The Creative Ireland Programme in Context: Promise and Paradox

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Abstract

The Creative Ireland Programme (2017–2022; 2023–2027) was launched as the primary implementation vehicle for *Culture 2025 – A National Cultural Policy Framework to 2025*. Emerging in the wake of the 1916 centenary commemorations, the Programme has been framed as a flagship initiative for creativity, cultural participation, and well-being. Yet questions remain about whether it represents a meaningful departure in Irish cultural policy, or an extension of long-standing tendencies towards instrumentalisation and political symbolism.

Using a desk-based review of academic research, government reports, and grey literature, this article combines a periodisation framework with an interpretive exploration to provide a synopsis of cultural policy from the formation of the Free State onward. A comparative baseline is drawn from a selective and non-exhaustive overview of major events including the *Arts Act* (1951), the *Benson Report* (1979), the establishment of the Department of Arts, Culture and Gaeltacht (1993), the Celtic Tiger expansion, and the post-2008 economic crisis.

The article argues that the Creative Ireland Programme (CIP) marks a significant moment in the expanding scope of cultural policy, particularly through its cross-government structure, extensive funding, the evolution of policy language from 'arts' to 'creativity', and the recurring emphasis on broadening participation. It embodies both continuity and change, reflecting the incremental nature of policy. Drawing on Stone's concept of policy paradox, the paper shows how the Programme uses ambiguity, symbolism, and policy storytelling to create alliances among diverse stakeholders. We argue that while CIP may signal a new phase in Irish cultural policy, without a stronger legislative and research-led foundation it risks intensifying long-standing patterns of instrumentalisation.

Keywords: Creative Ireland programme; cultural policy; Culture 2025; creativity; instrumentalisation

The Creative Ireland Programme in Context: Promise and Paradox

Introduction

The history of cultural policy in Ireland has long been shaped by conflicting sentiments and political agendas. For decades, it was as concerned with consolidating the Free State and rebuilding identity as with fostering artistic pursuits (Fitzgibbon, 2015; Kelly, 1989; Hadley et al., 2020; Cooke, 2021). Responding to calls for a stronger cultural framework, the government launched consultations in 2015, promising a national policy. This produced *Culture 2025 – A National Cultural Policy Framework to 2025* (Government of Ireland/Rialtas na hÉireann [GOI]), published in 2020, but criticised for its vagueness and lack of legislative status (Hadley et al., 2020; Rush, 2019).

The Creative Ireland Programme (CIP)[1], launched in 2016 and renewed in 2023, was presented as the main mechanism for implementing *Culture 2025*. Informed by cultural democratic values and a whole-of-government approach (O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023), it sought to broaden access and harness creativity as a driver of personal and collective growth. CIP has been praised for its ambitious scale, extensive cross-departmental coordination, and significant investment in cultural projects, which have expanded participation and visibility for the arts across Ireland (Finneran and McDaid, 2021; UNESCO, 2023). Despite its prominence, CIP has not yet received sustained academic analysis (Curran and Kenny, 2025; O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023). While recent research has begun to surface a policy–practice misalignment between national policy aspirations and local delivery (Durrer and Jancovich, 2024), there remains a broader dearth of critical, sustained research on the Creative Ireland Programme as a policy framework.

This article addresses that gap by asking: "Does the Creative Ireland Programme signal a new phase in Irish cultural policy?" The article draws on a selective historical account of Irish cultural policy since the formation of the Free State in the 1920s. This overview is not intended as a comprehensive history; rather, it functions to identify recurring tensions, such as the balance between autonomy and state direction, the rise of community and arts-in-education agendas, and later the expansion of 'creativity' as a policy term. These long-standing dynamics form the backdrop for understanding more recent developments in the post-2010 period, including shifts in policy language, the growth of cross-sectoral initiatives, and renewed debates over the instrumentalisation of culture. By situating CIP within five historical phases, the article critically assesses continuities and divergences, acknowledging earlier observations that Ireland lacks a fully documented cultural policy history (Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017), while also recognising more recent contributions such as Cooke (2021) and Durrer, et al. (2026) that begin to address this gap. The overall argument is that the Creative Ireland Programme does not represent a complete break with the past but rather consolidates and amplifies trajectories already visible in earlier decades, particularly after 2010.

The paper proceeds as follows: after outlining the methodology, it maps Irish cultural policy from independence to the present. It then analyses CIP, its national positioning alongside a brief consideration of international trends and concludes by assessing its potential as a turning point in Irish cultural governance.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, policy-analysis approach based on close reading of legislation, policy documents, strategic plans, and relevant commentary on Irish cultural policy. These sources help compensate for the limited peer-reviewed cultural policy research in Ireland (Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017; Barton et al., 2023). No interviews, events, or funding data were included. A periodisation framework (Tosh, 2015; Mulcahy, 2006; Cooke, 2013, 2021) is used to organise this material; however, this framework is understood as heuristic rather than definitive. As several scholars note, Irish cultural policy has often developed in an ad-hoc and non-linear manner (Fitzgibbon, 2015; Cooke, 2021), shaped by shifting political priorities, personalities, economic contexts, and institutional constraints (Slaby, 2014; Sablayrolles, 2021). The phases outlined in this article therefore do not claim to represent fixed or universally accepted stages, but instead function

as a way to highlight patterns, breaks, and recurring tensions that help situate CIP within a longer trajectory.

Periodisation divides complex phenomena into manageable units based on continuities and turning points (Besche-Truthe, 2025; Ebke and Haack, 2024). In this study, guided by the research questions, key turning points in cultural policy were identified through a process of critical synthesis, drawing on both the literature and our own professional engagement with the field. Anchor points were chosen for their recognised historical and political significance: legislative milestones (e.g., *Arts Act* 1951), institutional reforms (e.g., Department of Arts, Culture and Gaeltacht, 1993), advisory reports (e.g., Benson Report, 1979), and economic shifts (Celtic Tiger 2008 crash). These provided baselines for assessing the Creative Ireland Programme.

