



NAVIGATING THE TRADITIONAL ARTS SECTOR IN IRELAND

A REPORT ON RESOURCES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



Jack Talty
July 2020

I would like to sincerely thank all of the participants who generously contributed their time, expertise, and enthusiasm to this research project.

Researched and Produced by Dr. Jack Talty on behalf of Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann
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INTRODUCTION

Terms of reference

The terms of reference established by Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann for this research report were:

... "to retain a consultant to compile a research report examining the challenges, opportunities, and supports currently available to traditional arts practitioners in Ireland..."

Accordingly, I have divided this report into three primary sections. Section one provides an overview of financial and creative supports available to the traditional arts sector on the island of Ireland. The second section of this report presents the challenges encountered by practitioners and other stakeholders working in the traditional arts sector. The third section of this report summarises and reflects on the commentary of research contributors, and in addition, offers a list of 48 recommendations based on the findings of this research.

While I have endeavoured to present as comprehensive a portrayal of the challenges faced in the traditional arts sector as possible, the content of this report has been determined by the contributions of research participants, according to their own experiences and beliefs at a particular moment in time. Therefore, it is conceivable that some of the challenges faced by the sector have not been represented here. Perhaps an online user-generated database can provide an appropriate platform for interested parties to contribute ongoing concerns as they are observed, fulfilling a similar role to the online survey that was part of this research project.

Preface

At a time when the traditional arts of Ireland are acclaimed internationally for their artistic value and the cultural richness of our highly-effective communal and generational processes of transmission are the envy of musical communities around the globe, it is disheartening to observe the level of anxiety experienced by traditional musicians, singers, and dancers working in the traditional arts sector in Ireland and abroad. In general, the arts are severely underfunded in Ireland, when compared to our European counterparts, with 2019 figures revealing that Ireland spends only 0.1% of GDP on the Arts, in comparison to the European average of 0.6% (RTÉ News, 2019). According to a Council of Europe Study in 2013, only Moldova (the poorest country in

Europe at that time) spent a smaller proportion of its GDP on the Arts (The Irish Times, 2017). However, the under-resourcing of the traditional arts sector should not be accepted as an inevitable by-product of insufficient funding in the wider arts sector in Ireland.

Notwithstanding the rapidly-changing funding landscapes that are currently responding to the upheaval observed across all industries and sectors as a result of the current Covid-19 pandemic, I hope that the overview of financial and creative supports provided in this research reflects as comprehensively as is feasible, the supports that are available to those working in the traditional arts sector, and I hope this information will encourage practitioners and organisations to increase their engagement with such supports.

It is important to note that the survey, interviews and the vast majority of this research were conducted prior to the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent cancellation of arts activities. This fact has a number of consequences for this report. First, the anxiety and lack of career sustainability experienced by those in the traditional arts sector has been greatly magnified given the major and unprecedented disruption observed to arts sectors around the world. Second, given the long-standing concerns and challenges experienced by research contributors over numerous years, I have opted to reflect those experiences rather than adapt the research brief to disproportionately focus on the current economic circumstances at the neglect of concerns that have been evident in the traditional arts sector for some time.

In addition to the international reputation enjoyed by the traditional arts of Ireland, it is widely accepted that the levels of participation currently observed in the traditional arts is unprecedented. Enthusiasts who have been given an opportunity or 'in' to appreciate the artistic richness and excellence of Irish traditional music, song and dance, are acutely aware of its uniqueness, beauty and complexity as an artform. Conversely, those who have not benefitted from such a pathway to understand and appreciate the traditional arts, can have pejorative and prejudiced attitudes to whatever they perceive the traditional arts to be. Of course, such attitudes are the prerogative of any listener. However, such a scenario is problematic when such apathy is observed in cultural gatekeepers and others with various forms of cultural capital and power. In advance of writing this introduction, I stumbled upon a YouTube video that illustrates this point. In this clip from a public presentation at an Irish university, a well-known Irish marketing expert (formerly of Fáilte Ireland and Creative Ireland), refers twice to "diddley-eye-music" to reflect what

he is trying to describe as a clichéd or outdated image of Ireland. Considering his particular influence in a number of cultural and political arenas, this individual's professional attitude to the traditional arts is disappointing and unsettling if we consider its impact on the future of traditional arts funding, for example. Although confined to this one isolated example, this instance mirrors wider sector commentary suggesting that advocacy for the traditional arts must thrive and prevail in spite of such apathy rather than rely on the support of political and cultural intervention by the Government of the day, or by those who hold influential cultural positions in Ireland, and who may have very different perceptions of the traditional arts of Ireland.

It is possible that some of the commentary and recommendations contained in this report may appear 'old hat' to individuals who have been advocating on behalf of the traditional arts for some time. I accept this position, but I would argue that the consensus I have observed through conducting this research reflects a different reality; traditional artists and others feel that conversations about sustainability and appropriate funding and resources for the traditional arts have not progressed adequately over the years. I am also aware that some of the commentary offered by participants, as well as my own rhetoric, may frustrate those individuals who have been at the forefront of traditional arts advocacy for decades. It is not my intention to invalidate or disregard the pioneering work of so many artists and advocates, but again, this research suggests that the wider traditional arts sector as a whole, is fragmented and is not currently operating at an optimum level of collective advocacy and activism.

Context

This research report builds on the pioneering advocacy work conducted by countless individuals and organisations working on behalf of the traditional arts community and sector in Ireland and abroad. Organisations such as the now defunct FACÉ, (*Filí, Amhráinthe agus Ceoltóirí na h-Éireann* - trans. *poets, singers, and musicians of Ireland*), established by Steve Cooney and others in 2001, established a vital precedent for an advocacy collective that included members of the traditional arts community. More generally, the ongoing advocacy of highly effective organisations such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, The Irish Traditional Music Archive, Na Píobairí Uilleann, and Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland promote the traditional arts of Ireland on an international scale. Previous initiatives that focused specifically on career sustainability in the traditional arts include the Cruinniú meeting, held in Glór Theatre in Ennis in 2006. This conference provided a forum for a range of practitioners and other stakeholders to discuss the challenges and viability of pursuing

a career as a professional operating in the traditional arts sector in Ireland and overseas. More recently, industry-focused seminars have been facilitated by musician, composer, and broadcaster, Peadar Ó Riada, as part of his annual Bonn Óir Seán Ó Riada (*trans. Seán Ó Riada Gold Medal*) event that takes place in Cork city each February.

In addition, important pieces of research have been commissioned with a view to advocating for the traditional arts sector across the island of Ireland. Toner Quinn's *Towards a Policy for the Traditional Arts* (2004) and a *Report on the Harping Tradition and Ireland* (2014) are two examples of seminal reports commissioned by the Arts Council, while the Arts Council of Northern Ireland has also commissioned significant reports on the traditional arts, such as Dermot McLaughlin's *Audit of the Traditional Music Sector in Northern Ireland* (2015).

This piece of research acknowledges and draws inspiration from many of these important initiatives.

Terminology

Throughout this report, I use the term 'traditional arts' in reference to Irish traditional music, song, and dance. Although 'Irish traditional music' is the term favoured by many practitioners, and one that implicitly encompasses the practices of song and dance, I opt for the overarching term of traditional arts to explicitly, inclusively, and conveniently refer at all times to Irish traditional music, song, and dance. Unlike the traditional arts definition adopted by the Arts Council, I do not include oral arts such as *agallamh beirte* or *lúibíní*, within my definition of the traditional arts for the purposes of this research. I am primarily concerned with the opportunities and challenges encountered by practitioners of Irish traditional music, song and dance. Of the 105 individuals who described their relationship to the traditional arts in the online survey designed for this research, 92.4% stated that they were traditional musicians; 26.7% described themselves as a traditional singer; 8.6% were traditional dancers; and 5.7% stated that they did not perform but were traditional arts enthusiasts. Naturally, there was some overlap between each practice whereby some musicians were also dancers etc.

Perhaps my consistent references to a traditional arts sector will irritate some who feel that the term undermines or overshadows the generational and communal transmission of Irish traditional music, song, and dance in their informal, organic and non-professional cultural contexts. I

understand and appreciate such perspectives as a musician who grew up in a traditional music family and community; many of my most valued musical activities have taken place in informal environments, far from the concert stage. Confining the present discussion to professionalisation, career development, mentorship and industry practices may also conflict with how I experience the traditional arts as a practitioner. However, given the terms of reference and necessary task at hand, I unapologetically and wholeheartedly commit to exploring and documenting the opportunities and challenges encountered by those working professionally and semi-professionally in the traditional arts sector in Ireland today.

Similarly, the term 'sector' may also displease those who fear that a focus on professionalisation may overshadow and undermine non-professional practice. I do not disagree with such concerns but using the term 'sector' also prevents the imposition of industry and professional concerns, on the extra-professional and non-professional practices of the traditional arts community; using the term, 'traditional arts community' throughout this document would disproportionately conflate the professional and semi-professional needs and concerns of practitioners with those of the wider traditional arts community, who many not see professionalisation as being as central to how they experience Irish traditional music, song, and dance. Ultimately, if we accept that the traditional arts are a rich, diverse, and accomplished artform and cultural expression, we must advocate fervently for the opportunity to sustain a professional traditional arts sector for the benefit of all who wish to engage with it.

The traditional arts community

The traditional arts community in Ireland and overseas is celebrated as an inter-generational community of practice that relies on transmission from one generation to the next, thereby frequently dismantling age barriers and promoting a healthy respect for older, experienced participants. Not confined by geographical boundaries, the Irish traditional arts community is dispersed throughout the globe. While a separate study would be required to comprehensively document the population and demographics of the international Irish traditional arts community, I have provided a list of some useful numbers in figure 1, that can help determine the scale of activity involved.

The median age of the 219 individuals who disclosed their age when completing the online survey accompanying this research was 42. The vast majority of survey respondents (90.3%) stated that

they were resident in the Republic of Ireland or Ireland, while 1.4% specified that they were living in Northern Ireland. Other countries of residence stated by respondents include Spain, France, the USA, Austria, the UK, Germany, Japan, and Belgium. Of the 219 respondents who disclosed their nationality, 89% were Irish, while other nationalities stated included Italian, British, American, Australian, South Korean, Canadian, and Spanish.

Attendees at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann (CCÉ Annual Report 2020)	Approx. 750,000
Members of The Session (thesession.org) online Irish traditional music community	76,141
County and provincial competitors at CCÉ competitions (worldwide)	Approx. 25,000
Competitors at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann	Approx. 6,000
Members of the TradConnect online Irish traditional music community	8,825
Number of uilleann pipers (across six continents) according to NPU	Over 3,000
Number of traditional music students in Northern Ireland in 2015	5,295
Students registered for the 2020 Willie Clancy Summer School	Approx. 1,000
Tutors and lecturers at the 2019 Willie Clancy Summer School	Approx. 150
Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann branches (across 18 countries)	430
Students at CCÉ’s annual Scoil Éigse music school	Approx. 800
The number of writers who contributed to the Companion to Irish Traditional Music	Approx. 200
The number of Irish traditional albums released in 2016	> 160
The number of traditional arts practitioners represented by FACÉ	Approx. 300
Number of teachers providing traditional music tuition in Northern Ireland in 2015	406
Number of professional artists (all artforms) in Ireland in 2015	Approx. 4,915

Figure 1: The Irish traditional arts community in numbers.

Methodology

The research methodologies used for this research combine interviews with selected contributors, an online survey, and archival/desk research. In line with the terms of reference of this research, the research methodologies employed for this report have emphasised the collection of qualitative data in the form of interview conversations and open-ended survey questions, rather than a reliance on quantitative and statistical data collection exclusively. Further research outlining data such as detailed practitioner populations, audience demographics, and other valuable statistical information would undoubtedly enrich our understanding of the traditional arts sector in Ireland, but it extends beyond the remit of this report. Those wishing to pursue research of that

nature will find inspiration in *Working as a Traditional Musician in Scotland*, a report commissioned by Traditional Music Forum in 2019.

Interviews

A total of 74 individuals were interviewed for this research report. They were each selected on the basis of their perspectives and expertise in a range of areas relating to the traditional arts in Ireland, as well as their professional experience in the arts more generally, both in Ireland and internationally. Interviewees can be categorised as occupying one or more of the following roles:

- Performer and/or teacher of Irish traditional music, song, or dance.
- Media professional (broadcaster, journalist, radio producer etc.)
- Traditional arts advocate and/or representative of a traditional arts organisation
- Artist/practitioner/arts advocate in a discipline other than the traditional arts.
- PR/management/arts administration/publicity professional
- Venue or arts centre manager/director
- Creator of original work in the traditional arts or another discipline/artform

Online Survey

The online survey conducted as part of this research report was launched at the inaugural Trad Talk conference in Dublin Castle on 16th November 2019. Information on where to participate in the survey, as well as its closing date was circulated widely via social media; in an article written by Toner Quinn in the *Journal of Music* on 21st November 2019; and in a radio interview with broadcaster Kieran Hanrahan on Céilí House on RTÉ Radio One, on August 3rd, 2019. Consisting of 26 questions, the survey received a total of 243 responses. Again, the median age of the 219 respondents who disclosed their age was 42. Of the 218 individuals who disclosed their gender, 90 (41.28%) were female, 127 (58.26%) were male (1 individual (0.46%) selected 'Other').

Although the survey gathered important quantitative data outlining important demographical information such as age, gender, nationality, and country of residence, for example, I was keen that the survey would also provide an accessible platform for all interested parties to contribute their expertise and opinions in the form of open-ended responses. Consequently, the survey has generated a rich and substantial body of qualitative data consisting of a diverse range of perspectives on both the opportunities and challenges encountered by those involved in the Irish

traditional arts. Importantly, this has realised my ambition that the research benefits from the voices of a wider sample group than those 74 individuals I selected for interview. Irrespective of the methodological care and attention given to the selection of interviewees for this report, this research relies on the wider collective expert input of the community of traditional musicians, singers, dancers and enthusiasts whom this report is attempting to serve. Survey responses to a number of open-ended questions provided very useful insights which were later explored in conversations with research interviewees.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Oisín Mac Diarmada and Tristan Rosenstock of Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann for commissioning this report and for having the vision to provide practitioners and other stakeholders in the Irish traditional arts community with this opportunity to offer their expertise, experience, and opinions to the public record. I would like to thank all of the individuals who generously contributed their time and expertise to research interviews and the online survey accompanying this research. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the immense encouragement, goodwill and positivity offered by contributors and the traditional arts community more widely. I would like to thank Paul Flynn and Catherine Boothman of the Arts Council for their input as well as acknowledge the Arts Council's financial support for this research through the Traditional Arts Project Award. I would like to acknowledge the many personnel from traditional arts organisations who generously gave their time, expertise and enthusiasm to this report. These include individuals from Na Píobairí Uilleann, Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland, the Irish Traditional Music Archive, and FairPlé, as well as representatives from RTÉ, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, and TG4.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

This report relied significantly on the participation of a range of stakeholders in the Irish traditional music community, as well as on a number of individuals and organisations working in the wider arts community in Ireland and internationally. In addition to those who provided opinions and insights through the online survey conducted as part of this research, the following 74 individuals contributed to this research in the form of recorded interviews:

Anderson, Alistair	English concertina player and Northumbrian piper, composer, and teacher. Founder of Folkworks.
Barry, Aileen	Visual artist. Member of Aosdána and the Royal Hibernian Academy. Lecturer at the Limerick School of Art and Design.
Barslund, Rune Cygan	Danish folk musician and composer.
Begley, Cormac	Concertina player. Founder of the Tunes in the Church concert series.
Blake, John	Flute player, guitarist, pianist and audio engineer.
Bradley, Harry	Flute player and uilleann piper. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Musician of the Year 2014.
Breatnach, Cormac	Whistle player and composer.
Browne, Peter	Uilleann piper, retired senior producer at RTÉ Radio. Former presenter of <i>The Rolling Wave</i> on RTÉ Radio 1.
Browne, Ronan	Uilleann piper, flute player, producer and composer.
Byrne, Conor	Flute player, concert programmer and organiser. TV and radio producer.
Byrne, Ellie	Management, PR, and promotion professional. Member of Gradam Ceoil TG4 selection panel.
Carty, John	Banjo, fiddle, and flute player. Trad Ireland Trad Artist in Residence, Sligo. Tutor at the Irish World Academy, UL. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Musician of the Year 2003.
Casey, Karan	Singer. Founding member of FairPlé.
Conway, Zoe	Traditional fiddler, classical violinist, composer, and singer.
Cooney, Steve	Guitarist, and producer. Founder of FACÉ in 2001.

Davitt, Sibéal	Traditional and contemporary dancer and choreographer. Traditional flute player.
Denvir, Síle	Harpist and sean-nós singer. Irish language lecturer at Dublin City University.
Diamond, Danny	Fiddle player, singer, composer, recording engineer, and producer.
Doherty, Liz	Fiddle player, academic, and lecturer. Traditional arts consultant.
Dorgan, Angela	CEO of First Music Contact. Chair of the National Campaign for the Arts.
Dunne, Niamh	Fiddle player, and member of the band Beoga. Founding member of FairPlé.
Dyynes, Linda	Director of Folk Org in Oslo, Norway.
Fox, Edel	Concertina player and TV producer. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Young Musician of the Year 2004.
Friel, Clare	Fiddle player, and Gradam Ceoil TG4 Young Musician of the Year 2018.
Gavin, Frankie	Fiddle and flute player. Founding member of De Dannan. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Musician of the Year 2018.
Geerinck, Jeroen	Belgian musician, engineer, producer, and founder of Trad Records.
Geraghty, Des	Flute player and singer. President of the SIPTU trade union 1999-2004. Current Board member of TG4.
Glackin, Paddy	Fiddle player. Board member of the Arts Council.
Granville, Aoife	Flute and fiddle player. Director at the Ionad Cultúrtha, Ballyvourney, county Cork.
Hanrahan, Kieran	Banjo player. Presenter of <i>Céilí House</i> on RTÉ Radio 1. Chair of Culture Ireland Expert Advisory Committee. Artistic Director of Temple Bar TradFest. Director of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann's Scoil Éigse summer school.
Hanrahan, Joan	Fiddle player. Secondary-level music teacher and presenter of the <i>West Wind</i> on Clare FM.

Hayes, Martin	Fiddle player. Member of The Gloaming. Irish Government Cultural Ambassador. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Musician of the Year 2008.
Hill, Noel	Concertina player. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Musician of the Year 2011.
Howley, Sharon	Cellist. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Young Musician of the Year 2020.
King, Philip	Musician, producer, and presenter of the South Wind Blows on RTÉ Radio 1. Founder, producer and director with Hummingbird Productions.
Long, Siobhán	Traditional arts writer with the Irish Times.
Lorenzo, Anxo	Galician gaita and whistle player.
Lundström, Åke	CEO of Live at Heart Festival, Sweden. Nordic representative, Folk Alliance International.
MacEvilly, Brendan	Writer. Programmer with Words Ireland, Editor and Creative Producer with Holy Show Print & Production Company.
Madden, Joanie	Whistle and flute player. Leader of Cherish the Ladies.
Marin, Mikael	Swedish viola player, and member of the group Väsen. Tutor at the Royal College of Music, Stockholm.
Martin, Neil	Cellist, uilleann piper and composer. Member of the Gradam Ceoil TG4 selection panel.
McCarthy, Benny	Accordion and melodeon player. Founding member of Danú.
McCann, Aibhlín	Musician, and communications consultant. Chair of Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland.
McKeon, Gay	Uilleann piper. CEO of Na Píobairí Uilleann.
McLaughlin, Dermot	Fiddle player. Cultural and arts consultant.
McMenemy, Jamie	Scottish singer and bouzouki player based in Brittany. Former member of the band Kornog.
Mercier, Mel	Percussionist and composer. Professor of Performing Arts at the Irish World Academy, UL.
Molloy, Ryan	Pianist, fiddle player, and composer. Lecturer in composition at Maynooth University

Monaghan, Úna	Harpist and composer. Member of the Board of ITMA and member of Gradam Ceoil TG4 selection panel.
Napier, Hamish	Scottish flute player and pianist. Tutor at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow.
Ní Bhriain, Aoife	Traditional fiddler and classical violinist. Member of the Board of ITMA.
Ní Choisdealbha, Neansaí	Flute player, and presenter of <i>Ceol Binn ó na Beanna</i> on RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta. Head of Music at Raidió na Gaeltachta. Member of Gradam Ceoil TG4 selection panel.
Ní Chonaráin, Siobhán	Flute player and senior administrator with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.
Ní Ghráinne, Proinsias	Commissioning editor at TG4. Member of Gradam Ceoil TG4 selection panel.
Ní Mhaonaigh, Mairéad	Fiddle player, and singer. Founding member of Altan. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Musician of the Year 2017.
Nic Amhlaoimh, Muireann	Singer, and flute player. Presenter of <i>Malairt Port</i> on RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Singer of the Year 2011.
Nic Cormaic, Aoife	Fiddle player, radio producer and presenter of <i>The Rolling Wave</i> on RTÉ Radio 1.
Nic Gabhann, Caitlín	Concertina player, tutor and traditional dancer.
Ó Maonaigh, Ciarán	Fiddle player and TV director. Director of 'Sé mo Laoch traditional music series on TG4. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Young Musician of the Year 2003.
Ó Riada, Peadar	Multi-instrumentalist, singer, and composer. Presenter of <i>Cuireadh Chun Ceoil</i> on RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta.
O'Byrne, Marie	Director of the Hawk's Well Theatre, Sligo.
O'Connor, Dónal	Fiddle and piano player. TV presenter and producer. Audio engineer and producer.
O'Connor, Liam	Fiddle player. Director of the Irish Traditional Music Archive. Gradam Ceoil TG4 Young Musician of the Year 2002.
O'Hara, Maeve	Classical percussionist and music teacher.

Pearson, Jonathan	Director of creative production company, Islander. Concerts Manager with Crash Ensemble.
Penrose, Willie	Former Minister of State and Labour Party TD for Longford-Westmeath.
Quinn, Toner	Fiddle player and author. Founder and publisher of the <i>Journal of Music</i> .
Roth, Nick	Saxophonist, composer, and producer. Co-Director of Diatribe Records.
Rynne, Padraig	Concertina player, composer, audio engineer and producer. Development Officer with Music Generation Clare.
Sherlock, Tom	Manager and agent. Music business and programming consultant.
Thoumire, Simon	Scottish concertina player, composer, and founder of Scottish traditional music advocacy organisation <i>Hands Up for Trad</i> .
Vallely, Fintan	Musician and writer. Editor of the <i>Companion to Irish Traditional Music</i> .
Vallely, Niall	Concertina player and composer.

A NOTE FROM TRAD IRELAND / TRAIÐ ÉIREANN

Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann was established in 2018 by Oisín Mac Diarmada & Tristan Rosenstock with a mission to promote the traditional arts and support practitioners. We noted the very important work being done by resource organisations in areas such as literature, theatre, and music - including organisations working under a targeted remit in the traditional arts - and it became abundantly clear that the establishment of a resource organisation was a critical next step for the future development of the traditional arts community.

The most fundamental step in striving towards a resource organisation for the traditional arts is to endeavour to comprehensively hear the voices and experiences of the community. We also felt it was important to fully comprehend the needs of the sector as it has evolved, grown, and been challenged in recent decades. With a larger than ever number of traditional artists working in a full- or part-time capacity within the sector, the urgency of documenting the scope, scale, and challenges of the sector has created momentum for this report.

Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann is mindful of a traditional arts sector where practitioners operate as disparate, individual entities, without the coordination of a resource organisation. In November 2019 we hosted the inaugural TradTalk Conference in Dublin Castle, giving a platform for insightful discussions to take place regarding the traditional arts landscape. Reflecting on the event, Journal of Music Editor Toner Quinn remarked: "I didn't realise how badly we needed TradTalk until I was there listening".

TradTalk and this report are an attempt to harness an already rich community ethos within the traditional arts scene, empowering the sector to communicate with a stronger and more coherent voice. The work of our poets is championed by Poetry Ireland; the performing arts community are supported by Theatre Forum. Now, we believe, is the time for a resource organisation to strengthen the voice of the traditional arts community, to advocate on its behalf, and champion the extraordinary contribution to Irish cultural life which traditional artists can only continue to make with the proper supports.

We would like to sincerely thank Dr. Jack Talty for his indefatigable approach to this research project. He brought with him both meticulous scholarship and an intimate knowledge of the

landscape gained from years of experience as a traditional music performer, producer, and collaborator.

It is our hope that this report will prove to be a seminal moment in our understanding of the traditional arts landscape in Ireland. The report recommendations will chart the journey we need to take, building on the extraordinary achievements of our traditional artists, to sustain and develop the sector into the future. Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann is determined to play a central role as we take that journey together.

Oisín MacDiarmada & Tristan Rosenstock
July 2020

This research report overviews both the opportunities and challenges encountered by practitioners working in the traditional arts sector in Ireland. First, section one of this report overviews a range of funding and creative supports available on the island of Ireland.

Such artistic supports and resources include:

- Funding awards and supports offered by bodies such as the Arts Council, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and Culture Ireland;
- Local Authority Arts Office supports;
- Artist-in-Residence initiatives;
- Music Network;
- Foras na Gaeilge and Ealaín na Gaeltachta;
- Music business and enterprise supports;
- Resources provided by existing traditional arts representative organisations such as Na Píobairí Uilleann, Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland, and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann;
- Government initiatives and welfare supports.

It is hoped that traditional arts practitioners who are unfamiliar with existing artistic supports available in the traditional arts sector will benefit from becoming more informed about the various schemes and awards presented in this document.

Section two of this report focuses on the challenges experienced by those working in the traditional arts sector, and its role is to provide a pioneering platform for traditional artists to communicate such difficulties. Practitioner voices are represented through interviews with 74 individuals and an online survey also provided a forum for practitioners and other stakeholders to offer important insights into the traditional arts community and semi-professional and professional sector in Ireland.

According to interview and survey responses, the primary challenges encountered by those working in the traditional arts sector include:

- A need for a central information hub that overviews available funding supports and resources available in the traditional arts sector;

- A need for a centralised, cohesive and democratic advocacy voice for the wider traditional arts sector;
- A demand for a forum for ongoing sector-wide collaboration and dialogue;
- A dedicated physical space/premises for the wider traditional arts sector;
- A desire to mirror the international reputation of the traditional arts at home in Ireland;
- Career unsustainability regardless of experience or age;
- A difficulty in obtaining financial services such as mortgages and loans;
- A lack of employment benefits, illness supports, and access to schemes such as the Artists' Exemption;
- Declining album revenue;
- Part-time and full-time professionals competing for the same opportunities;
- The lack of an employment safeguard scheme such as the *Intermittent du Spectacle* in France;
- Insufficient media coverage for the traditional arts on mainstream TV and radio;
- Insufficient review/discourse opportunities for the traditional arts in mainstream journalism platforms;
- Perceived cronyism among media professionals, programmers, and other gatekeepers;
- Pejorative attitudes towards the traditional arts among media management and producers;
- Low and inconsistent rates of pay;
- Inconstancies in how intellectual property rights are respected and protected;
- Inequitable contracts and exclusivity agreements;
- Poor levels of Arts Council funding for the traditional arts in comparison to other artforms and genres of music;
- Perceptions that Arts Council application processes are formulaic and unrepresentative of the practices of the traditional arts community;
- A lack of consultancy and advice available on Arts Council funding applications comparable to previous Deis Advisor schemes;
- The resources required and challenges encountered when managing Arts Council funding for projects;
- The perceived disproportionate impact of the Arts Council on artistic practice in the traditional arts;
- The selectivity involved in both shortlisting and funding applications made to the Arts Council;

- The perceived biases and prejudices of Arts Council peer assessment panels;
- Poor public perception of the traditional arts in Ireland among non-participants despite unprecedented popularity among participants;
- Gender barriers and imbalances in programming;
- Inappropriate professional conduct and sexual harassment;
- Perceptions of the traditional arts as an artform, in comparison to other artforms and genres of music;
- The impact of the pub session on perceptions of the traditional arts and on audience engagement for paid concert performances;
- The perceived low level of knowledge about the traditional arts among programmers, arts administrators and other stakeholders;
- Insufficient and inadequate traditional arts content in the Irish education system.
- A need for increased audience engagement with the traditional arts;
- A lack of recognition for traditional artists in Aosdána, and the consequent public image implications for the traditional arts;
- Balancing creativity with music business and administrative work;
- A lack of business supports/experience among traditional artists;
- A lack of a connected touring and venue infrastructure for the traditional arts;
- IMRO registration and royalty collection;
- International instrument transport;
- Obtaining travel visas to the USA.

In an attempt to address these challenges, this report makes 48 recommendations:

Availing of existing opportunities

- Artists and other stakeholders unfamiliar with the opportunities and resources available to the traditional arts sector should use section one of this document as a starting point to proactively seek out supports relevant to their creative and professional needs as traditional artists.

- It is recommended that an advocacy body develop an online information hub that overviews and regularly updates the funding and professional supports and opportunities available to traditional artists in Ireland.

Career unsustainability and unsatisfactory working conditions

- It is recommended that an existing traditional arts representative or resource organisation facilitates workshops, webinars or other consultancy opportunities for traditional artists to avail of advice and guidance on matters such as financial management, accounting and business supports.
- In the absence of published pay rates or guidelines for the traditional arts, a traditional arts representative organisation should consider developing and publishing a charter for pay scales, contracts and working conditions, comparable to steps taken by advocacy organisations such as Words Ireland and The Contemporary Music Centre.
- It is recommended that the Arts Council communicates to events and festivals in receipt of funding, the importance of adhering to the Council's policy on pay and remuneration by respecting and protecting the intellectual property and rights of artists whereby permission (and remuneration, if possible) is required when performances are recorded for subsequent broadcast and other use.
- Traditional artists should engage with the Musicians' Union of Ireland to become familiar with the potential benefits of MUI membership.
- The Musicians' Union of Ireland should proactively seek out opportunities to interact with traditional artists at traditional arts festivals and events.
- It is recommended that a traditional arts representative organisation provide a forum to discuss the establishment of an industry co-operative that could collaboratively engage the various stakeholders in the recording industry chain, with a view to optimising and streamlining the process for the benefit of artists.

Mentorship and increased professional opportunities

- It is recommended that a traditional arts representative organisation, in collaboration with the Arts Council, establishes a mentorship programme whereby experienced practitioners and music business professionals offer guidance to emerging traditional artists and other interested parties in areas such as artistic development and music business.
- Interested venues and institutions should proactively seek funding from the Arts Council to establish artist-in-residence initiatives as part of their traditional arts programming.

Touring supports

- It is recommended that a traditional arts representative organisation encourage and facilitate the development of a partnership with venues and programmers, comparable to theatre networks such as NASC, Nomad, Strollers, Imeall, and Shortworks.
- It is recommended that a traditional arts representative organisation liaise and collaborate with an established and experienced organisation such as Music Network on an additional touring opportunity, to optimise the development of traditional arts projects and audiences, with a potential focus on supporting existing projects through an open-call application process.
- Where feasible and relevant, traditional artists, management and festival organisers should consult the airline policy rating system developed by the International Federation of Musicians when selecting an airline for international performances.

Artist welfare and employment supports

- It is recommended that an existing traditional arts representative or resource organisation collaborate with other Irish arts resource and representative organisations such as the National Campaign for the Arts in order to represent the voices of traditional artists in any collective dialogue with Government on issues such as employment, social protection, arts funding, and obtaining travel visas, for example.
- It is recommended that an existing traditional arts representative or resources organisation liaise with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to act as a certifying

professional organisation on behalf of traditional artists who are not members of the Musicians' Union of Ireland (MUI).

- It is recommended that the Arts Council and the Revenue Commissioners clarify or revise policy on the tax exemption status of traditional arts awards that do not involve the creation of new work. At present, documentation states that awards for interpretative work, which forms the vast majority of traditional arts activity, are not exempt from income tax.
- In the absence of any emergency benevolent fund to provide urgent financial assistance to traditional artists in times of unexpected financial crisis, it is recommended that models such as Help Musicians UK are researched with a view to developing a similar scheme for traditional artists in Ireland. This could potentially be funded through tax deductible philanthropic donations from sectors that benefit considerably from Irish traditional music, song, and dance.

The Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO)

- It is recommended that traditional artists liaise with IMRO in order to become more familiar with copyright and royalty payments accruing from their registered works.
- It is recommended that IMRO representatives increase engagement with the traditional arts sector by providing outreach activities at various events and festivals.
- It is recommended that IMRO appoint a dedicated officer to liaise with a traditional arts representative organisation in order to provide guidance to those who wish to claim outstanding royalty payments but who may not be IMRO members.

Gender imbalances and a reporting mechanism for inappropriate behaviour

- An appropriate umbrella advocacy or representative organisation should consider collaborating with relevant existing support organisations to facilitate the establishment of a confidential, robust, and ethical platform for reporting inappropriate professional behaviour relating to payment, contracts, and general conduct. Such an organisation could at least begin a conversation to liaise with the Musicians' Union and traditional arts festivals in an effort to collaboratively progress such an initiative.

- It is recommended that traditional arts festivals and events develop charters of best practice for eliminating instances of sexual harassment and misconduct and consider distributing flyers and posters detailing contact information for dedicated liaison personnel.
- It is recommended that the necessity to provide a safe environment for all attendees is communicated directly by the Arts Council to traditional arts festivals and events in receipt of Council funding.

