

A policy review of *Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN & ANNETTE CLANCY

Summary:

This review article analyses the Basic Income for the Arts in Ireland scheme, addressing it within the context of wider cultural policies on the arts and universal basic income schemes.

Abstract:

The launch of Basic Income for the Arts in April 2022 by the Irish Government marks a significant moment for the arts in Ireland. This article addresses the key assumptions underlying the policy and discusses whether what is primarily a welfare state redistributive intervention will address the social and economic complexities of life within the cultural and creative economy in Ireland.

Key words: Basic income for the arts; Universal basic income; welfare; cultural and creative industries

Introduction

In April 2022 the Irish government launched its Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme ('BIA'). Due to run between 2022 and 2025, the scheme will allocate €25m in its first year. BIA represents 'a sectoral intervention to support [2000] practicing artists and creative arts workers to focus on their creative practice' (Government of Ireland, 2022a, np) each of whom will receive a weekly payment of €325. BIA was launched in response to the report of the arts and

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

culture recovery task force (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media 2020 'DTCAGSM'), established by Minister Catherine Martin in response to the impact of Covid-19 on these sectors. The first recommendation of the task force was to 'pilot a universal basic income scheme for a three-year period in the arts, culture, audiovisual and live performance and events sectors' (DTCAGSM, 2020, p.17).

The idea of a basic income model has been in circulation in Ireland for some time. Variations on the basic income model are also in use in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands (Kinsella et al., 2017). Each scheme operates differently depending on a range of local factors so simple comparisons can be misleading. What these schemes have in common is the principle of 'an individual guaranteed minimum income without either a means test or a (willingness to) work condition' (Van Parijs, 1991, p.102) and 'that one's basic needs will be met' (Nagler, 2018: p. 83). Drawing on international research, Kinsella et al. (2017) proposed the idea of 'Creative Work Fellowships' ('CWF') in which artists in receipt of (or eligible for) social welfare benefits could apply to be a Creative Work Fellow and receive professional supports and a weekly payment over a four-year period. Elements of their proposal can be seen in Pillar 2 of the Creative Ireland Programme which proposes 'a new pilot scheme to provide income supports to low-earning artists through the social welfare system' (Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs 2017, p.25 'DAHRRGA'). The 'Professional Artists on Jobseeker's Allowance' was launched as a pilot in 2017 for visual artists and writers who were exempted from the department's 'activation programme' (Government of Ireland, 2019, np) for twelve months. In 2019 the scheme was established as a permanent feature and extended to include other professional artistic disciplines.

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

The social policy framework

BIA is an extraordinary moment in the development of Irish social policy. The state has effectively stated that there are categories of work incapable of earning a market income that should be supported by a redistribution of wealth via the central taxation system. Historically all areas of education, health and welfare were deemed, under the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, to be the responsibility of the individual, their families, communities and voluntary associations (Powell, 2017, Scott, 2014). The second remarkable aspect is that the labour of artists is moved out of the amateur, voluntary, or commercial into the protected frame of the welfare state, into what researchers refer to as the 'providential' layer of the 'foundational economy' (Froud et al., 2018, O'Connor, 2022). If they haven't been able to earn an income from their practice, historically artists have either been of independent means; supported by their family; had a wealthy patron or supported their art with other work. As Cooke states, prior to the *Arts Act, 1973*:

artists understood that making a living from their work was a matter of personal responsibility and saw financial autonomy as an intrinsic aspect of artistic freedom, which underpinned their role as exponents of outspoken social and political critique (2022, p.17)

The *Arts Act, 1973* ushered in an era in which the state adopted responsibility for the funding of the arts, paving the way for a cultural and creative industries policy framework requiring economic outcomes in exchange for state support.

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*
JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

Arts? Culture? Creative industries?

The Introduction to the *Life Worth Living* Report states that:

The arts, entertainment, cultural and live events sector in Ireland is large and recognised at home and abroad as a world-leader. It is central to Ireland's self-image and international profile. It is woven into the fabric of local, regional and national life...[it] has shown how essential music, drama, art and entertainment are to the wellbeing of this country (DTCAGSM, 2020, p.2).