While periodisation risks oversimplification (Chari and Heywood, 2009; Denning and Tworek, 2025), and researcher bias in what is included or excluded from each phase (Ebke and Haack, 2024; Denning and Tworek, 2025) it remains well suited to this study's central question: "Does CIP represent a new phase in Irish cultural policy?" Compressing 100 years into manageable phases allows exploration of continuity, divergence, and hybrid developments. The historical material that informs the early phases is necessarily selective and limited in scope and does not aim to provide a full account of cultural policy since independence. Nonetheless, this approach allows the reader to understand the historical, political, and cultural context surrounding the Programme and the valuable groundwork which set precedents for the Programme to emerge.
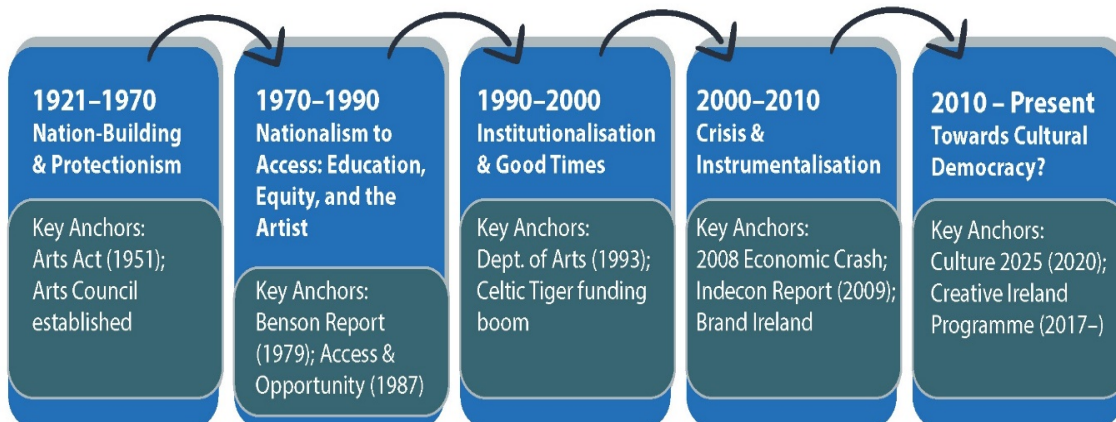
The study also draws on interpretive approaches to cultural policy (Belfiore, 2015; Gray, 2004; Hadley et al., 2020). Stone (2012, 2022) sheds light on several issues with her interpretation of ambiguity, storytelling, and symbolism in policy narrative. Methodologically, this complements the periodisation framework by ensuring that the analysis remains attentive not only to the chronological description of policy but also to the symbolic, narrative, and political dimensions of policy phases (Béland and Waddan, 2019; Curran and Kenny, 2025; Chari and Heywood, 2009).

Researcher positionality also shaped the framing. Both authors had previously been commissioned to review the *Creative Youth Plan 2017–2022* (O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023) and therefore had extensive knowledge of both the Plan and the wider Programme. This provided invaluable insights but also alerted us to the limitations of evaluating a recently established programme which includes the voices of diverse stakeholders. Although the study is exploratory, mapping significance rather than offering a definitive evaluation (Yanow, 2000; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012), we conclude with high-level recommendations that emerge inductively from the analysis.

Three guiding research questions shape the study:

1. How has Irish cultural policy evolved through distinct historical phases?

2. In what ways does the Creative Ireland Programme align with or diverge from these trajectories?

3. Does the Programme represent a new phase in Irish cultural policy?

Fig.1 Historical Phases and Anchor Points of Irish Cultural Policy

Phase One: Nation-Building and Protectionism (1921-1970s)

> Give us the future… We've had enough of your past… Give us back our country… to live in – to grow in – to love. (Michael Collins during the Treaty negotiations, 1921)

This phase is characterised by the absence of an overarching cultural policy, reliance on censorship as cultural management, and a privileging of national identity over artistic diversity (Sablayrolles, 2021; Cooke, 2021). The introduction of censorship laws reflected a narrow, protectionist stance toward culture (McQuaid, 2020) with writers and artists frequently marginalised or forced abroad (Ó Drisceoil, 2005). The early decades marked the immediate aftermath of British Rule in which "the arts" were considered vestiges of British colonial rule and were generally regarded with disdain (Sablayrolles, 2021). As Kelly (1989) observes, in a country where explicit cultural subjugation prevailed for over seven centuries (the Statutes of Kilkenny 1366 and the nineteenth century school system are examples of systemic repression of the Irish language and culture), an almost xenophobic attitude to the arts emerged. During this time, culture was mostly equated with the Irish language, folklore, and traditional forms, while the arts were regarded with suspicion as elitist, highbrow or "foreign" (Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017; Compendium on Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe [CCPT], 2024a). Such uses of culture for identity and cohesion illustrate what Stone (2022) observes as the symbolic dimension of policymaking; policies serve not only administrative or technical purposes but as vehicles for telling stories about who belongs to the community and in this instance reinforces the moral and national values of the new state (Béland and Waddan, 2019; Mulcahy, 2015). Ultimately, this led to a rather narrow and non-inclusive understanding of culture which some argue continues to hinder the development of cultural policy in Ireland today (Higgins and Donnellan, 2022).

The *Arts Act* (1951) and the creation of An Chomhairle Ealaíon/Arts Council (ACI) signalled the first institutional recognition of the arts, though funding and support were limited and heavily influenced by Catholic moral conservatism (Fitzgibbon, 2015). The purpose of the Arts Council was to redress

the neglect of the arts rebuked in Thomas Bodkin's *Report on the Arts in Ireland* (1949). Funding was primarily for artists working for educational purposes (Cooke, 2011); granting individual funding to artists was still largely unheard of (Slaby, 2014). Unsurprisingly, as a postcolonial state, throughout most of these decades, culture, nation, religion and identity remained intertwined (Mulcahy, 2015). Whilst the 1960s in Britain and other European countries such as France and Germany were marked by challenges to cultural consensus (Girard, 1997; Zahner, 2018), in

> Ireland a collective, homogeneous and binding vision of culture continued to inspire generations of cultural decision-makers and politicians (Slaby, 2014, p. 156).

The intervention of the State in arts and cultural policy during these decades (and arguably until the 1990s) has been criticised as uncoordinated and sparse, consisting for the most part of administrative changes rather than organised management and involvement (Kennedy, 1991). However, as we see later, when the government eventually began to engage more actively in the arts and cultural sector, it was met with a certain degree of hostility and concern around artistic autonomy (Cooke, 2013). Examining cultural policy from independence illustrates how foundational tensions between state control and artistic autonomy continue to influence contemporary initiatives such as CIP, something we discuss in greater detail below.

The Creative Ireland Programme was forged in the remembrance celebrations of the 1916 Easter Rising, so its connection to nation-building is there. However, whereas the government during these decades deployed culture to reinforce unity and Irish identity, CIP repurposes state-led narratives to promote participation, wellbeing, and creativity. To some extent, the Programme represents a shift from culture as a sign of national belonging to culture as a medium to promote inclusion, creativity, and social cohesion (CIP, 2021, 2023). Yet the reliance on broad, unifying cultural 'storytelling' (Stone, 2012) persists across both eras, one that CIP extends rather than abandons.

