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Culture

# Stop exploiting artists with 'freebie' culture, Arts Council says

Financial insecurity of artists in Ireland 'causes long-term damage to our society'

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Macnas's Out of the Wild Sky parade, part of the Bram Stoker festival in Dublin in 2018. Photograph: Dave Meehan

Deirdre Falvey

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The culture of underpaying or not paying artists is a hidden subsidy to Ireland's cultural life that is unfair and unsustainable, according to the Arts Council, which will on Tuesday launch a policy to ensure artists are paid fairly.

Arts Council chairman Kevin Rafter said its new policy, Paying the Artist, aims to end "the idea that it is acceptable to get artists to work as a 'freebie', or to offer work without proper payment because it might somehow enhance an artist's career". He said artists should be paid fairly and equitably for their work.

The council is responsible for funding and developing the arts, but does not set rates of pay. It will commit at Tuesday's policy launch at Poetry Ireland's headquarters to using its position to influence change, asserting that "the culture of underpayment continues to exist in 2020 and it is not acceptable".

"When even successful artists live in such financial insecurity that they can not have a normal life in Ireland, it causes long-term damage to our society as a whole."

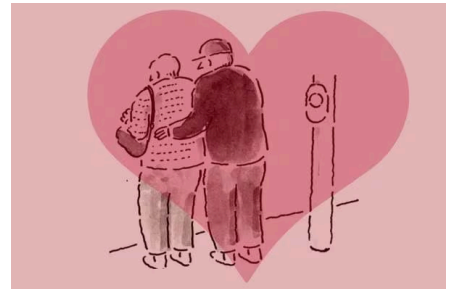
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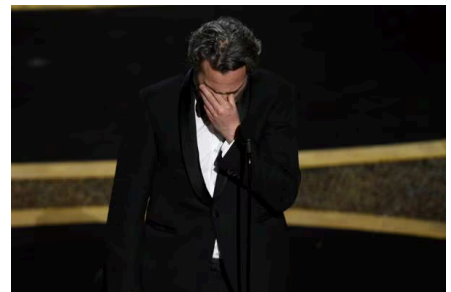
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The Arts Council will award grants only to organisations that pay artists fairly, and promises to foreground artists' pay through new funding conditions, research, education, advocacy across government and civil society, and a campaign, #PayTheArtist. It seeks to ensure the code applies across government departments, agencies and local authorities.

Paying the Artist outlines principles for treating artists fairly, in terms of their time, input and expertise, and taking account of their status and the value created by their work.

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Payment should aspire to best practice, not minimum standards. Where public funding is involved, "fair and equitable remuneration is a matter of policy and prioritisation and, accordingly, should be factored into the budgeting process rather than being budget-dependent", the policy says.

Outgoing Arts Council director Orlaith McBride said the council would work with artists, their representatives and resource organisations "improve the current situation and see an end to artists being underpaid or working for free in return for 'exposure'". There are variations in pay and contracts across arts sectors but the code establishes key principles, she said.

### **Best practice**

The policy outlines best practice, including being open, transparent and up-front in dealing with artists, and complying with rates, terms, practices and standards recommended by representative and resource organisations,

It urges continued improvement in rates, from a current low base, and says "minimum standards are not an acceptable ambition".

All engagements should be covered by a contract, and artists should have a voice in negotiations.

Contracts should be clear, including when and how artists are paid, and differentiating fees and expenses. Copyright must be respected and artists should benefit from the future exploitation of their work.

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Reflecting that sometimes the artist is last in line to be paid, the new policy says artists' fees should be ring-fenced within project budgets so they are protected against budget overruns in other areas.

It distinguishes these payments from genuinely voluntary work.

Mr Rafter said that “information needs to be transparent”. The issues would be easier to see with new research into artists' pay and conditions which the Arts Council is commissioning in 2020, and the best way to deliver on Paying the Artist, he said, is “more resources for the arts”. “As chair of the Arts Council I would encourage the new government and the new minister for culture to be ambitious for the arts, and to let that ambition be seen in the Arts Council budget for 2021.”



[Deirdre Falvey](#)

Deirdre Falvey is a features and arts writer at The Irish Times



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