

# Creative Youth

A Systematic Review of Outcomes and Trends  
in Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan –  
Final Report

## Insights and Implications



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On behalf of the Creative Youth Expert Advisory Group

The Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022

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We would like to state that any views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of any of the funders.

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## Acronyms

ACE	Arts Council England
ACF	Finnish Arts Council
CA	Creative Associate
CAHHM	Canadian Alliance for Healthy Hearts and Minds
CIP	The Creative Ireland Programme
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CY	The Creative Youth Plan
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DCU	Dublin City University
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DIEAC	Design, Implement, Evaluate Arts in Context
DIEACC	Design, Implement, Evaluate Arts in Community Contexts
DE	Department of Education
DTCAGSM	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
EAG	Expert Advisory Group
EDI	Equality Diversity and Inclusion
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ESCI	Educational Support Centres
ETB	Education Training Boards
GUI	Growing Up in Ireland
HDA	Health Development Agency
HI	Healthy Ireland
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IFACCA	International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies
LA	Local Authority
LCYPs	Local Creative Youth Partnerships
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex+
NCH	National Concert Hall
NCF	National Creativity Fund
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLM	Programme Logic Model
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RCT	Random Controlled Trial
SLA	Service Level Agreement
TAP	Teacher Artist Partnership
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## Foreword

The Creative Ireland Programme was established in 2017 to support the mainstreaming of creativity in the life of the nation. Creative Youth is one of five pillars of the programme and was identified from the start as the most significant priority.

An Expert Advisory Group (EAG) was established by the government to advise on the direction and implementation of the Creative Youth pillar. The EAG identified the need for a comprehensive overview of the Creative Youth experience over the first five years of the programme and commissioned TCD to carry out a systematic review for this purpose. It quickly became clear that while much evidence of achievement existed in the system, there was an unevenness in the quality of the data and evidence available. This proved to be an unexpected challenge for the researchers but is an important signpost for future strategy.

The report references Ireland's international and national child rights obligations, noting the rights of children and young people to participate freely in cultural life and the arts, and to a voice in decision-making on all matters that affect them. It observes that a core objective of Creative Youth is giving children and young people a voice in decision-making in the development, operation and evaluation of all projects, programmes, and initiatives. The report investigates the extent to which this voice has been listened to, heard, and acted upon. In exploring investment in creativity, the report notes the State's child rights obligations to invest in this domain and in giving voice to children and young people, regardless of associated social, educational or health benefits.

Most of the work captured in the report under the banner of Creative Youth has taken place within the arts, building on the achievements of the Arts in Education Charter (2013). This reflects the origins of the programme in arts-led centenary commemorations. But creativity extends beyond the arts – it is essentially about thinking and acting imaginatively, taking risks and overcoming the fear of failure. The capacity to be creative applies in all domains of living. This report addresses the significance of Creative Youth in building

relationships between creativity, culture, democratic citizenship and policy formulation.

The report cites a study, commissioned by the Arts Council (Smyth, 2016), which found that gender, age, and social differences greatly influence cultural participation among children and young people. Smyth identified specific cohorts of children and young people who are least likely to engage in cultural activity. This report explores the extent to which Creative Youth programmes, projects and initiatives are focusing on inclusivity by reaching seldom heard and underrepresented children and young people and affording them the right to participate in creativity, cultural life, and the arts.

The Creative Ireland Programme and the Creative Youth pillar in particular, provide a unique opportunity for us to learn more about the process of creativity. Crucially, this report highlights both the excellent work being done and also the weakness of the current systems of research and evaluation. The next phase of the programme needs a strong research strategy to open up new fields of knowledge and understanding and with a compatible evaluation component that will provide consistent and reliable data across the range of various activities. The strategy should also develop research capacity across the research ecosystem and support creative practitioners in their engagement in and with research.

This report finds that Creative Youth constitutes a major national achievement and has successfully achieved many of its goals. We are very grateful to the researchers, Carmel O'Sullivan and Lisa O'Keeffe for providing crucial points of reference for the next phase of the Creative Ireland Programme.

*Creative Youth Expert Advisory Group*

*August 2023*

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## Executive Summary

## Key Findings

The following final report presents findings on creative activity among children and young people in Ireland using data from reports submitted during Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan. Using a programme logic model to organise data from the systematic analysis process we investigated what can be learnt from the available data at the time of this study (cut off April 2023).

24 reports met the inclusion criteria and allowed us to explore a broad selection of arts-based and creative activities. A 'close reading' approach was used to classify and code information extracted from reports along the following axes: inputs, activities, outputs, expected/unexpected outcomes, challenges and recommendations.

NVivo 12 Plus was employed to code and classify data and to cross tabulate attributes across the initiatives. In addition, we undertook an extensive literature review to provide an overview of creative engagement on a national and international level, exploring its impact on individual and community well-being, social cohesion and as a strategy for economic development.

We engaged with broader research studies relevant to the Creative Youth Plan, such as Growing Up in Ireland (GUI), research into arts and cultural participation of young people in Ireland undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI), and research reports from The Arts Council.

The research examines if common trends were identifiable across reports, specifically in relation to achieving the key objectives of the Creative Youth Plan. Using the data available we

The Creative Ireland Programme (CIP) aspires to mainstream creativity by highlighting the cross-curricular and interdisciplinary reach of the arts both within and beyond the traditional arts sphere. Creativity is also employed as a strategy contributing to individual and community well-being, social cohesion and economic development.

To date funding stands at more than €25 million euro, a substantial investment on the part of government and a strong indicator of the importance of the Plan. The Creative Youth Plan has grown significantly in schools and youth centres through the LCYPs, Creative Schools, Creative Clusters and TAP. Teacher CPD has also expanded through several of these initiatives, supported by Hub na nÓg's training to enable child voice and participation. The Creative Youth Plan has also grown in the community since its launch, demonstrating commitment to expand access to creative activities in both formal and out of school settings.

A brief scoping review of cultural policy reveals that the CIP appears to align with a growing policy trend worldwide employing creativity strategically to tackle societal questions. Debates surrounding the definition of creativity, the dissipation of the arts, and distinguishing creativity from purely arts-based activities is a common concern for numerous international programmes similar to CIP and was raised by several members of the EAG. As such this issue is given due consideration throughout this review.

Evidence suggests that in adopting a nuanced and balanced approach, the Creative Youth Plan appears to locate itself firmly in favour of cultural democracy whilst providing space for innovation, excellence and risk-taking, necessary ingredients to support art making and the creative act.

Participation in a diverse range of creative activities was evident throughout the country with 96% of initiatives reporting

looked for evidence of creative engagement, the voice of children and young people, inclusivity, collaboration, innovation, increasing access to seldom heard groups, quality and robustness of evidence, and sustainable outcomes.

These findings detail the importance of capturing data through robust evaluation mechanisms and flexible and creative approaches to research in the arts and creative sectors. The data were incomplete in several areas, in many reports, there was little/no detail about research/evaluation design. The majority of reports (n=18) were missing important information about evaluation or research methods. In most, demographic details were limited or missing, with little/no information on gender, age or socio-economic status. 33% provided no sociodemographic details. The majority of National Creativity Fund reports (82%) provided poor to no socio demographic details. 69% of the Creative Youth reports provided fair to good sociodemographic details, but in a number of instances response rates from samples were very low demonstrating failure to engage with the targeted population.

Owing to a level of underreporting in most reports, 'granular' and extensive analyses were applied to address challenges posed. Using the data, we investigated the extent and nature of children's and young people's involvement in creative activities during Phase One of Creative Youth. These findings detail the importance of the Creative Youth Plan in driving personal and collective creativity, and its impact on individual and societal wellbeing and development through both sustained and larger scale initiatives

an increase in creative skills resulting from involvement in their projects.

Building partnerships and increasing learning opportunities through connecting creative practitioners, organisations and youth workers directly to schools and communities. was positively noted in 88% of reports. Cross and inter/sectoral collaboration were effective in capitalising on skills and infrastructure already available on a national/local level, maximising use of resources through people, public spaces and/or partnerships with established organisations.

Teachers remarked on developing creative skills through effective teacher artist partnerships and by establishing a community of practice with other teachers. Young people remarked on the benefits of working alongside experts, such as visual artists, theatre artists, writers, directors, designers, musicians and architects, to develop their art or skill.

The data corroborate findings from studies worldwide which associate development of self-confidence and improved wellbeing through artistic and creative engagement. Creativity was found to improve children's self-confidence (62%), to foster social cohesion (58%), and to enhance well-being (54%).

Almost half (42%) reported freedom to take risks and innovate as an outcome of participation from Creative Youth and NCF activities. Artistic integrity, problem solving, divergent thinking, risk-taking and experimentation were reported as important outcomes for teachers, children and creative practitioners who moved outside their comfort zones.

Similarly, 42% of reports reported broadening their understanding of creativity beyond the arts to include a wide range of activities, though challenges in understanding creativity across all learning domains were identified, particularly in school environments.

Arts integrated approaches are acknowledged as supporting student learning in meaningful ways, developing

such as Cruinniú na nÓg, Local Youth Creative Partnerships (LCYPs), Music Generation, Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, Youth Sing, Teacher-Artist-Partnership, Fighting Words, the Arts in Education Portal, and the National Arts and Culture in Education Research Repository and one off smaller scale projects such as those funded under the National Creativity Fund.

These findings present insights informing the objectives of the second Creative Youth Plan and provide foundations for future, more in-depth research on involvement, motivations, and barriers to participation.

The Creative Ireland Programme and the Creative Youth Plan offer concrete solutions to the attitudinal, structural and resourcing issues which John Coolohan (2008) underlined in his closing essay for the *Points of Alignment* report. On paper it represents a coming of age in Irish cultural policy rather than a wholly novel initiative, building on the shoulders of previous research, reports and initiatives whilst incorporating contemporary concepts.

As an all-of-government initiative, with generous investment in the arts and other creative activities, cross sectoral partnerships, local authority collaboration and a clear message around equalising cultural and creative engagement, the Creative Ireland programme and particularly the Creative Youth Plan are welcomed and much needed additions on the cultural landscape.

critical perspectives and fostering critical thinking. 71% referred to the value of adopting cross-curricular approaches as an outcome, however these were generally school-oriented with the out of school dimension underrepresented.

The Creative Youth Plan considers the development of a critical mass of creative practitioners, teachers, and youth workers as central to implementation and mainstreaming. 62% cited improved skills and employment opportunities for creative practitioners, teachers and youth workers as an outcome of participating in Creative Youth and NCF activities. Continued Professional Training was highly valued as teachers upskilled their creative aptitudes and artists gained invaluable knowledge of the curriculum.

62% reported 'enjoyment' as a positive outcome, detailing a creative 'disruption' of school and other challenging life settings such as those in direct provision centres, living in disadvantaged areas or living as refugees. Creative activities provided novel and stimulating experiences. Enjoyment was strongly linked to social interaction of being with friends and making new friends.