Phase Two: From Nationalism to Access: Education, Equity, and the Artist (1970–1990)

> Art within the Republic shall itself be a republic; the life of the artist should be individual, solitary and 'a perilous adventure', such that 'all that he should ask for was liberty and all that he should promise was disloyalty. (Séan O' Faoláin's Irish Times, October 13, 1965, as quoted in Cooke, 2011, p. 107)

During these decades, the fraught and contradictory attitude towards the arts eased at government level, and for the first time in 1982 both arts and culture were joined within the Arts and Culture Section in the Department of the Taoiseach (Slaby, 2014). In fact, some would argue that cultural policy during the first fifty years of independence was barely visible, mostly promotional and advisory (Cooke, 2021). The 1970s is considered by many as a turning point, with the passing of an amended and extended Arts Act and Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community. The *1973 Arts Act* represented for many a critical turning point: for the first time, local authorities were formally empowered to support the arts, signalling the start of decentralised cultural provision and a broader conception of cultural democracy (Mulcahy, 2022). This act also established a framework for partnerships between the state and local cultural initiatives; a structural precedent later reflected in

the Creative Ireland Programme's joined-up governance model and local authority collaborations (CIP, 2016a, 2022). In addition, the state began adopting a more interventionist and welfare-oriented role in supporting artists (Mulcahy, 2022; Cooke, 2011; Slaby, 2012). Ironically, in that oddly Irish way (Slaby, 2014), whilst Arts Councils across Europe were shifting support from top-down approaches to bottom-up arts policy in which access, social outcomes and decentralisation were increasingly important (Slaby, 2012), the Arts Council in Ireland appeared more focused on supporting individual artists. Tax exemptions such as the *Per Cent for Art Scheme* introduced in 1978, highlighted the artist's symbolic value to Irish society and provided much needed financial support (ACI, 2018b). However, in line with Stone's policy paradox (2022), the scheme could also be interpreted differently, in that, despite good intentions it may not have addressed deeper structural poverty reflected in data which showed that many artists were earning very little (McAndrew and McKimm, 2010). In government Ruairi Quinn from the Fine Gael and Labour coalition declared in a 1973 article for the *Irish Times* that it was time to place 'the artist at the heart of policy', the artist's role, he continued, is to 'expose the inequality, injustice and alienation within our society' (Cooke, 2011, p. 106). Despite such lofty aspirations and accolades, contradictions persisted: artistic freedom clashed with state funding and artists themselves were not necessarily in agreement, a view poetically captured in Séan O' Faoláin's statement above. The period again reveals the recurring tension between state intervention and artistic independence, a theme that persists in contemporary debates (Hadley and Gray, 2017; Barton et al., 2023; Belfiore, 2015).

Nonetheless, by the 1970s and 1980s, state policy began to broaden, 'While not all at once, the government began to take a more secularized and modernizing approach to cultural policy' (Mulcahy, 2022, p. 425). Initiatives such as the founding of Aosdána, and the appointment of Local Authority Arts Officers, all reflected a more structured and supportive cultural framework. *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education* (Benson and Ó Tuama, 1979) (commonly known as the *Benson Report*) recognised the role of arts education in schools and communities, highlighted the educational system's role in cultural equalisation and access and stressed that access to arts should not be elitist but available to all, regardless of class or geography. In a similar vein, *Access and Opportunity: A White Paper on Cultural Policy* (Nealon, 1987) advocated for expanding access to culture and the arts and proposed a broad understanding of culture including regional and community art (Moore, 1997). The latter also recognised the crucial role of the educational system in equalising access and executing cultural policy. These ideas foreshadowed key principles of the Creative Ireland Programme, particularly the emphasis on participation, rights-based access, and multi-sectoral collaboration. In Stone's (2012) terms, this marks a turn toward 'change stories' in which official reports are framed as deficit against transformative narratives of equity and access, in which policymakers use contrasting stories to argue for reform. While critics often cite weak implementation of these early reports in failing to move beyond discussion or put effective strategies in place, these shortcomings may be better viewed against the institutional and political backdrop rather than as conceptual failings (Drury, 1989; Kenny, 2017). Many of the ideas expressed in this phase were probably ahead of their time, as evidenced by the fact that it is several decades later before we see a real drive to implement many of them. This phase introduced structural precedents, local authority arts officers, cross-sector partnerships, and a broadened conception of culture, that the Creative Ireland Programme would later leverage to embed cross-departmental cultural participation into public policy.

Despite progress in some areas and a shift from an overly nationalist approach; small scale funding, a fragmented approach to policy, a deficit in teacher education (Kennedy, 1991) and an emphasis on a relatively narrow definition of the arts and culture meant widespread development in the cultural sector remained hindered during this phase. However, as Cooke (2013) remarks, all was to change and then change again as the coming decades would bring the prosperity of the Celtic Tiger followed by the cataclysmic economic downturn of the recession with both phases resounding through every aspect of the cultural sector.

Phase Three: Institutionalisation and the "Good Times" (1990–2000)

> When Irish people had money, you know, we gave things a go, didn't we? ... economists don't understand that. (Tommy Tiernan, 2012)

The third phase from 1990-2000 witnessed a dramatic shift in arts and culture administration and funding, in which a closer and more mature understanding of both developed. From the 1950s to the 1990s arts policy initiatives had been largely left to the Arts Council, and government involvement was considered generally uncoordinated and improvised (Cooke, 2013, 2021). However, this phase is renowned for the 1993 establishment of the Department of Arts, Culture, and Gaeltacht[2] under Michael D. Higgins. This marked the beginning of direct state involvement in cultural administration, something which the Arts Council feared would affect the arm's length principle previously upheld (Cooke, 2013). According to Cooke (2021) over seventy years after independence, this move signaled the potential for a broadened conception of culture to be institutionally embedded within the state's administrative framework. The *National Cultural Institutions Act* (1997) granted statutory independence to museums and libraries, while the Celtic Tiger years saw unprecedented economic growth which had significant repercussions for funding. Arts Council funding rose by 400% between 1994 and 2008, and projects like Temple Bar and regional arts offices flourished (McQuaid, 2020; Fitzgibbon, 2015). EU funding also boosted infrastructure and training nationwide.

