

ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY RESPONSE TO THE CREATIVE IRELAND PROGRAMME

Mary Canning



In the light of government's Culture and Creativity Capital Plan, which details an intent to fortify investment in a range of cultural activities and enterprises, the Royal Irish Academy's Culture and Heritage Working Group has undertaken to generate position papers highlighting modes of creativity associated with public culture, public institutions and vernacular culture. Written by senior academics with strong ties to many of the state's cultural institutions, these papers constitute a set of reflections regarding the necessity for and social benefits of supporting enhanced attention to the creativity of Irish life.

IN THIS SERIES:

Royal Irish Academy Response to the Creative Ireland Programme

Mary Canning, MRIA.

Discussion Paper 1. Creativity in the Sciences

Luke Drury, MRIA.

Discussion Paper 2. 'The earth has music for those who listen': Creativity in Music in Ireland

Lorraine Byrne Bodley, MRIA.

Discussion Paper 3. The Gaeltacht, the Irish Language, Folklore and Vernacular Creativity / An Ghaeltacht, an Ghaeilge, an Béaloideas agus Cruthaitheacht na nDaoine

Angela Bourke, MRIA with Diane Negra, MRIA.



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
Royal Irish Academy

CREATIVITY is a function of being human: a common thread that can make sense of individual experience and communicate it, even in immensely complex forms, over great distances and many centuries. The Royal Irish Academy, Ireland's leading body of experts in the sciences, humanities and social sciences, has a long tradition of investigating, communicating, celebrating and supporting creative work in culture and the sciences on the island of Ireland, and representing it internationally. While recognising that creative expression can have significant economic importance, the Academy warmly welcomes the Creative Ireland initiative as an investment by the state in humane values, independent of commercial consideration.

Every culture finds ways of encoding hard-won wisdom, humour and expertise as resources for individuals and communities; every generation finds new ways to understand and use its heritage. Long famous for creative output in the form of books and film, Ireland has adapted quickly and flexibly to new forms of media culture, in rural as well as urban areas. Irish traditional music now has players and audiences across the globe, as the Irish language has speakers and learners. Meanwhile, research demonstrates that the Ireland of the past was much more receptive to in-migration, and to music and other cultural influences, than has been generally understood.

A major challenge in our globalised world is for encounters between cultures to be peaceful, respectful and mutually enriching. Diverse forms of national creativity deserve our fullest support. It should be noted, however, that creativity resists codification and commercialisation. The Royal Irish Academy, a hub of critical thinking, brings together expertise in many areas. It sees in Creative Ireland an opportunity to dig deep into that expertise, integrating the aims of celebrating Ireland's cultural heritage, honouring the cultural capital and creativity of in-migrants, and enhancing our country's international standing. The Academy offers these short papers on aspects of culture and heritage as discussion documents for Creative Ireland.

Introduction

Creative Ireland is a cross-governmental framework to coordinate and support cultural policies in a wide range of institutions and through broad-based local initiatives. Culture here is to be seen in its broadest sense to include not only literature, painting and sculpture, and the classical performing arts, but also other elements such as folk and popular culture, the use of the Irish language, and sport, which contribute to our distinct community and national identities. The vision for the Creative Ireland programme stems from a belief that wider participation in cultural activities can release the creative potential of individuals, enhancing their well-being and that of society. The programme also recognises the need to increase public support for innovative and imaginative cultural projects.

Turning this vision into practical policies is challenging. As Taoiseach Leo Varadkar noted at the Creative Ireland Forum, in December 2017. ‘The required policy responses are not obvious.’

One important practical step was the launch, in April 2018, of a proposed investment programme ‘Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018–2027’, which sets out an allocation of almost €1.2 bn for projects within the National Planning Framework of Project Ireland 2040.¹ This physical infrastructure is intended to provide the foundation on which creativity can flourish. The urgent need to conserve Ireland’s archaeological and built heritage and invest in the major cultural institutions that house, curate and exhibit the artefacts and collections that reflect the collective history and heritage of Ireland has become increasingly evident. While such a plan can, at most, be indicative, and is vulnerable to both economic and political developments, it is an impressive statement of intent, underlined by the Taoiseach in his foreword to the investment programme document.²

Rather less widely recognised, but no less important, is a parallel need to invest in the people who will support Ireland’s cultural heritage: the scholars, scientists, technicians,

¹ ‘Heritage’ in this context includes not only museum collections, national monuments, and the built heritage, but also the restoration of historic urban areas; natural heritage, including national parks; and the preservation of biodiversity.

² Government of Ireland, *Infheistíocht inár gCultúr, inár dTeanga agus inár nOidhreacht/Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018–2027* (Dublin 2018), 6–7; available at: https://creative.ireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-04/Capital_Plan_AW_FINAL_05Apr.pdf (13 September 2018).

and knowledgeable administrators. Developing and supporting these people will create a variety of demands for formal education and training systems in Ireland.

Part of the vision of Creative Ireland is cultural participation by the entire population; therefore in order to avoid the danger that the programme will be seen as esoteric, financial support cannot be limited to providing and staffing cultural facilities. There also needs to be access to education in the arts for all members of society, at all ages, including access to non-formal adult education, but with a special focus on supporting existing programmes in schools where embedding an appreciation of music and art, an understanding of history, and an interest in scientific discovery can provide life-long personal benefits, even without individual participation in the activities themselves.

Quite apart from these benefits, Creative Ireland can only flourish in a democracy if there is widespread understanding and appreciation of its importance.