While almost two thirds identified aspects of organisation sustainability and capacity building as an outcome, the study found limited evidence that many of the factors supporting sustainability, at an organisational level, were present, challenging longer term sustainability and future delivery.

A rich and appropriately diverse range of research and/or evaluation methods had been used, but issues around fidelity in presenting/applying methods were found.

While 75% of initiatives cited expanding access to creative activities for participants in schools and in the community, 62% report targeting seldom heard communities. However, this report finds that offering more creative activities does not always mean initiatives are successful in reaching seldom heard communities. As the sociodemographic data are only partially recorded, further analysis

and robust evaluation mechanisms are required in order to ascertain the extent to which communities are being reached. Another gap in findings is the lack of reference to the LGBTQI+ community.

With initiatives such as Hub na nÓg's training to enable child voice and participation in creative activity, the lack of child voice in most reports was not expected. 44% report promoting the voice of the child as an outcome, however the majority did so to a limited extent. The inhibitory effect of Covid 19 on the inclusion of children and young people's voice particularly in the evaluation process, was extensively documented in the reports and is acknowledged in this review.

25% of projects were multidisciplinary, involving activities such as poetry, printing, playmaking, dance, theatre, and arts and crafts. 21% comprised arts-based or storytelling CPD, 17% involved visual arts, 13% involved music or singing, 8% storytelling, 4% theatre, and 4% design.

Deeper analysis of the data revealed that the activities were heavily weighted towards the traditional arts forms. Increased clarity around the concept of creativity throughout Phase Two of the Plan should encourage creativity in and across all domains of learning. In general, a dearth of activity involving national heritage organisations, in the areas of dance, reading, STEM, technology and creative activities in Irish were identified. Some of these issues are being addressed in the new Plan, such as the successful partnership with Kinia to promote technology, and funding of half a million to Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and their partners to support projects in the digital creative industries. Recently revised and funded creative strategies and partnerships with LAs nationwide, should impact positive engagement with cultural and heritage institutions.

Dance and creative activities in Irish and other languages should be prioritised in Phase Two of the Plan.

	<p>In conclusion, the Creative Ireland Programme and the Creative Youth pillar in particular, is a breakthrough initiative, an ambitious all-of-government creativity and well-being programme which entered uncharted waters and needed time to take root in Irish society. Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan has been successful in many aspects of achieving its goals. This report recognises that as Phase One comes to an end it is timely to reflect on the learning from the first five years and explore how it might be improved and expanded in the second phase. Policies which further embed EDI and child voice and address lower levels of participation among seldom heard and at-risk groups, should expand the level of participation in arts, cultural and creative activities, responding to barriers to access in future initiatives.</p>

# Chapter One

## Context



### 1.1. Context of the Research

The Creative Ireland Programme (1) was established in 2017 to support the mainstreaming of creativity in the life of the nation. The Programme works in partnership with local and national authorities, youth services, community, cultural, enterprise, arts and heritage organisations, creative industries, and schools to nurture and enable the creative potential across the full spectrum of Irish society. The core proposition of the Creative Ireland Programme is that participation in cultural and creative activity promotes individual, community and national well-being.



The Creative Ireland Programme is now built around several key themes: Creative Youth; Creativity, Health and Well-being; Creative Communities, Creative Climate Action and Sustainability; and Creative Industries<sup>1</sup>(2). *Creative Youth – a Plan to enable the creativity of every child and young person* (3, 4) articulated the Government’s commitment to ensuring that every child in Ireland had practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, arts and coding by 2022. The Creative Youth Plan is about realising this proposition and securing an opportunity for children and young people to become creative citizens. Implementation of the Creative Youth Plan has sought to enable the creative potential of every child and young person, whether within formal education settings or informal, out-of-school settings. The involvement of children and young people in decision making ensures the development of more effective policies and is a core principle of the Creative Youth Plan. Statutory and non-statutory organisations in Ireland are obliged to seek the views of children and young people and take them seriously under the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989) (5), *the United Nations Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities* (2006) (6) and the *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making* (2015) (7).

The Creative Ireland Programme is committed to conducting research that investigates creative practices, identifies factors that foster and support such practices, and explores their impact on the well-being of citizens, and on innovation in creative industries, communities, schools, and nation state. This report was undertaken by Trinity College Dublin in support of the work of the Creative Youth Expert Advisory Group (EAG). The report identifies and synthesises key findings from the available research studies, evaluations and reviews of Creative Youth and NCF funded initiatives, programmes and projects which featured measurable outcomes in the delivery of best practice for children and young people.

With 24 initiatives reporting outcomes from Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022), the findings of this report aim to support the work of the EAG and Research Subgroup in advising the Ministers responsible for the

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<sup>1</sup> The five pillars of the Creative Ireland programme 2017-2022 included Creative Youth, Creative Communities, Cultural Investment, Creative Industries and Global Reputation.

Creative Youth Plan on the objectives of the second 5-year Plan. The projects included in this report comprise large to medium-scale Creative Youth initiatives, such as Creative Schools and Fighting Words, Teacher Artist Partnerships (TAP), small scale Creative Youth initiatives such as Recreate and Graffiti, and projects supported within the National Creativity Fund (NCF)<sup>2</sup> (see appendix 1 for full list of projects included in this systematic review). The report provides an overview of all initiatives, however in order to highlight noteworthy differences and acknowledge the scope and diversity of the Creative Youth initiatives, where necessary, the research team has disaggregated data to afford a more nuanced evaluation. It is expected that these results will inform the implementation of the second Plan.

Using data from 24 evaluation reports (32 reports were initially made available to the research team but not all met the inclusion criteria), and information from additional Creative Youth and NCF documents (n=9) such as needs analyses, consultations and a variety of evaluation forms (n=20) employed by organisations (see appendix 2 for full list of additional documents), this systematic review:

- presents findings on outcomes and trends reported across Creative Youth and NCF initiatives, programmes and projects on the delivery of creative opportunities for children and young people in Ireland, under the implementation of the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022);
- provides a synthesis of the outcomes and trends against the available literature on creativity, culture and the arts, in addition to broader research that is relevant to Creative Youth, such as Growing Up in Ireland and research into child and youth mental health and well-being;
- employs a quasi-systematic review approach to exploring issues surrounding the context of delivery of creative opportunities for children and young people undertaken in Ireland under the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022);

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<sup>2</sup> NCF was a 2018/19 funding scheme to provide specialist and targeted support for smaller Creative Youth initiatives. Larger 'core' initiatives such as Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, Fighting Words, Local Creative Youth Partnerships, receive funding from the DE, DCEDIY, DTCAGSM and other sources.

- identifies gaps in provision that emerge from the findings of the analysis, which may be addressed in future phases of the Creative Youth Programme;
- makes recommendations to assist the Creative Youth Expert Advisory Group and Research Subgroup in developing proposals to Government to inform the second Creative Youth Plan.

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# Chapter Two

## Scope and Methodology



### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the purpose, scope and context of the review of Creative Youth and National Creativity Fund funded projects, initiatives and research reports. The rationale for this research is to facilitate identification of the ‘bigger picture’ outcomes from Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan, identifying gaps in provision that emerge from the findings of the analysis, thereby supporting the EAG and Research Subgroup in advising and guiding national policy in relation to the second 5-year Creative Youth Plan. Recognising the scale and extent of activity under Creative Youth, the EAG identified a need to synthesise the outcomes with a view to highlighting the trends and learning

across the available projects, initiatives and reports, and identify gaps/areas for future development in the provision of opportunities for all children and young people to explore their creative potential.

This review of Creative Youth and NCF is carried out in the context of:

- the launch by Government in March 2023 of a five-year extension to the Creative Ireland Programme;
- 10 research reports carried out within the Creative Ireland Programme and the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022);
- direct exchequer investment in the Creative Youth Plan (by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth; Department of Education, and the Arts Council) of €6.5m annually for the last two years. Provision of an additional €1m approximately is made available each year to host Cruinniú na nÓg, and a further allocation of approx. €1m was made available on a once-off basis in 2020 as a direct response to COVID-19;
- an increasing national and global emphasis on citizen engagement in cultural and creative activity to promote individual and community well-being (Arts Council, 2003, 2010; Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025; Wellbeing Framework for Ireland 2021, WHO, 2019, 2022; OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2022a);
- increasing prominence of wellbeing and creativity across the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment NCCA and the Department of Education (2021, 2023; DE, 2019); and
- increasing national and global emphasis on the importance of creativity in education (PISA, 2022; UNESCO, 2022b).

### **2.1.1. Scope of the Review and Methodology**

The scope of this review is limited to the inputs, activities, outputs, direct results and social outcomes (both expected and unexpected) of public investment in creative activities as they relate to the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022). The review focuses on the period from 2017 to December 2022 involving available government reports and policy, project evaluations, research papers and other

relevant documents such as evaluation forms, consultations and needs analysis. Although the report focuses on the Creative Youth Plan, we draw on publications from other sources when necessary/relevant.

## **2.2. Benefits of Evaluating the Effectiveness of Public Investment in Creativity**

The Creative Ireland Programme follows the current world-wide trend in which cultural, creative and artistic endeavours are increasingly viewed as vehicles of social change (8), becoming more widely established and accepted globally as health promoting practices (9). For some time now it has been maintained that cultural engagement yields many social, physical and psychological benefits for participants, ranging from a greater sense of well-being and life satisfaction (10) to the development of cognitive skills and increased self-confidence. Moreover, it is claimed that participation in creative and arts-based activities encourages social inclusion whilst fostering individual, collective and societal identity (11). As a result, cultural organisations are increasingly under pressure to demonstrate impact and legitimacy (12). The literature highlights numerous benefits in evaluating the outcomes of public investment in creativity and the arts (13, 14,15):

- to ensure that policy development and service provision is evidence-based;
- to improve the accountability and transparency of public investment in creativity and the arts, and better transmit the outcomes of that funding to the public;
- to develop an understanding of the ways in which creativity and the arts are of value to both individuals and communities and from this establish an inclusive understanding of a successful arts sector;
- to facilitate advocacy on behalf of the arts, particularly in relation to the allocation of public funding;
- to better understand the impact of investment in creativity and the arts on national and regional levels, the generation of new ideas and works, social cohesion and a wide range of other societal impacts;
- to enhance interest within the research community in creativity and the arts;



- to develop a robust evidence-base around the impact of creativity and the arts in our society, as a result of credible and realistic findings.

The fifth core principle of Creative Youth, Evaluation, corroborates the above, highlighting: “As new initiatives are developed; robust monitoring mechanisms will be put in place to capture data and ensure deliverance of best practice initiatives and value for money” (4, p. 4). The EAG affirm that public investment is a right and investment in creativity an obligation, in line with the *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making* (2015) (7) and Article 31 from the United Nations CRC (1989) (5) which acknowledges “the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts” (p. 8).