Funding bodies and awards

- Traditional artists and other stakeholders should subscribe to the Arts Council's regular newsletters for updates on available supports and upcoming deadlines.
- It is recommended that the challenges documented in this report are observed by the Arts Council as sufficient justification for re-assessing traditional arts funding when developing the next phase of Council policy beyond 2022.
- It is recommended that a traditional arts resource organisation make representations to the Arts Council to advocate for increased traditional arts funding on behalf of the wider community and sector.
- It is recommended that traditional arts funding awards such as the Deis Recording Award are re-evaluated in terms of their feasibility, in consultation with industry professionals and practitioners.
- It is recommended that the next three-year Arts Council strategy to follow *Making Great Art Work 2020-22*, offers a platform and mechanism for traditional arts stakeholders to contribute to traditional arts policy to ensure that Council policy resonates with practitioner perspectives.
- Based on the consensus outlined in this research, it is recommended that the Arts Council continue to increase their level of outreach and community engagement activities at festivals and traditional arts events, in order to attract new funding applicants.
- In the absence of *Deis* advisors it is recommended that the Arts Council provides more frequent funding advice clinics in locations not confined to Dublin and its environs.

- It is recommended that a traditional arts representative or resource organisation prioritise the provision of workshops and consultancy opportunities for applicants to receive support and feedback on funding applications.
- It is recommended that publicly funded Arts Council initiatives such as *Tradition Now*, programmed in collaboration with the National Concert Hall, implement an open-call element to its programming in order to provide traditional artists with an opportunity to apply to perform.

The public image and profile of the traditional arts

- It is recommended that programmers and artists consider increasing audience engagement for local performances through workshops and other outreach activities comparable to the model developed by Music Network.
- It is recommended that a traditional arts representative body consider engaging in effective dialogue with national media management in order to represent the concerns of the traditional arts sector about insufficient media coverage.
- It is recommended that a traditional arts representative body considers liaising with bodies such as the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and Screen Skills Ireland to increase collaboration between the traditional arts and creative media sectors, with a view to providing mentorship opportunities comparable to the Irish Traditional Music Writer Mentoring Scheme established by the Journal of Music.
- Traditional artists are encouraged to engage more proactively and effectively with media professionals in order to maximise airplay and media coverage for new releases and events.
- It is recommended that a traditional arts representative body considers programming a forum for traditional artists to interact with media professionals and broadcasters at a traditional arts event, such as TradTalk.
- It is recommended that a representative body consider facilitating workshops on social media promotional tools and digital marketing to enable traditional artists to look beyond conventional media platforms for promoting their work.

- It is recommended that a representative body consider the establishment of a national/ international Irish Traditional Arts Day to maximise exposure to the traditional arts among the mainstream Irish population.
- Interested parties from within the traditional arts sector should proactively engage with the Arts in Education Portal and open calls from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) with a view to developing traditional arts educational content.
- It is recommended that the Arts Council and Aosdána make a formal statement on Aosdána's policy on the traditional arts in order to acknowledge what are perceived as inconsistencies in the interpretation of the 2003 Arts Act.

Traditional arts advocacy

- Despite the exemplary work being undertaken by specialist organisations within the traditional arts sector, there is consensus expressed in this research that an umbrella representative organisation is needed to work on behalf of the wider traditional arts community/sector. It is recommended that Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann consider fulfilling that role.
- In response to a demand communicated by contributors to this research, Trad Ireland/Traid Éireann should endeavour to host a TradTalk event on an annual basis.
- Considering the demonstrated ambition and capacity of traditional artists to advocate for the traditional arts, albeit on an individual, ad hoc, and fragmented basis, the development of a new resource or representative organisation for the traditional arts should embed practitioner engagement and input as a key component in its own development as an organisation.
- Given the potential of an annual TradTalk event to address so many of the concerns expressed by traditional artists and other stakeholders in this research, it is recommended that the Arts Council and Trad Ireland/Traid Éireann develop a collaborative partnership that ensures the longevity and impact of such an event.
- Notwithstanding the highly ambitious pursuit of providing a premises for a new traditional arts representative body, it is recommended that further research into the feasibility of this objective be undertaken.

- Any resource or representative organisation with an ambition to sustainably advocate for the traditional arts in Ireland to the level demonstrated by organisations such as Dance Ireland, Folk Org, or the Traditional Music Forum in Scotland, must source strategic funding opportunities that will allow for maximum growth and impact. Relying on project-based funding awards will undermine the potential of such an organisation to adequately advocate on behalf of its membership.
- An umbrella traditional arts representative or resource organisation should regularly liaise with existing international organisations working with traditional and folk arts to collaborate and dialogue on best practice for sector-specific advocacy. This should include collaboration with the recently-established European Folk Network.

1. Current Opportunities and Resources for Traditional Arts Practitioners in Ireland

FUNDING SUPPORTS

This section of the report provides an overview of current supports and resources available to traditional arts practitioners on the island of Ireland. While every effort has been made to present as comprehensive a list of resources as possible, the recent economic uncertainty arising from the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic has shifted the arts funding landscape drastically. Readers are encouraged to consult the web links provided for the most recent funding updates.

The Arts Council

The Arts Council of Ireland is the national government agency responsible for funding, developing, and promoting the arts in Ireland. It aims to “stimulate public interest in the arts; promote knowledge, appreciation, and practice of the arts; assist in improving standards in the arts; and advise the [Minister for Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht (since 2020)] and other public bodies on the arts” (Arts Council website, 2020). The organisation operates under the 2003 Arts Act, which functions as:

“AN ACT TO PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF AND PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS; TO REPEAL THE ARTS ACT 1951, AND THE ARTS ACT 1973; TO CONTINUE IN BEING AN CHOMHAIRLE EALAÍON; TO CONFER CERTAIN FUNCTIONS IN RELATION TO THE ARTS ON THE MINISTER FOR ARTS, SPORT AND TOURISM; AND TO PROVIDE FOR MATTERS CONNECTED THEREWITH” (Irish Statute Book 2020).

Importantly, the 2003 Arts Act interprets the arts as:

“any creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes, in particular, visual arts, theatre, literature, music, dance, opera, film, circus and architecture, and includes any medium when used for those purposes” (Arts Act 2003, Irish Statute Book 2020).

Within the organisational structure of the Arts Council, a dedicated traditional arts section oversees the distribution of Council funding to the traditional arts sector. This traditional arts section was established in response to *Towards a Policy for the Traditional Arts*, a study commissioned by the Arts Council and authored by Toner Quinn in 2004. The Head of Traditional Arts at the Council is Paul Flynn, who works alongside Traditional Arts Officer, Catherine Boothman. In addition, musician Emer Mayock is employed as Traditional Arts Adviser to the section. The Government’s allocation of funding to the Arts Council for 2020 was €80 million. The

traditional arts received €2.1 million (2.6%) of this. Informed by the Council's policy document, *Making Great Art Work: Traditional Arts Policy & Strategy 2018*, financial support is offered through the following funding streams:

Arts Grant Funding

This annual award is open to all artforms and is open to organisations and individuals who seek support for a project or activity occurring over a fixed period of time. There is no fixed limit to the amount awarded.

Deis Recording and Publication Award

This award is open to traditional arts practitioners who wish to engage in a recording or publication of work. The maximum amount awarded is €10,000.

Travel and Training Award

This award provides financial support to individuals who wish to engage in training, and development, and it is divided in three streams. "Travel and Training Outbound" supports individuals who wish to avail of training abroad; "Travel and Training Inbound" supports those who wish to invite specialists from abroad to Ireland; and the "Creative Europe (Culture Sub-programme) Travel Award" supports arts organisations submitting proposals for EU funding under the Creative Europe (Culture Sub-programme) 2014-2020 (Arts Council Travel and Training Award 2020). The maximum amount offered varies according to the artform, and the maximum amount available to the traditional arts is €1000.

Countess Markievicz Award

This award is open to multiple artforms, including the traditional arts, and its aim is to provide artists with the time and space to "develop new work that reflects on the role of women in the period covered by the decade of centenaries 2012-23, and beyond" (Arts Council Markievicz Award 2020). The maximum amount awarded is €20,000.

Traditional Arts Commissions Award

This award is open to both individuals and organisations and its main purpose is to "facilitate creative partnerships between a range of commissioners and artists" to create new work within the

traditional arts (Arts Council Traditional Arts Commissions Award 2020). The maximum amount awarded is €10,000.

The Liam O'Flynn Award

This award, a joint initiative of the Arts Council and the National Concert Hall, supports traditional artists through the provision of fees, career advice, and a residency programme based at the National Concert Hall, Dublin. The maximum amount awarded is €15,000.

Next Generation Bursary Award

This award is open to individual artists who wish to devote time and space to developing their own practice, and a primary aim is to “support a group of promising artists across all disciplines at an early but pivotal stage in their career” (Arts Council Next Generation Artists Award 2020). The maximum funding offered under this scheme is €20,000.

Open Call

This award is open to multiple artforms, including the traditional arts, and its primary purpose is to support “the creation of original and ambitious work of excellence” (Arts Council Open Call 2020). The fund is composed of 2 strands, a development strand with a maximum award of €10,000, and a ‘Creation’ strand with a maximum award of €350,000.

Strategic Funding

This funding stream is open to organisations who provide an infrastructure for delivering arts events and services. Organisations working in and/or promoting the traditional arts sector are eligible to apply. There is no fixed limit on the amount of funding offered under this scheme.

Touring and Dissemination of Work Scheme

Open to practitioners in a number of artforms, this award offers financial support for touring and presenting work to audiences. There is no fixed limit on the amount of funding available under this scheme. A “Touring and Dissemination of Work Scheme - Advance Planning” award is also offered for touring/events taking place later in the next calendar year.

Traditional Arts Bursary Award

This award is open to traditional artists who seek financial assistance to devote time and space to focus exclusively on developing their arts practice. The maximum amount awarded was formerly €10,000 but this was raised to €15,000 in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

Traditional Arts Project Award

This award, comprising a small and medium scale strand (€20,000 maximum award) and a large-scale strand (€80,000 maximum award), is open to individual artists and organisations who seek funding for standalone arts projects.

Young Ensembles Scheme

The purpose of this award is to support groups of young people between the ages of twelve and twenty-four to create ambitious and original work together in any artform, including the traditional arts. The maximum amount awarded is €25,000.

Artist in the Community Scheme

Managed by Create, the national development agency for collaborative arts, the Arts Council's Artist in the Community Scheme, offers awards to enable artists and communities of place and/or interest to work together on projects. The scheme also offers an annual bursary, as well as residencies and a summer school. The maximum amount awarded is €10,000.

Arts and Disability Connect 2020

The Arts and Disability Connect scheme is managed by Arts and Disability Ireland, and is designed to support artists with disabilities to make new ambitious work. The maximum amount awarded for this scheme is €8,000.

Festival Investment Scheme

This funding award is divided into two rounds, depending on whether a festival takes place between January and June (round 1), or July to December (round 2). The aim of this award is to engage audiences and to contribute to the development of artform practices. Funding is divided into three bands that determine the maximum award available; band A offers up to €7,000; band B offers between €7,001 and €20,000; and band C offers between €20,001 and €35,000.

Traditional Artist in Residence, University College Cork

This residency is offered for one academic year and is jointly funded by the Arts Council and the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences UCC. Applications are accepted on an annual basis and the fee awarded is €20,000.

Arts Centre Funding

This award invests in and supports the infrastructure of arts centres required to sustain and develop the arts in Ireland, including the traditional arts. There is no current limit on the maximum award offered.

Invitation to Collaboration

This award is offered for local authority-led and Ealaín na Gaeltachta-led arts development projects that focus on public engagement, support for artists and arts policy development. The maximum award offered is €75,000.

I would like to thank Paul Flynn and Catherine Boothman of the Arts Council for their assistance in compiling this list of funding awards. For more information on these funding opportunities and their respective guidelines and deadlines, see <http://www.artscouncil.ie/available-funding/>

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), is the development agency for the arts in Northern Ireland (Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2020). The ACNI also has a long history with the traditional arts; the poet Michael Longley occupied the post of Traditional Arts Officer in the early 1970s. It offers a range of financial supports to musicians, including traditional arts practitioners. The primary funding stream offered to musicians is the Support for the Individual Artist Programme (SIAP). This annual funding scheme contains a number of individual initiatives:

- General Arts (max. £3,000)
- Artists Career Enhancement (max. £5,000)
- Major Individual Artist (£15,000)
- Artists International Development (max. £5,000)
- Self-arranged residencies (max. £5,000).

- Bursaries to attend WOMEX and the Folk Alliance
- Travel awards are available on a 'rolling' basis.

(Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2020)

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has also developed an International Showcase Fund that offers artists, bands, and managers up to £5,000 to contribute to travel, accommodation and visa costs for international showcasing opportunities such as festivals and conferences.

For a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the supports and initiatives developed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland see: <http://artscouncil-ni.org/>

Local Authority Arts Offices (Republic of Ireland)

Throughout the Republic of Ireland, there are 34 local arts officers working in City and County Local Authorities, who provide a range of opportunities and resources to artists working in all artforms. Each arts office works independently to develop and provide initiatives for artists living or working within their region. A list of each arts office with contact details for all officers is available at: <http://www.localartsireland.ie/conAtact/arts-officers/>

Examples of Local Authority Arts Office initiatives for traditional artists include, but are not limited to:

- Annual Arts Grants: to support artists and artistic projects.
- Tyrone Guthrie Centre Residency Bursary Award: a bursary that provides financial support to work and stay at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Annaghmakerrig, county Monaghan.
- Duala: a creator-in-residence project established by the Clare Arts Office in partnership with the Irish Traditional Music Archive.
- Sliabh Luachra Musician in Residence: a 12-month residency offered by the Arts Offices of Cork and Kerry County Councils and Limerick City and County Council, in conjunction with the Irish Traditional Music Archive and the Arts Council.
- Professional Artists Development/Support Schemes
- Festivals Grants
- Recording Bursary (Kildare County Council)

- The Arts in Context Award (Cork City Council): facilitates collaboration between artists and community groups, in community contexts such as schools and hospitals etc.
- Artist in Schools Scheme
- Musicians in Residence Programme: 3 residencies funded jointly by the Arts Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and managed by Music Network.
- Young Music Bursary: An initiative of Tipperary County Council that offers bursaries to emerging musicians who seek financial assistance for musical instruments, specialist tuition, travel, and/or recording time.
- John's Square: A Living Cultural Quarter: an initiative of Limerick City and County Arts Office that provides subsidised housing to artists in Limerick city.

A more comprehensive overview of funding opportunities and resources provided by each Local Arts Office can be obtained by contacting your local Arts Officer. Supports and awards offered are liable to change on an annual basis.

Music Network

Focussed primarily on the development of audience engagement through live musical performance, and the provision of career and professional development opportunities to performers, Music Network offers and manages a number of initiatives that provide opportunities to musicians with a range of performance backgrounds. Traditional artists frequently perform in national Music Network tours and can avail of a range of funding supports and resources offered by the organisation. These include:

Music Network Tours

Music Network regularly programmes national tours that feature traditional artists. At present, performers are selected by Music Network; it is not possible to make an application for membership of the Music Network roster.

Musicians in Residence Programme at dlr Lexicon Library

Funded jointly by the Arts Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, and managed by Music Network, this programme offers creative residencies and performance opportunities to three musicians from a range of musical genres on an annual basis.

Music Capital Scheme

This annual scheme, which is open to traditional artists, provides financial support for the purchase of musical instruments. 301 awards have been made since the scheme's inception in 2008.

Centre Culturel Irlandais' Artist Residency Bursary

This bursary provides financial support for a musician in any genre, to spend one month at the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris, France.

Workshops

In November 2019, Music Network presented a 3-day professional development course for artists in all genres. Topics covered included PR, online marketing, the recording session environment, and photography.

A comprehensive overview of opportunities offered by Music Network is available at:

<https://www.musicnetwork.ie/musicians/opportunities>

Culture Ireland

Culture Ireland / Cultúr Éireann provides opportunities and financial resources to artists and arts organisations who wish to perform and showcase artistic work internationally. Founded in 2005, the organisation is a division of what is now known as the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and its budget allocation for 2020 was €4.6 million.

Present funding initiatives include a Regular Grants Round, a See Here scheme, and a Showcase programme.

Regular Grants Round

This funding stream offers financial assistance towards costs arising from presenting or performing artistic work internationally. Such costs include travel, accommodation, transport, and subsistence costs.

[See Here Scheme](#)

This scheme provides financial support towards the costs of inward travel to Ireland, for international promoters and programmers. The purpose of this initiative is to facilitate the showcasing of Irish work in Ireland, to international promoters and programmers with a view to presenting that work at their venue or festival event.

[Showcases](#)

This scheme offers artists an opportunity to present/perform work at international showcasing events curated by Culture Ireland. Showcases include the Edinburgh festivals, and the annual WOMEX World Music Expo. Applications are invited annually by open call.

[Foras na Gaeilge](#)

Founded in 1999, Foras na Gaeilge is a body that promotes the Irish language throughout the island of Ireland. In pursuit of this objective, Foras na Gaeilge offer financial supports to individuals and organisations who promote the Irish language as part of their artistic activities. These include a Major Arts Events Scheme, and a Festivals Scheme.

For more information on financial supports offered by Foras na Gaeilge, see <https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/category/na-healaiona/>

[Ealaín na Gaeltachta](#)

Ealaín na Gaeltachta, a collaboration between Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Arts Council is a body that promotes the development of the traditional and contemporary arts in designated Irish-speaking Gaeltacht regions. Funding supports and professional services are available to traditional arts practitioners and organisations operating in these areas. The organisation employs three arts facilitators who are each allocated to one of three Gaeltacht regions: Connacht and county Meath, Munster, and Donegal. Among the supports offered by Ealaín na Gaeltachta are *Scéim na bhFéilte* (Festivals Scheme), *Scéim Cothú* (Funding Core Projects/Venues), *Scéim Forbartha na nEalaíon* (Arts Development Projects), *Scéim Sparánachta* (Artists Bursary Scheme), and the *Scéim Síol* (seed scheme), which supports smaller-scale initiatives.

For more information on Ealaín na Gaeltachta, see <https://ealain.ie>

Enterprise and Business Supports

Individuals or organisations working in the traditional arts sector who seek funding for business or enterprise projects can benefit from a range of financial supports offered by the following agencies:

- Údarás na Gaeltachta: <http://www.udaras.ie/en/forbairt-fiontraiochta/cunamh-airgid/>
- Local Enterprise Offices: <https://www.localenterprise.ie/>
- Business to Arts: www.businesstoarts.ie

The Social Welfare Scheme for Professional Artists on Jobseekers' Allowance

This means-tested social welfare scheme, established as a pilot project in June 2019, is a social welfare scheme for self-employed artists and writers, and extends to eligible traditional artists. Unlike the regular Jobseeker's Allowance, which demands that applicants be available for and seeking work, this scheme allows artists to focus on their creative practice for their first year on the scheme. There are a number of qualifying conditions that artists must meet to be eligible for the scheme, however. Artists must be registered as self-employed with Revenue and must be a member of a professional body relevant to their artform. Therefore, a traditional artist would need to be a member of the Musicians' Union of Ireland (MUI) to avail of the scheme. Artists also need to show that over 50% of their income from the previous year was earned as a result of their arts practice.

For more information on the scheme, visit:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b5474f-professional-artists-on-jobseekers-allowance/>

Additional Funding Opportunities and Resources

- Creative Ireland: <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie>
- The Ireland Funds: <https://irelandfunds.org/>
- Web-based funding platforms such as Fund It, Kickstarter, and Patreon.

- Enterprise Ireland Employment Incentive and Investment Scheme:
<https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/company/hpsu-funding/employment-incentive-and-investment-scheme.html>

CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Artist-in-Residence Initiatives

A number of Irish Higher Education Institutes employ traditional artists as Artists-in-Residence, usually for the duration of one academic year.

- University College Cork Traditional Artist-in-Residence (open call)
- Mary Immaculate College Irish Traditional Musician Artist-in-Residence (open call)
- The Irish World Academy Artist at the University of Limerick
- Sean-Nós Singer-in-Residence at The Centre for Irish Studies at NUI Galway

In addition, a number of regional arts centres and performance venues offer artist-in-residence opportunities to artists, including traditional arts practitioners. These include:

- Traditional Music Residency at Roscommon Arts Centre
- Sligo Trad Artist in Residence, curated by Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann (open call)
- Artist Residencies at The Dock, Carrick on Shannon, Leitrim
- Dance Ireland Mentored Traditional Irish Dance Residency Support Award (open call)
- Sliabh Luachra Musician-in-Residence (open call)
- Duala Creator-in-Residence at the Irish Traditional Music Archive (open call)

EXISTING TRADITIONAL ARTS ORGANISATIONS

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ)

Founded in 1951, initially as a regional adjunct organisation of the Dublin Pipers Club, CCÉ describes itself as “the largest group involved in the preservation and promotion of Irish traditional music”, who have “been working for the cause of Irish music since the middle of the last century (1951 to be precise).” CCÉ operate a local branch system in communities throughout Ireland (and the world), organising music and dancing classes, concerts, and competitions at county, provincial, and national levels in Ireland (Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, 2020). In addition to competitions and music classes, CCÉ also deliver two examination programmes, the *Scrúdú Ceoil Tíre* (SCT) exams for music students, and the *Teastas i dTeagasc Ceolta Tíre* (TTCT) exams, designed for those who wish to become teachers of Irish traditional music, song, or dance. CCÉ also houses a range of archival materials and resources throughout its network of seven Comhaltas Regional Resource Centres. CCÉ’s magazine *Treoir* is published quarterly and details national and international CCÉ events, occasional album reviews, eulogy-like pieces on deceased musicians, musical notation for selected tunes, song lyrics, as well as commentary pieces and articles on a variety of topics on Irish traditional music, song, and dance. CCÉ’s *Árdstiúrthóir* (trans. *Chief Director/Executive*) is Labhrás Ó Murchú.

For more on Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann see: <https://comhaltas.ie/>

The Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA)

Founded in 1987, and situated on Merrion Square in Dublin, the Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA) serves as a national public archive for the traditional arts and is home to the largest collection of Irish traditional music in existence. As well as provide archival resources to the traditional arts community, ITMA also presents live performances and has established a number of creative projects in collaboration with artists and other organisations. ITMA is accessible to the public on weekdays and selected Saturdays, free of charge. Archival items can be freely referenced on site, but copyright permissions must be sought in order to use or make copies of any materials housed in the archive. The Director of ITMA is Dublin fiddler, Liam O’Connor.

For more on the Irish Traditional Music Archive, see <https://www.itma.ie/>

Na Píobairí Uilleann (NPU)

Na Píobairí Uilleann (NPU) (*trans. the uilleann pipers*), was founded in 1968 “when there were less than 100 uilleann pipers remaining”, and “the main object of Na Píobairí Uilleann shall be the promotion generally of Irish music and the music of the uilleann pipes in particular” (Na Píobairí Uilleann, 2020). NPU is funded by the Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht, the Arts Council, Dublin City Council, and by private donors. NPU is based at 15 Henrietta Street, in Dublin and has in excess of 3,000 members worldwide. In 2017, NPU were central in inscribing uilleann piping on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Among the resources provided by NPU are piping classes; online instructional videos; NPU’s annual publication, *An Píobaire*; NPU TV; a regular concert series called *Session with the Pipers*; a regular lecture series called *Notes and Narratives*; scholarships to attend uilleann pipes classes at a number of traditional music festivals; the facilitation of reed making and pipe making courses; and online databases listing pipers, instrument makers, and teachers in Ireland and abroad. The CEO of *Na Píobairí Uilleann* is uilleann piper, Gay McKeon.

For more on *Na Píobairí Uilleann*, see <https://pipers.ie/>

Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland

Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland “is a collective of harp players working together to promote our national instrument, gain recognition for its status and secure its sustainability” (Harp Ireland 2020). Acting as an umbrella hub for the harp in Ireland, Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland works to promote Irish harp music of all genres through professional development opportunities for harpers; the commissioning of new harp repertoire; audience engagement; and general advocacy. Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland is led by a steering group of harp practitioners, and in 2019, the organisation was instrumental in ensuring the recognition of Irish harping on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland also established an annual National Harp Day in 2017, the most recent of which took place on October 19th, 2019. The organisation’s Chair is Aibhlín McCrann.

For more on Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland, see <https://www.harpireland.ie/>

Music Generation

Music Generation, a subsidiary company of Music Network, describes itself as “Ireland’s National Music Education Programme” and it aims to provide young people with “access to high quality performance music education in their locality” (Music Generation, 2020). Founded in 2010, the programme is funded by U2, The Ireland Funds, the Department of Education and Skills and Local Music Education Partnerships. In partnership with local education providers, it offers music education initiatives in Carlow, Cavan/Monaghan, Clare, Cork City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Galway City, Galway County, Kerry, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Leitrim, Limerick City, Longford, Louth, Mayo, Meath, Offaly / Westmeath, Roscommon, Sligo, South Dublin, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford, and Wicklow. Music Generation offers tuition in a range of genres, including the traditional arts, and among Music Generation’s regional development officers and tutors are a number of prominent traditional musicians.

For more on Music Generation, see <https://www.musicgeneration.ie>

FairPlé

Established in 2018, the FairPlé organisation advocates for gender balance in Irish traditional and folk music. Among the activities and initiatives developed by FairPlé to promote awareness of gender issues in Irish traditional and folk music are FairPlé Day; Rising Tides; an online directory of female musicians; and an online global networking platform for female musicians via the FairPlé website. FairPlé have also provided consultation on gender issues in Irish traditional and folk music to a range of stakeholders, including the Arts Council, and academics.

For more on FairPlé, see <https://www.fairple.com/>

The Musicians Union of Ireland

The Musicians Union of Ireland (MUI) is an affiliate body of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), Ireland’s largest trade union, which represents over 180,000 workers across all sectors. The MUI represents musicians, music teachers, and other industry professionals working in all genres, and it is a member of the International Federation of Musicians. As an advocate of musicians’ rights, the MUI protects its membership against contractual and financial exploitation, and provides advice on matters such as taxation, social welfare services, and

instrument insurance, for example. MUI members can also avail of rehearsal space at SIPTU's headquarters, Liberty Hall, as well as access discounts on the purchase and repair of instruments. The union's magazine, *Sound Post*, is published quarterly. Full-time musicians pay an annual subscription which is determined by weekly earnings, while freelance musicians' membership fee is €106 per year, or €8.23 per month.

For more on the Musicians' Union of Ireland, see <https://mui.ie/>

The National Campaign for the Arts

The National Campaign for the Arts is a "volunteer-led, grassroots movement that makes the case for the arts in Ireland" (NCFA, 2020). Established in 2009, the NCFA relies on donations and fundraising events for funding. Central to NCFA activities are collaborating with the wider arts sector and Government, and the commissioning of research. The activities of the NCFA are managed by a steering committee formed of a range of experienced arts practitioners and administrators.

For more information on the National Campaign for the Arts, see <http://ncfa.ie/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO)

IMRO was founded in 1989 as a national society to collect and distribute royalty payments on behalf of Irish composers, authors and publishers. IMRO is a not-for-profit organisation and governed by its members (approximately 12,000 in number), who comprise songwriters, composers and music publishers. Businesses that use copyright music in its variety of forms must pay an annual licence fee to IMRO, which is paid directly to music creators after administrative costs have been deducted. In addition to managing royalty payments, IMRO sponsors a number of song contests, festivals, and music education workshops on an annual basis. Traditional artists who perform traditional material or compose original work that features on commercial albums or that are broadcast on radio or television, for example, can register their compositions and arrangements online via the IMRO website.

For more on IMRO, see <https://www.imro.ie/>

Phonographic Performance Ireland (PPI) & Recorded Artists Actors Performers (RAAP)

Established in 1968, Phonographic Performance Ireland (PPI) collects royalties on behalf of performers and record labels when recorded music is publicly performed, broadcast, or reproduced. Businesses and broadcasters who use recorded music pay a licence fee to PPI, which is then transferred to those who own the rights to that recorded music. Performers who feature on those recordings are paid by Recorded Artists Actors Performers (RAAP), who are a not-for-profit organisation established in 2001, and operated “by performers for performers” (RAAP 2020).

For more information on the PPI and RAAP, see <https://www.ppimusic.ie> and <https://www.raap.ie>

The Journal of Music

Founded in 2000 by writer and traditional fiddler, Toner Quinn, the *Journal of Music* is an online journal that publishes critical essays, and reviews of albums, live performances, and publications. Focusing on Irish traditional music, Western art music, contemporary music, jazz, and popular music, the *Journal of Music* became an online-only platform in 2010. Today, the *Journal of Music* receives financial support from the Arts Council of Ireland and is free to access online, although advertising is available for a fee. In addition to publishing critical arts commentary on a range of musical genres, the journal offers regular updates on resources and opportunities for musicians both on its website and in the form of a regular newsletter.

For more on the *Journal of Music* see <https://journalofmusic.com/>

2. Current Challenges Encountered by Traditional Arts Practitioners in Ireland



Figure 2. Challenges encountered in the traditional arts sector.

The purpose of this section of the report is to provide a platform that represents the voices of traditional artists and other stakeholders interviewed for this research. Themes are ordered according to how frequently they appeared in interviews, and while some context is offered throughout, I do not reflect on or analyse any contributions until section three of this report, which offers a number of reflections and recommendations based on this commentary. First, I discuss the most prominent concern expressed by those who shared their experiences with me – the subject of career unsustainability and financial insecurity in the traditional arts sector.

2.1 CAREER UNSUSTAINABILITY & FINANCIAL INSECURITY

By far the most prevalent concern and challenge discussed in interviews was the level of unsustainability and financial uncertainty experienced by those attempting to make a living in the traditional arts sector. Many factors and potential causes of this precarious scenario were referenced, and I discuss each of them here. I introduce this section by first presenting the traditional arts sector in Ireland as it is viewed by international observers, to provide a sense of perspective and context to readers who may not be as familiar with the international reputation enjoyed by the traditional arts of Ireland.

Reflecting international recognition for the traditional arts at home

Irish traditional music, song, and dance has enjoyed a distinguished international reputation for many decades now and the artforms are performed globally by touring Irish artists, the Irish diaspora living abroad, as well as by practitioners and enthusiasts with no familial connections to Ireland. As this section of the report will illustrate, many traditional artists in Ireland feel frustrated that the level of international recognition garnered by the traditional arts is not reflected at home by way of equivalent value or appreciation among wider Irish society or by appropriate Government funding and supports. Furthermore, it is surprising to those advocating for folk and traditional arts in other countries that Irish traditional artists feel undervalued in this respect, given that the international popularity of the traditional arts of Ireland is a model that others aspire to. Linda Dynnes of Folk Org, a Norwegian organisation that promotes the music, song, and dance of Norway expresses her surprise at the challenges faced by traditional artists in Ireland:

"I was so surprised to hear that Irish traditional musicians don't have so many opportunities back in Ireland even though they are so big abroad. It's so surprising because we use Ireland as an example for our Government when it comes to using folk music in promoting our country and culture"

Likewise, Simon Thoumire, the founder of *Hands Up for Trad*, which promotes traditional music in Scotland, is surprised at what he perceives as a lack of support for Irish traditional artists at home:

"It's very surprising when you come from somewhere else like me and you know all the work that Irish musicians have done over the years, and realise that there is nothing done for them. And all over the world, people know Irish music, all over the world. It's sad, when I see the situation people are in. And when I think that people have to head off for 6 months a year touring in order to make a living, that's difficult. Especially when you have a young family"

When touring internationally in order to sustain a living, Irish traditional artists perceive a similar attitude among those they encounter abroad:

"I can't make a living in Ireland. There's no question about that. When you go overseas, to America, England, or wherever, you are held in far greater esteem. Especially after winning awards. When I tell people in America that I can't make a living in Ireland, they think I'm trying to crack a joke. They just don't believe me. And I don't blame them"

This opinion is mirrored by the experience of an artist manager and tour promoter working in the traditional arts sector in Ireland:

"It is remarkable that Irish traditional music travels so incredibly and gets such a massive response everywhere else that it is played around the world, and on the European festival circuit. It seems remarkable that it is not more valued here at home. Most traditional musicians can't make a living here. In order to be properly paid and to do proper comprehensive tours, they have to leave the country. Some people think that has improved. Not in my experience, it hasn't. I have found it increasingly difficult to organise tours for traditional musicians. Even musicians who have quite a high profile"

The need among Irish traditional artists to travel to achieve a sustainable level of income is an unfortunate missed opportunity according to one observer, an English folk musician who feels that opportunities to inspire local music-making should be incentivised:

"When you have got sensibly paid performance opportunities closer to home, or within your country, then your capacity to be a leading light amongst the grassroots activity is so much more. If such personnel could get 80% of their gigs in Ireland, and 20% in the States, rather than the other way around, the impact that they are likely to have locally is significantly more"

Some research participants pointed to a contradiction in using the traditional arts as a visual and cultural representation of Ireland for State events but then not providing adequate funding or resources for the artform and its practitioners:

"As soon as any international visitor comes along, they roll out the red carpet and have harpists playing at the foot of a jet, or they give rare copies of poetry by Seamus Heaney. That's what my biggest concern is. It's not quantitative, what we do, what we do for society and for the future of this country, and who we are as a people. If it's not in any way ascribed in our Constitution to protect those provisions of culture, then we are in trouble because the next recession will wipe everything out"

"Traditional Irish music is a flagship artform in this country, internationally, and very important for our image, and how people regard us, and as a very positive calling card, internationally. And so it does a tremendous job. But it's not financially supported in a commensurate way. That's not represented on the ground. Because many of those musicians that will perform at state events or do these international gala concerts are barely paying the rent"

Many of those who contributed to this research spoke about the value of the traditional arts to the Irish economy and the tourism sector:

"What traditional music is doing for this country is not what the weather is doing for the country. Let's put it that way. Look at the hundreds of thousands of visitors to Ireland every year, and they all want to hear Irish traditional music. But that is not taken into account. People are not coming here

for sunshine. You hear Tourism Ireland speaking about the millions that this is all worth, but do you think there is any consideration given to musicians?"

