



IHA Submission to the 'Culture 2025' Consultation

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Irish Humanities Alliance response to 'Culture 2025'

The Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA) welcomes the consultation on a national cultural policy by the Minister of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and the opportunity to respond to the 'Culture 2025' discussion document.

In our response we consider the definition of culture as outlined in the discussion document (Section One under the headings of *Culture and Ireland*, *Cultural Literacy*, and *Culture and the Humanities*) and outline the overarching principles on which we suggest 'Culture 2025' should be based.¹ Our specific feedback in Section Two relates to the other main topics in the discussion document.

Section One: Overarching Principles

In order to ensure the flourishing of culture in a modern state, national cultural policy must be adequately resourced. There are a number of ways to strengthen the public case for government funding of cultural activities over the coming decade. The point of departure should not be a defensive position in which culture appears as an appendage to economic life, but a robust acknowledgement that culture in Ireland is a central, defining concept and activity which galvanizes our collective purpose and constitutes the leading feature of our profile within and beyond the island.

Culture and Ireland: Culture has a particular importance in Ireland. Centuries of conflict, colonialism, and political domination made the sphere of the cultural particularly significant, becoming part of our direct inheritance from the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, into the period of independence. Arguments over cultural practices are intrinsic to the debates that animated these eras, including Irish agricultural practices and customs, representations of national character, the category of the 'Celt', and of course the implications of linguistic and religious difference. In short, we have a stake in culture that makes it imperative to understand and invest in it. Culture is also the connective tissue between Ireland and its Diaspora. Furthermore, there is little doubt that Ireland's international reputation is predicated on its cultural achievement in literature, drama, poetry, music, and the arts in general. The reasons for these achievements are complex, but culture remains a crucial resource and fount for Irish life in the future.

Cultural Literacy: Culture is foundational. In its widest definition, the concept of culture captures the ways in which societies make sense of themselves, interpret their experience, and communicate those meanings internally and externally. It is therefore constitutive

¹ As specified in the discussion document "regard will be given to views expressed as to whether any wider issues should be addressed, or indeed, whether the policy should be narrower in focus" (pg. 5).

rather than ornamental, and the neglect of it diminishes the social order as a whole. Contemporary Europe constitutes an ‘exceptionally mixed and dynamically changing network of societies and languages’.² Support for a dynamic cultural sphere and a high degree of cultural literacy by Irish citizens is essential for Ireland to operate successfully within it. Furthermore, culture has the function of not only affirming society and communal values but also challenging them and provoking debate. Its role in renewing society should not be underestimated: the marriage equality referendum in Ireland would not have taken place without precisely this kind of ‘cultural’ discussion. It has also been apparent that the cultural has preceded the political on issues such as child abuse in institutions, for example. Finally, culture is not hermetic but permeable and hybrid: it marks the ways in which groups encounter one another and negotiate meaning. The emergence of a multicultural Ireland provides the occasion for acknowledging that new relationships, meanings, and forms of self-expression require the space in which to occur. In light of this definition we reaffirm that culture is a fundamentally democratic and inclusive opportunity.

Culture and the Humanities: In the wider domain, culture is part of the tradition of Europe as a whole, which constitutes one of its leading contributions to the human community. Culture in that sense is inseparable from the humanities and it speaks to our fundamental commitment to the human, and to the preservation and fulfillment of human possibility. The humanities, not least through the medium of education at primary, secondary, and third level, cultivate this tradition and lay the groundwork for future achievement. Although rankings are at best only an estimate of performance, they are nonetheless indicative, and to that extent it is clear the Humanities are the strongest performers in Ireland and boost university rankings overall. Humanities subjects not only have a strong tradition in Ireland and Northern Ireland, but are currently leading the way in terms of international performance benchmarks. The partnership between humanities, artistic endeavor and cultural institutions is crucial to ‘a culturally literate understanding’ of the major challenges facing contemporary society.³ The open perspective on culture in Ireland is also a strength reflected by the international dimension of festivals hosted throughout the country, as well as the ways in which Irish humanities have shown a deep and informed interest in global cultures and their impact on one another within each of the places of origin.

Section Two: Specific Feedback

Institutional arrangements (governance and legislation) (pg 8)

Culture, as a ‘good’ that renews society, in part by challenging basic assumptions, deserves the financial support of government which serves as the repository of public funds. At the same time, government should rearticulate its commitment to maintaining the freedom and

² *Cultural Literacy in Europe Today*, COST and ESF Science Policy Briefing 48, January 2013

³ Ibid.

independence of cultural activity from state control. Only by doing so it will it foster true creativity and critical insight.