### **2.3. Methodological Challenges**

Evaluation in creativity, the arts, and culture is a complex and debated matter (16). Cultural policy has leaned into creativity as the means with which to tackle numerous social issues whilst applauding the capacity of arts/creativity-based activities to improve the individual and collective wellbeing of society (51, 104, 105). Closely associated with this increased presence in the political sphere and the prevalence of evidence-based policy (12) comes an increased pressure to legitimize and account for public funding through evaluation and impact measurements. The cultural and arts sectors are now expected to ‘perform’, expected to have an impact and have been progressively subsumed by the machine of performativity both within and beyond the educational system (17). As Clive Gray (143) observes, the creative/arts based sector is seen to have adopted a strategy of what critics describes as ‘policy attachment’, whereby the arts, notoriously underfunded, have ‘attached’ themselves to economic and social agendas to receive larger budgets and influence public policy (16, 24, 144), giving rise to a proliferation of evaluation and impact indicators within the arts and further igniting an already heated debate concerning the value of culture, art and creativity (160, 161). Criticisms from those reticent to evaluate artistic/creative activity centre around an instrumentalization and debasing of the artistic domain. Measuring ‘socio-

economic impact' in the arts is often seen as problematic when there is a requirement to instrumentally submit to 'poorly-fit' public accountability and audit practices, particularly when framed against a limited and technocratic understanding of 'impact' in policy fora (16). Some creatives and artists dislike the emphasis on evaluating the impact of their work and claim it in some way hinders or interrupts the creative process (163), in addition to taking up valuable time and money which could otherwise be directed at creative endeavours (19). Artists also frequently express concern that morphing the arts into a more accessible notion of 'creativity' runs the risk of leaving the arts behind and creating a relativist concept of culture (22), an issue further explored in Chapter Three. Similarly, the 'art for art's sake' movement frequently shuns any mention of evaluation, insisting on the intrinsic value of the arts and its unquestionable importance in society (20, 21). This can be exacerbated when, as previously mentioned, Article 31 of the United Nations CRC (1989) (5) acknowledges the freedom to participate in cultural life and the arts as a child's right, intrinsic to their lives and therefore independent of benefits or outcomes.

In contrast to these arguments, accountability and the need to democratise culture are emphasised (164). Criticisms are often voiced regarding the a priori assumptions of 'public good' and 'public value' implicated in research around the impact of creative and cultural interventions, and the unsubstantiated claims around the benefits derived from participation in artistic endeavours (160, 16, 24). Distinguishing between outputs and social outcomes which are more broadly defined and have a wider impact beyond the arts and cultural sector is a challenging feat as outcomes are often beyond the control of any one organisation (19). Therefore, attributing outcomes to a creative intervention should be approached with caution. Criticism also centres around a lack of rigour in arts-based research, poorly designed evaluation and overreliance on anecdotal evidence to sustain claims (24, 133, 166).

Operating at the intersection of cultural, social, and economic interests, arts organisations and creative practitioners often find themselves attempting to navigate quite fragile crossings in what the cultural sociologist Gielen calls 'the artistic biotope' (18) (see Fig. 2.1. below).

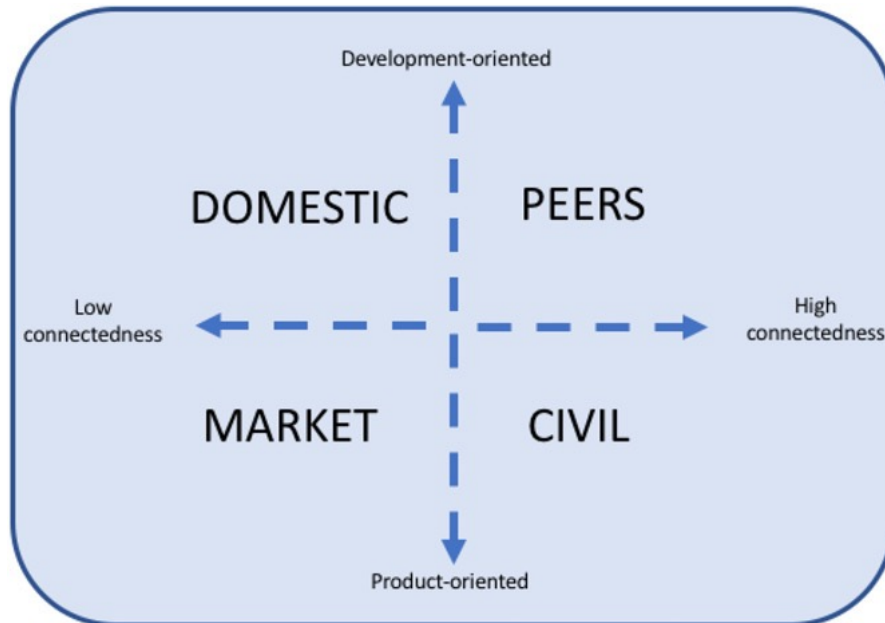


Fig. 2.1. The Artistic Biotope and its Domains (adapted from Gielen 2010 and Herman, 2019)

The intersection of Gielen's domains represent a complex and tense balancing act as each domain influences and shapes the others, posing challenges in terms of measuring impact and legitimatising aesthetic, macro sociological, empirical and economic value regimes (17). It is through the harmonious interplay of all four, that the creative practitioner can maintain their freedom to create in the private so called domestic domain, whilst at the same time participating in the market and civil domains. Evidently, getting this right is no easy task. In addition, while pressure to produce measures of success increase, governments and public agencies may not always take account of additional costs arising from evaluation and reporting, or training necessary to implement such reporting effectively. Data collection and analysis take time and expertise and outcomes may not be immediately recognisable in comparison to more proximate and widely visible effects of a creative or artistic project (23, 167).

Ultimately, there is no 'one size fits all' approach to evaluation in arts/creativity-based activities, however good evaluation aims to present as honestly as possible what happened and what emerged/changed as a result of doing the project, so that the creative practitioner and others can learn from the process to improve, sustain, and develop further successful creative practices

(168, 169). Therefore, planning and embedding the approach to evaluation at the beginning is as important as planning the activities for the project itself: one informs and enhances the quality of the other. It may help to consider evaluation as part of a cyclical learning process rather than an accountability exercise (176) which can facilitate understanding of how and why an activity can be linked to certain outputs and outcomes, strengthening in this way the evidence-base around the benefits and impact of art and culture in society (50, 170). The issue is not so much with attributing social value and benefits to the arts, which is as old as artistic expression itself (24, 171), but rather as aforementioned, with attempts to closely map 'impact goals' onto policy making imperatives, particularly economic over other benefits (16, 172).

Debate around the value of the arts/creative practice and how best to evaluate the sector in order to produce evidence based credible findings without destroying creativity in the process is ongoing. Either way, it is fundamental not to lose sight of the creative experience in and of itself. As Wamsley (2016) observes, "Rather than attempting to reify cultural value itself (and reduce it to a series of outputs), a richer and more fruitful endeavour might be to capture the processes of arts and cultural engagement and explore the emotions and other phenomenological insights to which these processes give rise" (p. 16). Gielen's Artist Biotope represents the delicately balanced ecology in which creative practitioners and arts organisations reside, in which personal aspirations and the forces of the market and political policy coincide, compete and jostle for position. It is undoubtedly a tense relationship but one which needs to be addressed particularly in state funded initiatives. Therefore, investing time, money and training in this aspect of a project is considered increasingly important in order to build a robust and credible evidence base and to avoid treating evaluation as a burdensome and meaningless box ticking exercise. The above caveats concerning the methodological challenges of evaluation in the arts and creative sectors are reflected in the evaluation framework employed in this study and resonate with the findings and recommendations in this report.

#### **2.4. Evaluation Framework**

The evaluation framework chosen for this review is the Programme Logic Model (PLM) which, in addition to defining the inputs, activities and outputs of

the Creative Youth Plan also includes both expected and unexpected outcomes, as they relate to the arts and creativity sector, to wider society, and the core objectives of the Creative Youth Plan (see Chapter Three, Fig. 3.1). Programme Logic models are tools for planning, describing, managing, communicating, and evaluating a programme or intervention (25, 26, 27). A PLM offers a simplified visual representation of the relationship between various components (linking activities with outputs, intermediate outcomes and longer-term impacts) of a programme (28, 29).

Previous applications of PLMs in Ireland include O'Hagan's (23) *Value for Money and Policy Review of the Arts Council* and Morrissey's *Creative Clusters Report* (30). The Programme Logic Model has been recommended for use in evaluation by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (23). This type of framework can help to identify a sequence of cause and effect concerning the intended (or unintended) benefits that can be attributed to a programme. We used a logic model due to its accessible format, its ability to relate goals, inputs, outputs, and outcomes whilst differentiating between all four aspects, in addition to the generic nature of the framework and in alignment with reporting frameworks employed by the majority of reports included in this review. The model also allows for analysis of gaps and shortcomings.

Whilst the PLM provided alignment, clarity and accessibility, we note the risks involved in employing a linear model for evaluation of complex interventions such as those supported by Creative Youth. We recognise that the outcomes observed do not account for implementation context, concurrent programmes, characteristics of participants and run the risk of "overstating the causal contribution of the intervention" (31, p. 34). However, more complex evaluation models such as Theories of Change or Realist Evaluations which explore causes, hidden causal mechanisms, context and so forth would have required much more detailed and qualitative data which were not available for this analysis.

The Creative Youth Plan funds a diverse range of projects from small to large scale in diverse contexts and with different cohorts of the population, therefore this report emphasises that conclusions drawn are tentative and "that the cause-effect relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, arts sector outcomes and societal outcomes are not linear but are a series of complex

interrelationships that are mutually reinforcing, contributing to the delivery of the strategic objectives” (23, p. 14). Increasingly, logic models are used in secondary research to support systematic reviews (32, 33, 34), but such use is not without challenges. Whilst in the context of this study, a PLM offered a standardised approach to the analysis of data and facilitated flexibility as appropriate to the individual context of a range of different project reports, logic models involving evaluation of existing evaluations can only ever offer a limited representation of the complexity of the creative initiatives being reviewed (35).

## **2.5. Research Agenda**

The methodology adopted was developed “in the context of the inherent challenges in measuring the effectiveness of artistic supports, and in particular the absence of established standard tools and indicators to evaluate the effects of arts related policy interventions” (23 p16). In the absence of robust statistical evidence, and given that most documents evaluated in this study could be considered grey literature (i.e. a wide range of information such as government reports, policy literature, working papers, newsletters, government documents, speeches, and so on, typically produced outside of academic and professional publishing and distribution channels) (36), it was not possible to identify this report as a bona fide systematic meta-analysis, nor was it possible to follow the standard guidelines involved in an analysis of this kind. Nevertheless, we chose to employ a quasi-systematic review framework which enabled a structured ordering of literature and aligned as closely as possible with accepted standards (37, 38, 39).

