engaged in by artists to obtain their income (Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 2000). The socio-economic study of the living and working conditions of theatre practitioners addressed characteristics of the population, work patterns, income,

unemployment, and standards of living; it focused on all theatre practitioners, including professional actors (Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 2005a).

Key findings from the 1979 study in the ROI were:

- A high proportion of artists had more than one occupation - creative artists were more likely to have art-related second jobs that were interpretive artists;
- Job satisfaction and fulfilment of ambition, together with the independence of being 'one's own boss', were perceived as the main advantages of an artistic career by creative artists;
- Low income and insecurity were the major negatives for all artists - long hours and excessive travel were negatives for some in the interpretive sector;
- Dissatisfaction with working conditions was an issue for approximately one-third of artists; lack of space and absence of a proper studio was the main problem on the creative side; while interpretive artists cited poor heating and a 'dearth of dressing room facilities';
- The majority of artists in the interpretive side had experienced periods of unemployment. Less than one-third of creative artists and less than one-half of interpretive artists were 'stamping a card' at the time of interview;
- The proportion of artists in either sector who indicated that they were availing of any welfare payments (social insurance or employment assistance) at the time, was lower than expected;
- There was considerable inequity in the distribution of artistic income in both sectors, and particularly amongst creative artists; the top 18% of creative artists control 50% of the artistic wealth within this sector;
- Most artists regarded their artistic income as unstable, and any stability in total income was reported to be provided by earning from sources outside the arts (other jobs, and spouses income);
- In terms of standard of living the proportion of artists living in privately owned homes was in line with the national profile; the number renting accommodation was slightly higher than average. Ownership of a car or van also broadly equated with middle class vehicle ownership levels;
- Two-thirds of the artists had not made pension provision;
- Artists in general were fairly happy with their current standard of living; however those most heavily committed to full-time artistic work had comparatively higher levels of dissatisfaction.

The research on supports for the individual artist (2000), reported separately for the ROI and NI, concluded that the employment status of the artists surveyed was complicated and involved a complex pattern of artistic and economic activity.

Key findings concerning the respondents in the ROI were:

- More than half were self-employed;
- About 30% were in full time or part-time employment - the majority of these were in jobs related to the arts though not necessarily in the artist's primary area of practice;
- Five per cent were unemployed;
- Artists' incomes were reported to be low and unpredictable - uncertainty of the amount was considered more important than its inadequacy;
- The main sources of the artists' income in 1998 were earnings from non-art (45%), earnings from art (36%), Arts Council support (11%) and other grants (6%);

- An average income of around Irl£12,000 (€15,000) was reported for 1998;
- Awards and grants were beneficial to individual artists - particularly to fund the completion of work;
- Awards gave artists recognition and endorsement;
- Grants were not generally judged to be large enough to affect an artist's financial stability;
- Artists believed that direct grants were the best way of supporting artists;
- The importance of support organisations was acknowledged but they were perceived to be limited because of under-funding.

Similar employment and income patterns were found in respect of artists living and working in N I. In this study:

- Two-thirds were wholly or partly self-employed;
- More than half had other sources of income;
- Earnings from art were low and irregular;
- Most respondents could not live on the income from their art;
- Even with other sources of income artists were still struggling;
- Support systems did not address the problem of low income;
- Artists in Northern Ireland felt they lacked status by comparison with the support conditions in the ROI and Northern Europe;
- Those who had moved between NI and the Republic felt there was more respect for and purchasing of art in the ROI.