Nonetheless, the arts and culture remained within a relatively narrow portfolio of creative activities and 'focused on the delivery of public service of culture' (Slaby, 2011, p. 83). Two reports[3] commissioned on the cultural industries and their economic potential in the second half of the 1990s reflected changing attitudes worldwide (Menger, 2013), but in Ireland the economic potential of the arts was still largely overlooked (Slaby, 2011). Here Stone's analysis highlights the paradoxical way in which policy can be defined by government in different and sometimes contradictory ways. Expanded cultural investment could simultaneously be justified through 'stories' of deficit and remedy, as advocating for access and inclusion (Fitzgibbon, 2015), as an instrument for national reputation on a global stage (Slaby, 2014; McQuaid, 2020), or alternatively as a tool for economic development and recovery (O'Hagan, 2015). The establishment of the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, combined with significant expansion of cultural infrastructure, created the bureaucratic capacity for cross-government policy mechanisms and sustained political support for closer state governance (Slaby, 2014; Cooke, 2021) which CIP now so heavily relies upon. Phase Three can also be understood as the preliminary understanding of culture as overlapping stories of access, prestige, and economy which created a precedent for the multi-story narrative upon which CIP stands.

Phase Four: Crisis and Instrumentalisation (2000–2010)

> If we winter this one out, we can summer anywhere. (Heaney, 1972, p.54)

The sense of expansion and euphoria was dramatically disrupted by the global financial crash of 2008. The amended *Arts Act of 2003*, which extended the definition of the arts to include dance, circus, and traditional forms, had already raised concerns around the autonomy of the Arts Council to guide policy (McQuaid, 2022; Fitzgibbon, 2015; Cooke, 2011). By 2008, however, the collapse of the Celtic Tiger exposed the vulnerability of cultural funding and the fragility of earlier gains. Artists were condemned for failing to anticipate 'the distant rumblings of crisis' (Cooke, 2015, p. 93) and accused of being as absorbed in consumerism as the rest of society (Cooke, 2011). The Global Irish Economic Forum of 2009 brought together stakeholders in business and the arts from the Irish diaspora to promote 'Innovation Island' and 'Brand Ireland,' explicitly positioning culture and the creative industries as vehicles for commerce (Slaby, 2011). By 2010, the renaming of the Department as the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport was viewed by many as an excessive alignment of culture with economic recovery (Cooke, 2013). In the wake of the Celtic Tiger boom, Ireland rapidly aligned its cultural policy with economic objectives: creative industries became a central part of its development strategy, reflecting what scholars describe as a 'creative turn' in which culture was increasingly valued for its economic as well as social contributions (Hadley and Carey, 2021; Byrne, 2012). In the face of global recession, politicians advocated the role of the arts to support economic wellbeing and called for a broader culture of creativity to maintain a positive image abroad (O'Hara et al., 2015). In Stone's (2012) terms, policymakers mobilised 'power stories' of helplessness in the face of global recession paired with a counter-narrative of control, where culture and creativity were framed as instruments for economic renewal and national resilience.

The Arts Council publication of the *Indecon Report* on the economic impact of the arts in 2009 advanced the economic discourse around the arts. Value for money infused cultural debates replacing to some extent discussions around the quality and diversity of artistic practice (Slaby, 2011). Cultural policy experts and academics pinpoint this as the time in which the arm's length policy of government began to shorten significantly and a recentralisation of institutions under the department through the dismantling of the 1997 *National Institutions Act* was met with disapprobation and concern (McQuaid, 2020; Fitzgibbon, 2015). In record time Ireland had caught up with Britain and its European neighbours and embraced the 'creative turn' in which the instrumentalisation of creative practice was gaining acceptability and an explicit focus on the economic value of culture and the arts was being widely and progressively consented (Hazelkorn, 2001). Following the 2008 crash, the arts were increasingly reframed as contributors to economic recovery and global branding. This reorientation of policy goals in the *polis* illustrates how policymakers continually redefine goals depending on context and political needs (Stone, 2022).

This turn would pave the way for a more explicit instrumentalisation of the arts in the coming decades. In comparison to Britain, discordant voices were few and far between (Slaby, 2014). Garry Hynes, founder of the Druid Theatre Company, who talked about the 'growing commodification of the arts' and the 'insidious way' artists had to justify themselves, and poet Alice Lyons who remarked that 'obsession with economics could lead to the ravaging of culture' (Slaby, 2014, p. 164) were amongst the few who spoke against the direction policy had taken in this era.

The 'creative turn' and increased instrumentalisation of culture during the 2000s shape the discursive conditions in which the Creative Ireland Programme emerges. The alignment of culture with economic, reputational and social outcomes becomes increasingly embedded during this decade, enabling CIP's broad framing of creativity as a driver of wellbeing, innovation, education and climate action. The Programme amplifies these tendencies, extending instrumental rationales across multiple policy domains through a whole-of-government structure (CIP, 2023). Later, we discuss the real risk of excessive instrumentalisation in cultural policy and suggest how this could be assuaged.

On another level, building on earlier reports (Bodkin, 1949; Richards, 1976; Benson, 1979) which had highlighted the need for stronger links between the arts and education, the 2006 *Artist–Teacher Guidelines* and *Points of Alignment* (2008) framework were published. These reports recognised the right of every child to access quality cultural and creative experiences as part of their education. Key recommendations within the latter reiterated recommendations for Local Authority partnerships and joined-up action between government departments and the Arts Council which ultimately laid important groundwork for cross-sectoral partnerships and multi departmental collaboration. During this period, the Arts Council published another important paper, *Partnership for the Arts in Practice 2006-10* (ACI, 2006) which supported a variety of schemes such as Writers-in-Schools, Artists-in-Schools and School Exhibitions. These initiatives foreshadowed the integrated, joined-up approach central to the Creative Ireland Programme, highlighting the importance of embedding arts and creativity into both formal and informal education, as well as wider civic participation. At the same time, a policy language shift was underway: distinctions between 'arts' and 'creativity' were increasingly drawn, with creativity framed as central to both personal wellbeing and enterprise (ACI, 2008). The Creative Ireland Programme extends this shift and, as we discuss below, one of the main characteristics that distinguishes it from other arts bodies is its use of "creativity" rather than "the arts" as its central organising concept. The reliance on broader and more accessible terms such as creativity and innovation reflect Stone's concept of ambiguity in policy which draws in a larger and more diverse audience through all-encompassing terms. The period from 1990 to 2010 thus represents a double movement: institutionalisation through the formation of a government department and structural expansion during the 'good times', followed by contraction, realignment, and the instrumentalisation of culture during the crisis years.