The use of explicit, transparent, systematic methods ensured the minimisation of bias in the synthesis and summary of reports on Creative Youth funded programmes and projects. This provided reliable findings from which conclusions could be drawn and recommendations made (40). Systematic reviews are considered relevant to policy when they present findings clearly to highlight policy problems; challenge or develop policy statements; offer evidence about the impact of policy options; whilst allowing for diversity of people and contexts (41).

Adopting Oliver, Dickson & Bangpan’s (41) Systematic Analysis Process, adapted from Gough et al. (39), the steps below were undertaken. This approach underpins the use of a logic model in this study to map out causal pathways that



help make sense of what can be learnt from the available reports submitted to Creative Youth.

### **1) Identifying the evidence gap**

Over a five-year period, the Creative Youth Plan enabled the provision of thousands of creative activities for children and young people in Ireland. The Creative Ireland website hosts a variety of documents and project reports which provide information and data on the nature of activities undertaken and outcomes reported. A number of large-scale funded research reports have been recently completed, focusing on specific aspects of the Creative Youth Plan, including flagship initiatives such as Creative Schools (173), Creative Clusters (27), Local Creative Youth Partnerships (174) and Teacher Artist Partnerships (TAP) (175), in conjunction with evaluation reports on smaller CY and National Creativity Funded initiatives. Comprising a great diversity of initiatives in terms of content, scope and scale, it is challenging to gain an overview of the impact of Creative Youth and NCF funded projects and initiatives during Phase One, and what lessons learned if any, might be drawn from looking across projects. With responsibility to advise Government in informing the objectives of the second Plan, the EAG identified the need to conduct a systematic analysis of available research and evaluation reports of Creative Youth and NCF projects, which feature measurable outcomes in the delivery of best practice in order to establish the 'bigger picture'.

### **2) Redefining the questions and the conceptual framework**

As the Creative Youth (2017-22) programme drew to a close, the EAG sought to avail of the opportunity to assess its impact in terms of identifying who participated in the activities offered and explore the factors associated with their creative engagement through this review (41) of largely desk-based research. The primary questions addressed by this report are therefore:

1. Do the available reports provide evidence of the extent to which Creative Youth projects played a part in initiating creative opportunities for the specific cohorts of children and young people

found to have a low level of engagement in Smyth's research (42, 43)?

2. What factors are associated with enabling children and young people to have a voice in decision-making in the development, implementation and evaluation of Creative Youth programmes, plans and activities?
3. What factors tend to distinguish or differentiate levels of engagement of children and young people in creative work (e.g., gender, age, academic capacities, socio-economic environment)?
4. How effective are partnerships between schools, communities, local authorities and cultural organisations in the domains of arts, creativity, innovation, science and technology?
5. What are the principal outcomes, recommendations and challenges emerging from the Creative Youth and NCF reports?
6. What is the quality of reporting and evaluation throughout the Creative Youth and NCF reports? (Indicators include research methods, sociodemographic details, voice of the child, formative and summative evaluation, baseline data.)

Following consultation with the EAG, a review of national and international literature on evaluation identified the Programme Logic Model (PLM) as appropriate (albeit limited) to commence the classification and analysis of project evaluation reports and documents. Within this, we adopted a framework analysis approach (44, 45, 46), which involved: identifying and familiarising ourselves with the available data from Creative Youth project reports; devising a conceptual framework as an initial structure for analysis, following Eikhof (47) (see appendix 3); coding the systematic reviews according to this framework and, during the process, refining the framework to suit its application to an arts-based creativity-focused analysis. A framework approach can address both evaluative research questions appraising the effectiveness of what exists and strategic questions identifying content for new policies, plans or actions (78).

### 3) Identifying studies of interest

In the initial phase of the research a number of documents, reports and project evaluations were provided to the research team, and additional documents were located in the publication section of the Creative Ireland website and through consultation with relevant stakeholders. Initially, in late 2021 a total of 32 items were identified as potentially relevant to the analysis. Government Reports and Policy were also crucial to understanding the broad context, principal values, evolution, inputs and goals of the Creative Youth Plan. In addition, Creative Youth conferences, videos and documents received from stakeholders were analysed. These formed the basis of an Interim Report produced in May 2022. During late 2022 and early 2023 several larger scale reports and smaller Early Years reports, funded through the Creative Youth Plan, became available and a decision was taken to extend the timescale of the systematic review in order to facilitate the inclusion of these documents in the preparation of a final report. The research team endeavoured to include as many reports and evaluations as possible, however in order to support best practice and coherency, the criteria were modified to a greater extent than initially planned (see Table 2.1.). A final decision was taken to eliminate several items which did not meet the inclusion criteria or were not considered relevant to the study. In the end, a total of 24 evaluation reports met the inclusion criteria and were included in the analysis (appendix 1). Of those 13 were Creative Youth evaluation reports and, 11 were evaluations of initiatives operating under the National Creativity Fund (NCF). NCF was a 2018/19 funding scheme to provide specialist and targeted support for smaller Creative Youth initiatives. Larger 'core' initiatives such as Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, Fighting Words, Local Creative Youth Partnerships, receive funding from the DE, DCEDIY, DTCAGSM and other sources Operating under the banner of Creative Youth, NCF is a scheme which aimed to identify, support and collaborate with a range of strategic partners on smaller scale projects<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the above 24 reports, a number of other documents were made available by the Creative Youth team from November 2021 to April 2023. Though some comprised wider reaching projects and

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<sup>3</sup> It was hoped that the NCF projects would significantly add value and/or scale to the implementation of the Creative Ireland Programme and would help inform policy and/or cross-sectoral development in the area of culture, creativity and well-being.

contained limited sections referring to initiatives which partly targeted children or young people, and others did not contain measurable outcomes nor fit the criteria of evaluations per se, the documents were deemed important in terms of underpinning and supporting the review and are referenced where considered relevant. These documents included 2 independent research reports, 20 Creative Youth evaluation forms and 9 additional Creative Youth and NCF reports/documents which comprised of needs analyses, consultations, strategies, quality frameworks and future visions (appendix 2).

Table 2.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
Creative Youth Research Reports (2017-April 2023).	Did not include consideration of the impact of the art-based intervention.
Creative Youth <b>AND NCF</b> (2017-April 2023) artist evaluations, creative associate/organisation evaluations, participant evaluations.	Did not contain any measurable outcomes and/or recommendations.
Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods were permitted.	Did not hold any relevance for Pillar I, Creative Youth Plan.
<b>REPORTED ON A CREATIVE YOUTH OR NCF INITIATIVE.</b>	Contained a number of different initiatives other than CY or NCF within the report.
<b>SMALL (5 PARTICIPANTS) TO LARGE SCALE INITIATIVES (100+ PARTICIPANTS).</b>	Funded by Pillars other than Creative Youth or the National Creativity Fund.

#### 4) Describing studies in terms of interest to stakeholders

Subsequent to an extensive analysis (all documents were read several times by two researchers to reduce bias), and through employment of the PLM conceptual framework, an Excel document was created in order to classify the information extracted from the reports along the following axes: inputs, activities, outputs and expected/unexpected outcomes This involved developing and using a coding guide, identifying outcome variables where relevant, context, the genre of activity, number of participants, sample size, research design and evaluation methods used, number of participating creative practitioners or youth workers, reported outcomes and recommendations, if the voice of the child and/or creative

practitioner was represented in the findings, etc. In total 13 categories were applied in the conceptual framework to classify the data.

### **5) Appraising studies in terms of stakeholders' interests**

After the screening process was complete, the systematic review team assessed each item for quality and bias. Several forms of bias were detected, including language bias, selective reporting of outcomes, citation bias (48). As aforementioned, this report could not apply the standard criteria for systematic reviews. Quality appraisal was considered and extensively debated when creating the Excel classification, however the need to include as many Creative Youth and NCF reports as possible in the review overrode the need for strict quality assessment. Evidence of bias and a lack of robustness in funded project evaluations is addressed in the findings and recommendations chapters.

### **6) Discussing the meanings of emerging findings**

Synthesis of the 'raw data' (Excel output) was undertaken using NVivo 12 Plus, in which themes were created through thematic analysis of the reported outcomes, recommendations, challenges and other data extracted from the evaluation reports. Informed by Braun & Clarke (49, 176) analysis was applied to the different types of qualitative data (e.g., reported outcomes, feedback, interviews, focus groups and case studies) included in this study (49). Thematic analysis was selected as it stays close to participants' words and other data (facilitating secondary analysis in this study). It involves a step-by-step process which begins with familiarisation with the data, by reading and rereading it, after which initial codes are generated. Coding is "The process by which segments of data are identified as relating to or being an example of, a more general idea, instance, theme, or category" (177, p.158). Codes can be considered interesting items identified in the data which tend to be repeated (177), frequently they are likely to be words or short phrases used by participants. Coding was useful for identifying patterns in the data including similarities and differences, trends and unusual responses (50) (see appendix 4 for extract from NVivo Plus 12 codebook). In this report codes emerged inductively from the bottom up and deductively from the top down (informed by the research aims and objectives). In both instances the aim throughout the

analysis is to remain as close to the data as possible (178). Thematic analysis is an iterative process in which preliminary findings inform subsequent work (179) and the ensuing steps of this report involved reviewing, defining and naming themes in order to capture in as accurate and reliable way as possible the findings. We initially created 97 codes, which were subsequently reduced to 65 codes through an iterative process of amalgamation, consultation and rereading of data. Finally, some codes were discarded and the remaining codes merged to form three principal themes: Social Outcomes (14 codes); Challenges (4 codes); and Recommendations (6 codes). In addition to coding, case classifications were created in which attributes (similar to variables) were assigned to each of the reports and other documents, enabling cross tabulation and deeper exploration of the data through matrix queries. Attributes included research methods employed, baseline information, name of funding stream, and sociodemographic information (see appendix 5 for a sample of the classification sheet and a matrix query). Data obtained from the reports were cross checked several times by the research team in order to accurately combine and compare information from across different reports. Discussions between the researchers were recorded, transcribed, and analysed, the results of which informed drafting of findings and recommendations.

## **7) Sharing and using findings**

Eight meetings with the EAG took place from January to April 2022 (four of these exclusively with the smaller research subgroup and four with the entire EAG in which findings were presented in the form of summarised PowerPoints and word documents. In October 2022 the four-year duration of the EAG expired and a research subgroup comprising several members of the former EAG, senior representatives from the Creative Ireland Programme and senior members of the Department of Education was established to guide the completion of the review. Input was welcomed by the research team from both the EAG and the research subgroup (in the form of critical discussion, documents and extensive draft tracking) with notes taken of all points raised during discussions. Meetings also took place with several other key stakeholders, creative practitioners<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup> We employ the term creative practitioner as an all-encompassing name to represent individual artists, organisations and creative associates involved in Creative Youth.

members of the Creative Youth and Creative Ireland teams to ensure maximum scope and rigour. Feedback proved invaluable to the research process and enabled us to adapt vocabulary, receive input from diverse expert voices, ensure accuracy, and expand knowledge around the functioning and outcomes of the Creative Youth Plan.