The introduction lists the metrics that have become a feature of 'produced commercial entertainment' (Galloway and Dunlop, 2007, p.18) such as: 55,000 jobs in the wider arts and entertainment sector; €1.6b in audio visual and the events sector; with an additional 35,000 full time equivalent jobs (DTCAGSM, 2020, p. 2). The language moves from the vague and aspirational to the firm language of economic data. Art is but an input to the economic process. As O'Connor summarises:

Human empathy is nice, but this does not cut it with governments organised around an economic utilitarianism requiring impact metrics of jobs created, local spend and return on investment (2022, p.5).

We cannot use the terms arts, culture and creativity interchangeably, particularly not in an economic model or policy, as they have very different economic realities. The combination of technology, distribution channels, and market size make film and a substantial part of the music sector financially viable (although not for all). They qualify as industry – where an original artefact can be copied and distributed to a significant and occasionally mass market. With technology each subsequent iteration of an original becomes less expensive.

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*
JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

Once a film or recording is made the artists and crew leave, but the audience can experience those artefacts wherever and whenever they choose. Part of the value of a painting is that it has been created by an individual artist (by 'value' we mean both the market value and the reputation and status assigned to an artist by a wider system, as these values are interwoven). The original artwork is resistant to duplication and enters a relatively small market.

The same is true of live performances—the same number of artists must appear every night, consequently productivity is low, and the practice is subject to 'cost disease' (Baumol, 1966). The economic experience of people working within the arts, culture and creative industries is different depending on practice, technology, market size and distribution routes. As such, attempting to design a single policy tool across this complex and diverse landscape is problematic at best.

Turning to the arts?

While people turned to the products of the creative industries during the pandemic (books, box sets, streaming and recorded music) this is not the same as turning to the unique artefacts and live experiences that characterise the arts. In their April 2022 survey of the UK, the Audience Agency (2022) reports that only 45% of respondents engaged online during the pandemic, the majority of whom were already engaging before the pandemic. It is difficult to find equally clear findings in an Irish context, however as Lillington reports in the *Irish Times*:

The problem is, people's interest in online events has apparently declined steeply, according to people I talk to across the arts sector in Ireland and elsewhere. And despite some people's excited social media posts about attending live events again, audiences haven't really recovered (2022, np).

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

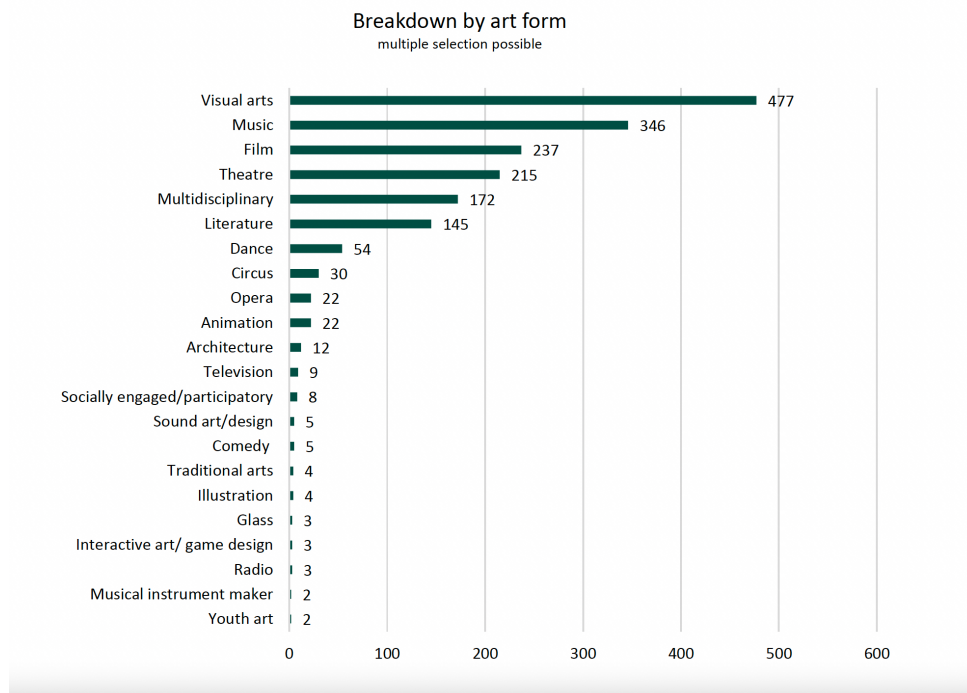
JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

The claim that the people of Ireland turned to artists for support and wellbeing during the pandemic is not necessarily matched by the available data.