Phase Five: Towards Cultural Democracy? (2010–Present)

> Poetry begins where language starts: in the shadows and accidents of one person's life. (Boland, 2012, p. xii)

This period marks several major developments in the arts and cultural sector which foreshadowed the emergence of the Culture 2025 - National Cultural Policy Framework to 2025 (GOI, 2020) and the introduction of the first Creative Ireland Programme (2017-2022). The publication of the Arts in Education Charter (2013), launched by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) promoting the arts among children and young people was amongst the most important. The modus operandi, built on previous dynamics, but more explicitly shifted to a less segregated, joined up and collaborative approach across Government Departments, Education Agencies, Local Authorities and Arts Organisations. In the

spirit of previous reports4, the Charter (DES and DAHG, 2013) articulated the essential role the arts play in education and young people's lives, enabling students to thrive both within and outside school. It stressed the importance of teacher-artist partnerships, professional development, and collaborative projects. However, lack of real investment continued to be an issue (Dowling Long, 2015; Benson, 2019) and as Kenny (2017) noted although important progress was being made

> arts in education work is largely fragmented, short-term, under-resourced, sporadic, poorly funded and lacking in rigorous research documentation (p. 254).

Renewed calls for the development of an overarching culture policy were articulated throughout this phase (Fitzgibbon, 2015; Cooke, 2021). In 2013 the National Campaign for the Arts presented their research strategy which affirmed the importance of building an evidence base for policy making. In 2014, the Arts Council published Inspiring Prospects, in which they identified policy deficits on a sectoral level, and between the sector and wider civil society. However, failure to deliver on the cultural policy promise made by the coalition government in 2015 exasperated the

> growing impatience with the stop/go trend of cultural history, the flurry of announcements followed almost inevitably by silence and disappointment, the cycle of positive initiatives which are then unrolled or dismantled (Fitzgibbon, 2015, p. 11).

Unsurprisingly then, the announcement in 2015 by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht of a major cultural budget[5] for the commemoration of the 1916 Rising and the subsequent Creative Ireland Programme (CIP, 2016a), were welcomed with a certain degree of irony and scepticism (Hadley et al., 2020; Higgins and Donnellan, 2022; Rush, 2019). Criticisms of the centenary celebrations centred on 'the state led narrative' (Murphy, 2018, p. 146) which was considered limiting and constrictive within the arts and culture sector, with many criticising it as a temporary funding option without any real implications for artists or culture in Ireland. Many in the arts and cultural sector felt it once again reflected the uneven and at times outright neglect which had plagued funding of the arts since the founding of the state (Fitzgibbon, 2014).

Despite criticism, the establishment of a new agency within the Department forged ahead, and the Creative Ireland Programme was launched in December 2016. While the Programme clearly builds on earlier phases and appears to offer tangible responses to the attitudinal, structural, and resourcing challenges identified by John Coolahan in his concluding essay for the *Points of Alignment* report (ACI, 2008), the question remains whether CIP represents continuity, rupture, or some form of hybrid entity. Curiously, the answer may lie in Stone's (2022) 'policy paradox': policy programmes rarely resolve contradictions but instead accommodate them by allowing multiple interpretations to coexist simultaneously in ways that sustain political support and alliances. In the following sections we unpack this conundrum in the context of the Programme and endeavour to determine the extent to which it aligns with previous policy or signals a meaningful departure from the phases preceding it.

The Creative Ireland Programme

> We are an *all-of-government culture* and *wellbeing* programme and it is our ambition to inspire and transform people, places and communities through **creativity**. We are committed to the vision *that every person* in Ireland should have the opportunity to realise their *full creative potential*. [emphasis added] (CIP, 2025)

Established in 2017 in the wake of the 1916 centenary commemorations, the Creative Ireland Programme (CIP, 2016a) was framed as the principal vehicle for implementing *Culture 2025 – A National Cultural Policy Framework* to *2025* with a commitment that the Arts in Education Charter (DES and DAHG, 2013) would be 'embraced, fast-tracked and resourced' (p. 5). This government-wide ambition that every citizen can realise their creative potential (Creative Ireland, 2017, 2024) views creativity broadly, extending beyond the arts to areas like languages, sciences, and entrepreneurship, and highlighting imagination, collaboration, and risk-taking.[6] What the extraordinary breadth of this definition means for culture is discussed below.

The Programme has evolved[7] and is now structured around five pillars:

1. Creative Youth

2. Creative Communities

3. Creative Industries

4. Creative Health and Wellbeing

5. Creative Climate Action

A distinctive feature of the Creative Ireland Programme is its capacity to formalise collaboration across departments through a "soft" governance model, avoiding the statutory complexities that have historically hindered cross-departmental cultural policy (CCPT, 2024a). Delivery requires extensive inter and cross-departmental collaboration. While housed in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, at least eight other departments have participated.[8] This whole-of-government design represents Ireland's most ambitious attempt to embed creativity across public life (Hadley et al., 2020; O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023), while also raising questions about coherence and artistic autonomy (Hadley et al., 2020; Barton et. al., 2023). While no single figure is published for the overall Creative Ireland Programme, available data point to substantial investment.[9] The figures demonstrate that the Programme represents a major financial commitment across multiple departments and sectors looking to address previous concerns about lack of coordination and poor funding (Kenny, 2017; Cooke, 2013; ACI, 2008). The ability to bridge administrative and departmental boundaries without structural reform also offers a promising and underexplored angle for future research.

National Policy Alignment: Continuities and Divergences

Nationally, and perhaps in line with that 'odd Irish idiosyncrasy' (Slaby, 2014, p. 160), the Creative Ireland Programme reflects both continuity and change. On the one hand, it continues Ireland's historical reliance on symbolic narratives alongside instrumental framings of culture (Cooke, 2021; Sablayrolles, 2021). On the other hand, its scope is unprecedented, creativity is now linked explicitly

to health, education, climate action, and enterprise (CIP, 2022, 2023, 2024; Hadley et al., 2020). Moreover, its powerful emphasis on broadening participation and its distinctive all-of-government approach set it apart from what has come before.

Building on the earlier discussion of Stone's (2012) policy paradox, this duality illustrates how policies often employ broad, ambiguous goals to appeal to multiple stakeholders and enable strategic alliances. The breadth of definition and ambition across CIP may sustain broad coalitions and increase visibility, but as we will explore later, risk diluting coherence and instrumentalising culture (Barton et. al., 2023; Hadley et al., 2020; Hadley and Gray, 2017). We now proceed to critically examine some of the principal divergences and continuities with earlier approaches.