### **2.5.1. Literature Review**

This study was undertaken over two time periods (Nov. 2021 to May 2022 – Interim Report, and October to April 2023 for the Final Report). During that time, the research team engaged with literature considered relevant to the analysis, and:

- 1) conducted an extensive literature review to provide an overview of creative engagement on a national and international level, exploring its impact on individual and community well-being, social cohesion and as a strategy for economic development;
- 2) engaged with broader research studies, relevant to the Creative Youth Plan, such as Growing Up in Ireland (GUI), research into child and youth mental health and well-being (51, 52), research from the Economic and Social Research Institute into arts and cultural participation of young people in Ireland and research reports from The Arts Council (43, 53);
- 3) explored the experience of evaluating public funding of the arts and government programmes (aimed at increasing access to creative activities) in other jurisdictions, with a particular focus on the use of performance indicators and other tools to measure the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of public investment in creativity and the arts. Approaches in a number of jurisdictions including Northern Ireland, the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand were identified as possible benchmarks for comparison purposes;
- 4) reviewed national and international literature around creativity and wellbeing in education (PISA, 2022; OECD, 2019);
- 5) reviewed evaluation guidelines and frameworks both nationally and internationally with a particular focus on creative evaluation (NCCA, 2017, 2019; DCEDIY, 2021; Vincent-Lancrin, S., et al., 2019; Daykin, Gray, McCree & Willis, 2017);



- 6) reviewed international cultural and creativity programmes similar to the Creative Ireland Programme.

## 2.6. Limitations

The findings in this report should be considered in light of several limitations. Although challenging and requiring considerable effort when analysing secondary rather than primary data sets, assessing the validity of measures used and how/what data were collected is essential to achieving a high standard of analysis (54). Becoming familiar with the datasets in exhaustive detail (as undertaken in this study) is recommended. Internal validity refers to the strength of the conclusions drawn from a study (55), i.e., how confident are we in the data reported that outcomes observed were caused by/are related to the creative activity or intervention? Could other factors have affected the claimed outcome? External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be generalised to a more universal population (56). If the arts-based or creative intervention occurred in a different context, for example, with different subjects, would similar outcomes occur? Based on the data evaluated, both internal and external validity issues emerged which limited the evidence base we could draw on to inform conclusions in this systematic review. The data were incomplete and/or limited in several categories, for example,

- the majority of reports (n=18) were missing important information about evaluation or research methods, this number comprised all NCF initiatives (n=11) and half of CY initiatives (n=7);
- in most documents reviewed, demographic details were limited or missing, with little or no information on gender, age or socio-economic status;
- in many cases, there was little or no detail about the research/evaluation design, for example, what questions were asked and why, when/where and of whom were they asked; where noted, the details often lacked clarity, robustness and rigour;
- none of the NCF initiatives took a baseline measurement, CY initiatives scored low in this regard also (n=4 reporting a baseline).



The researchers acknowledge that attention may have been given to these matters during individual projects, and indeed that the primary purpose of the reported data may not have been for a research purpose. However, the level of underreporting in the documents reviewed, poses challenges in terms of analysing the validity of claims made. In some reports outcome bias may have occurred in that funding was tied to demonstrating a number of outcomes, therefore prompting the reporting of certain outcomes and possible non-reporting of other outcomes or shortcomings.

DRAFT

# Chapter Three

## Locating the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022) in the Context of Current Trends and Issues in Arts and Cultural Policy



### 3.1. Introduction

Creative Ireland was launched in December 2016 to promote engagement in creative activity in the belief that cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity with significant implications for individual and societal

well-being and development. It seeks to place creativity at the heart of public policy (3, 4).

Operating in five key areas known as pillars, the Creative Ireland Programme (2017-2022) supports direct engagement with creativity (education, institutions, industry) as well as creativity to engage broader societal issues, such as mental health, rural isolation, poverty, and intercultural dialogue. The Second Plan has a particularly strong focus on climate change and well-being. Creative Youth constitutes Pillar 1 which supports, disseminates and implements Creative Ireland's strategy, vision and goals for the children and young people of Ireland (4). Aligning with Emer Smyth's findings (42), in which gender, age and social differences were found to greatly influence cultural participation in children and young people, the launch of the Creative Ireland Programme highlighted the importance of inclusivity and targeting underrepresented cohorts and seldomly heard voices currently not engaging in cultural or artistic activities (see Fig. 3.1.).

### **3.1.1. Pillar 1 - Creative Youth**

In the first half of 2017, some hundreds of meetings were held with individuals and organisations involved in the arts and in arts-in-education. A recurring outcome of those meetings was a desire that Pillar 1 – enabling the creative potential of every child, be given priority. The Creative Youth Plan was published in December 2017 confirming the Government's commitment to ensuring that every child in Ireland had practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, arts, and coding by 2022. The plan affirmed its commitment to embrace, fast-track and resource the pivotal *Arts in Education Charter* (2013) (57) which was central to initiating the Creative Youth Plan.

Creative Youth is about securing an opportunity for our children and young people to become creative citizens. 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 broadly:

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. (4, p. 4)

The Creative Youth Plan is based on a number of key principles (4 p. 3) and objectives (see Fig. 3.1.):

1. **The Voice of the Child and Young Person is vital:** A core principle in the Plan is that the voice of children and young people should be heard in both the development and delivery of Programmes. Through the Hub na nÓg structure, this will be built in to the various elements of the Plan.
2. **Collaboration:** Working together across Government and with various stakeholders means we are increasing the impact of our individual efforts and achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people.
3. **Innovation:** It is important that we honour the overall commitments made in the Creative Youth Plan. We are also, however, prepared to learn and adapt as we roll out that plan, to be open to change and new ideas to progress creative practice and thinking across our education system and across the non-formal system. We are prepared to try new things, take risks and expand the Programme as we move forward together.
4. **Inclusivity:** We will ensure, as we roll out new Programmes as part of Creative Youth, that we reach as many children and young people as possible, especially those in disadvantaged areas and those seldom heard. This commitment will run through all elements of the Programme.
5. **Evaluation:** As we develop and roll out new initiatives, robust monitoring mechanisms will be put in place to capture data and ensure we are delivering best practice initiatives and value for money. These mechanisms will allow effectiveness and impact of initiatives to be measured and allow the Programme to evolve to better achieve its aims. This will be a feature of all elements of the Programme.

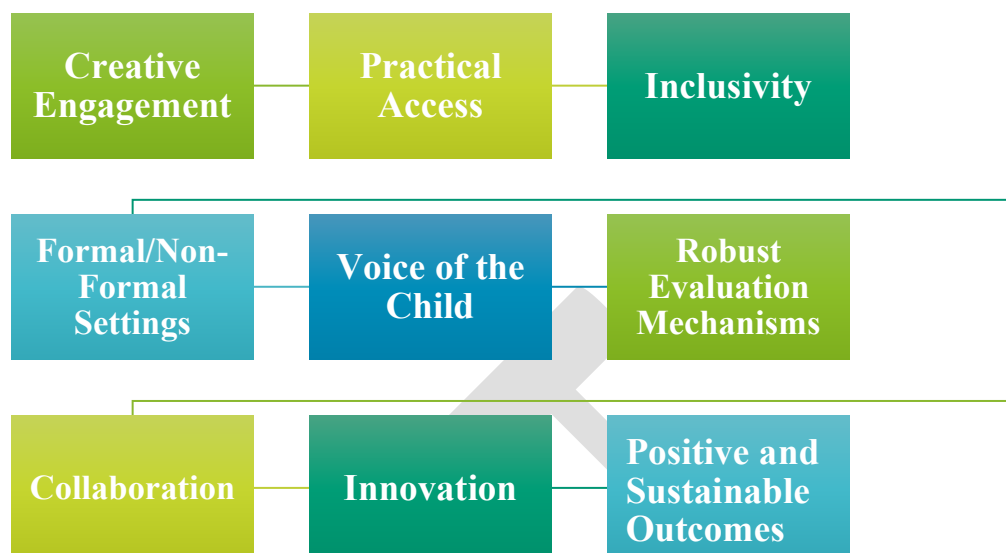


Fig. 3.1. Summary of Creative Youth Key Objectives and Core Principles (4, 58)

The EAG wishes to emphasise the voice of the child as a core objective of Creative Youth, and reiterate the fact that Ireland is one of the few countries in the world to have developed and implemented a rights-based national strategy on giving children and young people a voice in decision-making in all aspects of their lives. Ireland is a signatory to the previously mentioned United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) (5), and the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006) (6), both of which give the right to children to a voice in decision-making and for their views to be given due weight. All Government departments and agencies have committed to specific actions in the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making, 2015* (7) and Ireland has developed *The National Implementation Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*<sup>5</sup> aimed at putting the strategy into practice. A priority commitment in the National Participation Strategy was the establishment of Hub na nÓg by The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to support and enable implementation of the Strategy and build capacity in children and young people's participation in decision-making. On behalf of DCEDIY, Hub na nÓg provides training and support to both the Creative Schools Programme and the Local Creative Youth Partnerships in

<sup>5</sup> <https://hubnanog.ie/participation-framework/>

involving children and young people in decision-making in all projects and initiatives (discussed in Chapter Four).

### 3.2. Vision and Strategy

To translate the Creative Youth Plan into a workable programme which extended nationwide and involved grass roots participation, the Creative Youth Policy Context and Briefing (2021) (4) operated across:

- **Schools:** Enhancing arts and creativity initiatives in schools and early years settings;
- **Teacher CPD:** Increasing and enhancing teacher continuing professional development opportunities across primary, post-primary and early years settings; and
- **Community and Out-of-School:** Improving cross-sectoral collaboration to support creativity for children and young people in the community. (p. 3)

A comprehensive plan was devised in 2017, in which the overarching vision was defined as cultural and creative education for all. 18 individual actions were underlined as the means by which the furtherance of the vision and strategies of the Creative Youth Plan would be realised. Amongst the many actions supported by the Plan we highlight a few key activities: Cruinniú na nÓg, Local Youth Creative Partnerships (LCYPs), Music Generation, Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, Youth Sing, Teacher CPD (Teacher-Artist-Partnership; Arts in Junior Cycle), Fighting Words, the Arts in Education Portal, and ACERR (Ireland's National Arts and Culture in Education Research Repository). Details about these programmes are provided in Chapter Four.

This analysis aims to synthesise the evaluations of a number of Creative Youth and NCF projects, identifying and analysing common trends and outcomes, challenges and recommendations reported.