"For me, it's absolute stupidity that there isn't a better support system for traditional musicians in Ireland. I know you might curse a bus. It isn't much fun driving behind them but every one of those buses drops €100,000 in Ireland. That's an awful lot of money when you see how many buses are around. But without a doubt, that is the one thing that people say to me when I meet them here, they say they were in Ireland, but they couldn't find any traditional music. I really feel that the Government are mad not to support traditional musicians more. What brings people to Ireland is the music. That's what the tourists want"

"As a tour promoter, I bring busloads of Americans to Ireland every year. Tourism has been the life blood of Ireland for the last bunch of decades. And let me tell you, tourists want to hear Irish music. They don't want to go into a karaoke bar or hear Country Music. They are looking for the real deal. They want to reconnect with their roots"

Also, some visitors to Ireland do not merely admire the traditional arts as a novel tourist experience but travel here because they are keen participants themselves:

"There are people coming here from Japan and Russia, and they're not stopping in Temple Bar for the tourist shows, which is fine, that's a different business. They are coming for the art, and to learn, to play, to buy instruments, buy CDs, buy books, and bring them back home, and teach back home. And so, there's an exponential return on those kinds of people from an economic perspective too"

One commentator suggested that the tourism sector should contribute financially to the traditional arts sector, given the value that the traditional arts offer in attracting visitors to Ireland:

"I think we should try source funding from private tourists and the broader industry. If you go out to Dublin Airport, and there are surveys on this, Irish music is one of the main things people come to Ireland for. Maybe we are not asking, and you don't get unless you ask"

Financial insecurity in the traditional arts sector

While active touring acts may seem to achieve a degree of financial success, some contributors highlighted the financial reality as they observe it, and why there may be a lack of awareness of the true extent of the financial insecurity that even well-known traditional artists face:

"For us, money has been one of the main challenges, even though we are busy. I'm sure everybody is saying something similar to you. Some of our band are still in fulltime employment. And it's a bit mad that their wages are funding our music"

"People don't understand that a lot of us live on anywhere between 12, 13 grand to maybe 25 grand a year. I don't think people understand it because we don't say it. A lot of us don't say what it's really like. We present a certain picture of touring and that it's fantastic. But we don't talk about all the work that goes into that and the financial hardship that comes with that"

"I think we need to lose the idea of 'you're successful, you're sorted'. Anybody will tell you that there are more disappointments than successes. There is a lot of smoke and mirrors. People think you are doing great, and you're still trying to pay the bills. I think a more open conversation about all that will help"

Some state that a high level of activity and supply in the traditional arts sector impacts the opportunities available to practitioners:

"Today there are more professional Irish traditional musicians than ever. In a way it is something to rejoice. But it also has a negative effect artistically and financially. There is a saturation of musicians biting at the same cake so therefore there is only a certain amount of work to cover all"

For many, career unsustainability and financial insecurity manifest in the form of having to continually and intensively work just to maintain a living, regardless of age, reputation and level of experience.

"I often think at this stage of life, as a freelance musician, it's extraordinary to me how hard one still has to work to keep the wheels of the industry turning. To keep the loaf coming on to the table. I suppose one main gripe is that it is so difficult for musicians to have a sustainable career. You're constantly gigging and working away and living from project to project. I'm lucky because I'm

working most of the time but I'm probably working harder now than I ever worked in my life, just to keep things going"

"For the last twenty years, the most difficult thing is trying to maintain work. You go through years when you don't have to look for a gig or teaching. It just lands at your doorstep. And then you could have three or four years where you're back in the game again and you have to go emailing back and forth for different agents again. This is something that's very difficult for established musicians as well as up-and-coming musicians. Trying to maintain that regular work as a self-employed musician is pretty difficult, especially if you want to have a family, and have a mortgage. You need to figure it out pretty quickly"

One internationally-renowned traditional musician interviewed for this research feels that because career unsustainability is such an obstacle for artists, emerging musicians should not rely on traditional music as a viable career option:

"Look, established musicians like me can't make a living from traditional music in Ireland. I think emerging musicians should play music purely for the enjoyment of it, and to forget trying to make a living out of it. They should have a decent job in whatever their other passion is. Everybody has another passion other than music. Let's put it this way: let's not all be out of work together"

This reflects the views of other contributors interviewed for this research:

"I don't think there is any country that has the amount of talented young kids coming up playing traditional music. Every time you turn on Facebook or YouTube, you hear the most beautiful music and incredible players. And I'm thinking where the hell did all of these come from? It's the most beautiful music. And they're incredible players. But it seems with the way things are they're just expected get normal jobs"

"I would love to tell young people that are coming up now that being a musician is feasible. I would love young people to think that is an option once they graduate from college. But at the moment, it doesn't feel like that is feasible unless they join a dance show or sell your soul a bit and go play Country music or join a wedding band, or something."

Likewise, some see traditional music as a potential way to supplement another income or travel, but not as a sustainable career that can provide job security:

"The opportunities for good quality, good paying work are so limited within Ireland that it is just not possible to make a proper living doing it. I have tried to do it as a full-time professional musician for the last 4 years. At that, I feel that I have been relatively lucky in obtaining some of the better-paying work that exists in any calendar year, but without doing other things, I could not have paid my bills"

"The reality is most normal everyday people have little to no understanding about traditional music and very little interest in it so it's hard to get people to go to shows or buy albums etc. unless you are willing to travel constantly. It's a great option as a supplemental income and I feel most accomplished musicians can earn something from it. I feel for younger musicians it's a great way to travel the world and play and have fun but once reality sets in, it's a poor career choice with few exceptions. A good solo pub performer doing covers can easily out-earn a trad musician without even leaving their own county"

The following contributions also share views on the need to support working professionally in the traditional arts with alternative sources of income:

"Like farming, musicians need a secondary income. I do the radio. Other people teach. If you are a student and you are trying to make up your mind what you are going to do, you need to have this nuts and bolts information to see if it is practical. To see if you can do it, if you can survive. How are you going to put a car on the road? Because you need a car if you are a musician. Most of us are driving bangers. I have so many friends who are household names in the music industry who don't own a house after a life working in music, and who have no pension funds"

"It's much harder to make a living in music now than when I started out. It's really hard to make it work financially. Everybody seems to have a second job. It's just too hard I think"

"There are a lot of good things happening. I'm doing lots of bits and pieces, but I can't earn a living as a singer. I do so many other jobs just to pay the rent"

"It can also be a challenge to earn a great deal of money as a traditional musician, unless you have a very lucrative tour or series of tours; or a great-paying series of teaching gigs; or a very popular

album. Again, this financial security is the primary reason I would prefer to have a "main" job outside of music"

"I think the pay is low - that's why I'm sticking mainly to my day job and mainly play music for fun and the social side. I'd find travelling very hard as I'm raising a family at the moment"

"the number one challenge seems to be maintaining a steady stream of work opportunities and income. I understand it takes time to build critical mass and steady sources of income, and that many people rely on secondary sources of income outside music to meet their financial needs. Many people again turn to teaching (music or school) to balance income when not performing"

According to some, there are negative artistic implications arising from the need to work in another occupation in order to make a living:

"In an ideal world I would love to spend time writing and arranging. But my profession doesn't allow me to do that. So my music takes second place. Spending time on yourself and your music and having the space to reflect is a big challenge"

"I'd love to have more time to focus on my music rather than teaching music. I love teaching but I've always wanted more time to write and arrange more. Just to have that time and not to be worried, financially, if you are taking time off work to do that. And even saying that is strange. Taking time off work to do more work. But it's work that I actually want to do. I don't want to listen to the Kerry Polka and the Kesh Jig forever, and I love teaching. But it's too uncertain not to have a backup plan"

Interestingly, some suggest that a degree of artistic freedom comes from not depending on traditional music as a profession:

"Since I'm not totally dependent on my income as a traditional musician I am in a position to work under my own terms, but I imagine there has to be a level of compromising for those whose income is 100% dependent"

"If I didn't have my teaching job, life would be very different. One of the reasons I teach is because I enjoy doing it and I think it is useful to me in my overall practice, but it is also an excuse for me to

explore some of the creative things I want to do with much less risk. There are times when I wonder why I'm not writing full time, and then when I get paid at the end of the month, I quickly realise why I do what I do"

A common concern among those who contributed to this research is the uncertainty and difficulty that traditional artists face when attempting to secure financial supports and services such as mortgages and loans, as well as benefit from some of the employment safeguards that other careers and sectors provide:

"If you go down to the bank and ask for a mortgage and you say you are a gigging musician, you will be shown the door. It's an insecure world to be part of. A professional at the age of about 40 is often not a happy sight. I do think that a substantial part of higher education courses should have an element of showing people how to get on in that world and how to look after your own finances"

"It might be ok for a while to be in a touring band with some university friends, still living at home with your parents or renting a property short-term, but if you want to settle down, start a family, take out a mortgage, you won't do as a traditional arts practitioner. A bank manager or mortgage broker will laugh you out the door"

"I'm still unsure how things are going to pan out. It's still not clear to me how I can afford many of the things that are taken as a normal progression in life, a house, children, stability of income, a pension. People who know my work ethic and the work that I do would find that surprising. If that is how it is for somebody who is regularly working, then we are on a knife edge in terms of stability"

"In strict business terms it's not been a viable full-time option and will never be unless you're willing to work very, very hard for poor rewards. A full-time job may provide health insurance, pension and other benefits that being a full-time traditional musician doesn't offer or at least at the same cost"

"I'm self-employed, and like most self-employed people, there are difficulties when it comes to pensions and health cover, and everything else like that. You could say that about any walk of life when you are self-employed, but I do firmly believe that the state needs to support their traditional artists a lot more"

"It's just so difficult as a life. I had a period of illness a number of months ago, and I thought after being self-employed for so many years, and after paying so much tax, that I would get illness"

benefit. And I wasn't eligible for it. And that really surprised me because I literally have not stopped working since I was 19 or 20, and that really freaked me out. If we felt that if it all fell apart in the morning that there would be even a couple of weeks of a safety net, we would possibly take greater risks as artists, and take on bigger projects. But you are always being so careful, especially once you have a family to support"

One widely respected fiddle player and singer offers her advice to emerging musicians to help them navigate their way through a demanding and precarious industry:

"My biggest advice to younger traditional musicians starting out, is to tread carefully, look to the future and plan well ahead. Start a pension plan and save a few pounds in it. Insure your instruments. Have health or travel insurance in place"

Some contributors have expressed opinions on what professional supports that they would like to see developed for the benefit of traditional artists, and see State intervention as central to such initiatives:

"I feel that professional traditional musicians and artists who do not earn a basic wage, maybe because of illness, maternity leave, or lack of work, should be subsidised by the government or a reputable body to bring their take home pay up to the national average"

And given the nature of the traditional arts to be transmitted generationally from successive generations, one observer mentions the need to adequately protect the welfare of older individuals who have contributed so much to the traditional arts:

"I'd like to see some support for the older generations of musicians. There are no pensions, you know? We are all going that way. We should find a way to support that part of the tradition. There's Aosdána, but there aren't a whole pile of us in it. It would be lovely to try look after musicians down the line, after they have given so much for so long. So many musicians I know have faded away into destitution in the end and that's so heart-breaking to see"

The issue of the Artist Exemption, a scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners that makes earnings from certain artworks exempt from the payment of income tax in certain circumstances, was also raised in conversations with research contributors. The initiative is discussed in more detail later in the report but at this point it is important to state that the scheme places emphasis on original composition rather than artistic interpretation. Therefore, many traditional works occupy a somewhat complicated space in this domain due to the fact that so much of what traditional artists do is interpret repertoire that has been composed by others, or that has been written by an unknown composer in many cases. Consequently, many traditional artists feel excluded from the exemption if, for example, their album does not exclusively consist of original music.

"The whole idea of the Artist Exemption is a bit nebulous and very much based on western art music and popular music where you compose new music and new art, and then you get tax relief on what you earn from that. According to our tradition, every time we play, we compose on the spot. What we do is equally valid. We need to change the Artist Exemption so that people who are perceived to be doing valuable cultural work with their Irish music should be able to avail of that"

Declining Album Revenue

It is perhaps unsurprising to hear that global reports of declining album sales are also having an effect on the traditional arts sector in Ireland. Many who participated in this research expressed concerns about how challenging it is to earn income from album sales today.

"Things like Spotify have taken over album sales. For everybody really. You don't want to use Spotify because you know you won't make any money. Album sales aren't fantastic anyway. They're not like they used to be. But if you don't put your stuff on Spotify, then less people will hear it. You might get a younger audience if you're on Spotify or other streaming services but it's nearly impossible to make money. You put a lot of money into making an album just to sell after gigs. It doesn't make a lot of sense"

Some have also suggested that funding bodies should divert more supports to touring to reflect this decline in album revenue:

"I think it's very important to note that at the moment the whole sector is just up in a heap, in terms of recording, performing, and touring, and so I think everything from base level needs to be looked at and possibly changed because it has gotten an awful lot harder. I know from recording and how many album sales that I'm seeing that things have really changed. People are mainly streaming now and you rely on live performances more, so maybe if there is support available, it should be tour support rather than for recording"

Others still see the production of an album as being central to working as a touring musician but find the costs of making an album prohibitively expensive:

"Nowadays you can't work or tour without having an album. But it costs a fortune to make an album now and you make no money back out of it. So if you want to be a professional musician you have to go out on the road, it seems. Whereas a few years ago you could actually make a decent profit out of recording but now with streaming, it's zero practically, unless you are a big artist"

"To get sales, you need to make a CD. To make a CD, you need the money in the first place, and the know how etc. I'm coming from a time in the nineties and the noughties when I did have that record company, and I was in a big band. And I did win those big BBC and American awards, but of course nowadays, it's all on Facebook and Twitter, so it's very hard to know what to do. But I do think that record companies are needed again"

When traditional artists are successful in finding the resources to make an album, they need to tour internationally in order to sell them, as this observation notes:

"I find if you make a CD, it's hard to sell any unless you go to America. I made two CDs last year and I haven't made it to America yet and they're not selling, and we have boxes and boxes of them, compared with the CDs I did before that. So, you have to go abroad to make a living. And I know that's common knowledge as a professional traditional musician anyway. People in Ireland only appreciate you once you do well abroad"

Professionalisation in the traditional arts

Discussions on the professionalisation of the traditional arts in Ireland will invariably be contested given the history of the traditional arts as a participatory and communal music that has been

shared enthusiastically by successive generations, primarily because of a deep respect of the artform rather than for financial remuneration. The finest exponents of the traditional arts today operate in both the professional and non-professional sectors; some internationally renowned performers of Irish traditional music do not work exclusively as musicians.

The following contribution provides some interesting historical context for this relationship between professionalism and non-professionalism, and warns against partitioning the traditional arts in such a manner that prioritises the professional sector over the wider traditional arts community:

"Many people at the top end of the music seem to not be totally professional. They all seem to have other occupations which finance their music passion. That was always the way in music. They used to be called amateur musicians. But the thing is that amateur 100 years ago meant something completely different to what it means now. Amateur meant good, high quality musicians who didn't play music for a living. Sometimes they were better than professional players. But these days we take amateur to mean somebody who is a beginner. But as we all know there is a high level of amateurism in traditional music in Ireland, and there always has been. The standard has been very, very high. Maybe we should be worried that professionalism might look down on those who are not making their total income from music"

Some contributors to this research have remarked on how this co-existing professional and non-professional practice can impact on performance, teaching, and funding opportunities:

"To its advantage and disadvantage, traditional music falls between the two stools of professionalism and non-professionalism because to a great extent, it's an amateur practice. And you then have the excellence arising from that amateur practice, which isn't conventionally professional, as we see in other music forms. So I think something very different needs to be provided to the traditional arts"

"There are a lot of people who work for a living, they have day jobs. There are a lot of teachers and every summer they become available to do lots of summer schools and the like, and good luck to them. But there's no tiered system. Those of us who are just out there doing music have a lot to compete with"

"We're in a funny place with traditional music because you have a lot of semi-professional players who are in teaching jobs. And that's frustrating for some professionals, because when music is a 'nixer' for you, you don't really care what you are getting paid. But it's different when it is your bread and butter. And that does probably affect what people get paid"

"Me taking less money than I should for a gig is affecting somebody else who might actually be doing this for their job and who are having to take the work and getting a paltry payment. That worries me but the flip side of it is, if you don't do it, somebody else will"

"We all pursued traditional music when we were younger, but it was a pipedream. You put a group together and that's what you did. That's not quite as easily done now. What you have now is people in other professions playing in groups and doing bits and pieces, so for the solo artist to make that breakthrough and get noticed, is going to be difficult"

Intermittent du Spectacle (France)

A number of people made reference in this research to a scheme operating in France under the name, *Intermittent du Spectacle*. The scheme is widely believed to be a Government cultural intervention that provides a living wage to artists when they are not working, as long as they fulfil a certain number of hours (507 hours or 43 performances within a twelve-month period). Some Irish traditional artists have availed of the scheme while living in France for a period of time. However, the *intermittent* is not a Government initiative; it is managed by an independent association named *Pôle emploi* (trans. *employment centre*), and mainly funded by contributions made by employers. It essentially provides financial support for entertainment industry workers working short term contracts on a project to project basis, during periods of unemployment.

Importantly, the *intermittent* is not merely a social welfare payment that provides financial support to artists in times of financial need. It goes beyond this and provides entertainment industry workers the employment rights available to regular French workers. Therefore, the precarious nature of working in the entertainment industry as artists, performers, directors, and technicians, for example, is mitigated somewhat by social protections such as health care, pension contributions, and accident insurance. I return to the *intermittent* later in this report. For now, I outline the various references that have been made to the scheme by contributors to this research.

One contributor refers to the recognition and status that a welfare support for artists can bestow on the artform while addressing some of the difficulties in making a living from performance alone:

"It would be great for traditional Irish music to be recognised a lot better. One prime example is the way the French support traditional musicians in Brittany, for example. It would be good for people to realise the value of the traditional arts and what it is worldwide. It's not easy being a professional musician. I played music for a living for about ten years. I found it very difficult and as a result I had to go into different areas within the traditional arts, whether it be TV production, or organising festivals, or promoting concerts. It just wasn't feasible for me at that time to just play music"

"We do have the contribution made by the Arts Council. That has been important. Hopefully the increases in its funding will continue. The government support for good work in trad by organisations such as Music Generation and others is also welcome. We need more of that. We also need a scheme which will support the fully-formed traditional musician and make it possible for that musician to put trad at the centre of their life. There must be models out there, like the support for trad musicians in Brittany, or a version of the 'living wage'. As it stands, trad musicians need a safety net at least which they can build on to enjoy a career"

Musicians touring in France also contribute a portion of their performance fees to the *intermittent* system when performing in France. One traditional musician that I spoke to stated how he was happy to do this because he felt that he was contributing to the welfare of fellow artists:

"Anytime I worked in France, I had to pay into the Intermittent, but I didn't mind. I was never going to get anything out of it. But I didn't mind because I believed in what they were doing and I thought it was a wonderful idea. I felt honoured to be part of that system as a foreigner in somebody else's country and that part of my fee was going into that system to help musicians. Of course, I would never take it back out because I wasn't going to do enough gigs"

Unsurprisingly, the *intermittent* sounds like an appealing prospect for traditional artists for a number of reasons, and many desire a similar scheme here in Ireland. However, the development of a comparable pilot system in Ireland would need to be carefully considered in terms of its cross-sectoral feasibility. According to one musician based in Brittany, the initiative would not be welcomed unanimously:

"If you begin this process, you're going to face a lot of opposition from people who run pubs or restaurants, or people who usually have live music but don't pay a lot for it. I can imagine in the Temple Bar district if all the musicians who played weekends had to be declared as salaried workers, and the places where they played had to pay all the contributions towards social security and complete all the paperwork that goes with it, you can imagine how that would turn out. There would be a big fight, and it was a fight over here"

Jobseekers' Allowance for Artists

The Jobseekers' Allowance referenced on page 41 of this report has had a mixed reception among the wider arts community in Ireland; some of the conversations that I have had with individuals for this research have detailed some of the concerns around the scheme. For some, the Jobseekers' Allowance feels like a dole scheme rather than a support that recognises the value of artists:

"An artists' dole diminishes what we do as artists. What they should have been looking at is a national living wage for all of us in the creative sector. So I welcome that they did it but they never took it to the next evolution of it, and I know many musicians have told me that they find it so absolutely insulting. It's a shame that nothing else has been driven forward on recognising an artist as an important human in our society"

"The social bill seems to me to have a different feel to it. The intermittent is a symbol of status. It's a privilege to get on that scheme. Whereas the way that they talk about the welfare scheme that they want to bring in, it seems more like it's just the dole, but for artists. It doesn't feel like that's something to aspire towards. I'm not sure that is the best way of offering support"

2.2 MEDIA COVERAGE

Many of the traditional artists and commentators who participated in this research discussed insufficient media coverage as a major challenge encountered by the traditional arts sector in Ireland today. While radio and TV were listed as the main sources of frustration for artists, the print media's decreasing coverage of the traditional arts was also noted.

Supporting the traditional arts?

Some contributors expressed an opinion that the state broadcaster, RTÉ, fails to live up to its stated commitment to the arts, and especially the traditional arts:

"I feel that RTÉ could do so much more. It feels like artists don't get played on the radio anymore. I would love to think that would help with audiences. I feel it's very tough on artists to get heard. It's like as if there is no space for them unless it's a trad music programme. There's no space within general daytime radio. RTÉ supporting the arts? That's just a sales package. And RTÉ advertising is so expensive. It's not really supporting the arts at all"

"The national media needs to open their eyes and allow some new performers in. There are established performers who cannot get opportunities on RTÉ, and I think that is one of the biggest challenges at the moment for a professional musician in Ireland"

"On mainstream daytime radio, it's very rare that you would hear traditional music, and that really needs to change. Regularly, when I'm promoting a musician or an album, I would pitch to the mainstream radio slots where they would interview the band. For some musicians with a high profile, it might be easier. But if there's any slight doubt in the radio producer's mind as to the profile of the traditional musician, they are very resistant to having live trad music on"

"I don't think traditional music has enough of a reach on mainstream media. I feel to get broader media coverage, presenters will have to start taking risks in a world that they don't really know an awful lot about. And that's the fear. There are so many great musicians doing so many great things but it's always safer to stick with someone who brings a readymade audience. Hopefully that will change in the future but I think it will take the next generation of journalists, reviewers and radio presenters to bring Irish traditional music to the forefront again and maybe talk about it in a different way and make it more mainstream and inclusive. I think people think 'I wasn't brought up

with that so I don't get it'. If anything, it's one of the most inclusive artforms we have and yet people seem to feel shut out from it. But I think that is something that will be fixed by future generations"

"It would be nice to see some of the kids here who have never heard Irish traditional music, hear it, without getting their parents' view of it as being something that happens in a corner in a pub.

Suddenly they go away and they see that there's an interest in it in far-flung places all over the world. They see Japanese people playing Irish traditional music to a really high level and these kids can't recognise a jig. Awareness is a big thing and I think it could be achieved by the main media being a little bit more sympathetic to our music, not just having a programme on a Sunday night"

For many, the perceived inadequate coverage of the traditional arts is particularly unusual given the aforementioned global reputation of the artform, and the belief that many international visitors come to Ireland to enjoy traditional music, song, and dance. However, commentators feel that the traditional arts are not sufficiently represented in mainstream media at home, irrespective of how frequently the artform is drawn on by the State as a symbol of Irish identity, and performed for international dignitaries:

"I feel that traditional music is lost in mainstream media, in every media almost, in Ireland. And I feel the value that it has in terms of world value as a traditional music is underappreciated. If you take maybe the greatest Indian music, and the greatest Spanish music, it's up there with all of them, and I feel that most people in Ireland don't know that, and they don't understand the value of what they have, and it's a responsibility of the media to bring this awareness to people but the media don't even know its value"

"If I didn't have the background that I do in traditional music, I might think that this stuff is just middle of the road. In a country like Ireland, you have a flute player like Matt Molloy who is internationally regarded as one of the finest exponents of a very popular instrument that is played in most countries in the world, and yet where are the hour-long recitals of him on mainstream television such as RTÉ? Is he on the same parity of esteem as James Galway is through the BBC for example?"

"I still don't think that there is enough support for traditional music on the airwaves, and the champions that we do have are hidden away in the early morning or the late-night slot. I think on a Government level, we are really good at trotting out the traddies for when the expensive or important people come to visit, but in terms of real support, I don't think there is much in place there in terms of radio play. I think we are getting reviewed less too"

"Ireland is sold on our music and our culture and yet when people come to visit us they can't find traditional music. They find Country and Irish. RTÉ have a lot to do with it but there are others too"

One respected singer recalls her surprise at Irish language songs being deemed inappropriate for broadcast here in Ireland, despite the respect shown in other parts of the world:

"I can especially correlate how negatively the Irish language and Irish traditional music is perceived by Irish TV, radio and journalists in general. I mostly sing in my native tongue and only in Ireland have I been asked to change my song to an English song on TV and Radio programmes for ratings. As if Irish audiences do not like their own native language. In Japan, UK and the USA the programme producers ask for Irish language songs specifically and are fascinated by them"

Responding to the increasing levels of participation in the traditional arts

Many are surprised that the media are not responding to the popularity of the traditional arts among its expanding community of participants, given that the traditional arts are widely perceived to be more popular now than at any other time in their history.

"I know from working on TV shows over the years at the Fleadh that locals are shocked and in awe at how young and vibrant, and exciting Irish traditional music is. This sense of shock should not be there. There is something for everybody out there but they are not getting any opportunity to actually showcase it to the wider listener"

"People don't know what they want until you give it to them. I think we need more airplay. Irish traditional music has never been more popular with young people but instead of having more traditional music on radio, there's less. So it's kind of a contradiction in terms"

"The national airways need to change their attitude to traditional music. I would present a television show for free, just to do it. Just to make sure that people were hearing and seeing the level of quality that is out there. And it is extraordinary, the talent of young people playing Irish traditional music. And Irish traditional music is by far the most popular folk music on the face of the planet"

"Only for TG4, traditional music would get no exposure worth talking about. Yet you have Late Late Show specials on Country Music. There aren't many children in this country playing Country Music. Everyone from the age of 3 to 93 is playing traditional music"

"You need the media to take a risk because the fact of the matter is that there is enough talent, and diversity of personality, character, and musical style to create excellent programming, be it on radio or television"

"You need to make it normal to hear Irish traditional music. It needs to be a lot more available and we need a lot more radio and TV programming to let people see how much fun Irish traditional music is, and how alive it is"

As one experienced radio producer notes, there is a demand among the wider population for hearing more Irish traditional music and song on mainstream radio:

"I worked on Sunday Miscellany, for example, for two years, and definitely the biggest reaction I ever got to any music played on that programme was when traditional music was played. I was playing jazz, classical music, I was playing anything. It depended on the script. Traditional music is hugely popular and there is huge goodwill towards it. It taps into something within people that moves them in some way and gives them confidence, and that makes them feel good about themselves. It's a very positive force. And when I worked on the Pat Kenny show, when there were traditional musicians in, it was always a very positive and vocal reaction. We always got messages and emails looking for more information. So, I've no doubt that the audience is there"

Cronyism

According to some observers, on occasions when media such as radio and TV feature traditional artists, their selection is often confined to the same cohort of practitioners:

"If you take the number of seriously outstanding traditional artists that are out there, and you take the overall scant coverage of the traditional arts, and an over-reliance on a couple of the big names, that's where you really see how unrepresented the traditional arts are in the media in Ireland"

"I think we have a huge problem in terms of our mainstream media in Ireland. Our primary broadcasters have no interest in showcasing anyone on the next tier down. The same names appear

everywhere. I feel like the broadcaster is missing a trick because there is a vibrant scene, and a diversity within the tradition that really should be showcased. I think it would elevate traditional music onto another stage, in terms of the amount people listening to and enjoying it"

"I find it hard to even know where to look, to hear about good traditional music concerts anymore. There is so little media attention given to traditional music. Unless you have good PR, you're invisible. But the usual names still appear everywhere"

The media 'angle'

Some feel that producers and other gatekeepers in the media are reluctant to deal with the traditional arts on their own terms, and instead, mediate or dilute the artform in a certain way in an attempt to make it accessible for mainstream consumption. In addition, some feel that advocates almost need to justify why traditional arts coverage shouldn't conform to notional listener expectations that many not even reflect audience demand.

"The media copout is that they feel they need to sugar-coat it. They need to get artists from other musical genres to mess about with Irish traditional musicians and reach compromises that aren't artistically creative. And I think there is a huge amount of lazy programming. There are so many really fantastic musicians, singers, and dancers around the country but because they are not household names, they don't get asked to perform. These are really good artists and they are very entertaining. And those gatekeepers hold the budgets, whether it be the media, radio, TV, or concerts and festivals that are often funded by public funds"

"The relationship between the traditional arts and the media as I experience it is one of real struggle, to find the space, to secure the space, to give the traditional arts the space it deserves. And that's always a struggle. I still feel like it's going back to first principles when you're talking to somebody in an editorial position, about a particular story or a piece. You constantly have to go back and justify it. It never seems to evolve in the way that you see conversations evolving in the media about other artforms"

"It seems like a struggle for the traditional arts to be presented on mainstream radio, TV and newspapers and magazines. Unless you have something different to say or do, they don't entertain it, or if you are flavour of the month. I notice that if there is a good financed promotional campaign with a project, it will get into the mainstream on TV and radio and the press"

TG4 and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta

While a significant amount of goodwill was expressed towards Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4 by contributors to this research, many feel that RTÉ has delegated traditional arts coverage to these platforms, rather than investing in traditional arts programming that has the potential to bring the traditional arts to a mainstream national audience.

"I think it's wonderful that Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4 do really great work but I think generally, RTÉ's treatment of traditional music, in terms of its collection, and its projection on the premier station, which is Radio 1, leaves a lot to be desired. I've no problem with the programmes that they actually do. They are very important. But I think it's really difficult for young traditional musicians. And if they say Raidió na Gaeltachta is part of the RTÉ family, that's actually not a good enough answer"

"Since TG4 came into existence it seems like RTÉ decided to hand over traditional music to them and let them deal with it. When we had The Pure Drop and other programmes on RTÉ, it was broadcast to a big audience. Sometimes the mainstream audience who wouldn't have been into traditional music were coming across this and it was creating awareness and access. Now, TG4 are the only broadcaster who service the needs of traditional music, and there is more of it than has ever been on TG4, and I think a lot of it is really well done. Unfortunately, it is generally broadcast to very small audiences"

"The problem with RTÉ is that they see Raidió na Gaeltachta as taking care of their obligation to the Irish language and Irish traditional music. So, it takes the pressure off them to put the same content on Radio 1. They think they are fulfilling their public broadcasting commitments through Raidió na Gaeltachta, so they don't have to do much about it"

"The main media in this county have washed their hands of showing our music on radio and TV. They've left that to Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4 so therefore you have generations of people who never get to see our music. And I think a lot of people would love to hear a concert but they think that stuff happens in a corner in a pub and they think, 'it's not for me', but they're not given the option. Are you telling me that if a good piece of quality Irish traditional comes on during a daytime radio programme that people are going to turn it off?"