More recent research on individual artists in Northern Ireland found that, of the sample studied, less than half (42%) earned around or below the average household income in the previous year, while over one-third (39%) were above the average income range. There were mixed findings in relation to the percentage of household income earned from art. Almost 60% of those artists that had the average household income, and those that earned less than it, earned 50% or less of their income from art. Direct artists' grants were the preferred support for artists (74%). However 12% of respondents mentioned that direct grants were not enough and that more intervention would be needed to make Northern Ireland a better place for artists (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 2004)

Variable and uncertain work patterns were identified in the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon (2005a) study of the socio-economic conditions of theatre practitioners. Key findings were that theatre practitioners:

- In some cases manage different jobs, different types of jobs and periods of unemployment, in a typical year;
- Have low income levels relative to equivalent professional occupations;
- Are well educated compared to the wider labour force;
- Have relatively low levels of pension provision;
- Are less likely than the wider population to own their own home and more likely to rent;
- Are less likely to take a holiday as compared to the population as a whole;
- Can encounter difficulties in getting mortgages and car insurance;
- A minority of practitioners encounters difficulties in interacting with the social welfare and taxation systems.

These latter difficulties appear to arise, at least in part, from a lack of appreciation by these systems of the atypical work patterns of theatre practitioners. It is important to identify the

extent to which such similar living conditions and patterns apply to the wider professional arts sector, to inform ways in which policies might better support professional artists to maintain a career and life as a full-time artist.

Issues relating to the employment and working conditions of artists have also been addressed in other research studies e.g. employment patterns in the professional performing arts (Theatre Forum, 2004), and working spaces for artists in Cork and Dublin (CHL, 2002).

## **5. Regulatory and support framework for artists<sup>9</sup>**

### **Republic of Ireland**

Support for artists in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) is underpinned by legislation, including the Arts Act (2003), the Copyright Act (2000) and the Finance Act (1969) and the Taxes Consolidation Act (1997).

The Arts Act (2003) is the key legislative framework for governing the arts in the ROI. The Act defines the arts, and sets out the role and function of the Minister, local authorities and the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

The Copyright and Related Acts (2000) provides for the protection of a range of artistic work including literature, drama and music. Legislation for self-employed artists, addressed in The Finance Act (1969) and the Taxes Consolidation Act (1997) provides for tax exemption status for self-employed creative artists resident in the ROI.

While there is no overall status of the artist legislation, self-employed creative artists in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) benefit from tax-exemption provision. Employed artists are subject to the same tax regime, and to the same labour laws as all ROI citizens. There are no specific social security frameworks for artists in the ROI outside of the general social security regimes.

It is the objective of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism “to provide an appropriate resource, policy and legislative framework to support the stimulation and development of the Arts” in Ireland. State support for the arts is primarily channelled through the Arts Council, as the national agency for developing the arts, and the principal instrument of arts funding in the ROI. Government grant-in-aid to the Arts Council comes from two sources, the exchequer and the National Lottery.

The Arts Council / An Comhairle Ealaíon provides supports to individual artists and arts organisations and others who develop and promote the arts. The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon support framework includes financial assistance, policy, information and advice, research and advocacy, and other initiatives.

The Arts Council’s current goals and strategies in relation to its work are outlined in Partnership for the Arts: Arts Council Goals 2006-2010 developed in consultation with the arts community and other key informants.

Government funding to the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon in 2008 is €82.1 million. The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon runs a programme of direct financial support through

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<sup>9</sup> The regulatory framework and support structures for the arts in ROI and NI are profiled in the Council of Europe/ERIC arts – Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe, 2007.

awards, bursaries and schemes for all categories of individual artists. The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon also provides financial assistance to arts organisations through its grant making programmes. These arts organisations in turn provide employment opportunities and other supports to the artist including information and advice, training, networking, marketing and dissemination, and advocacy. An example might be the part funding of local authority Arts Officer salaries. In other cases arts organisations are directly funded or some co-funded by the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon to provide and/or disseminate supports in partnership with the Council.

Aosdana was established in 1981 to encourage and assist individual artists to devote their energies fully to art. It is an honorary association of peer-nominated outstanding creative artists in Ireland, with a maximum membership of two-hundred. Members are eligible for an annuity (Cnuas) payable for a period of five years.

