



Age & Opportunity and *Culture 2025*

This document sets out Age & Opportunity's response to the 2015 Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht's proposal for a national cultural policy for Ireland, **Culture 2025**.

The Role of Age & Opportunity

Age & Opportunity is a national organisation whose mission is to inspire and empower older people to live healthy and fulfilling lives and to influence policy to ensure the active participation of older people in ways that benefit our communities and wider society. In order to achieve this mission, Age & Opportunity has three strategic aims: to ensure *meaningful engagement* for all older people in socio-cultural life in Ireland; to *influence policy and practice* at local and international levels; and to ensure *organisational effectiveness*.

The **Bealtaine festival** of creativity for older people is at the centre of Age & Opportunity's arts and culture programme and central to its drive to create high-quality, meaningful engagement in the arts for older people in Ireland. It engages over 120,000 people each year.

Ireland is applauded internationally as an innovator in the creative ageing sector. At home, it has been cited in **Utilising the Arts to Combat Disadvantage** from the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht.

Culture 2025

Age & Opportunity welcomes the Department's aim for the policy to provide a strong, fully inclusive, cultural base in society, which is engaging with people across the lifespan and across social and economic circumstances. This chimes with National Goal 1 of the **National Positive Ageing Strategy**. We are also heartened by the recognition that culture creates tangible societal value, promotes wellbeing, and provides a positive direct and indirect economic impact, as these factors were independently evaluated by NUI Galway in their study of the Bealtaine festival¹.

¹ O'Shea, E. & Ní Léime, Á (2008) The Bealtaine Festival: An Evaluation. Galway, ICSG.

Cultural Rights

In light of the centrality of arts and cultural activity to our remit, Age & Opportunity welcomes the proposal for a national cultural policy and the opportunity to influence that policy in a way that reflects the interests and needs of older people as identified on Page 15 (**Young and old and people with disabilities**). As such, and taking into account Age & Opportunity's duty to inspire and empower, a proposal for a national cultural policy should be based on the key principles of cultural rights, that is the enshrining of the principles of equality, universality and diversity into cultural provision.

As the Department is aware, cultural rights include the adequate resourcing of cultural activity and infrastructures, the right to cultural representation and participation, the protection of cultural diversity, the promotion of sustainable development, as well as broader equality legislation (in addition to other areas such as religious protection, languages etc). Cultural rights, therefore, are particularly relevant to an organisation that strives to ensure meaningful engagement in the arts for older people. Although these rights are a core part of international law and practice², Ireland has yet to address these rights in the Irish Constitution. As this has formed part of the recommendations of 2012's Constitutional Convention, there is certainly a clear mandate to explore this.

As a consequence, it is recommended that the principles of cultural rights can and should be applied as a *lens* to assess the equality of arts and cultural provision in Ireland; that older people have the same right as any other group in society to participate, engage, access, attend and be *represented* by arts and cultural events.

Specific Recommendations

More specifically, Age & Opportunity wishes to reflect the needs of older cultural practitioners (e.g. artists, craftspeople), older participants and older audiences, by emphasising the following key points for inclusion in a national cultural policy:

There is a need to encourage arts agencies and institutions to:

- promote and support the work of older artists in Ireland (this responds directly to the theme of **Supporting artists and creative workers**, p.11)
- programme arts activities of interest to older audiences (**Young and old and people with disabilities**, p. 15)

² Cultural Rights arose through UNESCO's 2001 and 2005 Conventions on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression

- ensure and support the greater participation and representation of older people in the arts and to challenge negative and disempowering stereotyping (**Young and old and people with disabilities**, p. 15)³
- promote and acknowledge the contribution made by older people to cultural activity, including formal and informal volunteering (**Young and old and people with disabilities**, p. 15)
- ensure that there are arts programmes for disadvantaged older people (**Social integration**, p. 14)⁴
- ensure that there are intercultural arts programmes for older people (**A greater cultural diversity**, p. 14)
- ensure there are opportunities for intergenerational exchanges in cultural programmes (**Young and old and people with disabilities**, p. 15)⁵
- ensure that the impact of ageing on art practice and the need for diverse programming in the arts remains a live issue (this touches everything from **Funding and Resources** through to **North / South co-operation**)

Research work is needed in the following areas:

- to actively build on and champion existing research linking arts activity with older people to greater personal wellbeing and cognitive functioning in older age as well as to community gains
- to consider the impacts of ageing on art practice
- to consider how the arts contribute to understandings of difficult subjects of greater relevance to older people (e.g. illness, bereavement, death, fear...)
- to research the needs and interests of older people in relation to arts programming

As a postscript, it would be recommended that the use of the word "access" on Page 15, in reference to "promoting access to culture for older and retired people" be clarified as meaning participation and representation, as well as audience engagement.

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³ This might, for example, include requiring all publicly funded arts organisations to ensure that their programming specifically includes older people, either as audience, participants or deliverers of the cultural event.

⁴ See, for example, Age & Opportunity's programme Azure, which explores how people with dementia-related conditions such as Alzheimer's, and the people who care for them, can have a deeper involvement in cultural institutions and can participate in cultural activities. Azure is a partnership between Age & Opportunity, [The Alzheimer Society of Ireland](#), the [Irish Museum of Modern Art](#) and the [Butler Gallery Kilkenny](#).

⁵ Encourage all publicly funded venues to organize at least one intergenerational project every year.