Having recognised the very large amount of work that has already been done under the auspices of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Royal Irish Academy has been discussing how it can best contribute to furthering the discussion of the policies and priorities of the Creative Ireland programme. Through its Working Group on Culture and Heritage, it has drawn on the knowledge and expertise of its Members to prepare short papers with the aim of contributing to the policy debate about selected cultural and heritage issues. These papers focus, initially, on creativity in three domains: (i) Sciences; (ii) Music; (iii) and the Gaeltacht, the Irish Language, Folklore and the Vernacular. A paper with a focus on Museums, Archival Depositories and Libraries will issue later.

Discussion Paper I: Creativity in the Sciences

The Royal Irish Academy acknowledges the challenge and complexity of preparing for a future that is driven by science and by technology in, as yet, unimagined ways. This discussion paper makes the case for the universality of creativity as a core value at all levels of Ireland's education system. It highlights the importance of 'enquiry-based learning' and the need to move away from rote learning of 'facts' as part of the education of scientifically literate and engaged citizens. This will be necessary in order to create a society in which citizens understand how science works, especially now when climate change, genetically modified organisms, artificial intelligence, vaccination and the benefits of medical screening (to name but some) are key topics of political debate. Past deficits in science education mean that popular culture does not understand Ireland's proud contribution to science and does not value it highly enough.

Specifically, the paper recommends that Creative Ireland should seek to influence education and research policies as follows.

The current policy of funding research must be modified to allow a greater amount of curiosity-driven speculation ('blue skies research') even when there is no predictable outcome. The paper notes that this was the main motivation behind the establishment of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies by Éamon De Valera.

Policies to encourage innovation in third-level institutions and in companies must be informed by art and design as much as by technology. New ways of looking at the world certainly drive innovation, but that is not the primary reason we are inspired to acts of creativity. Apple defeated Nokia in the mobile phone market, for example, not by better technology but by having a focus on design and aesthetics.

Science taught at school level must encourage a broader appreciation of the value of creativity as a means to innovation and must promote an awareness of Ireland's scientific achievements.

Discussion Paper 2:

‘The earth has music for those who listen’.

Creativity in Music in Ireland

This paper calls for a broad understanding of Irish musical culture specifically in relation to Irish art music, music education and music research. It presents music as an active force within the life of Irish society, recognising that it has a special contribution to make, not just as entertainment but also to the advancement of knowledge. The paper argues that in order to achieve the aim of the Creative Ireland programme’s first pillar—‘to develop the creative potential of every child and young person’—a comprehensive education strategy starting at a very early age will be needed. Such a strategy must ensure that musical ability will develop organically and that a core knowledge in music literacy and music history will be nurtured at every stage of the education cycle and be present in the wider social and cultural context, including in support for our national orchestras.

Specifically, the paper recommends that Creative Ireland should:

Appoint one specialised music post to every Irish primary school. At the very least, Creative Ireland should seek to promote the reinstatement of the Primary School Support System.

Reinstate the remuneration for a postgraduate qualification in music in second-level education.

Create postdoctoral positions that recognise the cultural significance of musicology and which will enable new ideas to be presented nationally and internationally, thus creating opportunities in the music industry as well as in academia.

Develop an Institute for Musical Research in Ireland to promote scholarly research in music both nationally and internationally while making expert musical knowledge as widely available as possible to contemporary artists and audiences.

Reinstate Irish Research Council single-scholar grants for musical research, which would cost very little in monetary terms but would support the kind of blue-sky thinking Creative Ireland espouses.

Develop a cross-departmental national strategy to support Ireland's orchestras, thus connecting various sectors of society and placing creativity and the arts at the centre of public policy (this is Creative Ireland's fifth pillar).

Discussion Paper 3: The Gaeltacht, the Irish Language, Folklore and Vernacular Creativity

This paper, offered in both Irish and English, makes the case for the important part the Irish language, together with its rich literary and oral traditions, can and must play in deepening creative citizenship and enhancing critical thinking and mutual understanding for citizens, in-migrants, the Irish diaspora and that larger global community of people who wish to know about or engage with Ireland.

The paper argues that the Creative Ireland programme must adopt an approach that integrates significant historical awareness, an appreciation of the contemporary Gaeltacht with its economic and infrastructure needs, input from recent and emerging scholarship, active use of new media and a commitment to cross-fertilisation. It urges attentiveness to ground-level forms of popular culture (many of which are digital) as indices of public mindsets, interests and concerns.

Specifically, the paper recommends that Creative Ireland should:

Develop and support a clear contemporary vision of the Gaeltacht that takes stock of its relative fragility as a social and cultural ecosystem and its importance as a reservoir of inspiration for the whole country.

Develop a project to link existing archival and scholarly resources (many already available in digital form) with the systems that already connect Ireland with its diaspora, and put individuals in touch with places, through local history, genealogy, walking and other activities. One practical first step is to ensure that all government-sponsored websites include as many as possible of the relevant links to Irish, Irish folklore and the Gaeltacht.

Support the current policy of making digitised content freely available online, thus placing priceless cultural resources in the realm of the public good, beyond the reach of commercial forces.

Support PhD-level Irish-language and folklore specialists to interpret recent and current scholarship for interested general readers, viewers and participants, in cases in which investment may be needed to bring the findings from such scholarship to a wider public.

Royal Irish Academy Working Group on Culture and Heritage

Mary Canning, MRIA (*Chair*)

Luke Drury, MRIA

Lorraine Byrne Bodley, MRIA

Angela Bourke, MRIA

Diane Negra, MRIA

George Sevastopulo, MRIA

Michael Ryan, MRIA

Ms Sinéad Riordan Head of Policy and International Relations, Royal Irish Academy

Mr Craig Skerritt, Programme Manager, Policy and International Relations, Royal Irish Academy