### **Northern Ireland**

Some arts functions have been distributed under the Arts Act 2003 to government departments, agencies and bodies, and local authorities. Consequentially supports to artists, funding for example, are made available through these channels. A recent example might be Culture Ireland, formed in 2005, as the Irish state agency for the international promotion and advancement of Ireland's art and culture. Culture Ireland, funded by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism provides financial assistance to support Irish cultural activities abroad.

Support for the arts in Northern Ireland is underpinned by the Assembly and its institutions. The Northern Ireland Assembly is the prime source of authority for all devolved responsibilities. There is a dedicated portfolio for Culture, Art and Leisure; a Minister has been elected. A Statutory Departmental Committee for Culture, Art and Leisure has been established to advise and assist the Minister in formulation of policy for his Department, and to scrutinise work of the relevant Government department, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). DCAL's mission includes 'building a confident, creative, informed and vibrant community and its policy framework is underpinned by a corporate strategy with its overarching objective to 'protect, nurture and grow our Cultural Capital'<sup>10</sup>. DCAL is charged with the responsibility for public funding of the arts in Northern Ireland, primarily through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland which became a statutory body in 1995. The National Lottery, through provision made under the National Lottery etc. Act, 1993, as amended by National Lottery Acts of 1998 and 2006, is the other main source of public funding for the arts in Northern Ireland.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the lead development agency for the arts in Northern Ireland. As the main support for artists and arts organisations, it offers a broad range of funding opportunities through revenue and capital programmes and schemes. The Arts Council's mission is to 'place the arts at the heart of social, economic and creative life' in Northern Ireland<sup>11</sup>. The ACNI is a non-departmental public body of DCAL. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland received recurrent grant in aid of 10.5m GBP in the financial year 2007/08 (excluding capital allocations). Income from the National Lottery (ticket sales and investment income) for the arts in Northern Ireland is estimated at 5.8m. GBP and is distributed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

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<sup>10</sup> See [www.dcalni.gov.uk/about-us](http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/about-us)

<sup>11</sup> Creative Connections 2007-2012, ACNI, 2007, p.4.

There are no specific social security measures covering the arts sector in Northern Ireland, and no specific legislation covering artists' employment. Grants and awards to artists in the North of Ireland are taxable, but tax can be spread over a period of years.

Other key legislation supporting aspects of the arts are the UK 2006 Finance Act (Section 53), which refers to taxation of activities of film and sound recording and film tax relief; the Copyright Act (2002), and the 2006 implementation of the EU directive on harmonisation of Droite de Suite (artists re-sale rights). Additionally, artists in both the ROI and Northern Ireland are subject to general employment, health and safety at work, and employment equality legislation.

## **6. Changing environment for artists**

The current strategic plans<sup>12</sup> of the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland have been developed within the context of a rapidly changing Irish society including economic growth, increasing wealth, new lifestyles and work patterns and a growing and increasingly diverse population. Such changing circumstances have brought new opportunities and challenges. Recent studies on behaviour and attitudes to the arts in Ireland<sup>13</sup> have also been undertaken within the context of major societal transformation in the past decade resulting from changing social and economic patterns. These changes overlay a contemporary and new landscape in how the arts are produced and consumed. Correspondingly the life of an artist is one of constant change, and the arts are seen to need reliable support in this changing environment. Recent changes that are likely to have both positive and negative impacts for those working professionally in the arts throughout the island of Ireland include the following.

### **Socio-economic change**

There has been a sustained expansion of the population in of the Republic of Ireland, which has risen from around 3.6m to over 4.2m in the past decade. A key element of this expansion has been the marked increase in the number of immigrants working and living there. Northern Ireland has also recently experienced population growth linked to increased immigration, particularly from EU accession countries. The total population in Northern Ireland was nearly 1.75 million in 2006<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, sustained growth in the local economy has been recorded in Northern Ireland in recent years. The economic outlook for Northern Ireland is seen as favourable and mirroring expectations within the UK and Republic of Ireland economies, as major influences on the local economic climate. Economic growth has resulted in increased prosperity, disposable income and purchasing power. Continuing urbanisation, increased car ownership, and an improved road infrastructure has brought people physically closer to arts venues. However, the spread of population centres over larger areas and longer commuting times to and from work may have reduced the public's time for attending artistic events<sup>15</sup>.