#### 3.2.1. Broadening the Understanding and Function of the Arts

Morphing the arts into the more accessible concept of creativity is now a trend witnessed worldwide, but particularly in Western and Northern Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Over the last five years, the arts have become

increasingly central to government policy and arts councils have developed closer ties to government through funding, policy alignment and administration structures or as is the case for Creative Ireland and Creative Canada, they have been established within government departments. Creative Ireland operates as a unit within the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and is currently working with 10 other key departments. Arts Council England (ACE) now refers to itself as ‘the national development agency for creativity and culture’ (59 p. 18) purposefully replacing the word arts by culture to widen the scope and breadth of the activities supported. In a similar vein, the Finnish Arts Council (ACF) was converted into a performance supervised, governmental and nationwide agency, *Taike*, from the beginning of 2013 with renewed legislation to harness its work more tightly to government policies and social and economic outcomes.

In an era of culture democracy, creativity as opposed to ‘the arts’, now forms an integral part of the public discourse around arts and cultural policy (e.g., in UK, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland), in response to the fact that “Many people are uncomfortable with the label ‘the arts’ and associate it only with either the visual arts or ‘high art’, such as ballet or opera” (Arts Council England, 2020, 59 p. 9). The Arts Council England’s 10-year strategy (*‘Let’s Create’ 2020-2030*, 59) recognises and celebrates the creative lives of every person in the country affirming that creativity and culture when taken together can help people make sense of their lives and transform communities. Similarly, the Creative Ireland Programme 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” (4 p. 4), “by focusing on creativity, it generates a language that eases access to the arts for many who might otherwise think that the arts are ‘not for them’” (3 p. 6). The Arts Council of Northern Ireland’s *‘Ambition for the Arts Strategic Plan’* (2013-2018) (60) adopted a comparable stance in attempting to universalise the relationship between creativity, culture and the arts making sure that everyone has greater opportunity to be creative and to experience high-quality culture.

Through reframing our understanding of the arts into more accessible concepts of creativity, culture and closer alignment with government policy,



creativity can be employed to address numerous social issues and foster valuable individual and collective benefits (60, 61, 62, 63). Belief in the arts' social and economic power now operates as a core narrative of numerous arts policies worldwide (64, 65, 66). A brief scoping review of cultural policy reveals that the Creative Ireland Programme appears to align with a growing policy trend employing creativity strategically to tackle societal questions (67, 68, 69). Evidence from the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) (70), a global network of arts councils, ministries of culture and government agencies, places the Creative Ireland Programme alongside a majority of cultural policies worldwide in broadening its definition around 'the arts', culture and creativity:

Creative Ireland is a culture-based programme designed to promote individual, community and national well-being. The core proposition is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal well-being and achievement. (1 p. 7)

Creativity as a strategy for well-being, health and resilience has been further advanced in the second 5-year Plan which established Creative Health and Well-being as one of the pillars supporting the Creative Ireland programme (2023-2027). The IFACCA (70) identify the central role that creativity, culture and the arts are increasingly playing in issues affecting policy development and strategic planning in areas ranging from health to EDI, sustainable development to climate change, gender to global crises and conflicts, cultural diversity to social justice and human rights, language, heritage and intercultural dialogue to creative expression by children and young people (71). At a Ministers of Culture conference in Strasbourg (2022), the role of creativity, culture and cultural heritage were identified as strategic resources for a diverse and democratic Europe, with the Ukrainian Minister of Culture and Information Policy speaking about how the Ukrainian people were facing the current aggression "with resilience and using their creative forces" (72). Described as a motor for social, technological and political change, the Council of Europe confirmed a reciprocal relationship between technological developments and art and creativity,



heritage and landscape in which both areas benefit each other and help shape and define our new realities:

Culture and creativity, cultural heritage and landscape lend the way to freedom of expression (on and offline), supporting artificial intelligence developments, empowering civil society, encouraging public debate and providing an education platform for democratic citizenship. (73)

The international trend towards rethinking the role of the arts, creativity, and cultural sectors, attempts to activate all people's participation and engagement and collectively shape the future through creativity, the arts and culture. Leaders worldwide are looking to "carve out strategies for improved futures, with many looking across sectors to ensure public investment in arts and culture yields the greatest possible social benefit" (74). For example, recent research highlights an ability to reliably measure emotional creativity as a distinct but cognate capacity with cognitive creativity, which may be implicated with positive life outcomes (180). In February 2022, UNESCO urged policy makers to integrate creativity, arts and culture into their post-pandemic recovery plans (75). Similarly, in response to challenging the deepening global inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic, the African Union organised their assembly in 2021 under the theme 'Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want'. Echoing the Creative Ireland Programme, the Council for the Arts in Canada (2021) outlined that their forthcoming strategy and vision is to rebuild a more equitable, diverse, and sustainable arts and cultural sector which will place creativity, the arts and innovation at the heart of Canada's recovery and use public investment to further advance social cohesion and development (76). Creative Canada (2017) champions creativity to foster economic growth and promote Canadian identity particularly on a global stage: "It's about positioning Canada as a world leader in putting its creative industries at the centre of its future economy. We know that the economies of the future will rely on creativity and innovation to create jobs and foster growth" (77 p. 5). Creative New Zealand (2019-2029) (78) similarly champions the connection of government policy to explicit support for the arts for all New Zealanders through promoting human, social and economic capital. Northern Ireland's *'Ambitions for the Arts'* policy is also committed to harnessing

culture, arts and leisure to promote equality and tackle poverty and social exclusion (50). The Arts Council England's *'Lets Create' programme (2020-2030)* highlights challenges of inequality of wealth and opportunity, social isolation, mental ill-health, and above all, the accelerating climate emergency. Similar priorities were highlighted by the Arts Council of Wales, who in 2021 announced the development of a Cultural Contract in partnership with the Welsh Government to reimagine a future where the arts and their benefits can be accessed more fairly through ensuring public investment in the creative arts sector has a clear social, cultural, and economic purpose (79). Declared as the London Borough of Culture 2023, with a starting budget of £4.2m, Croydon's Council declared that it would leverage the creative and hospitality industries during 2023/24 to "deliver considerable economic and regeneration effects" and use culture and creativity to "improve the health and wellbeing of our residents" (179 p. 39).

The Creative New Zealand strategy (2019-2029) is correspondingly broadening its policies and understanding of the arts, highlighting creativity as a strategy for inclusivity through for example, increased acknowledgement and presence of their native Māori heritage. Linguistic diversity and multimodal concepts of language were also highlighted in Switzerland by Pro Helvetia (2021), a global network connecting cultural practitioners from Switzerland to other regions such as Cairo, Johannesburg, New Delhi, Shanghai, Moscow, South America, New York, Paris and Rome. In improving social security for creative and cultural professionals (a policy recently introduced in Ireland), Pro Helvetia spoke about the need for interdisciplinarity, new languages, sustainable processes, and an inverted notion where "the public finds culture" rather than where "culture goes seeking an audience" (80).

However, whilst the wider creative and cultural sector appear united in a belief that the arts and culture are a 'public good', with considerable potential to marshal social and economic transformation, the trend to broaden and meld our understanding and use of the arts and creativity is not without criticism. In this context, the EAG re-affirms the position that the arts and creativity are not synonymous (81). Working within a strongly interdisciplinary and multicultural approach, the Creative Ireland Programme may be well advised to continue playing a leading role in avoiding reductive collations which serve neither the

arts, culture nor creativity. A belief that Arts Councils should remain detached from government intervention and governments should adopt a 'laissez faire' policy in which decisions should be left to arts experts remains strong in the literature (83, 178). Criticism levelled at government funding of the arts within initiatives such as the Creative Ireland Programme allude to a negative correlation between such funding, the organisation's autonomy, and the extent of critique allowable (84, 179). In a similar vein, railing against utilitarian notions of creativity and culture, and a lack of autonomy and freedom to create (85), Lee (2021) cautions against a relativist concept of culture wondering:

what this would mean for professional artists and organisations: how can they articulate their unique roles and contributions and justify their eligibility for arts funding when every creative and cultural expression is valued equally and becomes a potential object for public support" (22, p. 63)<sup>6</sup>.

In the case of Ireland, it is noted that even though the Arts Council is a partner in many aspects of the Creative Ireland Programme, it has its own mandate and operates at an arm's length principle (177) under the Arts Act 2003.

Debates involving the arts and creativity seem unlikely to subside any time soon, and indeed should be welcomed in a world where arts and culture as a public good are to be shaped and accessed equitably by all (86). We should also note that the Creative Youth Plan shows no sign of leaving the arts behind and most of the activities are heavily weighted towards the traditional art forms, something we discuss in further detail in Chapter Six. Beyond the scope of the present analysis, further research and engagement in this discussion is required in order to explore and advance arguments beyond current dualisms, where on the one hand a functional cultural democracy approach champions the use of creativity to improve society, the economy and well-being, but accuses the arts sector's insistence on artistic excellence and innovation, of propagating cultural division, fostering cultural elitism and favouring artistic creation over public access (86, 87). In adopting a nuanced and balanced approach, the Creative Youth Plan appears to locate itself firmly in favour of cultural democracy whilst providing space for innovation, excellence and risk-taking, necessary

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<sup>6</sup> See Hadley, Collins & O'Brien (122) and Cooke (160, 161) for an in-depth discussion on this matter in relation to Cultural Policy in an Irish context.

ingredients to support art making and the creative act. Further research and consultation with creative practitioners, teachers, organisations and participants is necessary to explore this potential duality between instrumentalism and aesthetics in the Irish cultural, creative and arts landscape.

DRAFT

# Chapter Four

## Inputs, Outputs and Growth



### 4.1. Introduction

As noted in Chapter Two, the Programme Logic Model adopted in this study functions as a schematic representation to describe how a programme is intended to work by linking activities with outputs, intermediate outcomes, and longer-term impacts (see Fig. 4.1.). It offers a simplified visual representation of the relationship between components of a programme, project, or initiative (28, 29, 88).