The solution

150 participants from fifty artists' and arts workers' resource and representative bodies came together to discuss the BIA proposal in an online stakeholder forum in December 2021, and in a public consultation in January 2022 (Government of Ireland, 2022a, np). 1269 written submissions were received – a modest figure given the job numbers indicated in A Life Worth Living. Even if we narrow the target to the population of 8,000-10,000 artists identified in the EY report the response rate was approximately 12.5%.

Figure 1: Breakdown by art form



(DTCAGSM, 2022, p. 3)

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

The responses on the appropriate level of payment and number of hours to be worked are striking both for their lack of ambition, and because not everybody responded.

Figure 2: Views on the appropriate level of payment or number of hours per week participants should be paid

In response to the question: *Do you have any views on the appropriate level of payment or number of hours per week participants should be paid for?* The following proportions of responses were received.

Type	Count
40 hours	201
30	93
35	82
20	70

Type	Count
€10.50 per hour	127
€12.90 per hour	64

Type	Count
Minimum	404
Living	263

(DTCAGSM, 2022, p.8)

The above table indicates respondents' beliefs that artists should work forty hours per week for a minimum wage. It is not clear why fewer than half of respondents engaged with this question, or why a majority who did believed that a minimum wage was preferable to a living wage. The logic of basic income is not related to hours worked but to the basic requirements of existence within a specific society. It is more appropriate to ask what people need (housing, health care etc), as distinct from what they are prepared to do

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

(hours per week, hourly rates). The UBI debate is ongoing¹ but the basic understanding in discussions is that 'a basic income is a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement' (Basic Income Earth Network, 2022, np).

The report acknowledges that there is wariness around the question of 'productivity':

In particular there were contributions for questions on how the BIA affects each individual's senses of security, wellbeing, recognition, practice, the financial costs of a practice and also how enabled they feel to engage with their practice in a broader, community sense (DTCAGSM, 2022, p.9)

If DTCAGSM is creating a payment for a defined group of people based on what they do (duration of working week, and hourly rates of pay), but measuring the success of it around how they feel (secure, recognised, valued) then the nature of the work is irrelevant.

From consultation to policy

The report on the consultation demonstrates the complex and nonlinear relationship between consultation and policy: results are frequently ignored if they don't match the institutional ideas of the policy makers (Belfiore, 2021). When the scheme was launched in 2022 the Department was at pains to point out that BIA:

is not a Universal Basic Income...This is a sectoral intervention to support practicing artists and creative arts workers to focus on their creative practice (Government of Ireland, 2022a, np).

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

Rather than include the wider workforce in the arts and entertainment sector as recommended by the taskforce and the consultation, the scheme reverted to the *Arts Act, 2003* (Government of Ireland, 2003, np) to provide a definition of eligibility². That decision excludes a whole range of workers essential to the arts and entertainment sector such as gallerists, set builders and make-up artists.³

There are also questions around the integration of the scheme into the wider welfare framework, with the most obvious issue being that of disabled artists. The Department of Social Protection ('DSP') has stated that BIA will be assessed as self-employed income leading to an immediate loss or reduction of disability supports. Disabled artists are disadvantaged from the outset because being disabled in Ireland is estimated to cost 'between €9,482 and €11,734 per annum' (O'Dea, 2022, np). This issue has been the focus of campaigning and lobbying by disabled artists (McGranaghan, 2022).

Discussion

The argument for BIA was that it would create a stable social protection mechanism to support artists and creative arts workers during the pandemic and drive the recovery of the wider cultural and creative sector as it emerged from lockdown thereby allowing participants to take up contract work when it arose without losing social protection benefits. Instead, BIA withdrew from the cultural and creative industries framework and focused on artists with a practice consistent with *the Arts Act, 2003*. It focuses on identity (artist/non artist) rather than types of work or expressed need.