### **Arts related changes – Republic of Ireland**

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<sup>12</sup> Partnership for the Arts 2006 – 2010, Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 2006; and Creative Connections 2007-2012, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 2007

<sup>13</sup> The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, *The Public and The Arts*, (2006b) ; and Arts Council of Northern Ireland, *Arts and Culture in Northern Ireland* (2007)

<sup>14</sup> Annual Report of the Registrar General. NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

<sup>15</sup> The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, *The Public and The Arts*, (2006b) p.40

The significantly improved economic environment in the ROI has had both positive and negative effects for professional artists. Positive effects include<sup>16</sup>:

- The significant growth in the level of arts funding; helped by the presence of a government department with a specific arts remit, more planning in the arts, and the positive macro-economic environment. Arts funding has grown in the last decade at a rate well ahead of inflation. There has been steady increase in Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon funding; with €82.1 million provided to the Council by the government for 2008.
- A range of new arts venues has been developed providing for different artforms in all parts of the country. The number venues funded by the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon in the past twelve years has almost doubled. In 2005 there were 72 such venues including theatres, galleries, and multi-disciplinary art centres and performing arts venues.
- Local government has moved from a position of having a limited involvement in the arts, to having a significant involvement in 2007, through capital development and local arts programmes and services. Local government also plays a major role in the provision of public art
- The 'reach' of the arts has been extended by the incorporation of arts provision in wider, social, economic, and community programmes, and by the policy of the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon to engage in partnerships with other bodies and agencies.
- There is a significant increase in people's perception of accessibility to participation or attendance in the arts.<sup>17</sup>
- Changes in other areas include: increased funding for festivals and the traditional arts, more arts programming on radio and television, more arts provision for young people, and more international recognition for Irish arts and artists.

Negative effects of the improved economic environment in the Republic of Ireland for professional artists (together with stricter regulation and enforcement) may include<sup>18</sup>:

- Both performing arts organisations and individual artists have experienced significant increases in the costs of renting, exhibiting, insurance, and materials.
- Arts organisations in particular have increased costs arising from more and stricter regulation and enforcement.
- Living costs for professional artists have increased as they have for the population generally. Over the six year period 2001-2007, the Consumer Price Index in the ROI increased by 21.3 per cent (CSO).
- Increased costs of living may have impacted more directly on performing artists, who need to work in venues in more expensive urban areas compared with individual

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<sup>16</sup> The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, *The Public and The Arts*, (2006b), pp 30-41.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp 93.

<sup>18</sup> Based on observations of key informants consulted for this paper.

creative artists who may have greater choice in the location of their living and working environments.

- While living costs have increased the CNUAS award, though increasing from €12,180 to €20,000 by 2011 still will not fully reflect inflation and cost of living increases.
- Increased public funding for the arts, and the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, in particular in the mid-late 1990's coincided with a diminution in the significance of FAS as an arts funder. The improved economy and falling unemployment rates resulted in cuts in public Community Employment Schemes; this may have resulted in a decrease in arts-related part-time job opportunities for artists as many arts organisations were sponsor organisations for such schemes.