In response, one contributor with a professional familiarity with the inner workings of the TV industry, although very supportive to the concerns of traditional artists, feels that the relatively

small scale of our broadcasting sector impacts upon our ability to showcase specialist and niche interests such as the traditional arts in a similar way to arts channels in other jurisdictions:

"Artists would want to be represented on maximum platforms of course but in a broadcast landscape, it doesn't always work like that. We are a tiny territory in Ireland. So, it's not as if RTÉ sit back and say they will leave all that diddley-eye to that crowd down in Connemara. When they see that they will garner big audiences, they are right on it. Documentaries are done on the likes of Riverdance or Mary Black. They won't do a documentary on Junior Crehan because they see it as niche. That is the world of broadcasting. If you compare it to the UK, BBC 1 is the RTÉ 1, BBC 2 is the TG4. You get a lot of the arts and location stuff on BBC2. And then you have BBC Arts, or BBC 4 as it was, which is a dedicated arts channel that we don't have here because we're not big enough"

The print media

Traditional arts coverage in the print media such as newspapers and music magazines was also discussed in commentary offered to this research. Some feel that the traditional arts feature even less in the print media than on TV and radio. For example, the following contribution suggests that it is easier to get radio play to promote a new album than it is to have an album reviewed:

"Should one manage to create an album or get a project through to completion, the next hurdle is promotion. The niche radio shows continue to do an enormous service to the traditional arts. The presenters clearly love the music they play and are extremely knowledgeable about it. With the exception of a number of good music magazines, music journalism feels more underdeveloped. A wider pool of writers who, like the radio presenters, clearly love the genre and can communicate the artistry and essence of each project, is very much needed. It would be a great plus if an artist could contact a music journalist who would simply be more into, and knowledgeable about, a particular style and who could write authoritatively about the content"

It is also a challenge for reviewers and journalists to keep informed about new traditional arts releases and projects due to the high level of activity in the sector, and because many artists do not have the resources to delegate PR and publicity work to professionals who specialise in those areas:

"The fact that somebody has a new album just won't cut the mustard. It's interesting now with streaming, and people not releasing hardcopy albums more, that access to information about artists, and their work, and what motivates them is actually harder now for journalists than it would

have been in the past, because people are not resourced. They don't have the time and the money to do it. But then, that makes it that much harder for whoever it is in the media to make sense of what is coming into them. And there's so much noise. To be able to stand out apart from that is a real challenge, both for the journalist and the artist"

However, when an artist or act has support that attracts coverage by journalists, the results can be very different, and can have lasting impacts on developing audiences for the traditional arts:

"When you have something like The Gloaming, all of a sudden who have journalists outside of the traditional music world writing about them. Obviously, their music has some part to play in it, but I think that when somebody gets the media support, and record company support, and people hear Irish traditional music, they like it. So, I think there is an audience and a constituency that would enjoy hearing more traditional music in performance settings, but they have to actually hear it"

Pejorative attitudes to the traditional arts in the Media

A number of participants stated their opinions on how various elements of the media still look negatively at the traditional arts in Ireland.

"Unfortunately, there are still people around the media, sometimes in very influential positions, who still talk about 'diddle-eye', which is really hard to believe. That's really 'flat-earth' language. Things like Fleadh TV is aimed at a kind of frantic youth market, and that's fair enough if that's where they're getting their audience share and their advertising, but I'm not sure that it always serves the music very well. And RTÉ has ruthlessly de-prioritised traditional music, and I do think that is a problem, but it's only one of a number of problems they have as a public service broadcaster in a highly commercialised digital world where people's consumption patterns are totally different now"

However, such misconceptions about the traditional arts are not limited to the Irish media.

"It is hard to shirk the 'diddle-de-dee' persona that Irish music is inclined to have. And I think we are so much more than that and I get so frustrated. We have been asked to do something for the biggest radio station in the UK next week, and their point of reference was the basement of the Titanic scene. We do have a problem, even in Ireland, with how Irish traditional music is perceived by the general public and by those with power in the media"

A forum for critical discourse

Contributors also made reference to a perceived lack of media platforms for critical discourse on the traditional arts and suggested that this was not always the case. As a result, some feel that the high artistic qualities of the traditional arts are under-appreciated when the media emphasise participation over showcasing artistry.

"There's no space in the media for discourse on Irish traditional music, as in what is good, what isn't good, what people like, and what people don't like. And that's all relative but the discussion of that creates opinions and that creates an audience in itself. That isn't happening in Irish traditional music now and it's all the weaker for it. I think it was happening in the 1970s. You had traditional music front and centre"

However, programmes such as 'Sé mo Laoch on TG4 are seen as a positive step in addressing this:

"I love the Sé mo Laoch programmes that are on TG4 at the moment, and I would have been strongly advocating for those style of programmes to have been extended to the 55-minute format that they are in at the moment. They portray Steve Cooney as an artist, they portray Sean Keane as an artist. They get into the personality of these musicians, so that your next-door-neighbour can understand what we can hear in that music"

Clare FM

Some of the commentary on media coverage for the traditional arts made reference to the efforts of local radio stations in promoting the traditional arts in Ireland. Clare FM, a regional radio station based in Ennis, was by far the most commonly-referenced station in conversations with contributors who viewed the station as a model of good practice for traditional arts coverage. *The West Wind*, the station's flagship traditional music programme, is broadcast for 2 hours between 7pm and 9pm, from Monday to Friday, with a different presenter featured each night of the week. One contributor describes the value of Clare FM to their work from the perspective of a management and PR professional:

"Clare FM has been invaluable. And while it's a local radio station, it has a big listenership. And they have consistently, for 20 years, had a nightly trad music programme, which I think is kind of unprecedented. Clare FM is still a business and they still need to make their bobs, but they have not in any way rolled back and it's an invaluable source of airplay, and particularly now with the online presence of Clare FM, the word is getting out even more, and a lot of the presenters are very active on social media so they are talking online about new albums and that's bouncing all over the place. I think a lot of local radio stations could model their output on what Clare FM does"

One Clare FM presenter offers the following insight into why she feels that Clare FM works as a model for traditional arts programming:

"Although we have a huge global listenership, it's like a family. It has kept its local identity also. But everybody wants the local. They want to belong. People want to identify with our culture. And we also find that people who listen to Clare FM come and meet us. They want to put a face to the voice. And they have become very much part of the fabric of Ennis in county Clare. It intrigues me a lot, actually. They might come to Ennis three or four times a year, and the rest of the time they are online with us. It's all down to management. In every county in Ireland and abroad, people would do what I'm doing, and would really enjoy it. The interest is definitely there. I suppose it goes back to who was in Clare FM from the start. It's all about self-belief. Obviously, those at Clare FM felt that they had something unique, and that was our culture. And thankfully, the management for the last 30 years have recognised that and maintained it, and sustained it"

Engagement with the media

Broadcasters who contributed to this research offered some valuable insights into how traditional artists could improve their chances of getting airplay on national and local radio, as well as increasing the likelihood that performances and various events are publicised:

"A bit of thought as to how the media works would be good. But then there are the basics. People are often sending us stuff in a week before the event. But that's too late. We can't do anything. People aren't good, weirdly, about sending us music. Very oddly, it doesn't come in. I've bought a lot of new CDs this year from shops. If the stuff isn't here, we can't use it"

"Bear in mind that somebody might get 50 press releases a month and 20 CDs, so you have to be the kind of person who writes, and follows up because it is hard to keep on top of the volume of stuff that comes in. I definitely think the more that people know how programmes work, the more effectively they can pitch their music"

"It's interesting to me how people are not proactive. I want to play the music if it comes in. And things that do come in, often come in with no contact details on them, or no press releases or notes. Trying to be a little bit more cognisant of the person receiving your music would work well. If the word could go out about that, it would be great"

Future developments

A number of discussions with contributors on the level of media coverage allocated to the traditional arts suggested that the changing nature of media more generally will have an impact on its significance and influence on the popularity of the traditional arts. A retired senior radio producer at RTÉ observes how online content and podcasts are almost dominating the radio landscape, signifying a notable change in how programming is now determined:

"The way people are consuming music is changing. I don't think my own children will ever buy a newspaper in their lives. There's not much radio listening at all. It's all podcasts. That market is moving so fast. How can traditional music get attention or seek publicity? It's just such a changing world. It's hard to keep up with it. The graph has gone from where it was bureaucratic people, almost civil servants, deciding in response to their own brief or mission statements what they should be doing, and that was very Irish as such, to something that is now market driven, and it's in a world context, and it doesn't pay heed to what I would regard for the most part, as genuine traditional music"

Some are optimistic that online content, social media, and other avenues will provide a promotional infrastructure for the traditional arts in a way that, in their view, conventional media has not:

"I think the traditional arts are very poorly supported by the media in general. In general, that's the old media. I think social media has a lot to offer and I would be optimistic that's going to get better over time. There's a lot more harnessing of social media by traditional artists perhaps than there would have been before"

"I do think that it is remarkable that the tradition is thriving the way it is despite, not because of, the media, or because of anything that is happening in that zone, so I don't think its future is in any way dependent on that. I think its future is around how it organises itself or chooses to take different routes"

2.3 PAY RATES & WORKING CONDITIONS

Inconsistencies and ambiguity around fees and working conditions in the traditional arts sector were also cited by contributors to this research as major barriers to achieving a successful and sustainable career in the traditional arts. Opinions on the source of this problematic scenario are varied and I discuss the most prevalent of these views here.

Low fees

Poor rates of pay in the traditional arts sector were mentioned consistently as a challenging issue for the traditional artists that I spoke to when conducting this research.

"Unless you are hugely successful the income is not compatible to that available in other jobs if you have a high level of qualifications. The unsociable hours and travel are also a downside"

"One of the main problems is that within Ireland the gigs simply aren't there. There's a major need for smaller, more intimate, venues. Think 80 not 800. Many festivals etc too bring many musicians to play each weekend but the pay is low (some as low as €150 for 3 sessions over 3 days) and yes I know we can all say no for a musician starting out on a career in the arts this may simply not be an option. Organisations like Comhaltas totally monopolise the teaching of traditional music too, providing classes with young people, hardly able to play themselves, paying ridiculously low amounts which takes away much of the business for real professional musicians of a high quality should they wish to teach in a big way. I could go on and on"

Establishing pay scales and guidelines

Many traditional artists that I spoke to throughout the course of this research expressed a desire for pay guidelines to be established due to a lack of consistency in fees paid for performances and teaching activities. In February 2020, the Arts Council published *Paying the Artist*, a policy document that outlines the Council's policy on the fair and equitable remuneration and contracting of artists. While the policy sets out a number of actions and principles for best practice in improving artists' working conditions, the policy does not provide any recommendations or guidance as to what pay rates are deemed appropriate for artistic work.

A welcome recent addition to application forms for funding awards such as *The Deis Recording and Publication Award*, is a requirement for applicants to provide details on how they will ensure that artists involved in proposed projects benefit from appropriate pay and working conditions. However, one contributor to this research commented on his surprise that the Council didn't provide any guidelines as to what artist fees would be considered appropriate for his project:

"The Deis Recording Award has been updated to have a section on artists pay but they didn't have anywhere to refer me to. There are issues with pay rates. There isn't anywhere that has a list of recommended rates. The CMC, which is contemporary music really, have a list on commissions, but nothing is out there for what someone should get for a recording session. It would be handy to have some guidelines on that. When something is funded, it would be nice to know what we should be paying somebody"

This uncertainty around appropriate fees and working conditions is mirrored throughout the traditional arts sector, and a wide range of concerns have been expressed by contributors to this research on the variability of fees offered.

"In terms of money, and the value of a gig, and what musicians should charge is another thing that is hard for musicians. Where do you go to ask about that? You can ask other musicians but practical advice in terms of being a professional would be nice"

"I think there are issues to do with things like pay and conditions for traditional musicians generally. I think there could be better materials available to traditional musicians so that they could maybe assert their rights in a better and more consistent way"

"We need some kind of guidance for fees and some kind of a scale whereby promoters can't just say that they will give you a few bob and say nothing more. And you take what you get at the end of the day and you don't even count the money until you get home. Some kind of a forum should discuss this"

"I find the rates charged for music teaching to be very inconsistent, and it varies so much from teacher to teacher. There seems to be no benchmark or guideline about what is acceptable to charge for music lessons. I hate to see cases where teachers are paid unacceptable levels of pay, which happens too frequently, I'm afraid"

In relation to respecting intellectual property, some respondents were critical of the lack of awareness and courtesy demonstrated by festivals who did not seek artists' prior permission for media broadcasts of concerts:

"I think the media are arrogant in the way that they come in and take all this material for broadcast. Festivals are the main culprit, though. The organisers of the festival want the publicity. They won't shy away from it. You don't even get the courtesy of being asked. What about copyright and contracts? These are commercial media entities"

In a similar vein, one festival produced an album of a concert performance featuring a musician interviewed for this research, who also states that he was not made aware of this fact and only realised once the album had been released:

"One festival put out a CD of a concert we performed at and we were never asked in advance. We were disgusted. They should really be called out on it. Public funding is going to these festivals and they treat musicians like that"

As evidenced by these contributions, working conditions and agreements are often nebulous in the traditional arts sector. In addition, rehearsal time is often done on a pro-bono basis. According to one professional classical musician interviewed for this research, it would be beneficial to the traditional arts sector to adopt some of the practices associated with her chosen genre:

"Traditional arts and classical music are so different in nature in every way. If I had my way, people employed for a performance would be paid to rehearse together, and they would be paid to perform, and it would all be scheduled. Everyone does their own homework themselves, but people are being paid for a certain rehearsal timeframe"

For some, there is a lack of attention given to contracts in the traditional arts sector.

"People need to be paid properly and understand what they are signing if they do a piece for television or radio, and when you sign an innocuous-looking page and a half of something. How clearly do we all understand what we are signing and what the implications are? I think that's more important now than ever because it can be like the Wild West out there when people are working in an industry, but coming at it from a position where there is a very uneven balance of power, knowledge, and information about the paperwork that makes it all happen. I think people need to be more aware of their intellectual property rights and what can happen to them"

Unionisation

There was a large degree of consensus among contributors to this research that the traditional arts sector could benefit from the advocacy, representation, and industry guidance that unionisation can provide:

"For quite some time I have believed there is need for a union of traditional artists in order to protect trad musicians at a session, gig and concert level. For too long, traditional musicians who often have other forms of work will undercut fellow musicians as they claim to play "for the love of it" or that they don't classify themselves of the same standard as those who had the gig...but yet will undercut a musician who may depend on that gig"

"I would love to see a union for Irish traditional music and solidarity among musicians to avoid media exploitation. There needs to be no ambiguity about our rights as musicians. Otherwise, people who call out exploitation are just labelled as awkward"

"A functioning union that could lobby for the fair payment of traditional artists working in all sectors, particularly in the tourism industry would be beneficial"

"I would like to see a union that has a code of conduct that venues subscribe to. There is a dressing room provided, with a kettle, and towels, a place to change your clothes. Certain basic things. There should be certain basic provisions"

"A big issue with traditional music is semi-professionalism, that awful word 'undercutting' happens. This is where a union needs to come in. You have these unscrupulous publicans then, among others, who come in and take advantage of that. But somebody then has to take a stand, and if you take the stand you run the risk of not getting the gig. And you tell me how many musicians are going to take that stand"

"As a musician, I think unionisation is the only way to go. Even when I'm asked to give a talk, I'm often wondering how much to charge. We never know how much to charge and even musicians running festivals don't know how much to pay. So, the unionisation of gigging musicians is where we need to get to"

"Musicians are the last people paid a lot of the time. In terms of a television crew, the cameramen have set fees, the sound and lighting engineers, and stage crew all have a hard bottom line, and the traditional musicians get the crumbs that are left. Yet it is the traditional musicians' reputations that are on the line on stage at the end of the day. You're doing the heavy lifting as such, and you're getting the lightest fee of all the people involved in the production"

"Because of the nature of a lot of our music being played in pubs, it's up to the pubs to set pay rates. And if we say, actually the union rate is this, the publican will say he can get it cheaper elsewhere. That is our problem. And there's no security with those Temple Bar gigs. If there's a football match on, they'll say 'sorry, not tonight', and there's very little we can do about that. The more musicians we have, the more we can bargain"

"If a musician is unionised, it means their fees will go up. It means that festivals will need more money and then festivals will put more pressure on the Arts Council, and then the Arts Council will put more pressure on the Government. It means ultimately that there will be more money in the music economy. It all goes around. I've been writing about this for years but they are the conclusions that I am coming to"

"The situation is too perilous for traditional musicians. No matter how many walls or boundaries previous generations have broken down, the world hasn't expanded enough to have a life in it. And that concerns me. I think it all comes back to the fact that we haven't managed to actually increase the fees that traditional musicians get paid. If there was unionisation, I'd be a lot more confident about sending my children into the music world"

"I certainly think that a strong union is required, whether the existing union is strong or not is another thing. But obviously, the more numbers a union has, the stronger it gets, the stronger mandate it has. I think there should be a strong union for musicians that would promote rates of pay, certainly with TV and radio, and also involve a code of ethics so musicians wouldn't get involved in events where a particular musician has a grievance with that organiser, or who hasn't been paid, which can happen"

"There are a lot more professional traditional musicians than any other form of music in Ireland, and it's probably up to the 'traddies' to pull together and re-form or reawaken the musicians union in Ireland. Working in the independent television sector, first of all we have to tender for a job with a

broadcaster, and we put in what we consider to be decent rates of pay for artists and for the crew, and an ideal scenario for the production, and the first thing the broadcaster will say is that you need to reduce the hourly cost of these programmes. And then we say that you can't pay camera men less than this per day because that's the unionised rate, and we can't pay the editors less than this, and so on. And then the broadcasters will say that you have to cut the artists budget. It's the first line that gets cut in every single budget negotiation. If there was a musicians union rate that you can refer to, it would make those negotiations more realistic and transparent"

Some have specifically referenced the Musicians' Union of Ireland as a representative body for the traditional arts and the mutual benefits that would arise from more collaboration between the MUI and the traditional arts sector:

"I would advise everybody to join the Musicians Union of Ireland because if something happens, you have legal recourse. Orchestras and classical musicians have a much bigger forum and when SIPTU go into negotiations, they can argue vociferously for that group because they have so many members. But there aren't really a lot of us in the traditional music group. If more of us were in there, they could argue better for us"

"I don't think the Musicians Union of Ireland have done much around the actual working conditions for traditional musicians. They haven't done anything that I can see. Even the web page is static and doesn't seem to have been updated"

One London-based traditional and classical musician interviewed for this research outlines the benefits that she observes from being a member of a musicians' union, and suggests why unionisation may be advantageous to traditional artists in Ireland:

"Living in London at the moment, we have a musicians' union, which really changes the way musicians are treated. There are different pay bands for different concerts. Even if you are working in a theatre you will have a different pay band depending on the size of the theatre, and the length of the show you are playing. And I do think that it is necessary to bring into play at home, and that it covers all artforms as it does over here, so at least musicians are being offered the same pay for what they are doing. Just because you are a classical musician doesn't mean you are entitled to more money than a traditional musician. Yes, you may have studied it in college but so can a traditional musician. Any sort of recording work and festivals should have salaries outlined and they

should match up a little more than they do at the moment with what is going on in the classical world"

Likewise, a Danish folk musician interviewed for this research outlines benefits he experiences as a result of being a member of the Musicians' Union in Denmark:

"One of the things working well in Denmark is the fees we get as folk musicians. We have quite a strong union in the Danish Musicians Union so we have minimum fees, but we can get more than that. A lot of people are members here. I once played a concert here where they didn't pay us. After 3 months, I still hadn't been paid and the venue just kept making excuses. So I went to the union and their lawyer sorted it out. They took care of it and I got paid a few days later"

One English folk musician describes the benefits that he has observed as a member of the UK Musicians' Union:

"Unions are useful if you have a problem. Very occasionally, if there is a problem with the odd record company, they can be quite helpful with that. They are certainly useful for checking foreign contracts, if you've not done much of that. I remember in the days when tours of Italy might cancel at the drop of a hat, they were quite good at helping you through that"

Some have outlined that there are caveats involved in unionising traditional artists, even if the ultimate benefits arising from unionisation are deemed generally advantageous to the traditional arts sector:

"Artists are very hard to organise. They reason being that they're basically not working for a boss. They're self-employed and also they are in competition with each other for the same gigs. So, it's quite hard to organise that in terms of union membership. It has been done. If there was an independent representative body of professional and semi-professional traditional musicians, a sort of advocacy group that would do things like publish basic rates that people should be working for, studio, formal stage performance, and small venue performance, music sessions, and actually backed it up with some kind of naming and shaming, and organised clout behind it. You have to have some kind of stick potentially to beat unscrupulous employers with"

"In terms of unionisation, the problem that you are faced with in the traditional sector, is that it's hard to identify an employer. We negotiated with RTÉ because it was an established body and therefore people in the orchestras in particular, were actually members of the union and could speak about pay rates and conditions. And in some of the bigger hotels, we did deals with cabaret groups and so on, over the years. But at the moment, so many people involved with traditional music are individualists, and under European law, they become self-employed, and the self-employed have limited bargaining rights because they are supposed to be in competition with each other, and there is competition policy. So, you have to have an employee/employer relationship, and in most cases people backed away from that because you then have to take tax and PRSI into account. That's one of your difficulties"

Exclusivity agreements

The addition of exclusivity agreements in contracts, whereby artists must agree not to perform within a certain distance of a venue within a particular period of time, was criticised by some of those interviewed for this research. According to some, such agreements present a barrier that unfairly impacts upon an artist's ability to make a living:

"I was shocked that we were asked to sign an exclusivity agreement. That meant that none of those musicians could perform within a six-month window of our particular project, and I was quite shocked at that big ask, and actually I said no. But I was surprised at these kind of weird expectations being put upon artists. Nobody should be asking for an exclusivity agreement. I do see that happening in our field, in the visual arts too. And that really diminishes an artist's ability to have an income"

"I would like to see organisations stripped of their right to demand exclusivity. If you are paying me €10,000, fair enough, I can see some logic in that, but not €300. You are telling me that I can't play in Dublin for 6 months within 50 kilometres, if I'm doing a gig in Dublin for you? I need the right to work. I have to work to stay alive. And you're telling me I can't work? I think it's awful"

"A couple of times over the last few years I've noticed that a venue might email me from a venue in Kerry, for example, and say they've heard that you are playing in Cork in two weeks with a different group, and they say 'sorry, this isn't going to work out after all'. They want to keep you to themselves and you're not allowed to perform within an hour of their venue, or within a month. That seems to be a stipulation that's appearing more and more. So, you are being cornered by venues to perform less so that they can benefit"

2.4 FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Many survey and interview responses referred to a perceived deficiency in funding opportunities for the traditional arts sector in Ireland. Given its central position as a funding body for the traditional arts, the Arts Council was the institution referenced most frequently by contributors to this research.

The Arts Council

Introduced on page 32 of this report, the Arts Council is the most significant and most regular provider of funding to the traditional arts sector. The subject of funding is a widespread concern among traditional artists who participated in this research, and the main commentary offered relates to the inadequate amount of funding available to the traditional arts, given the level of activity in the sector, and its international reputation. In 2020, the Traditional Arts section received €2.1 million (2.6%) of the total €80 million Arts Council budget. Many acknowledge the efforts and dedication of the traditional arts section of the Arts Council but believe that they are not being adequately resourced to the same extent as other artforms:

"The traditional arts wing of the Arts Council is a well-intentioned, passionately run organisation. Sadly, the resources afforded to it are too few to offer a wide range of artists sufficient levels of income"

"Whether or not to do with personal bias in key members of the Arts Council upper management, it seems like we spend a disproportionate amount of funding on Opera. People don't look to Ireland for Opera, they do look to Ireland for traditional Irish music, singing and dance"

"Perceived 'high-brow' music, opera, classical music, or theatre seems to get more funding. The funding for the traditional arts is very low. Proportionally it should be way higher given the activity and involvement. And that traditionally, has been the way. I think the traditional music community need to realise that they need to be strong advocates for more funding for what they do"

"I feel other artforms are generally given preference over traditional arts and receive higher amounts of funding"

For others, the funding that is provided is not being strategically invested in the future of the traditional arts:

"In a modern, pluralist, diverse democracy, Ireland needs to have a differentiated narrative about what it is as it takes to the world in its second century of independence. And the sound of who we are, the humanity of what we are, and the heart and soul of the country is rolled up in the DNA of the music that we refer to as our traditional music. As the world becomes more digital and atomised, this is going to become very important. And it will become an asset that would be absolutely squandered if we do not invest strategically in its development"

"I think a lot of the funding is piecemeal and a lot of it is almost to shut people up rather than having a long-term plan. And I think the long-term plan should look beyond us. We are fine but who is to tell whether or not it will burn out, and we could leave the next generation with a dearth of music. If we are not careful, that could happen. So I think there is a lack of long-term thinking"

A number of people that I spoke with expressed concerns that certain artists are better than others at writing funding applications, and as a consequence, some applicants are disadvantaged regardless of the quality of their proposed project or activity:

"There are a lot of obstacles when it comes to funding. There are specific skills that you need to apply for funding. What I've seen over the years is that a lot of people who may not have the writing or academic skills to express themselves and express on paper what they want, may not get support whereas other people who have those skills have an advantage. The people that I respect most within the tradition, and who I enjoy listening to the most, generally don't apply for funding or put themselves out there to seek funding for projects and as a result, they are not catalogued or documented"

"It's not in everybody's making to sit down and fill out funding applications. It would be great to see people being able to access the creative space that bursaries and residencies give you, but there are a certain cohort of people who are applying for those. And when you get one, you get another, and you get quite good at applying. But opening that out and helping to widen the pool of people who can access those things is very important"

"A bit of work has to be done to make presentations to the Arts Council. Some people know how to get funding and others don't"

"If you get gigs and funding from presenting yourself confidently and overstating your abilities, and if that is how they assess things, and that's how gigs are got, then they will continue to be gotten disproportionately by certain types of people"

One young traditional artist interviewed for this research feels that it is particularly challenging to access funding as an emerging musician because of the competitive nature of Arts Council funding:

"For me, I find it's hard to compete with the big names. When you are up against the big names, why on earth would they give funding to somebody like me versus somebody who has a track record and more experience? It's probably a confidence thing as well. Everybody is in the same pool so I wouldn't even put myself forward. Because of that, it is difficult to dedicate the time to being a full-time musician, because there is that uncertainty"

It is clear that contributors to this research feel that additional support should be provided to guide traditional artists who wish to apply for funding to the Arts Council and other funding bodies.

"For people to be given a fair shout with funding applications, they need a little bit of advice. Not everybody is used to filling out forms like that. They often need another set of eyes. And I think there is a void there at the moment, it seems to me"

Some contributions suggest that there is demand among traditional artists for the Arts Council to reinstate advisors, such as those that were available for consultation on funding applications to the Deis traditional arts funding initiative from 2005 until 2013. In 2017, the Deis award transitioned to a Traditional Arts Project Award.

"There are people who are just not good at doing applications. I remember in the early days of the Deis scheme that there was a panel of advisors to help people work on their applications, and I think that is a good thing. It's a pity there isn't more of that"

"There are excellent opportunities but there is more information needed on what's available. The Deis advisors were great as they were independent"

Other contributors feel disadvantaged because they feel they have not had the opportunity to learn how to write successful funding applications in a formal educational environment such as third-level education, an arena in which many traditional artists are now studying their artform:

"Musicians are doing degrees and learning how to apply for Arts Council funding, and all that, but a lot of us aren't. A lot of use are feeling left out"

"Arts grants have always been a bone of contention with the majority of us traditional musicians. The reason being, that many of us didn't go to college. We didn't learn about what they are looking for. It's so complicated. We don't know the buzzwords. I think a help with this would be major in my book, personally"

However, one college graduate who studied Irish traditional music at masters degree level also feels ill-equipped to write Arts Council applications to a high level, and expresses a desire to see the Council connect more with a younger generation of traditional artists:

"There are friends of mine that don't even know what the Arts Council does. I'd love to see more young people encouraged to apply for funding. It would make everything seem more approachable"

There are also some suggestions made that there is a perceived formulaic approach to making funding applications, and that certain language and terms are valued more than others.

The funding applications themselves are just a minefield. I presume there are buzzwords. I wish there were webinars or places to go to get that information. Even to send off applications for feedback. Even if there were sample applications. If you want a sample CV, you just Google it. You could be shooting yourself in the foot in an application, but you just wouldn't know. Even to get a nod in the right direction"

Reference is also made to the filtering process that the Arts Council go through in order to shortlist applications for a peer panel of assessors:

"The Arts Council are a good funding body but you need to be able to tick the boxes. You really do need to get help with applications. There are buzz words. I'm not a fan of the way that the Arts Council filters applications before they get to a panel for a decision but that's the luck of the draw"

One contributor with many years of experience as an external assessor of traditional arts funding applications, wonders if funding criteria are in resonance with traditional arts practice and culture:

"I think there is a world of difference between a really good application and a really good idea. I know from being on assessment panels that very often there are some brilliant ideas that come from brilliant people but that don't get shortlisted or that fail, simply because they don't produce a good application that meets a whole set of governance requirements and metrics. Yes, they are necessary. We all know that but it gets in the way sometimes. I wonder sometimes if the support schemes that are there for traditional music are good enough or designed in a way that is empathetic enough to the practice and culture within the artform. You could say that it produces a form of methodological bias in a certain sense"

Some who acknowledge how daunting Arts Council applications are feel that traditional artists should interact more with Arts Council staff, as those who have made contact with the Arts Council feel that staff are approachable and helpful:

"When you apply for funding, and when it works out, you have a template. It becomes less daunting after that. But a lot of musicians don't have a notion where to go when they go at it first. People don't realise that you can pick up the phone and ring the Arts Council. There are people there who will talk you through it. People don't realise that. They look at ringing up the Arts Council as if it's ringing Revenue. Maybe the Arts Council could put a little more effort into connecting with musicians"

Managing projects that are awarded funding can be a demanding task and one survey respondent makes reference to the many additional skills that an applicant must have in order to bring a project to a successful conclusion:

"Having successfully applied multiple times for funding to the Arts Council of Ireland over the last four years, I have come to the conclusion that the last thing you want as a traditional artist is to be successful in obtaining a grant from the Arts Council. As the bank-account holder receiving the money, the producer of the project / event / show that's expected as an outcome of the funding, the organiser of the team, the pay-master for the team, the last person to get paid on the project if you're lucky enough to get anything, more often than not you put your own unpaid time into it, and sometimes even your own money to get the project across the line, you will inevitably be left with the burden of proof to your tax accountant and possibly the revenue commissioners why you shouldn't have to pay taxes on the gross amount received from the Arts Council"

"The project-based nature of arts-council funding means that there is no strategic support or continuity of support for traditional artists. This is to assume that traditional arts practitioners have the computer literacy and writing capacity to say in ten different ways within a 500-word limit 'what they want to do and why', and then if successful, have the organisational capacities and people management skills to manage a once-off creative projects"

Many examples were provided by those responding to this research whereby funding was received for a project, but it ultimately placed applicants in a difficult financial position because of the amount awarded. Two such examples refer to the *Deis Recording and Publication Award*:

"A change is needed. You can barely get a recording done on Deis funding anymore. Only for I have my own setup, I wouldn't be able to release music. I remember the last album we did. On day three or four we had to stop. We had two more tracks to do but it was becoming so expensive that we had to release eight tracks instead of ten, or something like that. The Deis isn't going to help you"

"The [Deis] Recording award is so important to traditional musicians that I would hate to jeopardise it in any way but I really don't think it is fit for purpose, and I think people who don't need the funding are taking advantage of it. Some that apply just pretend that they haven't already began or completed recording even when the guidelines are clear on not funding projects that are already underway. It happens because people can get away with it. There are no consequences and as a

result, those of us who seriously invest in our albums, get a lot less than we need, if anything at all, and we end up in debt because we will do exactly as we say we will do in our application"

Emerging traditional artists occupy a challenging position when seeking funding for a recording project given their specific need for funding to showcase and document a body of work, while competing with established applicants who can demonstrate their track records through existing recordings:

"Having the time to spend working on material is difficult. Financially, if you are not working, you're not going to have enough money to pay for it. If you are working, you don't have enough time to spend on the material. It's so important to have a recording as an example of your work. I've applied for the Deis recording award, but I wouldn't have chosen me either when I saw who did get funded. Without having a CD, there's very little for the Arts Council to go on, but it's hard to make one without funding in the first place"

A prominent theme that has emerged in relation to Arts Council funding for the traditional arts is concerned with the artistic influence that the Arts Council may potentially have on traditional arts practice. Again, some references are made to the style of application and language that are perceived to be valued by the Arts Council. The value of the former *Deis* advisor system is also referenced once again:

"It's great for instance that the Arts Council and Culture Ireland are providing funding. The way that funding is targeted, I'd have some issues with. And the way that it is actually changing the direction of Irish traditional music, I'd have issues with as well. It becomes a kind of cart leading the horse thing in a way. People look at other things that are being funded and they tailor their project to that because they know they are more likely to get funded if they follow a certain direction of previously-funded projects. Who is the artist? The Arts Council aren't the artist. They are the ones providing the support so they shouldn't really be having an influence on it, no matter how small. I'd just be worried that it's actually affecting the music. One thing that they could do is remove the buzzword culture that exists in any of these disciplines"

"The Arts Council have been the biggest publisher in the traditional arts by a huge distance. So many albums have Arts Council funding stamps on the back of them. The degree to which policy then dictates the evolution of the form could be potentially scary and this is something that people need to be much more aware of. I'm lucky enough that I can write good applications and get

funded, but I know that there are a lot of talented people who just miss that whole avenue entirely. It has a very profound impact on the artform in which we work. I thought the Deis advisors process allowed more people in"

"With funding, when it works, it works. The problem with it I guess is that too often you end up creating projects in order to fit with a certain funding situation. You're sitting there coming up the deadline and you're wondering what to do to make this work. But in reality what you actually want is to get some money to do what you were doing already"

"The expectation of the Arts Council that trad artists should have a "new" or inter-disciplinary concept within their proposal could imply that the trad arts are not enough as they are and that they must bring something new to the table when seeking funding. While I am an advocate for the evolution within trad arts, I feel this pushes this agenda in an inorganic way, leading to fusion for the sake of fusion"

Some dislike the inherent selectivity of funding awards and feel that funding organisations are not best placed to make decisions on what projects deserve financial support:

"I don't like the idea of Government organisations, or anybody, picking winners and losers. Saying 'this is good, this is not good. We like this, we don't like that'. They should never do that because they don't know anything about it. I don't care who they are. They don't know anything about this unless they're actually doing it. So they shouldn't be given the opportunity to decide. I think the world will decide what is artistically valuable but everybody should have the opportunity to at least make that statement"

The peer panel assessment policy adopted by the Arts Council that involves practitioners and other stakeholders connected to the traditional arts community and sector scoring funding applications is generally seen as a positive development:

"The Arts Council has a fairly healthy relationship with the sector now, I think. It has broadened out. There are a lot more people involved, through adjudicating panels. People are having an input, which is really important, and absolutely required"

However, some view this negatively, and suggest that peer assessment panels can be biased towards certain applications:

"Having both been on peer panels, and applied for funding, I realise that what controls what happens on peer panels is either what your preferences are yourself as a peer panel member when it comes down to a vote, or else what your prejudices are. You mightn't like somebody, or you might not know anything about them. So, the money tends to be given to people who are known, in some cases to people in families. I worry about that. In the days gone by, there was an Arts Officer, or a team of people there who supposedly got the job because they were qualified to assess, and they had a broad appreciation and understanding of the music. And they could make decisions. And I think they are really being relegated to the role of an administrator"

"Panels are formed of traditional musicians where knowledge and personal relationships with applicants can have an effect on successful applications"

Culture Ireland

Surprisingly, given the importance of Culture Ireland as a funding body that supports international touring and showcasing opportunities, the organisation did not feature prominently in discussions with contributors to this research. However, their reimbursement policy was criticised for being financially burdensome by one industry professional:

"I'd love to be able to have access to some funding for travel and accommodation where we can get some of it up front, without constantly having to take out loans or taking out money from my own personal savings account to give to bands to pay for flights and accommodation, and then 3 months after the tour, you get money back. I manage two Icelandic bands who get pretty much 70% of it up front with Iceland Music Export. Or you can book your flights and get repaid the following day. I work a lot in Iceland but I think there are a lot more barriers here"

2.5 AN APPETITE FOR ADVOCACY

Despite the existence of a number of respected resource organisations working on behalf of various interests within the traditional arts community, this research demonstrates a desire among the traditional arts sector to develop an umbrella advocacy group to consolidate the many strands of activity in the traditional arts community. The considerable achievements of both existing resource organisations and the wider traditional arts community itself, in effectively representing and advocating on behalf of the traditional arts, should not be understated here. This does not mean however that the challenges and concerns articulated throughout this report are not justified. There is consensus among contributors that advocacy for the traditional arts can and should be improved through channelling collective action in a streamlined and democratic representative body. This section of the report will outline some of the observations made by contributors on the subject of increased advocacy for the traditional arts in Ireland.