The Shift from Arts to Creativity

One of CIP's most striking features is the discursive move from 'arts' to 'creativity'. Earlier initiatives had broadened definitions, but CIP advances this further stating that focusing on creativity 'generates a language that eases access to the arts for many who might otherwise think the arts are "not for them"' (CIP, 2016b, p. 6). It further acknowledges that,

> while creativity is commonly associated with the arts, it is important to identify that creativity in the context of the Creative Ireland Programme should be considered more widely (CIP, 2021, p. 4).

This discursive shift enables new alliances but also introduces opacity. In line with Stone's (2022) argument, by replacing the language of "arts" with "creativity", policy goals are framed ambiguously and can unite stakeholders with divergent interests. While such alignments give culture visibility and possibly access to additional funding, critics caution it risks reducing the arts to mere policy instruments (Belfiore, 2015; Hadley and Gray, 2017). Similarly, Barton et al. (2023) in a recent critique of the *Basic Income for Artists* scheme, highlight the contradictions and rhetoric behind current arts policy in Ireland in relation to the discourse around creativity and particularly in defining artists' role in society. Vagueness is both a strength, facilitating wide appeal, and a weakness, risking a lack of clarity or the descent into policy 'buzzwords' (Hadley et al., 2020, p. 11).

To a certain extent, such broad definitions and ambitions also make it difficult to determine whether CIP is a continuation of cultural policy traditions or a redefinition. Moreover, Stone's (2012) concept of 'stories of power' (p. 165) provides an interesting lens through which to view the government's role in ensuring that each citizen realises their full creative potential. In Stone's (2022) terms, CIP uses a story of helplessness and control in which citizens are portrayed as having untapped potential but requiring state intervention to unlock it. This framing allows government to assume responsibility and gain recognition for enabling creativity across the population. Ironically it also risks reproducing symbolic hierarchies: some groups are implicitly positioned as already creative and culturally enriched, while others are cast as deficient and in need of remediation. Curran and Kenny (2025) show how this dynamic plays out in one of CIP's flagship initiatives, Creative Schools. Drawing on Stone (2012), they claim, the programme's narrative, positions 'outside' artists as 'champions' of arts education, while teachers appear disempowered. Moreover, it has exposed tensions around teacher

positioning, with calls for greater recognition of teachers as creative practitioners in their own right (Curran and Kenny, 2025; Fahy and Kenny, 2022).

The Programme's shift in language from "arts" to "creativity" mirrors a broader international trend. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), through *The Creative Society of the 21st Century* (2000) and more recently the *PISA 2022 Results (Volume III): Creative Minds, Creative Schools* (OECD, 2024), has advanced creativity as a transferable skill essential for innovation and future labour markets. United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) *Re|Shaping Cultural Policies* reports (2022) likewise position creativity as a cross-sectoral driver of development, extending beyond traditional artistic domains. In this sense, the Creative Ireland Programme aligns with global trends but diverges from earlier Irish policies, by extending the definition of the arts significantly, mainstreaming creativity across sectors and departments and demonstrating a marked increase in the government's financial commitment. The Creative Ireland Programme illustrates how creativity has been mobilised as a unifying policy tool. Yet as noted earlier, bridging alliances by employing broad scoping concepts may often be at the expense of the intrinsic value of the arts and moreover of little interest to the artists themselves (Barton et. al., 2023; Gray, 2007).

Instrumentalisation of Culture and Policy Attachment

The instrumental use of culture has deep roots in Ireland: for identity (1920s–50s), equity (1970s–80s), prestige (1990s–2000s), and economic recovery (post-2008). The Creative Ireland Programme continues this tradition but pushes it further and places Ireland within evolving European and international policy landscapes (Karlsson Blom and Kristiansen, 2015; Menger, 2013). CIP's publications demonstrate how creativity is strategically deployed for numerous objectives: economic purposes, to foster social cohesion, build children's confidence, improve health and wellbeing, tackle climate change, and to promote intercultural dialogue amongst others (O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023; CIP, 2016a; 2022; CIP, 2024). Cultural policy experts and artists alike argue that embracing a broader concept of creative practice has enabled the instrumentalisation of culture to an unprecedented degree (Gray, 2004, 2007; Hadley and Gray, 2017; Belfiore, 2015). Global organisations such as the OECD and UNESCO, have long promoted creativity as aligned with economic and workforce needs (Curran and Kenny, 2025). For example, the OECD's *Creativity, Innovation and Job Creation* (1997) reframed creativity as a driver of labour market and economic policy, while *The Creative Society of the 21st Century* (2000) extended this idea by situating creativity at the heart of broader societal and developmental change. Similarly, the EU's *New European Agenda for Culture* (2018) encourages culture to deliver on social cohesion, innovation, and sustainability. The trend is also particularly evident in education, where creativity has increasingly been framed as a neoliberal 'magic fix' for perceived declines in school standards (Curran and Kenny, 2025, p. 6). More recently, the Programme for Institutional Student Assessment (PISA) has institutionalised the assessment of creative thinking (OECD, 2024).

Rather than being valued as an intrinsic cultural or artistic pursuit, creativity has been redefined within neoliberal discourse as a set of transferable skills designed to serve economic and labour market needs (Curran and Kenny, 2025). However, as Hadley and Gray (2017) observe, cultural policy debates require greater nuance, particularly in relation to instrumentalisation and

hyperinstrumentalism. The former signals cultural policy pursued for non-cultural objectives, such as wellbeing or international reputation, but still derives meaning from its cultural content. Hyperinstrumentalism, on the other hand, arises when culture itself becomes irrelevant, valued only for its capacity to deliver external outcomes (Hadley and Gray, 2017). The Creative Ireland Programme illustrates this tension. While it advances creativity for international reputation, health, education, industry, and integration, echoing OECD (2024), World Health Organisation (Fancourt and Finn, 2019, WHO, 2023) and UNESCO (2022), its very strategy of 'policy attachment' (Gray, 2004) risks hollowing out cultural policy. As *The Future of the Creative Ireland Programme* (CIP, 2022) notes, it operates across Government, collaborating with several Departments, local authorities, the creative sector, and community organisations to support creativity as central to wellbeing, climate action, education and economic sustainability. The scope of ambition, combined with growing reliance on measurable outputs, participation rates, return on investment, cross-departmental partnerships, and social media metrics (CIP, 2022, 2024; Murphy and Eivers, 2023), suggests a drift towards hyperinstrumentalism. Hadley and Gray (2017, p. 96) warn that this trajectory risks a 'politics of extinction' where cultural policy becomes redundant if reduced to serving wider policy agendas. By contrast, the Arts Council's flagship strategy *Making Great Art Work* (2016–2025) reflects a more cautious recalibration. While affirming the centrality of the artist

> The work of artists illuminates the present, nourishes our understandings of
> the past, and inspires our visions of the future (ACI, 2018a, p. 18),

it firmly acknowledges the societal and economic value of the arts. These examples highlight the sector's balancing act, while CIP embraces explicit or even hyper instrumentalisation through cross-departmental policy attachment, the Arts Council adapts its discourse to instrumental framings, arguably to avoid marginalisation and provide a case for government funding (O'Hagan, 2015). It could be argued that this situation risks creating a two-tiered cultural landscape, one where intrinsic artistic value is safeguarded primarily by the Arts Council, and another where creativity, through the Creative Ireland Programme, functions as an all-purpose instrument of government policy (Belfiore, 2015; Hadley and Gray, 2017).

