

National Campaign for the Arts:
Making the Case for the Arts in Ireland.

NCFA Colloquia on Research 2013 – 2014
Executive Summary



The place of research in arts policy in Ireland

This is an Executive Summary of the Report on the NCFA Colloquia on Research run in 2013 & 2014.

In April 2013, the NCFA published its Strategy on Research document, which advocates for systematic and appropriate research into the arts in Ireland. The benefits are two-fold: to empower the sector to make a strong and effective case for the value of the arts to society, and to form the basis of robust evidence based policy. The Colloquia on Research were designed to move this research agenda forward in Ireland. The arts in Ireland face crisis in 2014. As resources continue to shrink, the sector is weakened by the lack of a coherent arts policy and limited resources are channelled into one-off initiatives driven by economic agendas. This short-term thinking undermines Ireland's ability to sustain a vibrant, diverse, and rigorous cultural sector, which is valued for more than its contribution to Ireland's immediate economic needs. A continuation of this approach threatens to damage the arts sector irrevocably. The NCFA believes that evidence based research will be the foundation for creating change in the way the arts are viewed in Ireland. This will create a greater understanding of the true value of the arts amongst policy makers and the public. This change is urgently required if Ireland is going to preserve and develop its arts which are a fundamental pillar of contemporary Irish society.

Colloquia Overview ¹

Dr. Tara Byrne was invited by the NCFA to devise a series of four public colloquia on the funded arts and to specifically explore considerations of policy and practice in relation to research needs in Ireland. The Colloquia were held between May 2013 and February 2014 in Dublin (twice), Kilkenny and Galway. Tara Byrne selected four key cultural and arts policy concepts: *the public, evidence, cultural value* and *education*, which were discussed at these open public forum. Though these terms are not yet widely used in Irish arts policy, they represent the building blocks and concerns of international policy with an implicit if not future impact on policy-making in Ireland, as well as embodying key points of contention within the policy and practice community.

Statement On Research and Arts Policy in Ireland

Arts research in Ireland is typically generated in two ways: through the academic world via highly competitive, short-term and uncoordinated national and international research grants, or indirectly (and infrequently) through the state via the Arts Council and local authority system. This results in a lack of arts research in general, and a lack of a coordinated and systematic approach to commissioning arts research in particular. The situation is further exacerbated by the lack of a research strategy at Government Department level (in contrast to other Government Departments) and a consequent disconnect between the arts, arts policy and existing research. For this reason, there is a need for up-to-date and timely information on arts consumption and participation practices in Ireland. This in turn will assist in a cross-sectoral approach towards a 21st century national arts policy for Ireland.

¹ The full report on the [NCFA Colloquia on Research \(2014\)](#), [NCFA Strategy on Research \(2013\)](#) and [NCFA Position on Research \(2013\)](#) are available online (including Colloquia short reports and podcasts) at www.ncfa.ie The NCFA Colloquia on Research were financially supported by Senator Fiach MacConghail, a member of Seanad Éireann.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The NCFA Colloquia on Research fundamentally demonstrated the need and desire for a more coherent and systematic basis and public (political) mandate for policy-making in Ireland. We have identified a series of recommendations² that emerged and have distilled those into the following. They represent a public mandate to demand from Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht action on the following recommendations:

- Conduct and publish an extensive and comprehensive literature review of arts research in Ireland, make more of existing and available data and sustain the commissioning of relevant up to date information on the arts regularly.
- Commission a wide variety of ‘multi-dimensional’ research as a priority that takes into consideration ‘everyday participation’ to assess the full extent of value in the arts, is not restricted to economic research, and shows the correlation between social class, gender, ethnicity and patterns of cultural consumption and participation in Ireland.
- Promote the broad dissemination of accessible research that demonstrates links between health, well-being and arts participation, impact and effect of arts in education and arts education on individuals, and the attitudes, behaviours, preferences and experiences of young people in relation to the arts in Ireland.
- Statistical opportunities exist to use the National Census of Ireland and the National Household Survey to gather data on arts professions and on cultural participation and consumption and this requires endorsement.
- Media impact on public debate and opinion on the arts in Ireland requires specific research.
- European opportunities exist to harness and cooperate on initiatives through the new European programme for research and innovation, Horizon 2020, and governmental and MEP participation in advancing the cultural agenda must be made a new priority.
- New research partnerships and communities must be supported to review current research funding structures to establish new research funding structures through governmental collaborations and synergies and create an arts research network involving universities and institutes of higher education, the Arts Council, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Local Authorities, working with organisations and agencies such as the Economic, Social and Research Institute and the Irish Research Council to develop research initiatives, and utilise the potential of existing bodies and organisations (e.g. the Association of Local Authority Arts Officers, Visual Artists Ireland, Theatre Forum) to help pilot research.

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