### **Arts related changes – Northern Ireland**

Key changes for artists and in the arts environment in Northern Ireland since 2001/2002 include<sup>19</sup>:

- Increased recognition of the role of arts in many policy areas including regeneration, reconciliation, education and life-long learning, and health, and the development of stronger links between the arts and these areas. The arts are increasingly playing a role in addressing issues such as racism, discrimination and sectarianism.
- Increased engagement by The Arts Council of Northern Ireland in many policy issues to support development of the Government's wider strategic goals. This has been facilitated through increased partnership between the Arts Council and government departments, statutory bodies and umbrella organisations.
- A series of new ACNI initiatives to provide a foundation for future development and support of the sector. Also improvement in the Council's internal systems and processes.
- Substantial and continuing improvement in the physical arts infrastructure outside of Belfast and expansion in the range of spaces where people encounter art; this has resulted in increased opportunities for artists and for audiences.
- Local government is playing an increasing role in supporting the Arts in Northern Ireland , including the provision of funding and the construction of new arts centres
- Increased revenue funding of arts over the period 2001/02-2005/6. However Northern Ireland has the lowest per capita spend on the arts, when compared with England, Scotland, Wales and ROI. The gap between investment in the arts in Northern Ireland and in the other countries has also grown sharply.

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<sup>19</sup> Deloitte MCS Ltd., Arts Council of Northern Ireland – Review of Five Year Plan, 2001/02 – 2005/06, April 2006; and Creative Connections 2007-2012, ACNI, 2007.

- A climate of reducing grant-in-aid for the arts and likely continued uncertainty about future funding for the arts. This is related to the increasing focus of the government to commit resources to areas such as health, education and infrastructure in NI, the cessation of a number of EU funds and the impact of the London Olympics 2012 on Lottery funding.
- The network of arts and cultural organisations has grown and become more varied and confident. However there is an underlying fragility to arts development in Northern Ireland, where many arts organisations remain financially insecure.
- An increased profile of artists from Northern Ireland, following from the work of gifted artists whose work has been internationally celebrated; this has promoted cultural exchange and cultural tourism.
- A rise in enrolments on arts related courses in secondary education; the number of students enrolled on such courses increased by 9 per cent between 2001 and 2004. However the number of students on tertiary level courses has remained relatively static.

#### **Technological change.**

The development (and falling cost) of new information and communication technology, including the Internet, online media and gaming technology, are providing completely new ways of creating and distributing art. The past decade has seen a huge increase in the use of internet in Ireland, and more recently increased broadband access; however the extent to which professional artists, and arts organisations, have benefited artistically and commercially from this is not known.

These changes are part of the communications revolution, in turn a part of and instigator of the broader phenomenon of globalisation, which has transformed the way in which information is stored, transmitted and received. The implications of these developments for the arts and culture have been profound. Technological changes, including digital technology, have had a number of profound impacts on the way art is produced, distributed and consumed.

New technologies offer both exciting possibilities and potential threats to the pursuit of a professional artistic practice. A number of ways in which the lives of the practicing professional artist have been affected by such developments in the decade 1993-2003 have been observed in Australia (Throsby and Holster, 2003 p11). These ways included: new creative possibilities being opened up by digital technologies, especially in visual and sound media; occupational boundaries have become more blurred as artists acquire new skills and interests applicable across a range of artforms; the creative spectrum of many artists has widened as a result of the range of skills derived from new technologies. A breakdown in boundaries between the arts and other industries has also occurred as artists are finding opportunities to employ their creative skills in areas remote from their 'core' discipline. Greater fluidity in artists' career paths was also identified as more flexible employment arrangements replace traditional job structures and employment contracts. Such developments suggest that the employment patterns and career structures of artists in Ireland may now be more complex than those found in previous studies. It is therefore important to construct an up-to-date picture on how artists in Ireland define themselves and their practice.