Programme Logic Model: Systematic Analysis Creative Youth		
Overarching Strategic Objective: Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child		
Strategic Objective 1	Strategic Objective 2	Strategic Objective 3
Expand young people's access to creative initiatives and activities.	Focus on the inclusion of every child.	Positive and sustainable outcomes for children and young people across formal and non-formal settings.
<b>Schools</b>	<b>Plan Works Across</b>	<b>Community and Out-of-School</b>
	<b>Teacher CPD</b>	

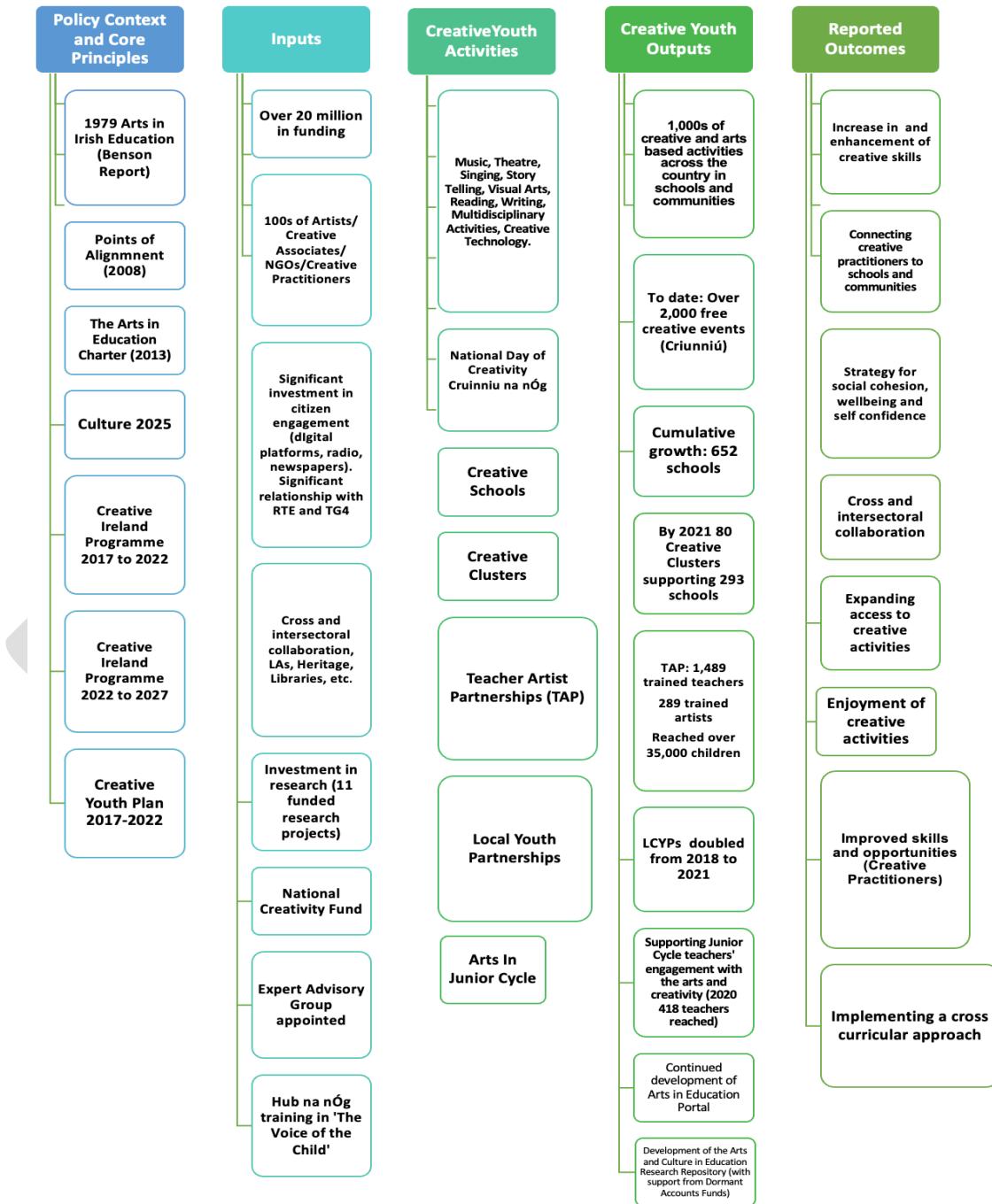


Fig. 4.1. Programme Logic Model: Systematic Review of Creative Youth and NCF Reports

In this chapter we look at inputs and outputs based on available data. Policy Context refers to the policies and plans which inform the programme. Input refers to the resources needed for carrying out the creative activities (time, money, expertise). Output refers to the immediate and direct quantitative result of the activity (such as the number of school children reached, social media presence, number of activities recorded, number of teachers reached, etc.). Chapter Five presents the longer-term social outcomes as reported (e.g., increased self-confidence, increased creative skills).

#### **4.1.1. Creative Youth Inputs**

##### **a) Policy**

Creative Ireland is a 2016 legacy project, inspired by an extraordinary public response to the Centenary. In the first half of 2017, hundreds of meetings were held with individuals and organisations involved in arts education (1). A consensus emerging from these meetings was that the broad policy underpinnings for integration of the arts into education are already in place and that what is now needed is implementation. Building on previous reports and policies such as the *Benson Report* (89), *Points of Alignment 2008* (90), the *Arts in Education Charter 2013* (57), *Culture 2025 Discussion Document* (91), and Smyth's (2016) report (42), the Creative Youth Plan was launched in December 2017 (1). In the wake of the success of Phase One of the Plan, the Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) was launched on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2023 and will operate across seven strategic objectives [Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027](#).

##### **b) Communication**

A major regional and local communications radio campaign was activated during the summer of 2017 to support and promote the publication of the 31 Local Authority Culture and Creativity Plans. An initial investment of over half a million euro in digital content and web development was undertaken, in addition to the delivery of a citizen engagement campaign (costing approximately one million euro) (1). The Creative Ireland Programme developed a significant relationship with both RTÉ<sup>7</sup> and TG4 in relation to Cruinniú na nÓg and other Creative Youth activities. This included a documentary for Creative

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<sup>7</sup> Significant support from RTÉ for Cruinniú na nÓg began in 2020.

Schools called ‘Creative Kids’<sup>8</sup>. There was also a documentary for Junk Kouture called ‘Waking the Muse’<sup>9</sup>. Both of these were funded by the Creative Ireland Programme.

### c) Expenditure

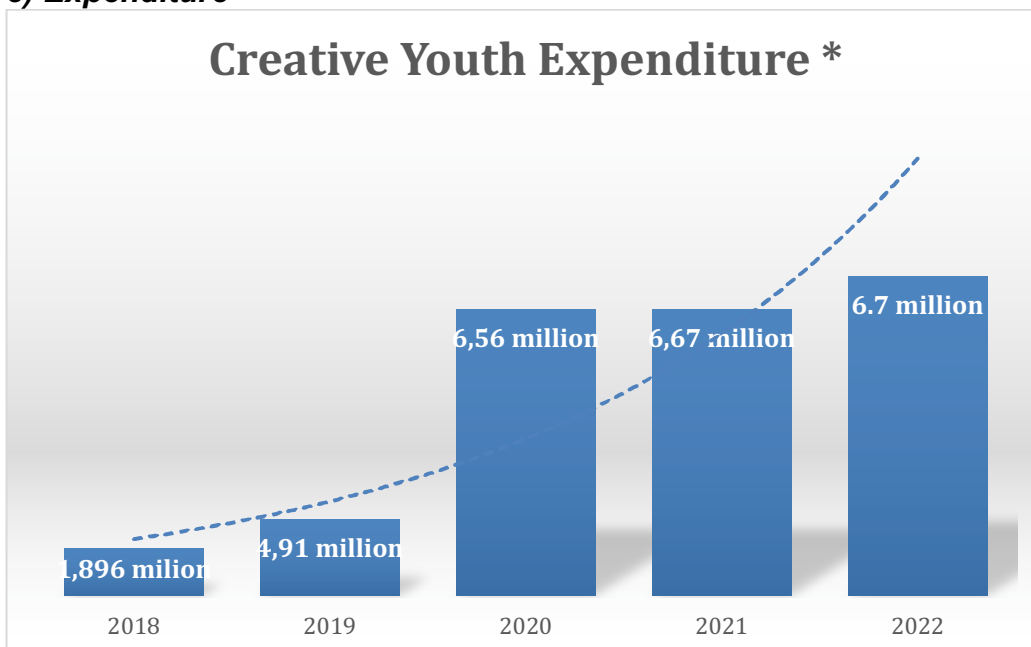


Fig. 4.2. CY Expenditure 2018-2022 (Figures provided by Creative Ireland office)

\*Note this does not include Cruinniú na nÓg and Music Generation core funding. Provision of an additional €1m approx. is made available each year for the hosting of Cruinniú na nÓg. As a direct response to the COVID-19 crisis, a further allocation of approx. €1m was also made available on a once-off basis in 2020 and €1.7m in 2022.

To date funding stands at more than €25 million euro, a substantial investment on the part of the government and a strong indicator of the importance of the Plan. NCF provided €715,470 for the funding of youth-based projects and this figure is not reflected in the above expenditure chart. The minimum level of NCF funding available per individual proposal was €10,000 up to a maximum of €70,000 (the Creative Ireland Programme Office could increase or decrease these thresholds if necessary). Funding criteria identified three thematic areas (Individual and Collective Well-being; Innovation; Connecting Communities) which reflected the broader objectives of the Programme and constituted the purpose for which funding was provided.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/news/creative-kids-rte-documentary/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/lifestyle/fashion/2021/1028/1256444-17-year-old-filmmakers-junk-kouture-doc-to-air-on-rte2/>



Funding was provided for broad cultural and creative sectors only and open to:

- Individuals
- Community groups
- Small to medium companies
- Research organisations
- Non-profit organisations
- Universities, colleges, and
- NGOs.

Qualification checks were carried out by the Creative Ireland Programme team and then by a panel of independent experts<sup>10</sup>.

Core funding for larger Creative Youth initiatives is provided through large multi way agreements involving several departments including DCEDIY, DE, DTCAGSM, in addition to the Arts Council.

d) **Hub na nÓg**

A priority commitment of the DCEDIY in the *National Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015-2020) (7) was the establishment of Hub na nÓg in 2017 as a centre of excellence on children's participation in decision making. The Strategy is guided and influenced by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights*. The Strategy represents a significant contribution to building capacity and shared understanding among all those working to improve outcomes for children and young people and to realise their right to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. In conjunction with the Strategy, *The National Implementation Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* was developed to support and enable implementation of the objectives of the Strategy and build capacity in children and young people's participation in decision-making (appendix 6). On behalf of DCEDIY, Hub na nÓg provides training and support to both the Creative Schools Programme and the Local Creative Youth Partnerships in involving children and young people in decision-making in all projects and initiatives. The

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<sup>10</sup> Full details on eligibility criteria and the funding process available on request from the Creative Youth team.

second Plan (2023-2027) builds on the work already done and reaffirms the importance of consultation, training and inclusion of voice through the Framework.

e) ***Investment in Research***

Significant investment in research has been made, with a total of 10 major research studies funded under Creative Youth core funding (10). Partnerships involve university engagement, the Irish Research Council, the Department of Education, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and the Arts Council. At the time of writing, 9 research reports were fully completed, and one was ongoing (see Fig. 4.3.). Investment as evidenced by the Creative Youth Plan in bespoke research recognises and supports the complexity and non-linear nature of research in the arts, culture and creativity sectors, and is well placed to assess research impacts that aren't always suited to a linear logic model. In writing about Government investment in innovation in the US, Larry Udell (2021) observes that investment in creativity and creative new technologies will lead to “a better and healthier life for all mankind today and into the future” (92 p. 14).





