

**Social
Democrats**

Arts & Culture

Supporting Artists,
Putting the Arts at the heart of Irish life

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Key Points

Every person in Ireland has a right to participate in arts and culture in their everyday life.

The Social Democrats believe that **arts and culture underpin our overall wellbeing and creativity, our innovation, and our social cohesion.**

Ireland has a very diverse artistic and creative ecosystem, which delivers huge cultural and economic value both nationally and internationally.

In Government, our priorities for the arts sector will include:

- Developing a roadmap for **progressive increases in total arts funding** to bring it in line with average EU spending over 5 years, with a focus on current expenditure to practicing artists through the Arts Council and Culture Ireland.
- Establishing **special commercial rates** for creative/arts spaces and “rates holidays” for new projects.
- Enhancing supports for the **Irish film and publishing industries.**
- Introducing **multi-annual funding for essential arts organisations** to allow for long-term planning decisions.
- Introducing an annual **Culture Voucher**, worth €200, to encourage 18–24-year-olds to take part in cultural activities.
- Ensuring **planning legislation** takes cultural and creative spaces into account for all public developments.
- Supporting the establishment of **Night Mayors** in each of our major cities.
- **Revitalising our night-time cultural economy** by legislating for later opening hours for venues and bars.
- Investing in **physical infrastructure** needed in the Arts sector such as studios, galleries, theatres and workspaces.
- Using the findings from the **Basic Income for Artists** study to create a **permanent scheme to support artists** financially.
- **Reforming Section 15 tax breaks** so that they do not unintentionally discriminate against Irish artists.

The Importance of the Arts

The Social Democrats recognise the arts as:

- Core to who we are as a people, fostering joy, human connection, and understanding.
- A beacon of our creativity, soft power and reputation internationally.
- A central component in our current and future success in the tourism sector.
- Key to the success of the Irish film industry, with further potential for the growth of film studios.
- Enabling better human-centred design processes for our built environment and infrastructure.

The arts have a vital role in **stimulating innovation** through creative thinking, helping to drive growth and giving us an economic edge in a globalised world.

We understand ourselves and others through culture – connecting our past, present and future.

Artists help shape **our collective sense of self** through reflection, provocation and imagination. Freedom of artistic expression and challenging the status quo strengthens democracy and accountability.

Success for the arts in Ireland will depend on the level of **collaboration** across government departments, state bodies and arts organisations/practitioners, including using cross-sectoral competencies to foster and platform new Irish creative talent across traditional and digital media.

For too long, the arts have suffered chronic underinvestment – **we have among the lowest levels of arts funding as a percentage of national income in Europe.**

Placing arts at the heart of education, public policy, and economic thinking, and strengthening the cross-departmental approach pioneered by Creative Ireland, will positively transform these vital areas.

Capital investment in arts and culture, while important, must be carefully balanced with current investment in the work of arts practitioners, through the Arts Council and Culture Ireland.

In Government, we will drive success in Arts through investment and innovation, including by:

- Developing a roadmap for **progressive increases in total arts funding** to bring it in line with average EU spending over 5 years, with a focus on current expenditure to practicing artists through the Arts Council and Culture Ireland.
- Establishing **special commercial rates** for creative/arts spaces and “rates holidays” for new projects.
- Enhancing supports for the **Irish film and publishing industries**.
- Introducing **multi-annual funding for arts organisations** to allow for long-term planning decisions.
- Introducing an annual **Culture Voucher**, worth €200, to encourage 18–24-year-olds to take part in cultural activities.
- Encouraging **affordable live/workspaces** for artists and creative practitioners.
- Ensuring the DSP/Intreo has a framework for **understanding irregular/freelance work**.
- Encouraging **funding of creative industries and arts activity** via Local Enterprise Offices and LEADER funds and Enterprise Ireland.
- Ensuring **planning legislation** takes cultural and creative spaces into account for all public developments.
- **Revitalising our night-time cultural economy** by legislating for later opening hours for venues and bars, as well as further extending the hours of public transport systems.
- Supporting the establishment of **Night Mayors** in each of our major cities.
- Ensuring the **Irish media sector is protected and remains a robust industry** which challenges and informs the country.
- Investing in **physical infrastructure** needed in the Arts sector (see next page).
- Increasing **investment in Culture Ireland** to enhance our global reputation and create more opportunities for Irish artists and international collaboration. We would also restore independent oversight of its organisation.
- **Reforming Section 15 tax breaks** so that they do not unintentionally discriminate against Irish artists.