Proactive advocacy for the wider traditional arts community

Many practitioners consulted for this research felt that the wider sector should be more proactive in how it advocates for positive change. Among the motivations expressed were concerns at the levels of financial support currently available to traditional artists. As highlighted in previous pages, many believe that more energy should be directed specifically at increasing both the amount of funding, and the types of funding available:

"I think an increase in State support is fundamental. We are communicating something very fundamental to each and every citizen. So, I think that advocacy needs to be stronger. I think we need to be right in there at the table, banging on it, or whatever needs to be done, to get a bigger slice of the pie. We don't have a big enough slice of the pie and that's really fundamental. So again, that goes back to this collective voice from the traditional arts world, to come together and say that we expect more from the Arts Council and other sources"

"I think an advocacy organisation for the traditional arts should be looking at things such as a parity of support among the artforms. I think there was a while there when traditional music was starting to get a better share of the taxpayers' resources through the Arts Council, but I think that needs to be an item for attention on an ongoing basis"

"There is a need for an inclusive, all-embracing vision for the traditional arts that creates an eco-system that nurtures transmission, creativity and audience engagement with the purpose of advocating for and informing funding"

Another primary observation among contributors to this research is a need to mobilise the wider traditional arts community to maximise how effectively it can advocate on its own behalf, by drawing on its diverse expertise, talent, and resilience:

"There is a lot going on and people are very creative and dynamic. And they make gold out of straw. And existing as a traditional musician in a way is a bit of a miracle. And they are to be commended for having the courage to keep going and do that despite all the odds"

"We have to mobilise the talent that is within the community. I'm not aware of any other community as talented as the traditional arts community, and I'm not just talking about music, I'm talking about a range of skills. There is serious potential there to get this right. I think people have a confidence, and qualifications too, but I think it's still early days. For the position that the traditional arts should have in this country, we are the very early days of establishing its own self-worth. I don't think we are quite there yet but there are signs of momentum building"

For some, perhaps this momentum is slow to build due to a lack of proactivity on the part of some members of the traditional arts community itself:

"I think there is a massive behavioural shift needed in terms of the traditional arts community. We're not happy with where we are but we don't really want to do anything differently. We're not really open to doing anything differently. And I say this as one of that community"

In addition, others feel that the traditional arts sector needs to remain informed about the various pathways that exist to effectively advocate on behalf of its collective needs:

"I think we need to need to become much more informed about what's going on in other jurisdictions. We need to be more proactive and we need to reach out to legislators. Nothing is going to happen unless legislation is there. We need to befriend TDs, senators, get them on board,

ask questions in the Dáil, get a bill drawn up, a Musicians' Rights Bill, whatever the bill needs to be. There was a problem heretofore with the Competition Act. For musicians' rates of pay, the response was that it was anti-competitive to be asking for a particular rate. It was ridiculous"

Other observers suggest that a resource organisation is needed to connect with international showcasing opportunities, with a view to representing the traditional arts in a way that can compete with international peers:

"We are one of the most coveted nations in the world for our music. People love it. But then seeing the size of the Norwegian traditional music stand at WOMEX, in comparison to ours. It's pretty disheartening. But maybe that's it. Maybe a resource organisation is needed for Irish traditional music"

A representative and cohesive voice for the traditional arts

Many people articulated their views on a need to establish a centralised and cohesive voice to adequately represent the voices of the wider traditional arts community and sector. Existing specialist resource organisations such as Na Píobairí Uilleann, Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland, and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann continue to advocate effectively for their membership, and those familiar with the historical trajectory of the traditional arts and their value in mainstream Irish society look positively on the status of the traditional arts today:

"I think it is important to keep up all the good work that has happened in reframing traditional music and repositioning its image. It has moved a long way over the last number of decades, and in more recent years, from being a very old-fashioned stereotypical thing to being something that is being seen as something much more contemporary and often very edgy. The role of traditional music is much more central right across the contemporary arts but there is an absence of a voice sometimes for musicians"

There is overwhelming consensus that an umbrella traditional arts advocacy group is needed to act as an intermediary to unite what is perceived as a dynamic yet fragmented sector, which does not speak with one voice at present:

"I know for a fact that organisations look at the trad arts world and they see everybody trying to outdo everybody else. There's not a coherent, organised, structured, strategic presence. In the pop world, people could name leaders like Angela Dorgan. In the trad world they don't know who those people are because they don't have a collective voice"

"The main thing that that totally baffles me, I have to say, is I cannot believe how organisations don't work together more and consolidate their finances and expertise more, in such a niche market. I think it's cuckoo. It's so fragmented"

"I wonder how many people are actually set up properly to allow them to be recognised and regarded as professionals. I think the more that we do that, the more that we can be taken seriously as an artform. We're still scattered. We're still all over the place. And there's no coherent thinking or coherent process or voice, really"

Although a perceived lack of support and coverage by mainstream radio and TV media is one concern that surfaced prominently in both interviews and survey responses, the traditional arts sector has not always advocated for change when opportunities have been presented. When campaigning to introduce radio quotas for Irish music on Irish radio through his proposed Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2016, Willie Penrose, then a Labour Party TD for Longford-Westmeath, recalls his disappointment at the level of support that he received from the traditional arts community:

"I was extremely disappointed at the level of support from the traditional music community. I'm not a newcomer to traditional music. My family play traditional music. I was deeply involved. With the broadcasting quota for Irish music I was hoping that it would invigorate a strong campaign and that it would emanate from the traditional music sector. Nothing could be further from the truth. When I tried to get this going, I found a very receptive audience in the likes of Paul Brady, Phil Coulter, Mick Foster, Tony Allen, and Michael English, and so on. Certainly, traditional music is an area that would have benefitted from this quota"

My rationale for making reference to this apparent lack of sectoral engagement with such a potentially important issue is not in any way to apportion responsibility or blame to traditional artists. Instead, I would hope that this would be viewed as an example of how the diverse talent and expertise of the traditional arts community could have been better mobilised to engage with,

and perhaps enrich this process, if there had been a centralised and representative advocacy body in place to present the concerns and views of the sector.

Responses to this research have also indicated that a centralised or cohesive voice for the traditional arts should be mediated by practitioners, who can personally identify with many of the concerns faced by those working in the sector.

"If there was some sort of organisation that people could adhere to and was a strong voice, and a respected voice, and was in contact with different organisations, and so forth, and meeting them, that would be a good thing. It should be a voice, a place for sound advice, a sounding post, and an organisation that can advocate and yet knows the values that will be of help to the musicians and to the artform itself"

"What we need is a democratic organisation run by people working frontline as musicians in the sector who were engaged in that way, and not it the middle-management model of advocacy, which is about them getting funding and giving artists peanuts. Things tend to be dictated by arts management people who run venues. It should be about getting musicians organised themselves to advocate for Irish traditional music on its own terms and its own merits"

A traditional arts advocacy group sensitive to the needs and concerns of artists through direct experience in the genre would also optimise how the concerns of traditional artists are presented and mediated in wider societal conversations. As the following contribution shows, practitioners' perspectives may not always be presented effectively to external observers who are unfamiliar with the inner workings of the Irish arts sector:

"How do we explain to the broader community the extent of the work that we do, without seeming like we are whinging or complaining. A lot of people think it's our job to make people feel better but that's not true. There's a current out there that if you are thoughtful, provocative, or different, which we are also supposed to be as well, that we are just being difficult. So, I see that is a big issue"

A forum for ongoing dialogue and collaboration

A significant amount of the commentary offered here on the demand for a centralised mode of advocacy for the traditional arts speaks about the need to facilitate frequent platforms for discussion and co-operation. Some interviewees welcomed the opportunity that this research presented to offer opinions and gather consensus on what the needs and challenges of the traditional arts sector are:

"In terms of this consensus-building, information-gathering exercise, I think it is very important. I don't know up to now if there was ever a time when people in the field were asked what works or what doesn't work, or what could be better. I think that is hugely positive"

Others hoped that this research could portray a realistic image to young aspiring professional artists, of just how challenging it is to develop a sustainable career in the traditional arts:

"I would hope a report like this would put on clear display the grim reality that traditional Irish musicians are facing. We are churning out masters degree students from Limerick, Galway, Cork, and DIT; they are coming out of a lot of places. There are musicians who are thoughtful, and educated, and they have reflected on this music deeply. They feel like it is such an uphill battle. We don't have any big orchestra for traditional musicians or things that can absorb traditional musicians in that way. They are supposed to go out and make their own way. People like me have been touring and traveling, and trying to figure this out our whole lives, I think we need to make opportunities to transmit that knowledge as well"

Likewise, many contributors to this research spoke about a desire to collectively share experiences and expertise in a sector that often operates as a loosely connected network of individuals.

"In the past, I've seen a lot of insular activity from traditional musicians. They kind of operate within their own little quiet places. And they're afraid to tread out, or to share experiences or information too much. I think when there is a forum where people can share experiences, people can then learn from each other, and I think it opens the whole world up, and benefits the whole world. I think a more open, inclusive, and collaborate way of addressing the whole industry with a united force of musicians, is much stronger than lots of individual voices"

"There is a lot of isolation and a lack of supporting one another. And I think it will benefit the sector if there is a bit less protecting of one's own patch and a bit more support, and awareness of what opportunities exist out there"

"I think it's very important that we speak to each other as a community and possibly be a little more open with each other, and more supportive of each other. I would love to help young musicians who are starting off. Certainly, a rising tide lifts all boats then. And a pooling of resources, now that we need to be more creative and collaborate more, I think having this kind of conversation and this kind of study done is ultimately going to help everybody as we figure out these new times together"

"There should be an annual event in Ireland, like an APAP in America, that gathers musicians in one place. Musicians speaking to each other can really help us all out. I've never held any secrets. I've never had any problem sharing contacts with anybody. Even to have a discussion to ask everybody how they are doing"

"I'd love somewhere to go for advice. I'm so unfamiliar with the whole business and legal side of things. And IMRO. There are so many of my friends who compose music and they aren't even members of IMRO. I'm not a member of IMRO. And I'd love if this advice was geared towards traditional musicians as opposed to musicians more generally"

In addition to meeting and sharing ideas, some commentators called for a central information hub that could act as a regularly updated resource to keep traditional artists informed about various opportunities and resources available to them:

"There's no central hub as such, for the sharing of information. To get that bigger umbrella view of what is happening. To know where funding is. To have ways of distilling that down into the community more, to enable people to engage with the Arts Council more, for example"

Establishing a physical space for the traditional arts

On a number of occasions research participants spoke about a desire to provide a physical space to the traditional arts sector in the form of a dedicated premises that would be accessible to all members of the traditional arts community. As well as provide a social outlet for artists, facilities

such as recording and practice rooms, especially for emerging artists, were listed among the priorities of some practitioners that I spoke to.

"In addition to recording spaces, we need rehearsal spaces. Places for young bands to come together where it doesn't cost them money to make recordings or videos, and to rehearse and create things. Because that is what they need, time and opportunity to create new ways of performing. So that idea of creating new performance models needs a lot of support"

"When traditional musicians are young and trying to start, nobody knows them. They have no reputation. They don't have access to funding so they are trying to start from nowhere. They need space and time, and support, and support to use that space and time so they can make things happen and create things. You don't want to put the cart before the horse here. In the end, it should be about giving the opportunity for creativity to flourish in the first place, not simply dealing with the results of it, but giving an opportunity to young musicians to really have these physical spaces where they can get together with other musicians, where they can create things, where they can record things, and experiment with things. And then maybe you can have an infrastructure of management and agents that can take a look at this and see if they can do things with ideas that emerge"

One traditional and contemporary dancer and choreographer noted that value of Dance Ireland's premises, *DanceHouse* to its members:

"Dance Ireland has a great building, which is very central, and everybody meets there. We are quite well kitted out now, the dance community, in terms of having one space, and a lot going on there. Whether you are starting out or very established, everybody is under one roof, and you get to chat to people at lunchtime"

2.6 GENDER

A number of contributors to this research discussed gender balance as an issue that requires attention in the traditional arts sector. The following commentary provides an insight into challenges faced by female artists who work professionally as traditional artists:

"It's the basic things. Childcare, and women having children. Having facilities available to women who do want to tour, and who do want to gig if they are in that position, and for men too. And I see that in the university too. This is a societal thing. I think these conversations are really important to have in each individual organisation and each individual community so that things might change. If we can all have those open conversations about respect in the workplace and to be empowered to ask for your gig fee and to ask for proper conditions. But I often think it is more difficult often when you are a woman in those situations"

"I think being a female in the industry is a little bit tougher. You feel like you have to work a bit harder to be taken seriously as a musician. I think it's quite normal to see an all-male band who are on tour from the age of 18 to 60. It's quite normal to see that they constantly have work. But if I think of women who have been professional, touring musicians all of their lives, I stop at around 4 or 5, whereas I can think of so many men"

Discussions on gender balance and perceived gender discrimination in Irish traditional and folk music has become increasingly topical in the past number of years due to the work of FairPlé, an advocacy organisation founded in 2018 to promote gender balance in Irish traditional and folk music.

"If anything, I think FairPlé has promoted conversations about gender that up until that point, hadn't been happening. It may have been happening in a whispered sense backstage or on the tour bus, mostly between women. So FairPlé has opened it up and made people think about gender. And that has been the biggest change that I have seen with discussions on gender, in terms of performance, bookings, politics, and how we treat people. I don't think the work is done, and I'd love to see it examined and supported further"

Similarly, this anonymous survey response describes a perceived gender imbalance that made it difficult to maintain a sustainable career as a female performer:

"Males seem to dominate most aspects of the traditional arts performance industry. And, in my experience, when I was actively performing (about 10 years ago) on average, male performers seemed more inclined to hang around with/be mates/friends with other men. This is so reasonable in many ways. However, in my view and experience, it also means that these men were more likely to ask their male musical friends to be their musical collaborators, instead of female musicians who they might not yet have that tight bond with. (Again, this was reasonable in many ways.) And every professional musician or performer needs musical collaborators in order to grow & develop. I certainly had many musical collaborators of every gender. However, it seemed to me that pursuing performance on a long-term basis would have been difficult for many reasons due to the general gender imbalance across the industry. I ended up finding more stable, regular, lucrative work elsewhere (just not in the performance field), and so I am not a regular performer anymore"

Some commentators, including members of FairPlé, would like to see their important work on gender balance developed into the future:

"I think it is very important for someone like Trad Ireland to take the gender conversation on because it shouldn't be a case that FairPlé did that a few years ago so that box is ticked. If this is going to be a national body for trad in Ireland, it's very important the gender conversation is continued. FairPlé was a conversation, which is why the word 'plé' was used. That needs to be taken to the next phase and the discussion needs a very stable forum"

"I suppose continuing the gender conversation started by FairPlé would be good. And to create safe work practices for everybody. And that there is a very clear way of complaint if something does happen to you on tour or at a gig, that there is somewhere to go"

The idea of a mechanism with which to report inappropriate behaviour was also referenced by another interviewee, and the Irish Festival of Oulu in Finland was mentioned as an exemplar of good practice:

"At a festival in Finland, I was given a document that gave you a number of a person to contact and options of what to do if anything of a sexual nature happened. It was one page and really simple. And it really said, 'we're not going to allow any sexual repression'. And I think that would be really easy to roll out. That is the issue. If something happens, many of us freeze and don't know what to do"

2.7 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE TRADITIONAL ARTS

Among the challenges encountered by traditional artists who pursue a career in the traditional arts are the opinions that some elements of wider society have about Irish traditional music, song, and dance. Research participants have outlined a number of reasons as to how such perceptions are relevant to present discussions on barriers to sustainability in the traditional arts sector.

Awareness of the traditional arts

Many perceive a lack of awareness about the traditional arts among the general population but again, many feel this situation could be remedied by showcasing more traditional music in the media:

"If an awareness of Irish traditional music was there and if people were spoon-fed Irish traditional music like they are spoon-fed other stuff on the radio, then there would be a demand for brilliant Irish traditional music, and then it would have the honour that it should have, and it really deserves, and it does have in other countries. We go to France quite regularly and we play in traditional Irish music sessions with musicians who are French, German, or Japanese, and they have got an amazing repertoire. The general view in Ireland is positive. People think Irish music is great but I don't think they really understand how great it is"

Another musician interviewed for this research expressed his disappointment at the lack of awareness about the traditional arts among his peers who occupy various key roles in wider cultural sectors:

"I'm involved with many boards, and I'm amazed at the lack of knowledge that people have about Irish traditional music. I try to get people to think differently but they're often just name-dropping because they don't know any better. They want to programme people that they have heard of before, or who might have been featured in the Irish Times recently. But they don't know anything more. They just don't have the experience and they don't know of the good acts that are out there"

Participation levels

As previously discussed, it is widely believed that levels of participation in the traditional arts in Ireland and overseas are seeing unprecedented levels. According to some contributors, this

perceived lack of awareness of the traditional arts among the general population in Ireland is surprising given this level of activity:

"At festivals, there are kids going to classes in the morning, playing sessions in the afternoon and evening, and just eating, breathing and living music. I think that's very healthy, and I can't see those numbers taking a dip. And they will be better people in their own lives, better humans, for having experienced something of music. It enhances everything in humanity, collaboration, development, communication, discipline, all of those things. They are terrific life skills that stay with them. And that's very healthy for society, I think"

"Traditional music has changed. There's a whole new population of people playing. There are newer generations coming through. It became trendy enough for people to bring their kids to music classes. I meet parents at Fleadhs who had no interest in traditional music in their own youth, but through their own kids they have developed an interest, and even an opinion. There's a fantastic cohort of young people playing traditional music now, so it's cool enough to play"

Perceptions of the traditional arts as artforms

Another common theme discussed by research participants involves the framing of the traditional arts as artforms, as opposed to participatory and functional activities associated with informal settings such as the pub and tourism, for example. One renowned traditional fiddler points to what he perceives as ingrained cultural attitudes to the traditional arts that are not found in other genres such as western classical music:

"Irish audiences can be the worst to play for. I'm not sure if there is some post-colonial mentality or something going on that people feel the need to make noise around it. I'm conscious that I'm representing the traditional arts and that if I allow the crowd in front of me to slip into conversation while I was playing, I would be letting the traditional arts be relegated, whereas if I was playing in a string quartet with another hat on, I could be sure that there would be silence. It would be very rude to talk over the music or move around. There is something there culturally, that is in Ireland, and people mightn't be aware of it, but a certain percentage of the population feel the need to absent-mindedly do silly dancing, for example, to insult the music"

One media professional discusses her experiences of being asked for traditional arts footage for commercial use, and expresses her frustration at how the traditional arts are invariably used as a symbolic tourism-focused label of Irishness rather than appreciated on their artistic merits:

"The traditional arts are now being looked on more as a tourist thing than an artform. We get requests all the time for various adverts. I won't mention the organisations, but they are always asking if they can have a few clips of céilí music in a bar. That's the level of interest. It's used to sell Ireland the same way as the Cliffs of Moher, the Guinness store, or Ryanair, and I think that is a huge pity. Of course, it is highly attractive as a tool and calling card but let's not confuse that with an artform, and I think the artform is being left behind. And again, we confuse providing all kinds of opportunities for performance with the support of an artform. That's not what it is about. There should be more commissions, scholarships and more opportunities to allow people create within the artform"

The following survey contributions also communicate very clearly a view that the traditional arts are not respected on their own terms but instead are relegated to a lower status than other artforms in this country.

"Lack of recognition of Irish traditional music as a valid genre to be paid for. It is sometimes looked down on compared to other genres"

"Lack of performance opportunity, perceptions of traditional music as non-artistic or creative, to receive support quite often need to conform to an interpretation of what is 'creative' often based on hitching traditional music to other genres in effort to be 'original'"

Interestingly, one commentator encouraged traditional artists to take ownership of how the traditional arts are perceived, and to ensure that presentations of the traditional arts publicly showcase the artform in its best light:

"The artists themselves have responsibility to represent the artform in its best light and I think artists need to take responsibility for that, not to cheapen the presentation of the work, be it on television, in a public performance space, or how they conduct themselves. I think traditional musicians have a cultural tendency to relegate their own standing as an artist. It can seem like a participation at all costs sport sometimes. If the image that is being portrayed to your neighbour or the national media, with the support of artists, is that it is something that you can clap your hands along with, and that it's just a bit of craic, that belies the deeper sensitive, emotional and cultural heritage that we actually have in an artform"

The impact of the pub session scene

While the pub session is often a positive and enjoyable experience, as well as a source of income for traditional artists, a number of points have been made by contributors to this research that discuss the potentially damaging effects of the pub session scene on the traditional arts sector. Opinions offered to this research suggest that the noisy atmosphere found in the traditional music session negatively impacts on how external observers appreciate the Irish traditional arts as artforms with a comparable status to western art music and theatre, for example:

"Once traditional music starts in the pub, a lot of people start talking and it becomes background noise. Irish traditional music is an artform. I think highly skilled traditional musicians have shown it to be an artform. In fact, it's one of the musics of the world. We can claim very high standards internationally"

Similarly, one survey respondent speaks about how performing in a pub environment can influence how a musician perceives their own artform, especially if their audience doesn't fully appreciate the music that they perform:

"I feel that a greater divide is happening between people who are genuinely interested in traditional arts and people who are completely disconnected from it. I live in a rural village in Clare where traditional music has always been an important part of the community, but there is an increasing number of local people who have literally zero interest. Some of these people include pub owners, who only see the music as a necessity for their business but have no interest in traditional music otherwise. This creates a difficult situation for musicians who end up in a position where they have to play for an audience who doesn't understand traditional music in its essence (tourists) and are paid by people who don't understand it either. This combination can be very damaging for a musician's approach to their art. The alternative of trying to provide musicians with a space where they can share their music with a genuinely interested and listening audience, where they can express themselves is great, but extremely challenging as many people will admit clearly that they won't pay to listen to traditional music"

This point highlights another complication arising from listeners accessing traditional music in pubs free of charge. It is believed that they will be reluctant to attend paid performances of Irish traditional music in a concert setting as a result. The following contributions illustrate how

musicians feel about this issue and its relationship to career sustainability in the traditional arts sector:

"People are spoiled for choice when they know they can hear free traditional music in the pub. I think musicians themselves need to be aware of it. If you are playing a paid concert on one night of the week and a free pub session on another night of the week, how can you expect people to pay? But then again people need to earn money and pay the bills, so they have to do the pub gig"

"I think the general public take a view that traditional music has always been with us. You get it for nothing. You go to the pub and you have a bit of 'ceol agus craic', and there you go. I don't think that's the way traditional music should be marketed. I don't think artists should market it that way"

"You've got so many amazing musicians who just go down to the local pub to play. So people can always go and hear great music at the pub instead of going to a concert and paying in. So for Irish musicians, they need to go abroad and play outside of Ireland to make a living"

"I hate seeing a bunch of traditional musicians playing fantastic music in a pub where everyone is shouting at the bar. You can't hear a note. It's just treated as background noise for a publican selling pints. That devalues it and people won't look at it as an artform. Unfortunately, people have gotten free music in pubs all over this country for free and therefore they won't pay for concerts"

"I know that it's very difficult to make a living as an Irish traditional musician. For years people have talked about sessions. There is so much free music. Everyone wants it for free and they are not really willing to go gigs. We've never really gone down that line here in Scotland but that aside, we would be still quite jealous of the Irish and the world reach of Irish traditional music"

However, one interviewee importantly points to the fact that some people may simply enjoy the experience of listening to traditional music in a pub environment, and that it may not always contribute directly to low ticket sales for paid performances. It is also worth noting the enjoyment that musicians can get from playing with friends in pub sessions, which are often an important social outlet for both participants and listeners:

"I've a feeling that people going to sessions wouldn't be paying into concerts anyway. I think a lot of the audience come into sessions for the ambience of the music while they're having a pint, or

whatever. They're coming into the pub and the music makes it more pleasant. I've a feeling that those people would not be paying into concerts. They wouldn't even be buying records. Traditional music audiences, maybe they like it in circumstances which are not formal. Maybe it means more to them if it's not formal"

Gatekeepers and programmers

A number of other contributors made observations about the manner in which gatekeepers, programmers, and other cultural mediators can influence what traditional arts performances and aesthetics are supported and showcased to mainstream audiences, thereby impacting on public perceptions of the traditional arts.

"There is a re-education of those involved in administration needed. There are some very questionable decisions being made. There is a lot of money being spent, and I find it hard to understand where it is being spent. And there is a lot of stuff being promoted that has nothing to do with us but it's done in the same kind of intellectual miasma. There is no rhyme, or logic, or reason to it. It's a post-colonial, subtle inferiority-complex that's rampant. It feels obliged to present our indigenous culture in more watered-down versions so it's more acceptable to the 'civilised' ear"

"This report needs to be taken seriously by the people who are in governance, bodies like the Arts Council and Music Network, and by directors and programmers of arts centres and of concert halls and venues that are places where people can interact with an audience, rather than going yet once again for the low-hanging fruit. Low-hanging fruit doesn't nourish. Cultural nourishment is missing for both the punters and the artists. The punters are being spoon-fed not what they want but what the gatekeepers perceive to be safe"

"I would always see myself as objective. I have a role to play on radio, and my tastes come into it but I think objectivity is lacking sometimes. We have agendas coming through. That is very dangerous territory when you are in a position of power. Everybody has a huge responsibility and a role to play in the trajectory of where traditional music is going and what we propagate as best practice"

"I think we have an issue with programming. Especially with larger venues. The people programming for those venues may not have a fantastic insight into Irish traditional music and might just follow trends. So rather than bring in the new audience that they are trying to attract,

they are just bringing in the trendy audience of the moment, but they are not generally traditional music fans"

"There's a misunderstanding on the part of who we might call the gatekeepers, the people who are able to allow things to happen. The fact is that good Irish music will walk on to any stage of any size, anywhere in the world, except Ireland. And when it's on that stage, it will blow people's minds. Except Ireland, and it's not because it's incapable of blowing people's minds. It's because it's not let onto the stage. If you've got something cool, and an angle, then you get onto the stage. But not otherwise"

"I think in terms of the industry, the barriers are promoters not thinking creatively enough. I really think that they are all just trying to make the gig work, or they want to make money. And I think structural scaffolding can be very debilitating, particularly to very creative people. It can be very diminishing for women. If you are a well-established male band, it's much easier to get back to festivals every year. If you are a woman you are told that they already have a female for that year"

"Getting chances to perform at festivals where you are not "known" to the festival organisers due to a "lack of profile" which can only be boosted by getting to perform at festivals [is a challenge]"

"Exclusivity [is a challenge]. Unless you are known, popular within a circle/cliue of musicians, you may not be offered paid gigs"

Traditional arts in the Irish education system

Some participants made reference to how the traditional arts are integrated into Ireland's secondary-level education curriculum. Many see our education system as a key opportunity to raise awareness of the traditional arts among the general population, as well as develop future audiences for the traditional arts. However, this opportunity is one that should be considered carefully, and in consultation with practicing traditional artists, according to some contributors:

"Irish traditional music is a living artform, and we need to help the general population in Ireland to better understand it. I think work needs to be done with the Department of Education, but it needs to be done to high artistic standards, or it could be damaging otherwise. That might be someone's last experience of Irish traditional music in a formal setting, and that's the summation of their

education in our own cultural heritage, and then we wonder why there are small numbers at concerts”

“I strongly believe that traditional music should be more central to the music courses for Junior and Leaving cert exams. For the traditional music section of the course, rather than having a teacher press play on a CD, students go to classical concerts, and there are classical seminars put on at the National Concert Hall for many of the schools. However, we don’t have the same infrastructure for the traditional music element of the course. And I think that’s a pity because at the end of the day, that’s your national heritage. And I do think that there are many very qualified traditional musicians that would give a fantastic seminar, and spark an interest, so there would be a wider, and younger audience out there and available who may not have been an audience for Irish traditional music beforehand”

Audience development

A number of interviewees highlighted what they felt was a lack of strategic audience development in the traditional arts sector:

“For artists, there isn’t a sustainable living there for people. The reason is that I don’t think we have developed our audiences. It’s easy to say it’s the fault of others like the media and the Arts Council but I think, while they are factors in it, ultimately there isn’t consensus among artists as to what they want to do. And I think audiences need to be developed and you only develop audiences by having a strategy, and individual artists just do their own thing, and as a result, everybody is losing out”

“I think there is a huge amount of work needed in audience engagement and education. It’s back to the chicken and the egg. Why are the GAA so successful? You have buy-in by parents. Most people, at some stage in their lives, have handled a sliotar or a football, so they have some understanding of what is happening on the pitch. Whereas with Irish traditional music and song, ultimately you can’t really understand the complexity of what is going on if you haven’t at least tried it out. I think we need to work hard to establish a listening base to reconnect a nation of listeners with their music”

One musician and composer who works in many genres of music made reference to the importance of integrating outreach activities such as teaching sessions with concert performances, much like the model adopted by Music Network; students in the locality of a particular concert

take a workshop during the day with musicians that they can go and see in concert later that evening:

"I went to Wexford and Bray a couple of times doing workshops with local children in local schools, in support of concerts that were about to happen in their area. And then they went to see the concert. The students were given a way into the music. A couple of sessions so you understand how jazz works, or you learn a couple of the trad tunes that are going to be played, means that you are part of the music already. That's the way to build audiences. It's about sending people out to meet other people and about teaching and explaining and shedding a light on the process. It's about making the music-making process transparent. That's what brings audiences in. They're not going to go to some sterile place to receive the culture. It's always about making personal connections"

2.8 BALANCING THE ROLES OF CREATOR & ADMINISTRATOR

A significant proportion of traditional artists invariably combine their creative practice with a diverse range of industry, business, and administrative tasks in order to work professionally in the traditional arts sector. Many feel that this DIY culture is necessary due to artists' inability to devote sufficient resources to paying others for professional services such as publicity and tour management. One contributor views engagement with some form of business management as an inevitable consequence of working as a professional artist, but she also suggests that delegating administrative tasks to professional management is desirable, if there are resources to do so:

"If you want to be an artist, you have to give a certain amount of time to being an entrepreneur. You have to accept that if you want to be a full-time professional musician, part of your headspace and lifespace has to be given to minding your business. But that's not the same as doing every single thing yourself. That could be spending 20% of your time talking to your manager, or your agent. Not that you have to do everything. But who are those other people who can help you to do that? We don't have a big massive supply of those"

The following reference to social media has been mentioned by many research participants as a challenge, as many feel pressure to continually maintain a visible online presence in the absence of having another person work on publicity on their behalf:

"The main challenge is to keep getting publicity in this age of social media. You need to be continuously working on that on a daily basis as so many are trying to earn a living in the same limited performing arena"

Some fear that this focus on administration and publicity stifles creativity by carving into the time and space that artists have to devote to their arts practice:

"One of the biggest differences for me is having to relearn a lot of things. All the social media sites and trying to grapple with those. I wouldn't ordinarily be conducive to that sort of environment. I see it in students that I have had. So much energy of that younger generation goes into being their

own promoters, agents, and publicists. They do so much more work. And as an older artist, I'm wondering where the time is for developing their artistry. And I think that takes its toll"

"I really don't take opportunities from the Arts Council and others for granted but then where it falls down for me is in the practicalities. If you're doing everything yourself it's hard to keep the creative work strong without getting worn down by the admin. It would be very interesting if there was some kind of infrastructure or route into allowing people to join together, not in an artistic collaboration, but on the nuts and bolts side"

"I'm a professional musician and what I end up doing is a lot of business. So, most of my life is actually emails, administration, accounts, organising flights, organising accommodation, tour-managing, everything. That's the most frustrating thing. It actually holds me back a lot in terms of music because for all of those hours I should be creating music. That's what I want to do, and I think that's my gift on this earth. All of the day-to-day things, the balancing of bills and all of that, makes it very difficult to have the time to be able to create. If I had a magic wand I think it would be great if there was a local network here that I could tap into, so somebody could look into a whole range of things that could really help artists. A lot of brilliant people don't have those business skills. They are never going to be able to succeed because they can't keep everything going. It's an incredible amount of work"

"The biggest pressure now on many musicians is that you have to be the agency yourself. You have to be a pro marketer. There are so many roles. Lots of musicians just want to play music and do the gig"

"Time. It's hard to be "off". When you're off you're not earning and you're also paying someone else to cover for you in your role. You're also answering emails and admin etc. I find it most difficult to switch off when I'm off so that I can be in the zone for creating and developing ideas"

"Thinking far enough ahead to book performances and apply for travel funding or culture Ireland grants or similar is difficult. And the type of energy that is needed to complete these kinds of application forms. They are doable but no music or creativity happens while dealing with this side of life, or weeks either side of dealing with them"

2.9 THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TOURING INFRASTRUCTURE

A number of research participants called for increased collaboration between artists and venues, and also between venues themselves. Some highlighted the value of the touring infrastructure developed by Music Network, but many would like to see it expanded to support existing acts rather than curating new formations of musicians, for example:

"Music Network works really well. The only downside to that is they won't do it for established artists or a set of artists who are already working together. If there was something like that for established artists, it would really help"

"I think collaborations between arts centres and artists would be great. They have facilities and limited budgets, and artists want to perform so if there was some way of developing an agency for connecting venues and artists in a more centralised way, that would help a lot"

"It would be nice to have a network of venues and gigs around the country for smaller acts, not the big bands. You rely on people on the ground and sometimes you don't know what you're going to get out of it. It's great when people come to you and ask you to do gigs and festivals but there are way more that you have to go and organise yourself. But 60-70% of it, I have to organise myself from the ground up, and do all the publicity"

One arts venue director that I spoke to also welcomed the idea of a network of venues that could provide a forum for collaboration and the sharing of ideas:

"You have the Arts Council for advice, and different organisations that we work with on a certain basis but there is no body that links us together properly. I think people in venues feel like they are on their own. I feel as an arts administrator that it is difficult to know where to start in terms of pulling people together"

Research participants feel that some arts centres do not dedicate enough space to developing traditional arts audiences, and instead rely on external management and curators such as Music Network, for traditional arts content:

"It feels as though the arts centre sector will get given three or four gigs a year from Music Network, and that kind of fulfils their traditional music quota for the year. There are very few venues investing in putting on traditional music in any way, and so there isn't development going on"

A publicity and tour management professional interviewed for this research agrees that whatever traditional arts performances are programmed, are sometimes seen as a box-ticking exercise:

"A lot of the nice arts centres in Ireland don't particularly have a traditional music remit, which I think is a failing actually. I would pitch a musician, or a group and the artistic director would say 'we've a harpist in two weeks before that so we already have a trad gig. We won't programme another trad gig'. They were just lumping the whole trad thing in together. It didn't matter if you were a harpist, or fiddle or flute player, we've done our trad thing. We've ticked that box"

One venue director suggested that this phenomenon could be a result of the administrative workloads of arts centre programmers:

"The big change that I have noticed in the last while is the administrative strain that is on us. It feels like it has doubled. Most people you talk to feel similarly. It's almost like the art part of what you do is becoming less and less important. There's so much emphasis on governance and transparency so I think as venues, we are becoming busier with box-ticking and red tape. I think that can affect our ability to support artists and trad. It takes its toll on our energy. You're expected to know everything about everything"

Another venue director provides an additional perspective that suggests that some traditional artists could be more proactive about seeking out gigs:

"A lot of the people that I would like to programme, I have to go chasing them. And I don't mind that. In other centres, they are just booking the people who are asking them for gigs, a lot of the time. Others would wear you down looking for a gig, and that's just different personalities. It's interesting. And they are the ones that are out there, and is it what we want to be out there? Maybe I'm speaking with my musician's hat on now"

2.10 THE IRISH MUSIC RIGHTS ORGANISATION (IMRO)

The Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO) came up in conversation with quite a few contributors to this research. Most of those who mentioned IMRO outlined their dissatisfaction with the royalty collection system that IMRO operates, as well as frustration at the lack of information available on how traditional artists should negotiate copyright.