## Work-related needs of artists in specific artforms

Information is also needed on the extent of differences between different art-forms in their living and working conditions. Differences in artforms needs were identified in the discussions in the nationwide consultation process that informed the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon strategy 'Partnership for the Arts'; as outlined in the summary reports on each consultation meeting. Some examples of artform needs raised included (Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon (2005b) included :

- Increased outlets for work for theatre practitioners, ability to have a creative life and creative nourishment, and to make a living;
- Support for on-going practice (including space and partnerships) for dancers;
- Assistance in accessing public/social services such as housing, welfare, crèche facilities;
- Opportunity for performing artists for further career development and training; including travel abroad to see other work, get international experience, experience new and alternative work;
- More performing opportunities for musicians through increased events (festivals), channels (orchestras, ensembles) and media (television); support for a portfolio career with other artforms and support for practice;
- Increased employment opportunities for young actors and directors;
- Ability to make a reasonable income as a film artist, freedom to develop ideas without early consideration of commerce, acknowledgement of ownership rights;
- Balanced infrastructural provision (e.g. studios, art centres, and galleries) for visual artists between different regions and counties; resources for visual artists to be able to live and work in more expensive urban locations; flexibility in duration and type of access to studio space and equipment. Access to small capital grants to set up studios.

Within these consultation groups opinions varied as to whether it was important to differentiate between the needs of creative artists and interpretive artists in respect of working and living conditions. While some felt that this divide was unnecessary and unhelpful; others argued that the employment patterns and conditions of interpretive and performing artists differ considerably from those of creative artist; thereby requiring different types of public support. Interpretative artists are more likely to be 'employees', whilst creative artists are more likely to be self-employed, with different sets of conditions attaching to both employment situations.

Needs related to the living and working conditions of individual professional artists were also identified in the internal Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon Review of Supports for Artists (2006c). Changes in the range and nature of supports were proposed to more effectively respond to realistic creative and career paths: the need for sufficient flexibility to realise ambitions; the variations and specificity of needs, both across artforms and practices; and artists' real costs in relation to fabrication and production in art projects.

## Changing role of the artist

Recent research has shown that the public in the ROI have very positive views of the arts and a strong allegiance to purchasing the work of Irish artists. Changes in patterns of consumption of the arts in the past decade were linked to increased choice. There was a strong rise in the

'consumption' of film or television drama via the purchase of DVDs or videos, while there were some downward trends in attendance at live events, particularly theatre. While there have been gains for popular forms of culture, the public was not found to be 'consuming' more 'art', as traditionally understood (Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 2006b)

Many artists' roles are changing to meet the wide ranging demands of a changing society. The professional artist or creator in Ireland today operates in a radically different environment to that of even a decade ago, with issues of intellectual property and copyright being of increased importance. At the same time new technologies are radically changing the production, distribution and consumption of art and other information, with little consideration for copyright. Artists may in the future be seen as 'content-providers' and 'workers for hire'.

## Regulatory changes

Moroney (2001) examined the complex range of issues pertaining to the legal, regulatory and commercial background of the work of creative artists in the ROI. A lack of knowledge among artists of their legal rights and responsibilities under Irish and international law was indicated. It was emphasised that because of digital technology an artist operates in a rapidly changing legal and regulatory environment; these changes are altering the mechanisms and economics of information ownership and distribution. European level legislation is setting the pace on regulatory change in Ireland.

The impact of the Copyright Act 2000 (ROI) and The Parliamentary Copyright (Northern Ireland Assembly) Order 1999<sup>20</sup>, in protecting the rights of artists across various media, need to be explored in this research. Similarly the impact of key legal, regulatory and competitive frameworks on artists' livelihoods and careers in Ireland should be addressed. This should include the impact of the Artists Resale, and Public Lending Rights directives.

## 7. International research

Artists in Ireland are increasingly operating in, and benefiting from, the experience of other European and international practice and environments as globalisation and increased mobility make it easier for Irish artists to live and work in other countries (Everitt, 2000). There is a need therefore to review the extent to which the living and working conditions of Irish artists and their support mechanisms are comparable with those elsewhere in Europe and internationally. In the past twenty years there has been a growing body of International research on the living and working conditions of artists. Much emphasis has been placed on the atypical, non-standard, and multi-faceted nature of their working lives. Three aspects of artists working lives have been the main focus of international research: (a) types and patterns of employment (b) earnings and (c) working conditions, including the legal and policy environment. Other aspects of artists working lives that have been the focus of studies include: their education, training, professional development and career paths, and the market for artistic work (Shaw, 2004).