In so doing, BIA conflates different types of activity. As stated previously, from an economic perspective producing a play, writing a poem or putting together a classical music group are very different from making a film or a TV drama, forming a band, or writing a crime novel. There is also the not insignificant

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

question around the definition of art (and therefore the artist). Is art a quality term (where it can be argued, some novels are art and some are not) or is art a practice (all writers are artists)? BIA, in its current form, does not enter into this arena.

The guidelines state that the scheme 'will be open to eligible artists and creative arts sector workers' (Government of Ireland, 2022a, np) but this is not fully supported by the detailed lists of who is and is not eligible. It is difficult to see the rationale behind these exclusions, particularly as so many of them are vital to the production of artistic work. It is also difficult to ignore the hierarchy of labour that these exclusions establish. There appears to be an assumption that artists work alone, and art is created as an individual endeavour. The work of collaborative artists is almost entirely overlooked as is the interdependence between them. It is as though artists exist in a solitary bubble out of which their creativity emerges.

The pandemic's impact on the income and wellbeing of artists and arts workers was deemed to be severe, but on the other hand the population turned to the arts to sustain them through the lockdown. Unfortunately, both of these statements cannot be true. The reality is somewhat more mundane. Watching endless box sets on Netflix or revisiting the entire One Direction *oeuvre* on Spotify does not really qualify as 'turning to the arts' in the sense that policy makers mean. If the population had turned *en masse* to the arts in the sense the policy makers imply then arguably there would be no need for BIA.

Conclusion

From a policy perspective BIA is a complex emergent phenomenon, with a significant implementation gap. In its conception it is a universal income tool to stabilise income patterns of those working in the wider cultural and creative

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

industries and events sector. In its design it is a welfare state redistributive intervention that acknowledges certain kinds of work and categories of people worthy of direct state support. However, it presupposes a welfare state model of universal access and provision that does not yet exist in Ireland, and consequently its intentions are being withered way.

What is being delivered is an exclusionary model for people with established arts practices as defined by the *Arts Act, 2003*. Within that delivery model the DSP has further diluted provision by effectively excluding—or at the very least making it unattractive to—disabled artists. The response of the DSP to BIA demonstrates the importance of the universal provision of basic services (housing, health, education, childcare, etc.) to the effectiveness of a basic income model. The danger with basic income models is that a single cash payment comes to replace all other welfare supports. Indeed, the return of inflation has already reduced the effectiveness of BIA as a policy intervention.

The implementation gap has exposed the tension between the new language of cultural and creative industries, with its incongruent combination of unchallenged assumptions around wellbeing and creativity and a need for hard economic metrics, and almost nineteenth century notions of art and artists as framed by the *Arts Act, 2003*. This tension in turn reveals a lack of understanding of the complexities of life within the cultural and creative economy, and the dense networks of interdependencies that make the production of its multiple values possible – the gap between talking the talk and walking the walk. There is a considerable risk that BIA will not produce the desired results, not because of its internal flaws, but because it is a single welfare tool introduced into an otherwise hostile policy environment.

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &

ANNETTE CLANCY

John O'Brien is an independent consultant specialising in policy and strategy in the arts, culture and creative industries. He works with local governments, national agencies, arts and cultural organisations and individuals. He was a theatre director, producer and venue manager. He also lectures part time in business and arts management.

Annette Clancy is the director of the MA in cultural policy and arts management at the school of art history and cultural policy in UCD. She researches the emotional and unconscious dynamics of organisations and her work has been published in the *British Journal of Management*, *Journal of Management Education* and *Gender, Work and Organization*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Basic Income Earth Network. 2022. *Basic Income Earth Network*, [Online]. Basic Income Earth Network, Available: <https://basicincome.org/about-basic-income/> [Accessed 3 July 2022].

Baumol, W. 1966. *Performing Arts, the Economic Dilemma: a Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music, and Dance*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund.

Belfiore, E. 2021. Is it really about the evidence? Argument, persuasion, and the power of ideas in cultural policy. *Cultural Trends*, 31, 293–310.

Bray, J. 2022. More than 9,000 artists apply for universal basic income scheme. *The Irish Times*.

Cooke, P. 2022. *The Politics and Polemics of Culture in Ireland, 1800-2010*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Department of Arts Heritage Regional Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. 2017. *Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022*. Ireland: Department of Arts Heritage Regional Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Department of Tourism Culture Arts Gaeltacht Sport and Media. 2022. *Basic Income for the Arts Consultation Report*. Ireland: Department of Tourism Culture Arts Gaeltacht Sport and Media.