While contributors view IMRO's royalty collection system as ineffective at times, broadcasters, and even artists themselves often submit information incorrectly to IMRO:

"In the IMRO system, it is pretty impossible to get paid for many of my compositions due to inaccurate information being submitted to IMRO by either artists or radio stations. I periodically check with the IMRO website and then have to engage in email tennis to request broadcast performances to be linked to my works"

In addition, some feel that IMRO does not advocate enough on behalf of its membership, and suggest that more should be done to ensure that artists collect royalty fees for the many unpaid performances (UPs) that are retained, as they remain unclaimed:

"I don't feel that IMRO isn't fit for purpose at the moment in terms for sticking up for musicians' rights. They make it incredibly hard to collect royalties"

"IMRO's duty is to remit the royalty money to the members who are due it, in a timely fashion. But the UP files are proof that they don't make any effort, and after three years, it disappears into their coffers. So it is in their interests not to remit the money to their membership"

"What IMRO need to do is appoint somebody to go through the UP files, contact the people, go out and visit them if necessary, and get the money back to the people"

One contributor went on to suggest an alternative method of collecting royalties on behalf of musicians that would bypass the IMRO infrastructure and distribute payments locally, with each region managing its own network of musicians and venues:

"We should establish local collectives. And accept in principle that the pubs should pay that copyright fee not to IMRO, but a local organisation, who know who the traditional musicians who play locally are, and they can redistribute locally. So collect locally, and distribute locally"

2.11 TRAVEL AND VISAS

A number of contributors to this research have commented on the necessity to tour outside Ireland in order to make a living as a performer. Although this report focuses on opportunities currently available to traditional artists within Ireland, challenges faced when traveling abroad are relevant to this discussion, considering the likelihood that many traditional arts practitioners must tour internationally in order to make a living. Some describe how travel and obtaining visas has become more difficult in the recent past:

"It's getting more and more difficult in America, as any musician will tell you, to get work permits. It's getting harder and harder, and more and more expensive. I was told not to even dare attempt to apply for a three-year visa, which I had been getting for years. My last bill was \$9600 to get the band in. And they told me not to even try. And I got the three-year visa. I was one of the lucky ones. Otherwise I'd be out of business. Now, people are booking tours. The tours are set up. They apply for their paperwork to get everything in line, and they're not getting the visas on time"

"My booking agency, a big agency here in the US, have just announced that they are no longer accepting international touring artists because of the difficulties with ascertaining visas. They have spent months, maybe a year booking an entire tour and getting it all together, and then bands can't get in. I mean, we've covered for so many bands here"

"Things are getting increasingly difficult. To get into America and get visas is really expensive and difficult. It has become so more stressful. And you are hit with these customs agents in Dublin and Shannon, and although everything is in order, they just put you through the hoops"

"It is impossible to get out to America now, for a duo or trio. It's just too expensive and there are a lot of challenges such as tax issues, and immigration, and the expense of getting there. That has virtually wiped out any of those duos and trios that get out to the States touring. Unless they get a little festival and tag on a few house concerts. That's the only option that a lot of them have"

"Really, the only money you can make is in touring. But in places like the US, where you have the most chance of making money, the initial output for anything you get back makes it impossible. You have to put in thousands firstly, for flights and your accountancy fees, so you don't get charged your 33% withholding tax. Your visas, your accommodation, your car hire, and food. It's almost impossible to make it work"

One interviewee made the following suggestion as to how the process of obtaining a visa for the United States of America, for example, might be made less problematic:

"I would love to see the Irish Government get a cultural agreement, and for example, a certificate from the Minister for Arts and Culture to say that this artist is legitimate, and is regarded in Ireland, please let them bring the culture of Ireland to America, for example"

2.12 AOSDÁNA

Despite its lack of engagement with the traditional arts, the artist collective, Aosdána (*trans. people of the arts*), was mentioned by a number contributors to this research, and criticised for what is perceived as its failure to adequately recognise and represent traditional artists within its remit. Founded in 1981, Aosdána's membership is limited to 250 individuals, and it "honours artists whose work has made an outstanding contribution to the creative arts in Ireland, and assists members in devoting their energies fully to their art practice" (Aosdána website, 2020). Members can also apply for a *Cnuas*, a means-tested stipend worth €17,180 per annum, and paid by the Arts Council to Aosdána members who wish to focus exclusively on their practice. At present, Dónal Lunny is the sole representative of the traditional arts within Aosdána. However, renowned fiddler Tommy Peoples was also a member until his death in 2018.

As well as lament Aosdána's perceived underrepresentation of the traditional arts, the following observation highlights how this impacts on how an artform is valued more generally:

"The biggest failure in the arts community is the lack of representation of Irish traditional music in Aosdána. It's an absolute farce. We celebrate our architects, we celebrate our ballet dancers, and not to be disparaging but what is Ireland known for? It's known for Irish traditional music. Our own culture, and we reject in our country. If Aosdána can't recognise Irish traditional music, why would the media recognise it? If the media don't recognise, why would people go watch it and value it?"

For some, it is peculiar that Aosdána do not recognise more traditional artists and admit them as members, given the national attention that they receive as revered artists in other instances. One contributor calls for recognising artists while in their lifetime rather than merely commemorating them at a later stage:

"People like Liam O'Flynn weren't even in Aosdána, yet when he died, he had the RTÉ funeral, and all the dignitaries, and the President attended. But let's start asking for something to be done while people are alive. It was a glaring omission from Aosdána, and it hinges on an archaic and misinformed, non-artistic view of creativity. And I think it snowballs too. If you're not in then your peers don't come in either, and in a sense, it's a closed shop"

Another point is well made on how many artists, and members of Aosdána are supportive of the traditional arts, and also incorporate elements of the traditional arts in their own work, even if Aosdána itself is deemed to under-appreciate the artform:

"There is any amount of poets, writers, playwrights, and visual artists that will make art inspired by traditional Irish music, song and dance but they are not inviting us into the club that is Aosdána"

A visual artist and Aosdána member interviewed for this research outlines her surprise at the low level of representation for the traditional arts in Aosdána's membership and feels that increasing numbers will have an impact on how the arts are valued in Ireland:

"I've said this before even before I got elected. That's something I want to change. I can't understand how we are not championing doubling Aosdána. It was really aspirational in the '80s when it was first set up. But something for us all to be living for is a recognition by our peers and those that value what it is to be Irish. I think that Aosdána is something that could be expanded. It only has 250 living members. It could really have 600. And that would totally change the whole typography of the value system in arts"

It seems unlikely that the current structure of Aosdána can be shaped in any significant way to reflect the level of activity and international recognition of traditional artists in Ireland. One contributor suggests that another funding stream could be established specifically for the traditional arts:

"If you did a projection to see how many traditional musicians would get into Aosdána, year on year, even with good will, and because it's already a packed house, would it be more efficient to say we haven't been allowed in here, let's create another pot. I wonder would you get to a situation where you would get 100 traditional musicians into that pot quicker than you would get them into Aosdána"

3. Main Findings & Recommendations

3.1 EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES

Section one of this report has endeavoured to present the opportunities and resources available to those working in the traditional arts in Ireland. Survey responses, interview discussions, as well as informal discussions at events such as TradTalk 2019 have each provided insights into the relatively low level of familiarity that many in the traditional arts community have with the various initiatives that can support their work. Consequently, there are perceptions expressed in this research that a relatively small cohort of people continually seek and receive support from bodies such as The Arts Council, for example.

Even a cursory glance at Arts Council funding decisions suggests that there is some basis in these observations. It is hoped that this document can contribute to addressing this gap, and that those who wish to seek out financial supports and resources will be encouraged to do so. It is important to appreciate the range of supports that exist for traditional artists, and to acknowledge the determination and advocacy of those who endeavour to provide such resources. Therefore, before advocating for much-needed additional resourcing in the traditional arts sector, it is vital that the wider sector becomes more familiar with the creative and financial supports outlined in section one of this report.

Recommendations

3.1.1

Artists and other stakeholders unfamiliar with the opportunities and resources available to the traditional arts sector should use section one of this document as a starting point to proactively seek out supports relevant to their creative and professional needs as traditional artists.

3.1.2

It is recommended that an advocacy body develop an online information hub that overviews and regularly updates the funding and professional supports and opportunities available to traditional artists in Ireland.

3.2 CAREER SUSTAINABILITY

It is alarming to hear the extent of concerns about career and financial insecurity expressed in this research by some of the most internationally celebrated and talented traditional and folk artists in the world. While this section focuses primarily on career sustainability and aims to suggest some ways to make improvements to the working lives of traditional artists, it is important to consider the artistic implications arising from the fact that so many of our best traditional artists opt to work in other areas rather than focus exclusively on their practice as musicians, singers, or dancers. It is perhaps beyond the scope of this research to assess the artistic losses of such a scenario, but one can only imagine the implications for artforms such as poetry, theatre, and the visual arts, if such work was only accessible to those creators who could afford to work in their chosen artform.

The international reputation of the traditional arts

International contributors to this research have expressed their dismay at the career unsustainability and lack of financial supports available to traditional artists in Ireland, in spite of the international reputation and popularity of the traditional arts. Furthermore, many effective and successful folk and traditional arts advocates in Scotland and Norway have looked to the international reputation of Irish traditional arts with envy, as a model of best practice, unaware that traditional artists in Ireland feel largely unsupported at Governmental level. Likewise, it has been clearly communicated by some contributors to this research that Irish traditional music, song, and dance is considered to be among the major attractions of inward tourism to Ireland. According to one study from 2014, “listening to Irish music in a pub” was the number one activity cited by 83% of visiting tourists (The Contribution of the Drinks Industry to Tourism, 2014). The total spent in Ireland by tourists in that same year was €5.1 billion (Fáilte Ireland, 2014).

On some level, there seems to be some acknowledgement of the importance of the arts in Ireland’s international image. In 2019, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade appointed Eugene Downes, a former Chief Executive of Culture Ireland and Director of Kilkenny Arts Festival as its Cultural Director. Research by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has suggested that Irish culture and productions such as *Riverdance* have contributed to Ireland’s economic success via its positioning on a wider world stage, and that our arts scene has also attracted a cohort of younger international workers who see Ireland as a viable and vibrant place

of employment (*Ireland – An Ageing Multicultural Economy*, 2004). Despite the many artistic and economic contributions made by the traditional arts to the international image of Ireland, traditional arts practitioners cannot sustain careers as performers, and as this research highlights, many traditional artists perceive that the traditional arts sector is severely underfunded and poorly supported by Government and funding bodies such as the Arts Council.

Career unsustainability and financial insecurity

The precariousness of the traditional arts community is experienced by established performers just as much as emerging traditional artists. The most prominent sources of anxiety mentioned by those who participated in this study include difficulties in availing of financial services such as mortgages, and contributing to pension plans, irrespective of their experience, work ethic, or skillset. Traditional artists generally have to secure secondary employment or teach music to supplement their performance incomes. Also, the lack of employment supports available in the event of illness or injury is a common worry among traditional artists.

Many of the resource organisations listed in section 3.5 have attempted to address the professional needs of their membership by providing guidance and workshops in areas such as arts business, finance and accounting. Although they deal with different artforms, genres (and operate in other jurisdictions in some cases), with varying levels of access to funding streams, these organisations, when viewed as a whole, provide a wide range of approaches that could be adopted and adapted by an Irish traditional arts resource organisation, according to the needs of its membership.

Recommendations

3.2.1

It is recommended that an existing traditional arts representative or resource organisation facilitates workshops, webinars or other consultancy opportunities for traditional artists to avail of advice and guidance on matters such as financial management, accounting and business supports.

Pay rates and working conditions

In order to create an environment that makes working as a traditional artist more sustainable, there are a number of issues concerning pay and working conditions that could be addressed. Contributors to this research feel that the establishment of fee guidelines would be a helpful aid to achieving a scenario where traditional artists would be paid fair fees for their work, and minimum fee guidelines would prevent 'undercutting'. Also, traditional artists feel that more attention should be devoted to understanding the specific details of written contracts, such as exclusivity clauses, and rights waivers, for example. Others believe that venues, festivals and organisers should adhere to a code of ethics and standards that provide artists with certain facilities and basic requirements in advance of a performance, as well as ensure that consent for the recording of performances for broadcast and/or subsequent publication is sought in a timely, clear and respectful manner.

Fee Guidelines

Many who contributed to this research made reference to the lack of consistency in the fees paid to traditional artists in Ireland. There is a significant amount of commentary in the public domain that criticises organisations such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann for paying low fees for touring, teaching and adjudication at various competitions. Many suggest that this subsequently results in such activities being undertaken by performers with employment in other areas, or by performers who are younger or less established. However, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann rates of pay are not universally poor, and fair fees and working conditions are observed in many instances, although such conditions invariably depend on the specific ethos and policy of a particular local CCÉ branch, rather than reflect wider institutional policy. Regrettably, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann declined an opportunity to contribute to this research, and consequently, it is not possible to discuss CCÉ fee policies in any further detail.

In the absence of any published pay rates for the sector (or the wider music industry), traditional artists generally rely on the advice of colleagues when setting performance fees, while others simply take whatever fee is offered. For many, this scenario presents a significant barrier to achieving sustainable rates of pay. The timely Arts Council publication, *Paying the Artist*, mentioned on page 78, outlines fair and equitable remuneration and contracting of artists but stops short of providing guidelines for pay. Nevertheless, it is a welcome development that will no doubt inform how the Council allocates its funding in the future.

Music resource organisations such as First Music Contact and the Musicians' Union of Ireland are currently developing pay rate guidelines for publication but at present, the only comparable reference available to traditional artists in Ireland are the rates published by the UK Musicians' Union. For example, while there is some inconsistency in the rates of pay (if any) for radio and television broadcasts of traditional arts performances, the UK Musicians' Union have collaborated with broadcasters such as the BBC in agreeing contributor fees for a variety of performance types and contexts. In Ireland, other artforms have taken the lead in establishing payment guidelines in the Irish arts sector. Visual Artists Ireland, Words Ireland, and the Contemporary Music Centre each provide guidance to their respective sectors on payment rates that are relevant to their artforms.

Contracts

A number of people made reference to issues that they have observed with written contracts, whether for media broadcasts or touring. According to some, traditional artists can often sign away various rights without adequately understanding or interrogating the contents of a contract. This can be the result of not wanting to jeopardise a media opportunity or because an artist is simply unfamiliar with the terminology used in a contract. At present, there is no clear Irish platform that provides traditional artists with advice or support on how to negotiate contracts. A notable model of comparison can be observed through the work of Visual Arts Ireland. The VAI's 'How To' manual includes valuable information on all the components of a contract as well as how best to devise contracts appropriate to artists' professional needs.

Apart from intellectual property rights waivers that prevent any opportunity to collect royalties from a media performance of your work, exclusivity agreements were also referred to by contributors to this research as inconsiderate barriers to making a living. Exclusivity agreements are frequently imposed by venues or promoters via written contracts, and in practice, they involve an artist formally agreeing not to perform within a specified distance of a venue within a specified timeframe. Because there is no additional financial incentive or gesture made to encourage artists to adhere to exclusivity agreements, there is justification in the idea that they can be perceived as barriers to employment, and consequently, a threat to career sustainability in the traditional arts sector. A contract sent to me by one renowned traditional artist, highlighted the stark reality of exclusivity agreements; one of the stipulations of this particular contract was that the artist could

not perform in the Dublin city area between the date of signing the contract and the performance, even though the contract was sent to the artist six months in advance of the performance:

“The Artist agrees they shall be engaged exclusively by the promoter and shall not perform or otherwise exercise the Artist’s talent or provide performance services for the benefit of any company or person(s) in Dublin City Centre from the date of signing this Agreement up to and including the date of the performance”

Recommendations

3.2.2

In the absence of published pay rates or guidelines for the traditional arts, a traditional arts representative organisation should consider developing and publishing a charter for pay scales, contracts and working conditions, comparable to steps taken by advocacy organisations such as Words Ireland and The Contemporary Music Centre.

3.2.3

It is recommended that the Arts Council communicates to events and festivals in receipt of funding, the importance of adhering to the Council’s policy on pay and remuneration by respecting and protecting the intellectual property and rights of artists whereby permission (and remuneration, if possible) is required when performances are recorded for subsequent broadcast and other use.

Unionisation

Many opinions offered to this research directly and indirectly referred to unionising the traditional arts sector. Some spoke conceptually about issues that could be resolved as a by-product of unionisation, while others specifically called for more traditional artists to become members of the Musicians’ Union of Ireland. Issues such as fee guidelines and contracting are central to what unions advocate for on behalf of their members. According to contributors to this research, unionisation would benefit the traditional arts sector by setting standardised and/or minimum fees, thereby preventing undercutting or exploitation. Music unions also offer legal and financial services to their membership and can protect the professional interests of traditional artists to the same degree as orchestral musicians working in Ireland, such as those employed by RTÉ, who have an established history of unionisation and association with the MUI and other Irish unions. Specific to the traditional arts, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann’s Association of Irish Traditional

Musicians, registered in 1957, served as a union for its membership but according to one interviewee, it was established for the specific purpose of negotiating venues and logistics when embarking on Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann international tours.

While the MUI offers many valuable services to its membership (from discounts on car finance and insurance, to travel insurance and financial advice), its website does not function as an information hub for members and non-members in the same way the UK Musicians' Union does. A comparable set of online resources would undoubtedly attract more members to the MUI. Irish Equity, an Irish trade union for professional actors and theatre professionals, is also part of SIPTU, and its website serves as an important online resource for the general public. Its remit does not include musicians, however.

On a theoretical level, effective unionisation would remedy many of the issues discussed throughout this report. However, traditional artists are not engaging with the Musicians' Union of Ireland to a level where collective representation can be adequately enacted. As one contributor to this research also pointed out, the numbers and level of activity involved in the Irish traditional arts has the potential to significantly leverage the potential impact of the MUI as an organisation, which in turn, benefits traditional arts advocacy. While I am not suggesting membership of the Musicians' Union of Ireland is essential for the traditional arts sector, it is recommended that traditional artists become familiar with the MUI and what it offers. Conversely, the MUI should actively seek out opportunities to interface with the wider traditional arts sector at festivals and events.

Recommendations

3.2.4

Traditional artists should engage with the Musicians' Union of Ireland to become familiar with the potential benefits of MUI membership.

3.2.5

The Musicians' Union of Ireland should proactively seek out opportunities to interact with traditional artists at traditional arts festivals and events.

Declining album revenue

In line with international trends in many genres of music, contributors to this research expressed concern at the decreasing levels of income that they are receiving from album sales in an arena dominated by streaming services such as Spotify. While revenue from album sales is actually increasing at present, the income received by artists is unsustainable. Revenues from recorded music in the United States grew 13% in 2019 from \$9.8 billion to \$11.1 billion. However, this increase is not reflected in levels of income to artists as 79.5% of this revenue was generated by streaming services (Recording Industry Association of America, 2020). Spotify, the major global streaming service pays its artists approximately \$0.00318 per stream (The Guardian, 2020). Any attempts to redress the decreasing album revenue experienced by traditional arts will need to re-think how best to connect with their listenership. In the past, large record labels supported the output of traditional artists on an international stage, but this trend has largely discontinued, and today, most traditional artists release music independently.

While it is difficult to counteract these global trends, the general concept of collaborative and coordinated activity mentioned by contributors to this research on a variety of topics, could be adopted as one approach to the album-making process, whereby replication and printing plants, studio engineers, and publicity and PR professionals (for example), are engaged by a collective co-operative formed by traditional arts practitioners and other stakeholders. Using the co-operative as a model, member advantages could include benefits such as streamlined production costs, information-sharing, and audience development.

Recommendations

3.2.6

It is recommended that a traditional arts representative organisation provide a forum to discuss the establishment of an industry co-operative that could collaboratively engage the various stakeholders in the recording industry chain, with a view to optimising and streamlining the process for the benefit of artists.

Mentorship

There was consensus among interviewees and survey respondents that many of the challenges encountered by the traditional arts sector could be remedied by developing a variety of mentorship programmes to both emerging and established traditional artists. Some interviewees who have had considerable success as performers even stated that they would gladly provide mentorship and guidance to others who could benefit from it. Many organisations working in Ireland and internationally have developed effective mentorship initiatives as part of their advocacy remit. However, traditional artists feel that comparable supports are not available to them as they attempt to navigate a fragmented traditional arts sector in which practitioners have to develop their own entrepreneurial and business skills or alternatively, find the resources to delegate administrative tasks to management and administrators.

Balancing creativity and business / administrative work

A common point made by contributors to this research centred on the difficulties faced by artists who strive to devote time and space to being creative while simultaneously managing all of the administrative tasks that accompany being a professional or semi-professional traditional artist. Some called for workshops that could help artists become more familiar with business, music administration, and PR, for example, while others expressed a desire to develop relationships and networks to delegate such work to others. Some made reference to the one-day symposium, *TradTalk*, organised by Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann in November 2019, and suggested that it would be a suitable platform to provide advice to traditional artists on topics including, but not limited to IMRO; the recording process; social media; PR; the media; taxation; legal issues; accountancy; and other financial services.

Mentorship models for comparison

As outlined, a number of existing mentorship models could be explored by any resource organisation that aims to provide professional development and career supports for traditional artists. In Ireland, arts organisations such as Words Ireland, Poetry Ireland, Dance Ireland, and Theatre Forum strive to equip practitioners with the resources and experience needed to work sustainably as professionals. International mentorship and professional development models such as those developed by Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland, The English Folk Dance & Song Society, and Hands Up for Trad (see section 3.5) are worth investigating for any traditional arts

resource organisation intending to provide mentorship and training to traditional arts practitioners in Ireland.

Recommendations

3.2.7

It is recommended that a traditional arts representative organisation, in collaboration with the Arts Council, establishes a mentorship programme whereby experienced practitioners and music business professionals offer guidance to emerging traditional artists and other interested parties in areas such as artistic development and music business.

Increased artist-in-residence opportunities

Artist-in-residence opportunities have been shown to support a variety of artistic needs, professional resources, and increased audience engagement with an artform. Like artists' bursaries, artist-in-residence initiatives usually provide artists with space and time to focus on their artistic work, but they often also include an element of audience engagement that connects artistic output to a local community or audience. As well as provide important insights to local communities and/or local students who may engage with the residency, artist-in-residence programmes offer valuable artistic content to the venues and institutions in which they are based. Undoubtedly, such initiatives are also significant as they provide artists with employment for a fixed period of time.

Increased artist-in-residence opportunities for the traditional arts would serve the sector as a whole and lead to wide-ranging impacts on how various institutions and other sectors (from the formal education system, to local arts venues, to our national broadcaster) engage with the traditional arts. In areas where there is a perceived under-representation or misrepresentation of the traditional arts, artist-in-residence opportunities would be an impactful way to connect various audiences with the traditional arts in a manner informed by practitioner perspectives.

Organisations and institutions interested in initiating traditional artist-in-residence programmes should consult the Traditional Arts section of the Arts Council to discuss possibilities of funding such residencies through existing funding awards. Subsequent artist-in-residence application processes should be publicly advertised and accessible to all traditional arts practitioners through an open call.

Recommendations

3.2.8

Interested venues and institutions should proactively seek funding from funding bodies such as the Arts Council to establish artist-in-residence initiatives as part of their traditional arts programming.

Touring supports

A requirement for touring supports was a common concern expressed by traditional artists consulted for this research. Again, many practitioners were weary of the time involved in administrative tasks undertaken when organising tours. Many felt that this time should be devoted to creativity. A number of potential supports are discussed here.

The development of a touring and venue infrastructure

The experiences of traditional artists and other stakeholders interviewed for this research suggests that a network of venues, managers, and promoters is required to sustain the ad-hoc and fragmented nature of touring in the traditional arts sector. Many praise the model developed by Music Network but feel that this infrastructure could be expanded to accommodate acts that are already established, rather than focus on curating new collaborations. Venue directors and artists alike have expressed a desire to develop channels of communication between venues, artists, production companies, and management, to ensure that traditional arts programming can meaningfully impact local audiences, as well as expand on the amount of traditional arts programming that can be accessed throughout the island. Existing venue partnerships are common in the discipline of theatre; examples include NASC, Nomad, Strollers, Imeall, and Shortworks.

The Arts Council's Creative Production Services scheme

Another useful initiative, again borrowed from the discipline of theatre but instigated and funded by the Arts Council, is a pilot creative production services scheme which aims to support production companies to undertake the administration, production, and management of a theatre project on behalf of theatre practitioners. Consequently, theatre makers and artists are free to focus on creating theatre work rather than managing production activities and logistics. The scheme is designed to allow theatre artists to draw on shared resources rather than develop an

ad-hoc or individualised production infrastructure for each production or work. An adapted initiative for the traditional arts sector would provide a similar co-operative, resource-sharing model that would allow artists to delegate production or administrative duties to a centralised agency or production company. Subsequently, traditional artists would benefit from having more time to devote to their practice. Given the lack of a comparable agency in the traditional arts sector, such a scheme could invest in cultivating a creative services model rather than offer a tender to an existing production company, as is the focus of the theatre scheme.

Travel and visas

Although the purpose of this research is to identify challenges and opportunities encountered by those working in the traditional arts sector in Ireland, international travel and touring is relevant to this discussion due to the fact that so many traditional artists depend on international touring to make a living. The primary challenges experienced by traditional artists involve the high financial cost of an appropriate travel visa to the USA, as well as the demanding process involved in obtaining a visa. Some have suggested that a type of certification or endorsement issued to traditional artists from the Irish Embassy to the United States would be a welcome initiative to improve the process of obtaining a visa. In addition to the costs involved, many traditional artists feel intimidated and deflated as a result of the application and interview process, which many feel is unwarranted given the fact that traditional artists have a history of representing Ireland as cultural ambassadors throughout the world. Examples of information clinics on US visas for artists or musicians include those offered by First Music Contact in partnership with IMRO and Culture Ireland. Given the prominence of Culture Ireland as a division of the Department of Arts, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht, and its demonstrated support for the traditional arts, advocacy bodies working on behalf of the traditional arts who wish to further explore the issue of working visas should liaise with the organisation with a view to opening channels of communication with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the US Embassy.

Instrument transport

A number of contributors to this research criticised the changes they have observed in how airlines transport musical instruments. Again, considering the scale of international travel involved in the traditional arts sector, it is deemed relevant here that a traditional arts resource or advocacy organisation consider investigating the possibility of representing the concerns of traditional artists in conversations with bodies such as the Musicians' Union of Ireland, and Irish airline

representatives. In Ireland there have been precedents for discussion on the carriage of musical instruments between SIPTU and Aer Lingus, for example. Internationally, the American Federation of Musicians have been successful in advocating for legislation that prohibits airlines from insisting that instruments must be placed in the aircraft hold if they can fit on board an aircraft. Instead, these laws guarantee that musicians can buy seats for instruments when dimensions allow for it. The AFM have also published guidelines for musicians on the policies of various airlines, as well as information on how to make complaints. Likewise, the Paris-based International Federation of Musicians have petitioned for a change in EU laws on musical instrument carriage and have produced a useful resource that musicians and concert organisers can consult when selecting an airline. Categorised using a traffic light system, the initiative rates airlines according to their track record in managing the requirements of artists and their instruments.

Recommendations

3.2.9

It is recommended that a traditional arts representative organisation encourage and facilitate the development of a partnership with venues and programmers, comparable to theatre networks such as NASC, Nomad, Strollers, Imeall, and Shortworks.

3.2.10

It is recommended that a traditional arts representative organisation liaise and collaborate with an established and experienced organisation such as Music Network on an additional touring opportunity, to optimise the development of traditional arts projects and audiences, with a potential focus on supporting existing projects through an open-call application process.

3.2.11

Where feasible and relevant, traditional artists, management and festival organisers should consult the airline policy rating system developed by the International Federation of Musicians when selecting an airline for international performances.

Artist welfare and professional supports

A number of contributors to this research expressed disappointment at the level of welfare supports available to traditional artists in Ireland. Employment rights and benefits deemed valuable to many are inaccessible to traditional artists due to the self-employed status of so many practitioners. One commentator made reference to the need to safeguard the welfare of older

musicians who have given so much to the traditional arts community, but who may find themselves in difficult health or financial circumstances. While the little-known and even lesser-advertised *Ciste Cholmcille* (an artists' benevolent fund) is offered by the Arts Council to artists in urgent need of financial assistance, it is not resourced to an extent that it can serve as a support for an entire sector. Given the broad-ranging and cross-sectoral reforms that would be required to consider many of the welfare and employment systems outlined below, it is vital that representatives of the traditional arts sector collaborate with organisations such as the National Campaign for the Arts to ensure that the traditional arts sector has a seat at the table in all discussions relating to professional supports for artists in Ireland.