Some common trends and findings from international research are<sup>21</sup>:

- Non-standard and flexible patterns of employment are commonplace in the arts. Self-employment is the most common employment status for artists. While self-employment is valued by artists for the flexibility and control it allows them it results in reduced

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<sup>20</sup> Derived from the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

<sup>21</sup> Derived from Arts Council / An Comhairle Ealaíon, (2005a).

social protection and protection under employment legislation. Seasonal work and fixed contracts are features of artists' employment patterns. There is however some evidence that an increasing number of artists are employing others

- Many artists cannot work full-time in their principal artistic occupation because of limited employment opportunities and rank amongst the highest of all workers with secondary jobs. Their secondary job serves to guarantee a minimum level of income. Second jobs can be in arts-related areas and in non-arts areas. Those engaged in other arts-related work are often found in teaching or in administration. Second jobs that allow artists to pursue their first job in art are frequently chosen but may entail low pay and benefits. However it has also been proposed that for many artists, multiple job holding is a choice rather than a compromise.
- There is some variation in employment patterns across art forms. Unemployment is a serious problem for performing artists because of their short or limited seasons and the freelance nature of their working arrangements. In performing arts there are often more performers seeking work than there is work available. Dancers have a long professional training duration, but have short working careers in their profession. Artists of all disciplines are increasingly crossing artform boundaries.
- Artists are a highly skilled and educated group compared to the general labour force, but this educational attainment is not rewarded with a greater chance of employment and higher incomes.
- Artists' incomes (apart from a relatively small number of highly successful exceptions) tend to be low in an absolute sense and relative to other occupations. Low incomes are compounded often by the high cost of an artist's professional practice, which can include training, materials and equipment, travel, work-space, union membership, professional fees and agents commissions.

The study of the working and living conditions of artists in Australia may serve as a research model for the planned research in Ireland (Throsby and Hollister, 2003). The study found that while artists make an immense contribution in cultural and social terms, the value of this contribution is not reflected in market prices and the economic return to artists remains stubbornly low. The income levels for most artists were found to be almost the same in real terms as artists' incomes levels 15 years earlier whereas the income levels of other professional occupations, requiring similar lengths of training and experience, had been steadily rising. It was concluded that the ongoing disparity between the incomes of artists and other professionals was becoming more pronounced. Non-arts work is a very important source of income for some artists, providing on average double the income earned from creative practice for the same amount of time. Similar employment and income patterns were found in a study of artists in New Zealand (Creative New Zealand, 2004). It is important to identify whether similar patterns of increased disparity of income have occurred for professional artists in Ireland, within the era of the Celtic Tiger economy.

The Australian study also found that the complex nature of artists' employment, and in some cases the cyclical or unpredictable nature of their earnings, has implications for their standards of living, home ownership, health and welfare, social insurance status, eligibility for mortgages and private pension funds, taxation and income assessment.

Studies in the US have also focused on patterns in artists' employment, and identified them as being similar to those of 'contingent workers'. Features of 'contingent' work include flexible employment, multiple-firm careers, uneven benefit and wage levels, network-based job-finding and employment, self-marketing and occupational strategising, employment insecurity and stress. While artists' work patterns are highly flexible and bring certain life-style benefits, they also present artists with significant employment-related drawbacks because of unpredictability of work and lack of financial security. Drawbacks arising for artists arising from their often ambiguous employment status and fluctuating income levels include difficulties in fitting into both tax and social security legislation, inadequate levels of social insurance and difficulty in distributing the tax burden between tax periods (Arts Council of England 2002).