Ironically, despite the emphasis on the social importance of the arts, recognition does not always extend to artists themselves. As Barton et al. (2023) note, artists are increasingly expected to contribute usefully to society through their labour rather than produce art for art's sake. Such processes advance broader political agendas but do not necessarily serve artists' needs. Questions of artistic autonomy remain pressing and have long been voiced by artists and cultural policy scholars (Cooke, 2011; Gray, 2004; Lee, 2021; Belfiore, 2015).

In summary, CIP reflects Ireland's long-standing instrumental use of culture. Like earlier frameworks, it lacks strong legislative support, leaving it susceptible to Ireland's historic stop–go cycle (Fitzgibbon, 2015; Rush, 2019; Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017). Its divergence lies in its unprecedented scope, mobilising creativity across multiple departments and linking it to European and global agendas in health, wellbeing, and climate change (Laitinen et al., 2020, OECD, 2024; EU, 2018). While this positions the Programme firmly within international trends (Cooke, 2013, 2021; O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023), it risks hyper-instrumentalism (Hadley and Gray, 2017; Gray, 2007) and, without the statutory underpinning seen in Nordic models such as Finland's Act on Cultural Activities in Local

Government (2019) or Sweden's constitutional provisions (Karlsson and Kristiansen, 2015), it remains vulnerable to political will and changing policy priorities.

Broadening Participation

At the heart of the Creative Ireland Programme lies a cultural democratic ethos, extending opportunities for participation beyond the traditional arts to encompass a broader, more inclusive understanding of creativity (CIP, 2017, 2024). CIP advances this ethos by embedding creativity across schools (*Creative Youth*), communities (*Creative Communities*), industry (Creative Industries) and national celebrations (*Cruinniú na nÓg*) (Creative Ireland, 2023, 2024). In this sense, CIP represents a clear continuity with earlier policy commitments to access and inclusion, yet, once again, the scale and cross-sectoral scope of the Programme mark a significant divergence.

This focus on cultural democracy and widening participation is not unique to Ireland but resonates with broader international policy developments. Australia's *Indigenous Languages and Arts* program (Australian Government, 2025) aim to sustain and broaden participation in cultural life, particularly among First Nations communities. Within Europe, the EU's *Culture Moves Europe* (European Commission, 2025) scheme likewise extends opportunities for mobility, collaboration, and access across borders. Northern Ireland's Ambitions for the Arts policy is committed to harnessing culture, arts and leisure to promote equality and tackle poverty and social exclusion (ACNI, 2014). The Arts Council England's *Let's Create: Strategy* 2020-2030 (ACE, 2020) equally emphasises cultural democracy, creativity for all, and links to health and education.

In addition, CIP explicitly advances a rights-based approach through its Creative Youth pillar (O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023), which upholds every child's entitlement to participate in cultural and creative life as part of their broader development. By embedding creativity within schools and youth settings, the Programme situates participation not merely as an optional activity but as a right of citizenship and childhood in line with international frameworks. CIP aligns with UNESCO's *2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, which recognises cultural participation as a fundamental right, and with the United Nation's Universal *Declaration of Human Rights* (1948, Art. 27).

Nevertheless, structural barriers are not necessarily reduced by policy. As Stone (2022) observes, participation can operate as both a practical goal and a political symbol. On the one hand, CIP funds inclusive initiatives such as Creative Schools, Creative Clusters and the Nurture Fund. On the other hand, 'participation' could well mask tensions over resources, inequalities, and delivery. As Hadley et al. (2020) observe:

> The prerequisite of a socially just and democratic cultural policy, encompassing all that is in 'our culture', is that it will function not as an instrument for, nor as a minor corrective to, economic policies but rather as a challenge to that which degrades our civic and social sphere (p. 12).

Similarly, Stone (2022) highlights how policy narratives are driven by stories as much as by evidence, framing complex issues in easy to understand and persuasive terms. CIP (2017, 2022, 2024)

exemplifies this by promoting stories of change (government improving access to creativity to transform societal health and wellbeing), power, (government providing the resources to stimulate citizens' creative potential), and numbers (participation data, digital metrics, investment figures) to justify interventions and funding. While such narratives signal ambition and intent, once again they risk obscuring structural and systemic inequalities in participation (O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023; Belfiore, 2018). The persistence of inequalities in participation by gender, geography, education, and age demonstrates the gap between rights-based aspirations and lived realities (O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023; Smyth, 2016, 2020).

Against this backdrop, CIP reflects continuity with earlier policy commitments but at a greater scale and scope. Moreover, it situates cultural participation within a global rights discourse. At the same time, while rights-based rhetoric strengthens the symbolic legitimacy of CIP's policy, its translation into real outcomes remains contingent on addressing structurally embedded inequalities (Smyth, 2016, 2020; Coughlan et al., 2014), a task which requires much more than 'storytelling'.

Conclusion

> If poetry and the arts do anything, they can fortify your inner life, your inwardness. (Seamus Heaney, as cited in *The Poetry Foundation*, n.d.)

This paper addressed three questions, the first asked how Irish cultural policy has evolved through distinct phases. The historical analysis demonstrated that Irish cultural policy has moved through diverse but overlapping phases: from protectionism and identity-building (1920s–70s), access and education (1970s–90s), institutionalisation, prestige enhancement and a funding boom (1990s–2000s), crisis-driven instrumentalisation (2008–2013), to recent efforts toward cultural democracy (2010–present). The analysis shows how these dynamics intensify in the post-2010 period and situates the Creative Ireland Programme as both a continuation of, and departure from, earlier approaches. Across these phases, policy has repeatedly relied on symbolic framings and instrumental motivations (Slaby, 2012, 2014; Cooke, 2021), whilst lacking a consistent legislative and research foundation (Fitzgibbon, 2015; McQuaid, 2022; Barton, 2022; Barton et al., 2023). This has resulted in a stop-go policy cycle (Fitzgibbon, 2015) shaped by political priorities and shifts.