Department of Tourism Culture Arts Gaeltacht Sports and Media. 2020. *Life Worth Living: The Report of the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce*. Ireland: Department of Tourism Culture Arts Gaeltacht Sports and Media.

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

Ernst & Young. 2020. *Employment and Economic Impact Assessment of Covid-19 on the Arts Sector in Ireland*. Dublin: The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

Froud, J., Johal, S., Moran, M., Salento, A. & Williams, K. 2018. *Foundational Economy: The infrastructure of everyday life*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Galloway, S. & Dunlop, S. 2007. A critique of definitions of the cultural and creative industries in public policy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 13, 17–31.

Government of Ireland. *Arts Act, 2003*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Government of Ireland. 2019. Professional Artists on Jobseeker's Allowance [Online]. Ireland: Government of Ireland. Available: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b5474f-professional-artists-on-jobseekers-allowance/> [Accessed 10 June 2022].

Government of Ireland. 2020. *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*. Available: <https://assets.gov.ie/130911/fe93e24e-dfe0-40ff-9934-def2b44b7b52.pdf> [Accessed 26 July 2022].

Government of Ireland. 2022a. Basic Income for the Arts [Online]. Ireland: Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. Available: <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/09cf6-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme/> [Accessed 10 June 2022].

Government of Ireland. 2022b. Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme: Guidelines [Online]. Ireland: Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. Available: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/29337-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-guidelines-for-applicants/#who-is-not-eligible-to-apply> [Accessed 10 June 2022].

Government of Ireland. 2022c. Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme: Your questions answered [Online]. Published by: Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. Available: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6d4e1-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-faqs/> [Accessed 10 June 2022].

Kinsella, S., NicGhabhann, N. & Ryan, A. 2017. Designing policy: collaborative policy development within the context of the European capital of culture bid process. *Cultural Trends*, 26, 233–248.

Lillington, K. 2022. Culture shift needed as audiences decline for both real and virtual events. *The Irish Times* [Online]. Available:

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

<https://www.irishtimes.com/technology/2022/05/26/culture-shift-needed-as-audiences-decline-for-both-real-and-virtual-events/> [Accessed 10 June 2022].

McGranaghan, M. 2022. Maybe this video will explain why this is NOT the "best deal possible" for Disabled Artists. How is this not understood by now? Disabled Artists are wondering whether to apply or not. Non-Disabled Artists don't have to wonder #BasicIncomeArts @cathmartingreen @DeptCultureIRL. In: @MATTMCGRANAGHAN (ed.) 10.36pm ed.: Twitter.

Nagler, C. R. 2018. Performing Labour's (Non)Futures. *Performance Research*, 23, 80–89.

O'Connor, J. 2022. *Art, Culture and the Foundational Economy*. Working Paper 02.

O'Dea, B. 2022. Basic income scheme the latest knock for disabled artists. *Irish Times*.

Powell, F. 2017. *The Political Economy of the Irish Welfare State: Church, State and Capital*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Scott, C. 2014. Welfare, Regulation and Democracy. In: Healy, S. and Reynolds, B. (eds.) *Planning and Delivering a Fairer Future: Values, Democracy and Service Provision*. Social Justice Ireland.

Taylor, F. W. 1911/1997. *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Stilwell, Kansas: Dover Publications.

The Audience Agency. 2022. *Covid-19 Cultural Participation Monitor*. UK: the Audience Agency.

Van Parijs, P. 1991. Why Surfers Should be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 20, 101–131.

A policy review of
*Basic Income for the
Arts Pilot Scheme*

JOHN O'BRIEN &
ANNETTE CLANCY

Endnotes

¹ The debate has expanded to include Universal Basic Service. Indeed it can be argued that these are more valuable than simple cash transfers. See <https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/analytics/move-debate-universal-basic-income-universal-basic-services>. The question now is, with the return of inflation can a Basic Income work without universal basic services?

² Here 'arts' means 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, Part 1, Section 2.

³ A full list of professions excluded from participation in BIA is available at this link <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6d4e1-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-faqs/>