The conditions in which artists work can in some cases be hazardous to physical health. Visual artists are often exposed to dangerous chemicals, and dancers, actors and singers may sustain injuries during the normal course of their work. These hazards can be accentuated because of bad ventilation, bad floors, and other physical hazards often found in the inadequate and under-maintained spaces in which many artists must work. Despite these health risks, many artists do not obtain routine health care from a private physician. Artists are less likely to have health coverage from employers, but in the US generally are more likely to pay for health coverage themselves (Jackson et al, 2003).

Jackson *et al* also found that artists do not tend to see themselves as 'small businesses', so they did not tend to access health insurance using available small business models or programmes for self-employed people. Those artists that can access Union membership generally avail of health insurance available to members.

While it is desirable to compare the working and living conditions of artists internationally with those of professional artists in Ireland; benchmarking will be difficult because of differences in definitions of the artists population, different methods of measurement and the absence of common indicators.

## 8. Key Issues

This context essay has raised some key issues and questions for the planned research, including:

- There is a need for evidence-based data on the profile of the professional artist in Ireland to ensure that effective supports are provided. Accurate definition of the professional artist population, its size and its distribution across artforms is essential to develop a profile of professional artists. As there is no register of artists in Ireland identification and compilation of the population to be studied will be a necessary first step for both Arts Councils.
- The extent, to which the professional artist population in Ireland has grown in the past decade, across the various artforms and at respective career levels, needs to be identified. The factors influencing growth including population growth, increased arts infrastructural supports nationally and locally, and increased third level arts education provision should be explored.
- Changes and trends in artists living and working conditions need to be benchmarked against previous studies, against standard measures used in the wider economy and

society, for example, national, and where available and meaningful other indices such as rates of car and house ownership, and membership of pension schemes. Due to globalisation and increased mobility of artists, it is also desirable to benchmark against international trends in artists living and working conditions.

- The positive and negative impacts of the improved macro-economic environment for the living and working conditions of artists should be examined. For example, to what extent have the effects of increased costs of living and of working as a professional artist in 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland been offset by the increased level of provision and range of public supports for artists?
- Extensive technological and regulatory changes in the past decade are likely to have impacted on the working conditions of artists. The ways in which these have impacted and their effects on the ways in which artists work and live, need to be identified.
- Artists working patterns are known to be complex, atypical and often involve multi-jobbing. The proportion of the professional artists that are self-employed and of those who are in full-time arts-related employment and the respective differences in arts practice and conditions should be identified together with the perceived support needs.
- Given that artists' working patterns often involve multi-jobbing, consideration might be given to how their skills might be enhanced to develop their artistic careers and improve their opportunities in alternative employment. There are indications that technology developments are facilitating cross-sectoral skill transfers and career paths.
- Consideration might be given to the incorporation of some measures of artistic performance/excellence into the study. Such information would not be used for any evaluation of individuals but rather to place the study's findings in context.
- Both the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Census Office for Northern Ireland Northern Ireland (CONI) should be requested to provide more detailed breakdowns of occupational categories including artistic occupations if at all possible. They should also, as a matter of urgency, be requested to devise definitions and categories that will take account of artists in future censuses and surveys.
- The study should build on the existing strong body of existing international research on the working and living conditions of artists; particularly research undertaken in Australia (Throsby and Hollister, 2003).
- Given the significance of income for living conditions it is critical that accurate estimates of it are obtained. Also, given that it is notoriously difficult to obtain such accurate estimates, thought should be given to how it is best elicited. It will be important to maintain clear distinctions between income earned as an artist and other earned/unearned personal income. Likewise clear distinctions should be made between personal income and household income if the latter is to be obtained. It is important that income data collected in the 2007/08 survey are comparable with similar information collected in earlier surveys of artists living conditions. It is equally important that measures of artists' income should be compared with other standard income measures. This will greatly facilitate meaningful tracking of incomes over time.

## Appendix

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