Secondly, we asked how the Creative Ireland Programme aligns with or diverges from these phases. We argue that CIP is best understood as a hybrid initiative, a culmination of everything that has gone before whilst laying new precedents for the future. It reflects long-standing tendencies to position culture as central to Irish identity and to widen public access, while also embedding the arts within education. At the same time, it reinforces the continuing pattern of the instrumental use of cultural policy which often risks sidelining intrinsic cultural value (Barton et al., 2023; Belfiore, 2015; Eckersley, 2008). Where it diverges is in its ambition, scale, and international orientation: its substitution of 'arts' with 'creativity', its whole-of-government design, and its focus on wellbeing, climate, and social cohesion mark significant departures from earlier models. This hybridity also speaks to what Stone terms the *policy paradox*: broad and ambiguous framings that allow competing narratives to coexist. In this sense, CIP operates simultaneously as continuity and departure, telling different stories to different audiences, but this flexibility could, as earlier discussed, undermine coherence.

Thirdly we asked whether CIP constitutes a new phase in Irish cultural policy. Cultural policy in Ireland has developed in an irregular and contested manner (Cooke, 2021; Slaby, 2014; Pine, 1983). Several scholars argue that a recognisable national policy framework only began to emerge in the 1970s (Cooke, 2021), while others point to the later establishment in 1993 of the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht as key (CCPTa, 2024). Some contend that Ireland still awaits a 'strong statement on cultural policy' (Hadley et al., 2020, p. 154). However, we argue, that what might be interpreted as historical reluctance to address cultural policy in a fundamental way (Kelly, 1987, as cited in Hadley et al., 2020) must be read against the political and economic fallout of post-colonialism, where identity formation has been inseparable from cultural policy development (Mulcahy, 2015).

Despite this uneven trajectory (Fitzgibbon, 2015), evolution has occurred. Insularity and homogeneity have gradually given way to a more outward-looking approach. CIP embodies this change and significantly advances previous ambitions. It marks a clear departure from earlier policies using creativity to address tomorrow's social, environmental, and democratic needs and is boldly aspirational in scope. While its origins in the 1916 commemorations highlight continuity in culture's role in nation-building, its emphasis on creativity, embedded in a cross-departmental design as fundamental to climate action, health, and wellbeing, suggests a future-oriented turn toward cultural democracy (Hadley et al., 2020). Yet, as noted earlier, ambiguity and storytelling can yield contradictory outcomes (Stone, 2022). On the one hand, they may make programmes like CIP more resilient to shifting political will; on the other, they risk becoming so far-reaching that they lack substance, leaving the Programme vulnerable to over-instrumentalisation and the dilution of intrinsic cultural value.

Recommendations

Going forward, if CIP is to realise its potential, several priorities are clear. Establishing a legislative framework would provide statutory protections for cultural policy, helping to ensure continuity beyond electoral cycles, as seen in France and the Nordic countries (Vestheim, 2019; CCPT, 2024b). Equally important is the need to balance instrumental goals with recognition of the intrinsic value of the arts. Heaney's reminder that poetry fortifies the inner life captures why culture matters not only for economic development, education, climate awareness or wellbeing, but also for the cultivation of inwardness and autonomy. This means safeguarding space for artistic independence even as culture is mobilised in service of wider political agendas.

Sustained investment in independent, longitudinal research is also essential, particularly to evaluate participation, equity, and wellbeing. Such research would support a more robust evidence base and prevent cultural policy from being steered by short-term political priorities. Central to this is the position of artists themselves: they must not be reduced to deliverers of policy objectives but recognised and supported as creative agents in their own right. Finally, while Ireland should continue to align with international cultural agendas, these must be critically adapted to the Irish context to avoid over-reliance on imported models.

The Creative Ireland Programme therefore stands as both promise and paradox, promising in its scale and ambition, yet paradoxical in its breadth and ambiguity, which risk deepening the instrumentalisation of culture within policy. As Ireland's most ambitious cultural policy initiative to

date, CIP stretches the definition of culture, aligns with global trends, and aspires to embed creativity across society and government. Its success will depend on its ability to transform all-of-government ambition into sustained structural change, balancing the outward reach of cultural democracy with the inward fortification of life that Heaney so powerfully evoked.

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Endnotes

[1] In this paper, we use the abbreviation CIP interchangeably with the full name, the Creative Ireland Programme, to ensure clarity while maintaining the flow and readability of the text.

[2] See Uí Mhaoldúin (2007) or Slaby (2014) for a detailed discussion on departmental name changes.

[3] *Employment and Economic Significance of the Cultural Industries in Ireland* (1994); *Access All Areas – Irish Music an International Industry* (1997).

[4] The Benson Report (Benson and Tuama, 1979) and *Points of Alignment* (ACE, 2008) are two such examples.

[5] In 2014 it was announced that the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht secured 'an additional €4 million in funding' (16 October 2014: Announcement of Funding Allocation for Centenary Projects in Budget

2015) for the Decade of Centenaries events leading up to 2016. This was in addition to the €22 million already allocated to the capital plan for the commemorative decade (Murphy, 2018, p. 147).

[6] 'Creativity is the use of imaginative capabilities to transform thinking and produce original and innovative ideas and solutions. It involves collaboration, investigation, challenging assumptions and taking risks and there are opportunities for creativity to be expressed in not only music, drama and visual art but also in writing and learning languages, in mathematics and sciences and in designing, making and entrepreneurial activities'. (CIP, 2021, p. 4)

[7] Initially a 5-year Programme from 2017-2022, the Creative Ireland Programme was based on 5 pillars:

1. Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child

2. Enabling Creativity in Every Community

3. Investing in our Creative and Cultural Infrastructure

4. Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Media Production

5. Unifying our Global Reputation.

[8] Other Departments which are involved include: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; the Department of Rural and Community Development; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; Department of Communications; Department of Climate Action and Environment; Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation; and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

[9] For example, the Creative Youth pillar alone has received over €25 million in direct interdepartmental funding to date, excluding Cruinniú na nÓg and Music Generation (O'Sullivan and O'Keeffe, 2023). In 2024 and 2025, the Programme's annual allocation stood at €10.7 million, with an additional €6 million provided under the Shared Island Initiative (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, 2024). Beyond these running costs, significant long-term commitments are embedded in its pillars: €1.2 billion for cultural infrastructure under Project Ireland 2040 and €200 million for Screen Ireland over the next decade (CIP, 2023).