Jobseekers' Allowance for Artists

It is clear from the commentary of those who spoke to me about the Jobseekers' Allowance for Artists scheme that it is not viewed as a constructive measure, and unlike its French counterpart, it does little to acknowledge the role of an artist as an important component in either the cultural or economic fabric of Ireland. Perceived as a financial crutch rather than an artistic stipend, contributors who mentioned it in interviews were disappointed at how they felt it was framed as an artists' dole. Of particular relevance to traditional artists who wish to avail of the Jobseekers' Allowance for Artists is the need for industry or artform accreditation. All artists need to demonstrate their credentials, and part of this process involves being a member of an organisation that represents your artform. In the case of musicians, the certifying body is the Musicians' Union of Ireland (MUI), according to documentation published by both the MUI and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Therefore, according to these guidelines, traditional artists wishing to avail of the Jobseekers' Allowance for Artists would need to become a member of the MUI.

Intermittent du Spectacle (France)

Contrary to what many believe about the *Intermittent du Spectacle*, it is not a Government cultural subsidy. It is a system that recognises entertainment industry workers as being equivalent to any other sector, and therefore provides registered and eligible musicians and entertainment workers, with the employment benefits and assurances that other French employees enjoy, once a number of criteria have been met. Due to the national and cross-sectoral nature of the *Intermittent*, importing the scheme to another jurisdiction has implications across the board, for all industries and employees. While it is crucially important to aspire to providing artists with employment

benefits and safeguards such as those offered by the *Intermittent*, Irish arts advocates and resource organisations will need to collectively collaborate and undertake substantial further research into how best to advocate for a support infrastructure of this magnitude. As discussed earlier in this report, a system like the *Intermittent* would encounter resistance among certain stakeholders, such as business owners, as evidenced by the opposition witnessed in France. However, the fact that the *Intermittent* is managed by an independent association, *Pôle emploi* (*trans. employment centre*), and is at least part-funded by its own subscriptions, implies that the administration of such a welfare system is not as dependent on the policy prioritisations of the Government of the day, and therefore some elements of the *Intermittent* could possibly be piloted in a country like Ireland. A further detailed study would be required to interrogate this possibility.

The Revenue Commissioners' Artists' Exemption

The Artist's Exemption, established in 1969, was referenced by some participants in this research, and many feel that the scheme should be extended to the traditional arts. Although income earned from newly-composed work (up to a maximum of €50,000), created in the style of the traditional arts may qualify as tax exempt as "a musical composition", the interpretation or arrangement of existing traditional repertoire is ineligible for consideration, thereby excluding the majority of traditional arts work. Guidelines under Section 195 (12) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 by the Arts Council, and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, consider 'interpretation' to fall into the following category:

"any arrangement, adaptation or version of musical composition, or other like work, which is not of such musical significance as to amount to an original composition"

Given the Arts Council's obligation to adhere to the 2003 Arts Act, which values any "any creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form" (Arts Act 2003, Irish Statue Book 2020), and the Council's involvement in the drafting of Exemption guidelines as a consultancy body, one may be justified in perceiving the Council's advice to be inconsistent with its own policy on the traditional arts, which values the interpretation and arrangement of traditional/existing repertoire as an artistic practice. At the root at this consistency however is the fact that while the Arts Council adheres to the Arts Act, there is no obligation for the Revenue Commissioners' Taxes Consolidation Act to do so. The involvement of the Arts Council in the Artists Exemption scheme is more to provide occasional guidance on the quality of

individual applications, for example, and any changes to Artists' Exemption policy would need to be agreed by the Minister for Finance. Previous attempts to have choreographers included within the eligibility criteria for the Artists' Exemption were unsuccessful. Traditional arts works such as albums of self-composed original music can be considered for exemption. If the determination is successful, income from the album up to a maximum of €50,000 per annum would be exempt from income tax.

Importantly, the Artists' Exemption has implications for traditional artists, beyond the issue of income earned from the sale of works. Arts Council awards, such as bursaries, made to traditional artists who do not qualify for a Revenue exemption, are subject to income tax. In the absence of clear guidelines on this matter, it is recommended that funding awardees confirm the taxable status of their payment with an accountant or the Revenue Commissioners.

Help Musicians (UK)

Help Musicians is an independent UK charity that supports musicians of any genre, whether they are emerging, established, or retired. In addition to providing a range of creative opportunities to musicians, from funding awards, to artistic consultancy, the organisation offers many health and welfare supports, including services in mental health, vocal health, hearing loss, and support in times of bereavement or in the event of an accident. Financial assistance is also provided in cases where musicians cannot afford an adequate standard of living in retirement, or when unexpected expenses or illness arise. Help Musicians UK is a registered charity and is funded by private and corporate donations, fundraising activities, and volunteerism.

Recommendations

3.2.12

It is recommended that an existing traditional arts representative or resource organisation collaborate with other Irish arts resource and representative organisations such as the National Campaign for the Arts in order to represent the voices of traditional artists in any collective dialogue with Government on issues such as employment, social protection, arts funding, and obtaining travel visas, for example.

3.2.13

It is recommended that an existing traditional arts representative or resources organisation liaise with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to act as a certifying

professional organisation on behalf of traditional artists who are not members of the Musicians' Union of Ireland (MUI).

3.2.14

It is recommended that the Arts Council and the Revenue Commissioners clarify or revise policy on the tax exemption status of traditional arts awards that do not involve the creation of new work. At present, documentation states that awards for interpretative work, which forms the vast majority of traditional arts activity, are not exempt from income tax.

3.2.15

In the absence of any emergency benevolent fund to provide urgent financial assistance to traditional artists in times of unexpected financial crisis, it is recommended that models such as Help Musicians UK are researched with a view to developing a similar scheme for traditional artists in Ireland. This could potentially be funded through tax deductible philanthropic donations from sectors that benefit considerably from Irish traditional music, song, and dance.

Perceptions of cronyism

Many interview and survey responses to this research made reference to perceptions of elitism, exclusivity and cronyism in the traditional arts sector. For some, this manifests in how funding decisions are made. Others observe cronyism in festival programming. Some feel that the media showcases only a small clique of traditional artists. Given the range of personnel and variables involved in providing performance and funding opportunities to traditional artists, it is difficult to address these concerns on a wider sectoral level. While acknowledging the autonomy and independence of the media and festival programmers etc., it is perhaps more productive here to re-focus our attention to the selection processes of publicly funded events, initiatives, and funding awards. Some suggestions as how to ensure that the traditional arts sector embraces diversity and accessibility, and is democratic and meritocratic in presenting opportunities to practitioners, are offered throughout this section of the report. One positive development in how bodies such as the Arts Council and The National Concert Hall have increased access to creative opportunities is a move away from previous invite-only traditional arts residencies towards open-call initiatives such as The Liam O'Flynn award (see page 34). Other (directly-funded) collaborations between the Arts Council and The National Concert Hall, such as *Tradition Now* could also take a similar step in increasing accessibility and opportunity by allowing artists apply for a performance opportunity.

Recommendations

3.2.16

It is recommended that Arts Council initiatives such as *Tradition Now*, programmed by the Arts Council, in collaboration with the National Concert Hall, implement an open-call element to its programming in order to provide traditional artists with an opportunity to apply to perform.

Professionalisation and amateurism in the traditional arts

Although this report looks primarily at the opportunities and challenges encountered by those who work professionally or semi-professionally in the traditional arts sector, it is important to acknowledge the significance of non-professional practice to the traditional arts community. Most, if not all traditional artists, including this author, view informal performance with friends and peers as being among the most enjoyable and significant aspects of Irish traditional, music, and song. For the purposes of this discussion, I am primarily concerned with semi-professional and professional traditional artists, and how they collectively engage with the traditional arts sector.

A number of professional traditional artists who contributed to this research expressed concern that many important supports and resources offered in the traditional arts sector, are available to all, regardless of whether or not practitioners work exclusively as artists or are employed in other professions. Many of those who teach at traditional music festivals, who record and release albums, and who tour nationally and internationally, do not rely on the traditional arts for their primary income. One consultant labelled the existence of such an environment as “nixer culture”, and some expressed a concern that those who do not rely on income from the traditional arts may directly or indirectly undermine pay rates for all in the sector. Others wondered whether or not the Arts Council should take traditional artists’ primary professions into account when awarding funding. Attempting to ascertain the relative quality of non-professional and semi-professional activity is not seen as relevant or desirable here, but we should acknowledge that this scenario does have an impact on the sustainability of the traditional arts sector in Ireland.

Applying means-testing as a qualifying criterion in funding applications may be viewed by some as an unnecessary and disproportionate step, but this research shows that the traditional arts sector is suffering from a dearth of resources in proportion to the number of practitioners involved. The most critical and logical next step in addressing this shortcoming is to increase the

budget allocated to the Traditional Arts section of the Arts Council, rather than cause disquiet among the community itself, or create alienating partitions between those who practice full-time, and those who work in other forms of employment.

The Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO)

The Irish Music Rights Organisation has had a turbulent history with the traditional arts, and controversy still surrounds financial settlements made between IMRO and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann on behalf of the traditional arts community. It is beyond the scope of this research to discuss this in any greater detail, but the doctoral work of Anthony McCann in *Beyond the Commons: The Expansion of the Irish Music Rights Organisation, The Elimination of Uncertainty, and The Politics of Enclosure* (2002) provides some interesting historical context to IMRO's initial engagement with copyright and Irish traditional music. IMRO's current policy regarding the pub session and tariffs payable by pubs and venues remains somewhat peculiar:

"Irish traditional music in the public domain is exempt from this tariff. Playing of copyright music within the Repertoire Controlled by IMRO will incur the full tariff. Where there is a dispute as to whether the music at the session or venue is Irish traditional music, the matter can be referred to the Arbitration Committee" (IMRO website, 2020).

In terms of copyright and material that is broadcast live or in recorded form, IMRO pays royalties to its members who register pieces of music that they have composed, or who register traditional, public domain repertoire that they have arranged in the process of personally interpreting that work. Such arrangements are designated as "trad arr" (traditional, arranged by).

Irrespective of IMRO's history with the traditional arts, a number of important points have been made by respondents to this research. Perhaps the most urgent item requiring attention here is the strengthening of the relationship between IMRO and traditional arts practitioners. An alarming amount of potential earnings are not claimed by those who are entitled to royalty payments. Performances that go unclaimed because they cannot be linked to registered works are placed on a UP (unidentified performance) file and disregarded after a period of three years. IMRO members can view this UP file but a remarkably low percentage of traditional artists register as IMRO members and consistently register their work. Despite recommendations made by Toner Quinn in *Towards a Policy for the Traditional Arts* in 2004, that the Arts Council aid in investigating the

matter of royalties on behalf of traditional artists, the findings of this research suggest that interactions between traditional artists and IMRO remain problematic in 2020.

Of the 105 who responded to my survey question on IMRO membership (only 43.2% of all 243 contributors did), 57 (54.29%) stated that they were not IMRO members. Of the 65 respondents who described themselves as professional or semi-professional traditional artists, as many as 26 (40%) are not members of IMRO; 7 (10.77%) are IMRO members but have not registered their compositions or recorded tracks with IMRO. In summary, that means that only 32 (49.23%) of professional and semi-professional artists stated that they have registered tracks and compositions with IMRO. Of the 44 respondents who described themselves as professional or semi-professional traditional artists and who compose original traditional arts work (either occasionally (70.45%) or frequently (29.55%)), only 27 (61.36%) have previously registered works or album tracks with IMRO. These statistics suggest that efforts should be directed at informing traditional artists about the benefits of IMRO membership. Some discussions I had with interviewees suggested that some may be reluctant to engage with IMRO (as well as other supports and resources) due to potential tax implications. As other areas of this recommendations section suggests, a platform for sharing knowledge on matters such as taxation and finance is deemed necessary in order to equip traditional artists with the knowledge to make informed choices about issues such as royalty payments.

It is also clear from the responses of interviewees who are members of IMRO that there is a general frustration at the process involved in registering works via the IMRO website. Many feel daunted by the steps required to register works, while others are critical of how registered works are logged by broadcasters after tracks have been played, but much of this criticism is also levelled at IMRO due its logging methods. Others feel that IMRO could be more proactive in providing supports and opportunities to traditional artists, given the revenue that is generated from radio and live performances of the traditional artists, as well as subscriptions paid to IMRO by venues who programme and feature the traditional arts in various ways. Royalty collection agencies such as The Performing Rights Society (PRS) in the UK support musicians through initiatives such as The PRS Foundation, which funds the development of new music and talent through grants, residencies, commissions, and showcase opportunities (PRS 2020). According to one musician interviewed for this research, the PRS has provided many opportunities to English folk musicians, and similar supports would be welcomed enthusiastically by the traditional arts

sector in Ireland. It is apparent that more can be done by both traditional artists and IMRO itself in order to optimise how traditional artists benefit from the advantages that IMRO membership provides.

Recommendations

3.2.17

It is recommended that traditional artists liaise with IMRO in order to become more familiar with copyright and royalty payments accruing from their registered works.

3.2.18

It is recommended that IMRO representatives increase engagement with the traditional arts sector by providing outreach activities at various events and festivals.

3.2.19

It is recommended that IMRO appoint a dedicated officer to liaise with a traditional arts representative organisation in order to provide guidance to those who wish to claim outstanding royalty payments but who may not be IMRO members.

Gender and sexual harassment

While a number of contributors made reference to gender imbalances or biases in the traditional arts, and the achievements of the FairPlé organisation in advocating for gender balance, the overall prominence of the subject as a professional barrier or challenge was less than expected. However, at the time of writing, a significant development has brought attention to instances of sexual harassment and misconduct in the traditional arts community. Inspired by global trends in calling out inappropriate sexual behaviour in a range of industries, #MiseFosta (*trans. Me Too*), an important movement emanating from within the traditional arts community, has raised awareness around instances of sexual harassment, abuse and inappropriate conduct, most often perpetrated against young female traditional artists. Although this report focuses on identifying and documenting the professional needs and challenges inherent in the traditional arts sector, it is important to make reference to, and applaud the significant achievements of the #MiseFosta movement. The FairPlé organisation highlighted how a disproportionate amount of young female traditional artists were not pursuing traditional arts performance despite the high numbers of young females attending classes in Irish traditional music, song, and dance. The testimonies and

accounts made public through the #MiseFosta movement have made a significant and pioneering connection between the inappropriate treatment of young females and a professional environment that may stifle their professional potential and career development. While further research is needed to investigate this hypothesis, an important piece of forthcoming research from musician and academic Úna Monaghan presents the experiences of traditional artists who have experienced gender inequality in a variety of forms, including sexual abuse and harassment.

A reporting mechanism for inappropriate professional conduct

A number of contributors to this research called for various mechanisms or platforms to report various forms of inappropriate conduct. Such behaviour included gender discrimination and sexual harassment, non-payment of agreed performance fees, as well as poor working conditions in the form of venue facilities and provisions. On two occasions, contributors applauded the Irish Festival of Oulu in Finland, who provided information leaflets to festivalgoers on how to report inappropriate behaviour (including sexual harassment). In terms of gender discrimination and balance, policies such as the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty must be adopted by all public bodies in Ireland, including the Arts Council, whose application forms make clear reference to a requirement and expectation that successful applications promote equality of opportunity for all, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, or membership of the Traveller community, for example. The Arts Council should be made aware of instances whereby funded activities and events do not comply with this equality policy.

Returning to the recent revelations made by the #MiseFosta movement, it is recommended that festivals (who are often and unwittingly the site of instances of inappropriate behaviour) adopt and publicly display (through posters and flyers etc.) policies on sexual harassment, just as child safeguarding statements and policies are adopted by festivals who provide tuition in the traditional arts under the Children First Act 2015. The Arts Council also occupies an important role in this issue as a major funder of many traditional arts festivals, events, and projects. In line with its *Equality, Human Rights and Diversity Policy & Strategy*, it is recommended that the Arts Council communicates the importance of providing a safe environment for all participants and attendees of events that it funds, through direct correspondence. As observed at the Irish Festival of Oulu in Finland, Irish festivals could also appoint a dedicated liaison to confidentially deal with any complaints or concerns raised at their events, and in any instance where inappropriate behaviour

has been conducted by a performer or tutor employed by that festival. Comparable roles include the existing position of Garda Vetting liaison.

Advocates or organisations who wish to promote safe environments for all participants could look to models such as the MU Safe Space Scheme developed by the UK Musicians' Union. Likewise, the Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) in the UK have developed an industry charter and campaign for eliminating sexual harassment and misconduct at festivals through their *Safer Spaces at Festivals* programme. Useful resources can also be found in the work of *The Good Night Out Campaign*, who collaborate with festivals and events in the UK by providing information and training resources. In Scotland, useful models can be found in the work of The Bit Collective, who have developed a confidential email contact line that provides professional and legal advice on a confidential basis.

In addition to discussion on issues relating to gender, other contributors called for a naming-and-shaming of individuals or organisations who do not adhere to contractual or payment agreements, or who exploit traditional artists in various ways. While this reporting process would need to be mediated sensitively and judiciously, it would be worth considering publicly acknowledging best practices and the exemplary actions of individuals and organisations who strive to ethically support the work of traditional artists. One example of similar work undertaken by an Irish representative organisation is '*Ask! Has the Artist Been Paid?*', a campaign by Visual Artists Ireland that highlighted poor payment practices at the National Gallery of Ireland, whereby some artists were not being paid adequately, or at all, despite the fact that paid tickets were required for admission to exhibitions (The Sunday Times, 2019). While trade unions such as SIPTU advocate for equality and appropriate behaviour in the workplace, traditional arts representative organisations could provide their own membership with information on existing third-party resources and supports that can be accessed when needed.

Recommendations

3.2.20

An appropriate umbrella advocacy or representative organisation should consider collaborating with relevant existing support organisations to facilitate the establishment of a confidential, robust, and ethical platform for reporting inappropriate professional behaviour specifically related to payment, contracts, and general conduct. Such an organisation could at least begin a

conversation to liaise with the Musicians' Union and traditional arts festivals in an effort to collaboratively progress such an initiative.

3.2.21

It is recommended that traditional arts festivals and events develop charters of best practice for eliminating instances of sexual harassment and misconduct and consider distributing flyers and posters detailing contact information for dedicated liaison personnel.

3.2.22

It is recommended that the necessity to provide a safe environment for all attendees is communicated directly by the Arts Council to traditional arts festivals and events in receipt of Council funding.

3.3 FUNDING

The issue of funding supports available for the traditional arts in Ireland was one of the most prominent themes discussed by those who contributed to this research. The vast majority of this commentary focused on the Arts Council and consequently, it is that organisation that dominates this section. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland will seem underrepresented in this section due to the fact that it did not appear frequently in conversations with traditional artists based in Northern Ireland.

The Arts Council

Today, traditional arts policy at the Arts Council is informed by *Traditional Arts Policy & Strategy 2018*, developed under the *Making Great Art Work* roadmap. Focusing primarily on 'the artist' and 'public engagement', the priorities of this strategy document includes the provision of mentorship to emerging traditional artists; the commissioning of research on audience engagement, professional development, and challenges specific to dance practitioners; and the addressing of recommendations made by the *Report on the Harping Tradition in Ireland* and the *Report on Harp Making in Ireland* (2014).

Conversations with contributors to this research suggest that attitudes towards Arts Council personnel and supports are positive. However, there is consensus among many in the traditional arts sector that an increased level of assertive advocacy and support is required to increase traditional arts budgets. An analysis of traditional arts budgets over the last decade suggests that such views are justified (see figure 3 on page 151). Claims that the traditional arts have been under-funded and under-resourced by the Arts Council are not confined to external practitioners; the Arts Council itself has acknowledged that it has not always adequately resourced the traditional arts when making the following statement in 2004:

"The Arts Council acknowledges the historic neglect of the traditional arts and the present underfunding of these art forms, and is committed to undertaking a more active role in the development of the traditional arts in order to assist these art forms and traditional artists to maximise their potential. The Council recognises the importance of building upon the inherent strengths of the traditional arts and the need to develop an inclusive policy for these art forms. The Council believes that a more effective relationship needs to be developed with the traditional-arts community, one which is based on ongoing communication and consultation" (*Towards a Policy for the Traditional Arts, 2004*).

The Special Committee on the Traditional Arts

In December 2003, the Minister for the Arts, Sport and Tourism, Fianna Fáil TD, John O'Donoghue established the Special Committee on the Traditional Arts, under the provisions of Section 21 (1) (a) of the Arts Act 2003, and its purpose was to advise the Arts Council on how best to develop future traditional arts policy, culminating in a report designed to inform a three to five-year policy for the traditional arts. The initiative was understandably the envy of the wider arts sector, and the findings made by the committee, comprising chair Jerome Hynes, Philip King, Katie Verling, Úna Ó Murchú, and Micheál Ó hEidhin (the latter two being representatives of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, who would later distance themselves from the process and the subsequent published report), led to the publication of *Towards a Policy for the Traditional Arts* (2004). Authored by Toner Quinn, the report made a total of 46 recommendations, one of which resulted in the appointment of Liz Doherty as Traditional Arts Specialist in 2005. The establishment and activities of the Special Committee demonstrated the significant cultural capital of the traditional arts community, and a political will to provide financial support at Government level.

The special committee and subsequent report was a monumental development for the traditional arts sector and responded to a demonstrated need among traditional arts practitioners and advocates. However, the scale and diversity of needs and concerns expressed and documented throughout this report (and contributed to the public record for the first time), affirms that there is as much (if not more) of a demand at present to advocate strongly for increased funding for the traditional arts sector, than ever before. Perhaps a comparably consequential shift is needed in Arts Council policy if budget allocations for the traditional arts are to increase beyond the 2.63% average of total Arts Council budgets observed from 2010 to 2020.

Arts Council budgets for the traditional arts

Although many existing traditional arts organisations such as Na Píobairí Uilleann and the Irish Traditional Music Archive receive financial support from the Arts Council for the invaluable work that they do, there is widespread consensus among commentary relating to traditional arts funding in Ireland that the artform is under-resourced in comparison to other genres and artforms. Some feel that this is a consequence of a lack of external advocacy in the form of a cohesive representative voice for the traditional arts community and sector, comparable to organisations such as Poetry Ireland, Dance Ireland, and Irish National Opera, for example. The budget

allocated by the Arts Council to its Traditional Arts section has increased slightly over the past decade, according to data provided by the section (illustrated in figure 3). Although the figures outlined below do not include the potential funding available to traditional artists through non-artform-specific awards such as the Next Generation Award, or the Open Call award, the figure of €2.1 million allocated to the traditional arts in 2020 represents just 2.6% of the Arts Council's total allocation of €80 million received from the Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht for 2020.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Traditional Arts Budget</i>	<i>Total Arts Council Budget</i>	<i>Traditional Arts Budget as % of Arts Council Budget</i>
2020	€2.1m	€80m	2.6%
2019	€1.9m	€75m	2.5%
2018	€1.8m	€68.1m	2.6%
2017	€1.7m	€65.1m	2.6%
2016	€1.6m	€60.1m	2.7%
2015	€1.5m	€56.9m	2.6%
2014	€1.5m	€56.7m	2.6%
2013	€1.6m	€59.9m	2.7%
2012	€1.8m	€63.2m	2.8%
2011	€1.8m	€65.2m	2.8%
2010	€1.7m	€68.7m	2.4%

Figure 3: Traditional Arts budgets from 2010 to 2020.

Traditional arts budgets in context

Although the individual budgets allocated to each artform section of the Arts Council are not publicly accessible in documents such as annual reports, there are examples of discrepancies in how traditional arts awards are funded in comparison to similar awards in other artforms. The Traditional Arts Commissions Award offers €10,000, compared to the fund of €13,000 offered to the Music Commissions Award, and the €45,000 fund offered for the Opera Commissions Award. Similarly, the Traditional Arts Bursary Award was capped at €10,000 until recently (but raised to €15,000 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic), compared to the €20,000 fund for the Visual Arts Bursary Award, the €15,000 fund for both the Architecture Bursary Award and Film Bursary Award.

Although these funding amounts are decided by each individual artform section and do not reflect an overarching Arts Council policy or attitude towards individual artforms, each artform section must operate within the limits of their annual budgetary allocation, which directly impacts on the amounts offered to artists and organisations working in individual artforms.

The most recent publicly accessible Arts Council annual report from 2018 provides some useful insights into how the traditional arts budget compares with other artforms and genres supported by the Council. Referring back to figure 3 reminds us that €1.8 million was allocated to the traditional arts in 2018. In comparison, Aosdána received €2.5 million, €7 million was awarded to the Abbey Theatre, €1.5 million was awarded to Irish National Opera, and €1.45 million was awarded to Wexford Festival Opera. In the same year, Dublin Theatre Festival was awarded €825,000.

Application criteria and consequent impacts on traditional arts practice

A number of those interviewed for this research – some of whom adjudicate in peer assessment panels – feel that the evaluation criteria and artistic objectives of traditional awards do not fully reflect the practices of the wider traditional arts community. A primary concern among those who offered such commentary involves a perceived expectation that proposed projects involve innovation and collaboration with other artforms of genres of music. These perceptions are valid as numerous traditional arts awards explicitly list “innovation” and “collaboration between the traditional arts and other artforms” among their award objectives and priorities (Deis Recording and Publication Award Guidelines 2020). Many feel that this stipulation places undue influence on the approach taken when completing applications, and some have expressed opinions in this report that application processes are formulaic and akin to box-ticking exercises. As a result, this research suggests that the evaluation criteria and artistic objectives of the Arts Council’s traditional arts funding awards are somewhat prescriptive, rather than responsive to the traditional arts community, even if discretion and artform knowledge is exercised by the traditional arts team and peer assessors.

The enthusiasm of the Arts Council to engage audiences and publicly promote projects that it has funded, as well as the de facto status bestowed on projects that are successful in receiving funding, suggests that projects and artistic activities that meet the artistic objectives and criteria of traditional arts funding awards will consequently enjoy greater exposure than projects who have

been unsuccessful in obtaining Arts Council support. As a result, the value judgements made by the Arts Council through internal shortlisting, followed by external peer assessment, have enduring implications for the type of traditional arts activity that is sustained and promoted in the traditional arts sector. For this reason, it is imperative that the Arts Council responds to, rather than prescribes, practice in the traditional arts sector. Rather than limit peer consultancy to the assessment of funding applications, an open-call platform could be developed to allow practitioners and representatives from the traditional arts sector contribute to the next *Traditional Arts Policy and Strategy*. There is precedent to inviting submissions of this nature in the work of the aforementioned Special Committee on the Traditional Arts. The open call survey element of this research also provided a range of insightful commentary and views from various stakeholders in the traditional arts sector.

Assessment processes

Many interviewees (among them peer assessors) offered various opinions on the peer assessment process operated by the Arts Council. While some observe peer assessment as a necessary channel of communication between the Arts Council and traditional arts practitioners, others, although aware of the importance of peer assessment, are critical of their experiences of practitioner adjudication. Some feel that funding decisions are too often influenced by subjective personal opinions and relationships rather than by objective value judgements informed by award guidelines. While a peer panel generally consists of a diverse cross-section of the traditional arts sector, other commentators are critical of the internal shortlisting process conducted by the traditional arts head and traditional arts advisor; some interviewees feel that all eligible applications should be assessed by external peer assessors, as is the case with the Traditional Arts Commissions Award. In addition, due to an understandable need to diversify and continually change peer assessment panels, some feel that there is consequently a lack of consistency in the types of projects that are funded from year to year.

Repeat awardees

Many opinions offered to this research included perceptions that funding is generally allocated to a small cohort of repeat awardees. Some feel that this may be due to favouritism, or the high profile of some applicants, while others see it as a consequence of gaining increasing skill and experience in writing applications through repeated attempts. Some also point to a belief that third-level students and graduates have directly or indirectly gained an advantage in writing

applications. An inspection of the 'Who we've Funded' section of the Arts Council's website, as well as its annual reports, demonstrate that many individuals and organisations, across many artforms, have been awarded funding on multiple occasions; many of the same names appear consistently in Arts Council funding announcements. There is also merit in the commentary of the Traditional Arts section of the Arts Council that more traditional artists should apply for funding awards. Some traditional arts awards are undersubscribed. For example, only 11 composers applied for the Traditional Arts Commission Award in 2019. Five awards were made. Only 13 traditional artists applied for the inaugural Liam O'Flynn Award in 2018. In comparison however, schemes such as the Deis Recording Award are oversubscribed. Although only 16 awards were made in 2019, 69 applications were received. It is fair to suggest that encouraging traditional artists to engage more with the Arts Council will have an impact on the diversity of applicants and projects funded.

Advice and consultancy

Many research contributors spoke of a desire for the Arts Council to instigate more outreach and consultancy activities to provide advice to those who wish to apply for traditional arts funding awards. Since a considerable amount of information on funding awards and deadlines is outlined in this report and regularly shared on the Arts Council website and in regular Council newsletters, perhaps it is more productive to focus here on the consultancy and advisory potential of the traditional arts section. The former *Deis* Advisors initiative offered by the Council was popular across the sector and a number of traditional artists have expressed a desire in this research to see a similar scheme reintroduced. This would undoubtedly erode an already under resourced traditional arts budget, but the consensus offered in this report in relation to a demand for such consultancy warrants attention. While the Council's traditional arts section does already provide advice and consultancy to traditional artists, it is not within their remit to offer specific feedback or practical assessment on individual applications before they are submitted. Instead, it would be advisable that the Arts Council's traditional arts section and a traditional arts resource organisation collaborate with a view to establishing a platform that offers prospective applicants with information and feedback on their applications. Existing models outside the traditional arts include the work of Visual Artists Ireland, and the Galway-based Theatre 57.

Additional administrative and financial responsibility

Some contributors to this research have outlined a concern at both the financial and administrative responsibilities that accompany projects that have been awarded funding. Many artists who apply to seek funding for an artistic activity or project are consequently responsible for managing the project as well as paying collaborators. In the absence of resources for third-party management, artists must devote time to project management rather than focus exclusively on the artistic activity that has been funded. Likewise, it has been stated by contributors to this research that the awarding of funding has financial implications for awardees who must engage the services of an accountant to navigate taxation and correct payment procedures for collaborators, and invariably accrue unexpected costs that have not been deemed as appropriate expenditure in application budgets.

Similarly, some commentators specifically mentioned the *Deis Recording and Publication Award* as an award that does not adequately cover the costs involved in the successful completion of a project that it is designed to fund. While it may act as a subsidy, many feel that it is not possible to cover all relevant costs within the budgets awarded by the Arts Council. In some cases, awardees are placed in a difficult financial position because they use their own funds to address the shortfall in funding, or, as one contributor stated, he was forced to reduce the number of tracks on his album as there was insufficient funding remaining to pay for additional studio time.

Awardee categories

Some people that I spoke to suggested that the Arts Council should consider the professional/non-professional status of applications when awarding funding. As is appropriate, *Towards a Policy for the Traditional Arts (2004)* foregrounded the importance of extra-professional and non-professional traditional arts performance, and a need to invest in such activity rather than focus on professional artists exclusively. The Special Committee's rationale for such a perspective remains valid today but this research suggests that there is an appetite for reflecting on a needs-based approach to traditional arts funding that supports artists who cannot rely on alternative sources of income to support their work. In line with current Arts Council policy guided by *Making Great Art Work 2020-22*, funding decisions should reflect the strategies developed to optimise career sustainability and viability for artists across artforms, while respecting the artistic quality and development of those who do not work as full-time professionals in the traditional arts sector.

Culture Ireland

While almost all discussion on funding focused on the Arts Council, some contributors made positive references to Culture Ireland and the assistance that it provides for international touring and travel. However, some were also critical of the financial burden placed on successful applications who must pay significant amounts of money in advance of recouping costs from Culture Ireland. In two cases, interviewees stated that they had to take out personal loans in order to finance project-related costs such as travel and shipping, which understandably placed them in a vulnerable financial position.

Alternative funding models

The commentary offered throughout this research both implies and directly states that an overreliance on Arts Council funding to support artistic activities is ultimately unsustainable. Given that contributors are critical of the Council's traditional arts budgetary allocation, and the nature of assessment criteria and procedures, it is important that traditional arts practitioners and other stakeholders seek out alternative sources of financial support.

Philanthropy and charitable donations

Internationally, and especially in the United States, one of the most common sources of non-State aid for the arts is provided in the form of philanthropy. One obvious and large-scale barrier to philanthropy is its reliance on Government policy on matters such as taxation. In Ireland, many cultural and arts institutions operate as charities or 'approved bodies'. Traditional arts organisations such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, The Irish Traditional Music Archive, and Na Píobairí Uilleann operate as registered charities under the Charitable Donation Scheme. According to the Charities Regulator, traditional arts organisations are eligible for charitable status if they: operate within the Republic of Ireland; benefit a community (in this case through the advancement of the arts, heritage or sciences); or provide a clear public benefit in Ireland or abroad.