Investing in Physical Infrastructure

In government the Social Democrats will continue to Invest in **physical infrastructure** needed in the Arts sector. This includes galleries and theatres, which should be accessible and present throughout the country.

However, the priority around physical infrastructure in the Arts sector should be investment in artist studios and workspaces.

Consideration must also be given to artist accommodation, following models used in the UK. Many theatres have space that could be converted into artist accommodation so that touring companies do not have to worry about accommodation on arrival in a new city.

Artist-led spaces and galleries, rather than local authority owned/led.

Reframe physical to focus on accommodation and workspace

Basic Income for Artists

The current government ran a ‘Basic Income for Artists’ pilot scheme.

The Social Democrats supported this pilot and view the scheme as a necessary step towards properly supporting people working in the sector. It should be the first step in **a series of progressive increases in total funding for the sector**, to bring Ireland in line with the EU average for funding the arts over the next few years.

We believe that the findings from the study should be used to ascertain the best way to efficiently support artists and the sector more widely. This should ultimately come in the form of **a permanent scheme to support artists financially, to ensure they can work without the risk of poverty, or the need to engage regularly with the Department of Social Protection.**

Artists working in the live performance, film and other audiovisual sectors in France have a designated unemployment insurance scheme, the ‘Scheme for Intermittent Workers in the Performing Arts’ in English. In government, we will examine the possibility of a similar scheme for Ireland.

Education & Equality

The arts are a vital part of our education system, encouraging creativity, innovation, resilience and adaptability; skills so important in the modern economy.

The Social Democrats believe that arts and culture can have a **positive transformative effect in achieving a more equitable society**. That is why we are working to make sure our cultural policy promotes equity, inclusion, diversity and accessibility.

Arts education has a unique and proven ability to reduce student dropout rates, to improve engagement with education (particularly for disadvantaged students) and to raise performance standards across the board.

The Social Democrats are committed to **increasing investment in arts education**, and to ensuring that state-funded arts organisations and programs lead the way in **promoting equality, diversity, and integration in Irish society**.

The Social Democrats aim to:

- Ensure **universal access to arts education** at both primary and secondary levels.
- Expand the **Creative Schools programme** and ensure it continues beyond the life of the Creative Ireland initiative.
- Ensure all National Cultural Institutions take action to **promote equality, diversity, inclusivity and accessibility**.
- Introduce **Drama and Theatre Studies** as a Leaving Cert subject.
- Support the **rebalancing of arts curricula** to ensure a more equitable gender representation.
- Provide an additional **Arts budget for DEIS schools**.

Arts in the City

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed Irish society. Some of these impacts present us with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to re-shape our towns and cities according to principles that value what the arts bring to society.

The economic recovery of the years prior to the pandemic was of course welcome, but it also brought with it some negative trends: Many creative, artistic and performance spaces in our cities **were squeezed out to make way for so-called “progress”**. Too often, this progress came (especially in our capital city) in the form of yet another characterless hotel or office block, replacing a theatre or other cultural space.

The Social Democrats recognise the importance of tourism to sustain livelihoods, and the importance of the many firms which inhabit offices throughout our cities and large towns.

However, the development of Ireland’s tourism infrastructure, or our status as a major hub of the European tech sector, **should not come at the expense of the thing that brings so many thousands of tourists to Ireland annually**, and many thousands more here to live and work; that is its character, its creativity, and its vibrant culture.

Remote working will mean less need for office space, while shopping trends make it likely that many retail units will remain vacant for some time to come. Over the next few of years, we can expect many empty premises to become available, **giving us the opportunity to re-purpose units across Ireland**, and especially in cities.

Many of these can be re-invented as pop-up galleries, performance spaces, and other kinds of creative venues. The Social Democrats would establish **special commercial rates for creative/arts spaces, as well as “rates holidays”** for new projects, to encourage the use of vacated premises for artistic purposes.

There is a real need to make arts spaces affordable. Developments of the last few years have unwound many of the benefits experienced by the sector post-financial crisis. The availability of **affordable performance and exhibition space in Irish city centres**, especially in Dublin, has dried up. Where once there was a good supply of living spaces/workspaces for artists, this is noticeably dissipating.

We want artists to be able to live in cities, rather than forced out by the cost of living, and our cities stand to lose much of what gives them their character if we don’t grasp this opportunity.

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