‘Culture 2025’ should address the institutional architecture which delivers public sector cultural services. As per the recent [Draft Corporate Governance Standard for Central Government Departments](#) consultation document prepared by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform: “Departments should set out governance arrangements in relation to bodies under their aegis in their Governance Framework” (pg 27-30) and should adhere to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

We recommend that the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht’s relationship with state boards in particular should be modeled on that of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, as set out in the “*Governance Model for Tourism*” chapter in the recent Tourism policy statement [People, Place and Policy](#). For example Ministers are expected to provide a candidate specification to the Public Appointments Service, containing the key requirements for each board role(s) including:

- Specialist skills and technical knowledge;
- Relevant experience /sectoral expertise;
- Educational and other qualifications;
- Particular personal attributes; and
- Range of skills of existing Board members (pg 79-82).

Funding and resources (pg 9)

Durable (multi-annual) financial investment is needed to foster cultural bodies and institutions dedicated to the development and promotion of all aspects of Irish culture. While it may be beyond the scope of this document to introduce multi-annual funding it should be highlighted as a goal for future government planning.

Local authorities have a distinctive role in fostering the cultural life of communities. This should be strengthened through a policy of distributed financial support, in accordance with the priorities set out by the Arts Council regarding Spatial and Demographic Planning in the [Making Great Art Work](#) Strategy.

Infrastructure provision (pg 10)

In its present form, ‘Culture 2025’ neglects a number of key areas that the IHA considers as important components of cultural policy, particularly for the preservation of our cultural heritage. These components must be incorporated into Culture 2025:

- Book production, publishing and the importance of literature generally;
- Libraries as sites and supports for culture;
- The built heritage, including architecture; and

- The remarkably impressive array of cultural events and festivals in the country, ranging from summer schools on poets, playwrights and novelists to festivals of film, literature, drama and performance, and the arts.

'Culture 2025' should also open out the definition of cultural institutions beyond the limited set that currently enjoy recognised status.

International promotion and context (pg 12)

The IHA suggests that 'Culture 2025' needs to give voice to a more ambitious vision for Irish culture in the years ahead. To do so internationally there is a requirement for a promotion and dissemination strategy, which is systematic and maximises the available infrastructure and resources that currently exist such as our Embassy network, Culture Ireland and trade missions.

The digital age and creativity (pg 13)

'Culture 2025' should endorse the preservation and development of traditional and established forms of cultural expression while remaining open to new and as yet unimagined cultural forms that will emerge in the next decade. In a changing environment of cultural production we must ensure that the role of the content creator is not exploited and therefore recommend that copyright laws and protections are revised only after careful review and consultation. In relation to preservation, digitisation is crucial to achieving the goal of preserving cultural heritage, and new technologies must be utilized; however, this work must be carried out by state archives, libraries and higher education institutions with the requisite controls, personnel and sustainability. Ireland cannot afford to become digitally invisible or underdeveloped in terms of its cultural heritage. Public policy and dedicated resources are needed to ensure that new technologies serve the best interests of the Irish public by opening up access to cultural heritage in new and exciting ways.

A greater cultural diversity (pg 14)

Culture is not merely historical reflection rendered into artefact, but is also performative and predictive, especially in terms of the kind of multicultural society in which we aspire to live. Therefore supporting, celebrating and examining popular, hybrid and emerging forms and modes of expression and performance from across all levels of society, especially from ethnic minorities and disenfranchised communities that may not yet enjoy formal institutional support structures, is crucial.

North/South co-operation (pg 16)

Culture has a crucial role to play in increasing understanding, reconciliation and co-operation. As an all-island body the IHA is well placed to observe that much work is still required to build and improve North/South ties, given the current jurisdictional and structural differences and our history. Ideally these efforts would be targeted and

sustainable in nature, and the benefits of co-operation would be apparent. Examples: seed funding could be made available for North/South co-operation projects in this specific area; an annual all-island Arts and Culture conference could be planned to ensure networking and the development of working relationships; and opportunities should be identified in Creative Europe and alternative European funding streams for cross-border co-operation.

Education and Culture

Culture cannot be separated from education: culture is a critical practice and the emphasis should therefore fall not so much on consumption as on creativity, engagement, interpretation, and debate.

There are also specifically educational activities that require support, including conservation training programmes, and courses in film production, dance, theatre, crafts, and digital humanities.

Any new initiatives and policies pertaining to arts, culture and heritage in 'Culture 2025' should complement those of the Department of Education and Skills and curricula development by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

The Irish Humanities Alliance

The Irish Humanities Alliance (IHA) was formed in September 2013. It is a joint initiative of Humanities researchers within eleven higher education and research institutions, including all of the universities, North and South, Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal Irish Academy.

The Alliance is working to generate public awareness of the importance of humanities teaching and research in higher education and society at large. It is concerned also to inform and shape public policy in both jurisdictions and in the EU.

For more information: <http://www.irishhumanities.com/>