As a registered charity, an organisation can claim tax relief on donations (of over €250 and less than €1 million in one year) made to them by individuals or organisations. In addition to benefitting from the donation amount, approved organisations can also reclaim the taxed amount of that donation. However, donors must not receive any benefit in return. The Charitable Donation Scheme is one that should be explored by organisations who wish to consider funding streams other than the Arts Council exclusively. Also, the National Lottery Good Causes Awards offers

funding in the arts to eligible organisations and projects that have been awarded funding by the Arts Council.

Recommendations

3.3.1

Traditional artists and other stakeholders should subscribe to the Arts Council's regular newsletters for updates on supports available and upcoming deadlines.

3.3.2

It is recommended that the challenges documented in this report are observed by the Arts Council as sufficient justification for re-assessing traditional arts funding when developing the next phase of Council policy beyond 2022.

3.3.3

It is recommended that a traditional arts resource organisation make representations to the Arts Council to advocate for increased traditional arts funding on behalf of the wider community and sector.

3.3.4

It is recommended that traditional arts funding awards such as the Deis Recording Award are re-evaluated in terms of their feasibility, in consultation with industry professionals and practitioners.

3.3.4

It is recommended that the next three-year Arts Council strategy to follow *Making Great Art Work* 2020-22, offers a platform and mechanism for traditional arts stakeholders to contribute to traditional arts policy to ensure that Council policy resonates with practitioner perspectives.

3.3.5

Based on the consensus outlined in this research, it is recommended that the Arts Council continue to increase their level of outreach and community engagement activities at festivals and traditional arts events, in order to attract new funding applicants.

3.3.6

In the absence of *Deis* advisors it is recommended that the Arts Council provides more frequent funding advice clinics in locations not confined to Dublin and its environs.

3.3.7

It is recommended that a traditional arts representative or resource organisation prioritise the provision of workshops and consultancy opportunities for applicants to receive support and feedback on funding applications.

3.4 PUBLIC IMAGE AND PROFILE: DEVELOPING AUDIENCES FOR THE TRADITIONAL ARTS

Audience development through outreach

Many who contributed to this research identified a need to further develop audiences for the traditional arts in order to increase sustainability in the sector. A number of useful initiatives have been suggested by various respondents to this research, and explorations of other jurisdictions and artforms have also provided some worthwhile models for comparison. As noted by some consultants, the outreach and educational elements of Music Network's touring programmes are significant in how they promote concert performances in each area and venue, but importantly, these workshops also provide students and other attendees with insights into the musical practices, repertoire, and personalities behind the musical performance that they subsequently experience in their local venue. As well as having intrinsic educational value, these workshops increase awareness of a particular musical practice, and provide artists with employment in the process. Existing traditional arts organisations such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Na Píobairí Uilleann, and Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland already have proven track records in providing and supporting high quality tuition in Irish traditional music, song, and dance. However, this outreach model is one that could be further explored by any artists touring in a particular area, in collaboration with venues, schools, and local traditional arts education providers or similar bodies who may work in genres other than the traditional arts. Further research on audience analysis and development for the traditional arts, comparable to the *Opera in Ireland: Audience Development Project* (2014), would also be worth considering, with a view to statistically mapping current audiences for the traditional arts.

Recommendations

3.4.1

It is recommended that programmers and artists consider increasing audience engagement for local performances through workshops and other outreach activities comparable to the model developed by Music Network.

Media coverage

There was overwhelming consensus among contributors to this research that the traditional arts do not receive what is perceived as sufficient coverage on radio, television or in the print or online media. The consistency of such commentary suggests that the relationship between the traditional arts and the wider media is not working at an optimum level. However, it is also important to acknowledge the individual work of broadcasters, producers, and journalists who clearly demonstrate a desire to showcase the traditional arts on mainstream media platforms. It appears that many of these important opportunities are the result of advocacy and support from individual staff, rather than any overarching policy. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge sector-wide appreciation for specialist traditional arts programming and broadcasters who diligently provide an essential platform for the traditional arts in mainstream media and who are perceived to operate in a media landscape that does not support traditional arts adequately at an organisational or management level. However, Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4 were often excluded from such criticisms.

While nobody specifically called for broadcasting quotas, many expressed frustration at what they feel is insufficient traditional arts coverage, which is believed to be especially baffling given the popularity of the Irish traditional arts. Some feel that the mainstream media should respond more appropriately to an existing demand for more traditional arts coverage, while others see the curatorial value of the wider media to help create and develop tastes for the traditional arts.

A number of contributors expressed disappointment at a perceived failure of mainstream broadcast and print media to represent the diversity of practice in the traditional arts today by consistently showcasing the same small number of artists. In addition, many feel that the traditional arts are only given space in the media if aligned with an appropriate 'angle' or narrative. Only dedicated traditional arts shows are believed to present the traditional arts on their own terms, in a way that is representative of wider practice. On a more basic level, publications such as the Irish Times are criticised for continually reducing the traditional arts coverage designated to its traditional arts reviewer, while some accuse RTÉ of delegating traditional arts coverage to TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta, thereby failing to connect wider national and international audiences with the traditional arts of Ireland. Despite the perceived current vulnerability of conventional media such as radio, TV, and newspapers, and what some may present as an inevitable unwillingness of national media to cater to niche interests, regional radio

stations such as Clare FM have been applauded by contributors to this research for their unwavering commitment to traditional arts programming. This suggests that the provision of traditional arts coverage is not inconsistent with broadcasters' financial viability.

Fostering future talent

This research suggests that positive developments in the relationship between the media and the traditional arts need to be instigated by members of the traditional arts community itself. Many specialist traditional arts programmes and media publications have been (and continue to be) curated by experienced traditional artists or enthusiasts, but a number of approaches could expand traditional arts coverage in mainstream media. In order to redress what is perceived as a lack of perspective on the traditional arts among editors, producers, and other media gatekeepers, a traditional arts resource or representative organisation could look to facilitating a mentorship programme similar to the model developed by Toner Quinn at the *Journal of Music*, as a way of equipping artists, enthusiasts and others familiar with an artistic culture or scene, with the skills necessary to write about the arts in an informed and engaging way. Much of the positive commentary on the media presented throughout this document is attributed to the work of media professionals who understand the traditional arts because they are practitioners or enthusiasts themselves. The *Journal of Music* mentorship model can also be applied to contexts other than journalism, such as radio and TV production. Providing media training, internship opportunities, and educational scholarships to the traditional arts sector could aid in fostering the next generation of radio and television producers, and media professionals from within the traditional arts community itself as well as provide a diverse range of employment and vocational possibilities.

Developing new traditional arts content

In an attempt to increase traditional arts coverage on television and radio, it would be advantageous for a traditional arts organisation to liaise more closely with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, the Irish broadcasting regulator whose activities include the awarding of funding for programming (under the Broadcasting Funding Scheme), to individuals and production companies who wish to make programmes on a variety of subject areas. The Broadcasting Act of 2009 specifically refers to the "traditional and contemporary arts" as programme content included within the remit of new television and sound broadcasting programmes to be funded under the scheme (Broadcasting Act 2009, Irish Statutes Book 2020).

Similarly, Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland and Screen Skills Ireland offer funding and mentorship supports to professionals working in the screen and audio-visual industries in Ireland. Regular interaction between these bodies and a relevant traditional arts organisation could ensure that the traditional arts sector remains informed about the various funding and development supports offered to support the creation of new media content. Such support could also include a mechanism for consulting on funding applications. Subsequently, this could provide an opportunity to increase the traditional arts content presented on national media.

The role of the artist

Broadcasters and other media professionals who contributed to this research also highlighted the value of traditional artists taking a proactive role in increasing airplay for their work. As this research shows, there is a lack of consistency in how effectively traditional artists present new albums to broadcasters. Press releases are not always provided by artists, and important and basic information is often not included when sending an album to a broadcaster. This suggests that artists who chose to release albums should improve how they interact with the media, and if possible, consider delegating publicity and promotional work to a professional. However, an important first step in this process could be the establishment of an online resource for artists, or a workshop event that would provide an opportunity for traditional artists to connect with relevant broadcasters, journalists, and other industry professionals who work with the traditional arts. A useful point of comparison is Ireland Music Week, a music industry showcase and conference event organised by First Music Contact, although a smaller-scale event catering to the traditional arts sector specifically would undoubtedly produce worthwhile insights to all who wish to optimise how the national media in Ireland engage with the traditional arts.

Embracing alternative media

Taking into account the perceptions of those who view the conventional media landscape as one that is evolving in unprecedented ways, it is also important that traditional arts practitioners and other stakeholders be mindful of alternative media opportunities for the traditional arts, including the obvious social media platforms, and other web-based solutions. Social media has provided unprecedented promotional possibilities to artists, and career sustainability in the traditional arts sector is inevitably connected with how traditional artists embrace social media promotion and e-mail lists, for example. Consequently, it is vital that the traditional arts sector, and those who strive to advocate on its behalf, provide opportunities for interested practitioners to avail of professional

development and training opportunities in the areas such as digital marketing and online promotion, rather than rely on conventional media platforms such as radio, television, and newspaper reviews exclusively. A noteworthy example of a traditional arts organisation embracing such an evolving media environment is *Hands Up for Trad*. Among the many useful resources hosted on its active and informative website is *Hands Up for Trad TV*, a video-based series of music videos promoting the work of traditional and folk artists all over Scotland. The website also produces regular podcasts, as well as provide updated information on various Scottish traditional music festivals and other events. Na Píobairí Uilleann's NPU TV platform is also a useful resource that showcases events such NPU's Notes and Narratives lecture series.

Recommendations

3.4.2

It is recommended that a traditional arts representative body consider engaging in effective dialogue with national media management in order to represent the concerns of the traditional arts sector about insufficient media coverage.

3.4.3

It is recommended that a traditional arts representative body consider liaising with bodies such as the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and Screen Skills Ireland to increase collaboration between the traditional arts and creative media sectors, with a view to providing mentorship opportunities comparable to the Irish Traditional Music Writer Mentoring Scheme established by the *Journal of Music*.

3.4.4

Traditional artists are encouraged to engage more proactively and effectively with media professionals in order to maximise airplay and media coverage for new releases and events.

3.4.5

It is recommended that a traditional arts representative body consider programming a forum for traditional artists to interact with media professionals and broadcasters at a traditional arts event, such as TradTalk.

3.4.6

It is recommended that a representative body consider facilitating workshops on social media promotional tools and digital marketing to enable traditional artists to look beyond conventional media platforms for promoting their work.

Public engagement: an Irish Traditional Arts Day

National and international days designated specifically to artforms and music genres are an effective method of increasing public awareness of a particular activity. Na Píobairí Uilleann celebrates International Uilleann Piping Day (November 2nd in 2019), while Cruit Ireland / Harp Ireland established National Harp Day (October 19th in 2019). National Fiddle Day, first established by Donegal fiddler, Caoimhín Mac Aoidh in 2012, is celebrated annually in multiple locations around the world. However, there is no national or international Irish Traditional Arts Day. In 2011, UNESCO designated April 30th as the annual International Jazz Day. The international World Poetry Day took place on March 21st, 2020, while Poetry Ireland celebrated Poetry Day Ireland on April 30th, 2020. Perhaps the highest profile public awareness campaign of this nature in Ireland is *Seachtain na Gaeilge* (*trans. the week of the Irish language*), an international Irish language festival that now takes place over a period of two weeks. Run by Conradh na Gaeilge, the festival promotes the Irish language through a wide range of events, and a number of ambassadors champion the Irish language across all media platforms. Specially-designated events of this nature are a valuable method for showcasing an activity to the wider public, and many of the existing examples referenced here provide useful models for comparison. An Irish Traditional Arts Day would certainly provide a focused event and accompanying publicity campaign to make the traditional arts more accessible to those who may not be aware of the diversity and talent existing in the traditional arts community in Ireland and abroad.

Recommendations

3.4.7

It is recommended that a representative body consider the establishment of a national/international Irish Traditional Arts Day to maximise exposure to the traditional arts among the mainstream Irish population.

The pub session scene

Various viewpoints have been expressed in this research on the role of the pub session in Irish traditional music. For many, the pub session is a welcome opportunity to perform with friends in a relaxed and enjoyable environment, surrounded by enthusiastic listeners. For others it is an important source of income, as well as an opportunity to maintain musical technique and learn repertoire, in some cases. Others feel that the pub environment negatively impacts the public

perception of the traditional arts and relegates the practice to raucous tourist entertainment. Some feel that the session provides listeners with free entertainment, thereby reducing the likelihood that people will attend paid concerts. Regardless of one's views on the pub session, it remains a popular and ubiquitous outlet for the performance of Irish traditional music, song, and dance. Taking steps to change pub session culture is possibly unfeasible, and unnecessary in the eyes of many who perform regularly in such environments. Instead, any negative impacts of the pub session could be redressed by using other strategic opportunities to improve the public perception of the traditional arts, as well as establish fair working conditions for those who perform regularly in pub environments. It is hoped that some of the recommendations made in this report can at least instigate a conversation on such issues, while appreciating that the pub session, in the right circumstances, is often enjoyed by many as a forum for performing and hearing traditional music and song. For example, an awareness campaign designed around a Traditional Arts Day could acknowledge the positive and social aspects of the pub session as one site of traditional arts activity while foregrounding and showcasing the rich artistic value of the traditional arts in alternative settings.

The traditional arts in Irish education

For some commentators, the prominence and quality of Irish traditional arts content in Irish secondary-level education is an important factor in shaping the public image of the traditional arts, and ultimately, in developing both the performers and audiences of the future. However, some feel that the traditional arts content delivered by secondary school music teachers (in some instances), as well as the syllabi designed by the Department of Education and Skills, fails to adequately represent the true artistic quality and potential of the traditional arts. Rather than debate the merit of such concerns and criticise teachers, it is important to continually appraise the presence of traditional arts in the second-level classroom. It is worth considering what supports and resources can be made available to secondary-level teachers in order to optimise how students experience the traditional arts. I focus here on the secondary-education sector because that is the arena that contributors made reference to most frequently. It is important to state here that in many cases, students in primary and secondary-level education receive exemplary tuition and guidance in the area of the traditional arts due to the fact that so many skilled practitioners are employed as primary and secondary teachers.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann's *Trad is Fab* and *Trad Time* initiatives appear to be promising and valuable programmes designed to raise awareness and educational engagement with the traditional arts across mainstream Irish education. Regrettably, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann declined an opportunity to contribute to this research. Consequently, I have been unable to explore these initiatives any further with those who have developed such educational programmes.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is the body responsible for designing and implementing curricula and examinations in the Republic of Ireland, and part of their ongoing work includes open consultation with a range of stakeholders. Traditional arts practitioners and advocates who wish to contribute to the conversation around music curricula and exams should consider using this platform to dialogue with those responsible for prioritising the type of content found in school curricula. For example, any individual or organisation who wishes to, can submit a Junior Cycle short course on any topic to the NCCA for consideration. Successful submissions are subsequently made available as an educational resource to schools nationwide.

Likewise, the Arts in Education Portal aims to collaboratively inform arts education in a way that draws on the expertise and experience of many stakeholders in the domain of both the arts and education. It offers a way of connecting artists, educators, and students with the ambition of enriching the access that students have to the arts in Irish education. The portal is open to submissions on an ongoing basis, and while it does not claim to instigate collaborations between artists, teachers, and schools, it does provide an important outlet for showcasing existing educational projects as well as provide useful guidance to artists who wish to work in schools.

In addition, the Laureate na nÓg, Writers in Schools scheme, and Creative Schools initiative are examples of existing models that are funded by the Arts Council and aim to connect young people with arts practice in a variety of formats. Traditional artists and advocates who seek to optimise how young people engage with and gain access to the Irish traditional arts are likely find some inspiration in these existing programmes.

Recommendations

3.4.8

Interested parties from within the traditional arts sector should proactively engage with the Arts in Education Portal and open calls from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) with a view to developing traditional arts educational content.

Aosdána

Many contributors to this research expressed disappointment at the underrepresentation of traditional artists in Aosdána. In order to become a member of Aosdána, an artist must be nominated and seconded by current members working within the same discipline. Therefore, a traditional musician would be nominated by a music composer. Aosdána is funded by the Arts Council, which also manages Aosdána's administrative and financial arrangements, although Aosdána's *Toscaireacht*, an independent elected committee of 10 members oversees overall administration autonomously (The Journal of Music, 2005). However, the regulations of Aosdána may only be changed by unanimous decision of the Arts Council (Aosdána website, 2020).

Reflecting on the 2003 Arts Act referred to on page 32 of this report, which the Council is obliged to observe, it is clear that artistic interpretation is included within its definition of the arts. This reference to "interpretative expression" suggests that the traditional arts would fall under the remit of any initiative supported by the Arts Council, just as traditional artists are eligible for a range of Arts Council funding awards. Consequently, it is understandable that stakeholders in the traditional arts community express disappointment at the exclusion of the traditional arts from an artists' affiliation such as Aosdána, and express concern at what this symbolises. While it is perhaps overambitious to think that Aosdána policy will change because of any recommendations made in this report, it is important, given the unexpected prominence of this topic in conversations with research consultants, that Aosdána and the Arts Council make a formal statement on this issue, and to provide clarity as to why Dónal Lunny is the sole traditional artist in Aosdána (representing 0.4% of its membership).

Considering the lack of traditional arts representation in Aosdána up to this point, it is perhaps worth examining the value of establishing a separate traditional arts collective that would recognise the contributions of venerated traditional artists, as well as provide financial support

similar to the *Cnuas*, to those artists who wish to devote time to focusing exclusively on their arts practice, or who may unexpectedly find themselves in financial difficulty. At present, the negligible presence of traditional artists in Aosdána at the very least, looks bad, and as has been pointed out by contributors to this research, surely impacts on the status of the traditional arts in the wider arts landscape in Ireland.

Recommendations

3.4.9

It is recommended that the Arts Council and Aosdána make a formal statement on Aosdána's policy on the traditional arts in order to acknowledge what are perceived as inconsistencies in the interpretation of the 2003 Arts Act.

3.5 TRADITIONAL ARTS ADVOCACY

Despite the existence of many excellent traditional arts resource organisations such as Na Píobairí Uilleann, Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Cairdeas na bhFidléirí, and the Irish Traditional Music Archive, working on behalf of various interests within the traditional arts, there was a significant degree of consensus among contributors to this research that a centralised and unified representative voice is needed to advocate on behalf of the wider traditional arts sector. Comparable Irish advocacy organisations working in other artforms and disciplines include First Music Contact, Theatre Forum, Poetry Ireland and the Contemporary Music Centre.

Advocating for change

Many participants in this research expressed a desire to see positive advancements made in areas such as increased funding for the traditional arts. However, consensus among commentators is that there is no overarching representative advocacy group established to represent the wider traditional music community in dialogue with organisations such as the Arts Council, for example. Traditional artists and other stakeholders in the traditional arts community are perceptive, critical thinkers, and effective communicators; numerous important developments and events have demonstrated the potential of practitioners and practitioner-led organisations to advocate on the behalf of their membership and peers. Examples include the establishment of the Arts Council's now defunct *Deis* award, UNESCO's recognition of uilleann piping and Irish harping, and the work of bodies such as FACÉ and FairPlé. However, the fact that Irish traditional music, song, or dance are not recognised by UNESCO on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, suggests that, despite the impressive advocacy work being done by specialist traditional arts organisations, there is a lack of collective and unified advocacy being undertaken on behalf of the community or sector, as a collective unit.

A primary concern expressed by participants in this research relates to inadequate funding for the traditional arts, as detailed in section 3.3. However, in order to effectively advocate for more Arts Council funding for the traditional arts, a concerted and centralised effort needs to be made by representatives of the traditional arts community because contributors to this research feel that such developments are unlikely to happen from within the Arts Council itself, given the lack of progress made in increasing the traditional arts' share of the Arts Council budget up to this point.

Mobilising the traditional arts community

The strength and vibrancy of the traditional arts lies in the skill, expertise, and dedication of the practitioners and enthusiasts who continue to passionately promote Irish traditional music, song, and dance in Ireland and throughout the world. This research highlights consensus that any efforts to advocate effectively for the traditional arts requires a practitioner-centred focus, thereby minimising what is perceived as middle-management bureaucracy and alienation. As many have pointed out, the resourcefulness and diverse expertise consistently demonstrated by the traditional arts community attests to its capacity to advocate effectively on its own behalf, but it has also been expressed that the lack of an umbrella advocacy organisation for the traditional arts stifles its potential to mobilise that community in a systematic and productive way.

A cohesive representative voice

Irrespective of the resourcefulness and talent inherent in the traditional arts community, this research has shown that while external observers acknowledge the expertise and capacity of the sector, it is perceived as being fragmented and somewhat ad-hoc, in the absence of a cohesive representative voice. This opinion has also been supported by traditional artists themselves. Existing organisations undertake exemplary work in resourcing and promoting the interests of their own membership, but this research shows that there is a demand for a representative or intermediary body that can represent the voices and opinions of the wider traditional arts community and sector as a whole.

It is not suggested that an advocacy organisation should in any way attempt to duplicate or undermine the valuable work of existing organisations. However, it is worth considering the possibility of establishing an umbrella organisation that can act as an inter-organisational liaison and collaborate with other traditional arts bodies. For example, Words Ireland, a collective of seven literature organisations, each of which promotes literature in Ireland according to their own organisational principles and objectives, exemplifies a collaborative partnership that may be worth adopting in the traditional arts sector.

A forum for ongoing community dialogue and collaboration

Respondents to this research valued the forum for discussion and dialogue facilitated by TradTalk 2019, which took place in Dublin Castle on 16th November 2019. In general, the traditional arts

community has a strong history of proactively convening various important events and platforms for discussion, from *Crossroads* conferences to lectures and public discussions at schools such as the Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, to academic symposia that provide a platform for discourse on various aspects of the traditional arts. However, this research highlights a demand for the type of forum that provides professional development and artistic opportunities and encourages ongoing dialogue and co-operation among the wider traditional arts community and sector. Na Píobairí Uilleann and Cruit Éireann / Harp Ireland provide a range of useful services and information to its membership, including opportunities to engage in dialogue and consultancy on a range of issues but there is no current overarching organisation that provides a knowledge-sharing and collaborative forum for the wider traditional arts sector, in a way that Visual Artists Ireland does for its membership.

A physical space for the traditional arts

A number of interviewees and survey respondents referred to a need to provide the traditional arts community with a physical central hub or centre in which members could avail of a range of services, similar to the facilities and opportunities that are provided by organisations such as Dance Ireland at their headquarters, DanceHouse. As stated by one interviewee, DanceHouse provides her with the possibility of not only booking rehearsal space, but it also serves as a social forum that connects practitioners with their peers, as well as providing a central home to Dance Ireland's various professional development programmes.

As suggested by contributors to this research, a physical infrastructure similar to DanceHouse would enable traditional artists to develop their arts practice through rehearsal and recording facilities, as well as provide a social forum for collaboration, professional development, and collective advocacy. As pointed out by Toner Quinn in his *Report on the Harping Tradition in Ireland* (2014), a dedicated premises is an essential asset for any organisation, and this has been clearly exemplified by the success and significance of Na Píobairí Uilleann's home at Henrietta street in Dublin, a site which is hoped to be expanded to become the International Uilleann Piping Visitor Centre and Theatre.

Existing advocacy models

A number of advocacy models have been researched for the purpose of writing this report. Some relate specifically to traditional and/or folk arts in other jurisdictions while others are resource

and/or representative organisations in Ireland that work in other artforms and disciplines. While this list should not be considered an exhaustive survey of best practices, it does provide some interesting insights into how the concerns and perceived challenges described in this report may be addressed by a traditional arts advocacy body.

Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland

Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland (TRACS) is Scotland's national network for traditional arts and culture, and it manages the Traditional Music Forum, the Traditional Dance Forum, and the Scottish Storytelling Forum. Its brief includes working with various agencies and policy makers on behalf of the Scottish traditional arts. It also offers opportunities for professional and creative development and aims to increase access to the traditional arts. TRACS shares information and opportunities through media such as its website, newsletter, and social media platforms. Among the resources that it has provided include research reports, mentorship programmes, policy documents, and multi-media instructional materials. TRACS is funded by membership subscriptions, Creative Scotland, The City of Edinburgh Council, and Culture Edinburgh.

Folk Org (Norway)

Based in Oslo, Norway, Folk Org works as a resource organisation on behalf of folk musicians and dancers in Norway. In addition to organising various events and competitions, such as the *Folkelarm* showcase and conference, Folk Org publishes its magazine, *Folkemusikk*, four times per year, and it provides a range of online resources for individual practitioners, teachers, and organisations. As a proactive advocacy body, Folk Org liaise with the media to increase the public profile of Norwegian folk music and dance, and continually engage in dialogue with Government with a view to increasing public funding for Norwegian folk music and dance.

With an annual budget of €1.4 million, including €600,000 sourced from the Arts Council, as well as additional public and private funding, Folk Org have a membership of over 4,500. Following a successful funding campaign, Folk Org established *Riksscenen*, a state-funded premises that houses three performance spaces, a rehearsal space, and a café/bar, serving as a central hub for folk musicians and dancers to congregate when visiting Oslo. Membership benefits include discounts on instrument insurance, accounting software, as well as access to member-only events.

English Folk Dance & Song Society

The English Folk Dance & Song Society promotes English traditional arts through learning and participation programmes as well as artist development initiatives. Based at Cecil Sharp House in London, the EFDSS represents over 3,000 performers and enthusiasts. As well as provide information on events and performances, the EFDSS publishes an annual scholarly journal called the *Folk Music Journal*. The society offers supports to artists in the form of bursaries, and commissions, and it has played a central role in the foundation of the English Folk Expo (EFEx), a programme of events, festivals, and training and development opportunities for those working in the English traditional arts. An important element of the EFEx platform is an online resource, *Folk Talk*, that provides mentorship and advice from established folk and traditional artists. The English Folk Dance and Song Society is a registered charity and is funded by the Arts Council of England.

Hands Up for Trad

Established in 2002, Hands Up for Trad is an organisation established by Scottish concertina player, Simon Thumire, and it promotes Scottish traditional music through advocacy and education. Among the many activities promoted and instigated by Hands Up for Trad are the Scots Trad Music Awards, a Battle of the Folk Bands, the BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year, The Tinto Summer School Programme, The Scottish Traditional Music Hall of Fame, Hands Up for Trad TV, and weekly mentoring sessions for Scottish traditional artists that are intended to support emerging traditional artists with career advice as well as with funding applications. The Hands Up for Trad website is an important online platform that contains a discussion forum, and provides access to e-books, podcasts, and newsletters, as well as spotlight emerging artists, and composers. Hands Up for Trad is funded by Creative Scotland, and The National Lottery. Private donations are also accepted via the online patronage platform, Patreon.

The Contemporary Music Centre

The Contemporary Music Centre (CMC) is both an archive and resource centre that supports the work of composers throughout the island of Ireland. As well as provide resources for performers, composers, teachers and students of contemporary music, the CMC also focuses on developing audiences for contemporary music in Ireland. In addition, the CMC provides guidance on recommended rates of pay for commissions. CMC's fortnightly podcast, *Amplify*, features discussions and current issues on contemporary music, as well as interviews with contemporary

composers. The CMC is funded by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, The Arts Council, The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and the Northern Ireland National Lottery.

Dance Ireland

In addition to providing members with a physical space and hub to develop their creative practice, Dance Ireland also functions as an important knowledge-sharing resources for its membership. Its website acts as an important and accessible platform that keeps dancers updated on a variety of events, funding, development, and employment opportunities. An online library also contains a collection of films, podcasts, and other publications relating to dance practice. Placing a strong emphasis on creative and professional development, Dance Ireland also offers many programmes and courses designed to mentor and foster the talents of its membership. Dance Ireland is funded by membership subscriptions, the Arts Council, Dublin City Council, and by private donations.

Visual Artists Ireland

Visual Artists Ireland represents professional visual artists in Ireland. Established as the Sculptors' Society of Ireland in 1980, the organisation changed its name to Visual Artists Ireland in 2005 and it is currently the only all-Ireland representative body for professional visual artists. As well as advocating on behalf of its members, among the most valuable services and supports that the VAI offer is its 'How To Manual', which offers advice in areas as diverse as taxation, social welfare, contracts, pay guidelines, insurance, copyright, and selling work. VAI are funded by member subscriptions, the Arts Council of Ireland, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Dublin City Council, through fundraising, and corporate and individual donations.

Theatre Forum

Theatre Forum is an advocacy body that aims to provide a sustainable future for the performing arts in Ireland. Comprising practitioners, venues, festivals, production companies, arts officers, and resource organisations, Theatre Forum provides its membership with a number of training opportunities such as artist development programmes and residencies. Important touring initiatives have been established by Theatre Forum, including a Touring Forum, an event held in partnership with the Association of Irish Stage Technicians that connects a range of industry stakeholders with a view to collectively developing touring supports for the sector.

First Music Contact

First Music Contact is a national resource agency that supports and showcases popular music artists in Ireland. At the centre of FMC's work are three primary initiatives: Ireland Music Week, a conference and international showcase that connects networks of performers and industry professionals from all over the world in the form of panels, workshops and masterclasses; Music From Ireland, a showcasing opportunity run in partnership with Culture Ireland with support from the Irish Music Rights Organisation, that presents Irish talent at international music conferences; and Breaking Tunes, an online music portal that showcases Irish bands and artists. In addition, First Music Contact offers free consultancy services for artists as well monthly industry factsheets designed to help independent artists navigate the music industry in Ireland. FMC is funded annually by the Arts Council.

Recommendations

3.5.1

Despite the exemplary work being undertaken by specialist organisations within the traditional arts sector, there is consensus expressed in this research that an umbrella representative organisation is needed to work on behalf of the wider traditional arts community/sector. It is recommended that Trad Ireland / Traid Éireann consider fulfilling that role.

3.5.2

In response to a demand communicated by contributors to this research, Trad Ireland/Traid Éireann should endeavour to host a TradTalk event on an annual basis.

3.5.3

Considering the demonstrated ambition and capacity of traditional artists to advocate for the traditional arts, albeit on an individual, ad hoc, and fragmented basis, the development of a new resource or representative organisation for the traditional arts should embed practitioner engagement and input as a key component in its own development as an organisation.

3.5.4

Given the potential of an annual TradTalk event to address so many of the concerns expressed by traditional artists and other stakeholders in this research, it is recommended that the Arts Council and Trad Ireland/Traid Éireann develop a collaborative partnership that ensures the longevity and impact of such an event.

3.5.5

Notwithstanding the highly ambitious pursuit of providing a premises for a new traditional arts representative body, it is recommended that further research into the feasibility of this objective be undertaken.

3.5.6

Any resource or representative organisation with an ambition to sustainably advocate for the traditional arts in Ireland to the level demonstrated by organisations such as Dance Ireland, Folk Org, or the Traditional Music Forum in Scotland, must source strategic funding opportunities that will allow for maximum growth and impact. Relying on project-based funding awards will undermine the potential of such an organisation to adequately advocate on behalf of its membership.

3.5.7

An umbrella traditional arts representative or resource organisation should regularly liaise with existing international organisations working with traditional and folk arts to collaborate and dialogue on best practice for sector-specific advocacy. This should include collaboration with the recently-established European Folk Network.

This research report has endeavoured to achieve two primary aims. It has aspired to outline as comprehensively as possible, the resources and financial supports available to those working in the traditional arts sector on the island of Ireland. Second, it has documented a diverse range of challenges encountered by traditional arts practitioners and other stakeholders in the traditional arts sector at present.

I hope that emerging traditional artists and those who have not previously engaged with existing creative and financial supports available to the traditional arts sector will proactively seek out the opportunities detailed in section one of this report.

Importantly, this document has provided a public platform for traditional artists to voice their concerns on a range of issues ranging from general career unsustainability and employment supports, to media coverage and funding bodies. So many of these contributors are celebrated and listened to around the globe as exceptional artists. It is now time to listen to their concerns as professionals striving to maintain a sustainable living.

There are a variety of support mechanisms that contribute to a vibrant and sustainable traditional arts sector but funding, and the Arts Council, are central to any such conversations. Returning to December 2003, and the Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism, John O'Donoghue's establishment of the first special committee on the traditional arts reminds us of the potential to enact substantial changes in the traditional arts funding landscape. That committee was convened to inform Arts Council policy in response to an awareness of a "sense of dissatisfaction that existed within the traditional arts sector with the treatment that the sector has received over the years" (Houses of the Oireachtas 2003). Consequently, during the Minister's tenure, Arts Council funding for the traditional arts increased from €800,000 in 2005 to €3 million in 2006, the highest ever funding allocation dedicated to the traditional arts in the history of the Council. While I would not dispute the validity of O'Donoghue's impression that the arts sector was under-resourced and under-funded back in 2003 when he established the traditional arts special committee, he did not have a report of this nature at his disposal; many concerns were voiced convincingly by passionate and dedicated traditional arts advocates. However, the research presented in this document provides a pioneering public platform for a diverse range of representative voices from the traditional arts sector to speak openly about the challenges that they encounter as professional and semi-professional practitioners. If the well-intentioned and effective advocacy of a few could

do so much to advance resources for the traditional arts in the first decade of this century, surely we should pay heed to the stark anxiety communicated by a cross-section of our most revered artists and cultural ambassadors.

The recommendations listed in this report are made for the benefit of all who desire to advocate for the Irish traditional arts. I sincerely hope that my efforts in undertaking this research report will instigate important conversations on artistic and economic sustainability and prosperity in the sector and adequately serve the interests and concerns of those with a passion for the traditional arts of Ireland.

Jack Talty

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