Fig. 4.3. Creative Youth Funded Research

## 4.2. Creative Youth Outputs

The reports included in this analysis measured output in several ways. Some measured number of participants, some the number of new initiatives, others social media presence, or the number of counties reached, and others the number of schools applying to the programme. In general, there was a lack

of consistency in terms of reporting outputs (e.g., it was not possible to say how many children, teachers, artists etc. participated as the required data were not provided in all reports). In most cases it was not possible to chart progress since 2017 as many projects were one off initiatives. Due to the diversity of activity and differing reporting methods, and as many projects did not record exact data, we highlight several flagship initiatives where there was a degree of consistency in reporting as examples and note growth in several other larger Creative Youth programmes.

#### **a) Teacher Artist Partnership (TAP) CPD Initiative**

CPD for teachers and artists working in education is key to the implementation and development of the Creative Youth Plan. In order to infuse the educational system with creativity and culture “It is necessary to build a critical mass of education and arts professionals who are versed in the theoretical frameworks of arts and creativity education, and equipped with the skills and techniques for delivering programmes” (4, p13). The Teacher/Artist Partnership (TAP) CPD summer course and residency programme is an arts-in education initiative in which artists work in partnership with teachers. Pre-dating the Creative Ireland Programme and fuelled by the momentum from the Arts in Education Charter (57), the TAP initiative commenced with a core group of teachers and artists in 2015, and now forms an integral part of Creative Youth. At present there is a fully trained and experienced panel of Teacher and Artist Lead Facilitators ready to deliver to all 21 Educational Support Centres Ireland (ESCI) network. In addition to face-to-face training, the TAP initiative has evolved and been accredited as an online programme and successfully delivered online in 2020 and 2021. TAP is now being developed as a European programme under the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership in innovation and sharing of best practice category with four other countries.

The following have participated in TAP to date\* (see Table 4.1.).

Table. 4.1. TAP Training Input (Data provided by Creative Ireland office, 2023)

TAP trained teachers	1,468
TAP trained artists	365

TAP facilitators trained to deliver TAP	79
TAP artist in-school residencies	822
Children in primary schools directly impacted by TAP	*22,194
Children reached via number of teachers trained	*40,000+

\*The figure for children involved or impacted by TAP CPD and in-school residency is based on each teacher being involved with approximately 25/26 students in a class. The figure is a conservative estimate.

Table 4.2: TAP Funding 2018-2022 (Creative Ireland Office 2023)

TAP CPD	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
DE	150,000*	113,000	240,000	120,000	250,000	250,000	1,123,000
DTCAGSM	70,000	230,000^	240,000	352,000^^	240,000	240,000	1,372,000
Arts Council	55,800**						55,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>275,800</b>	<b>343,000</b>	<b>480,000</b>	<b>472,000</b>	<b>490,000</b>	<b>490,000</b>	<b>2,550,800</b>

\*Dormant Accounts Funding via DE

\*\*Once off for Artist participation

^Inclusive of additional €15,000 paid in 2018 by DTCAGSM relating to the administration of both TAP and Creative Clusters

^^Inclusive of €112,000 stimulus funding

CPD features prominently across the Creative Youth Plan, and the Arts in Junior Cycle initiative supports Junior Cycle teachers' engagement with creativity, the arts and active learning in their classrooms. Partnering with such organisations as the Irish Architecture Foundation, National Gallery Ireland, Cartoon Saloon, Poetry Ireland, the Goethe-Institut, the Irish Film Institute and the Design and Crafts Council Ireland, Arts in Junior Cycle builds on such partnerships to enhance teacher creativity and reflective practice to ensure the arts and creativity are seen as integral to high quality learning environments in schools. 1,668 teachers attended Arts in Junior Cycle workshops from January to November 2022.

### **b) Creative Schools**

Creative Schools is led by the Arts Council in partnership with the Department of Education, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration

& Youth. Each participating school is assigned a Creative Associate who works with the school to carry out an analysis of current engagement with the arts and creativity. Using this they create a sustainable Creative Schools Plan drawing on a range of opportunities within the school/centre and the wider community. Schools/centres receive a grant of €2,000 per annum for 2 years to implement plans (input). Interest in the initiative has been significant with, for example, over 1,400 applications to the programme over 5 rounds (from 2018 to December 2022), (Creative Ireland Office, 2023) resulting in 850 successful applicants. This would suggest potential for further growth and development if adequately resourced to meet supply with demand. Figure 4.4. presents the cumulative totals to year end 2022.

Table 4.2. Creative Schools Successful Applications\*

CREATIVE SCHOOLS - ROUND 1	CREATIVE SCHOOLS - ROUND 2	CREATIVE SCHOOLS - ROUND 3	CREATIVE SCHOOLS - ROUND 4	CREATIVE SCHOOLS - ROUND 5
148	149	163	187	185

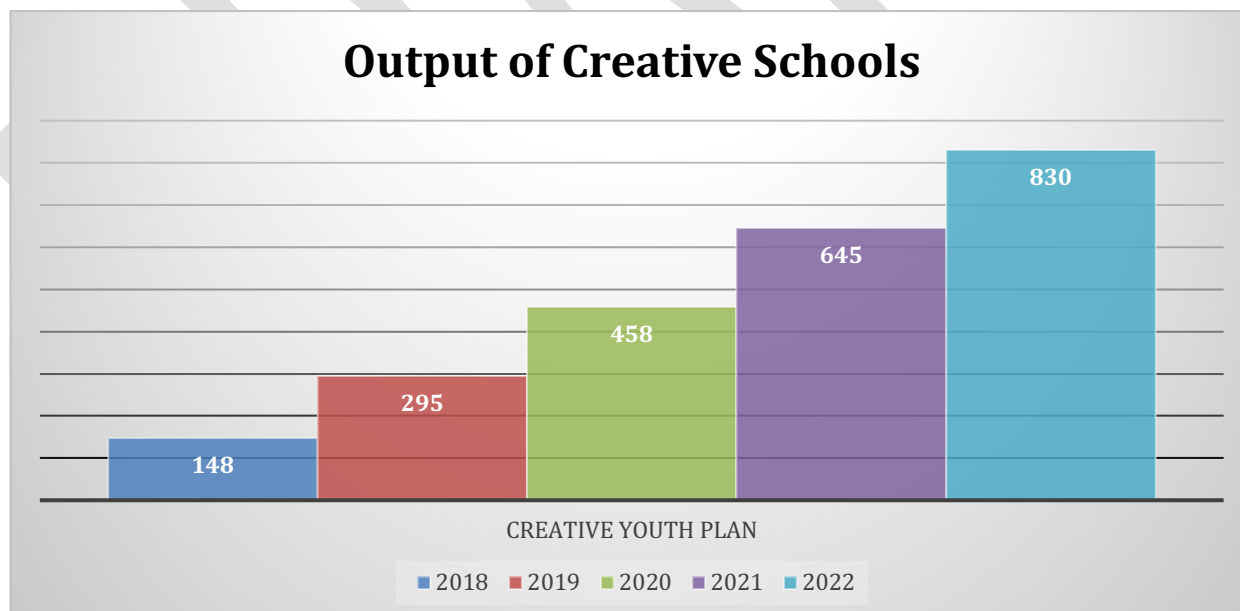


Fig. 4.4. Cumulative Growth of Creative Schools Initiative (2018-2022) (Data provided by the Creative Ireland Office, 2023)

\*A small number of successful applicants did not accept the offer to participate in the Creative Schools programme.

### c) Creative Clusters

Launched in 2018, Creative Clusters is a pilot initiative of the Department of Education, led by and in partnership with the Teacher Education Centres Ireland (ESCI) and funded through the Schools Excellence Fund. A Creative Cluster consists of between 3 to 5 schools and can involve primary schools only, post primary schools only or a combination of both. Between 2018 to 2022, 450 schools participated in this programme. Each cluster receives training and support from a designated Cluster Facilitator (linked to an ESCI full-time Education Centre) and is led by a teacher as lead school coordinator from a designated lead school. The pilot was designed to explore how the arts and creativity might encourage clusters of schools to work together to address common learning challenges experienced. Schools collaborate on the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of an innovative arts and creative learning project which supports them in addressing a common issue/challenge. Cluster schools are encouraged to centre the voice of the child or young people in identifying challenges (30).

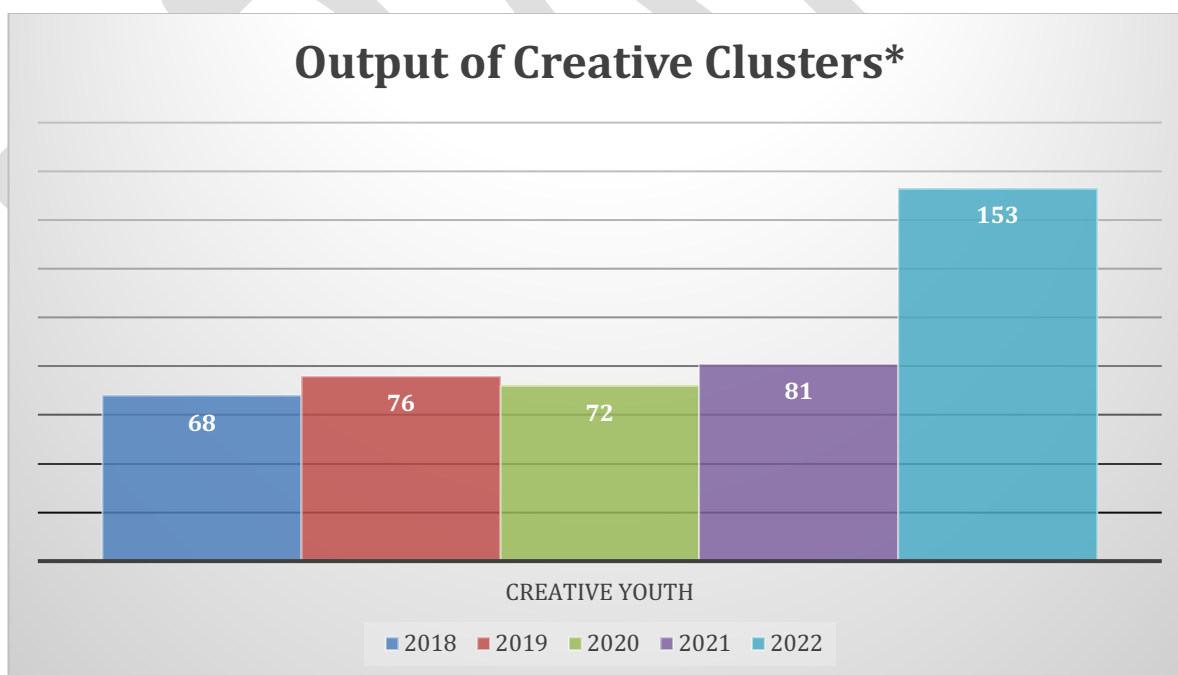


Fig. 4.5. Growth of Creative Clusters (Creative Ireland Office, 2023)

\*Figures represent number of schools involved in clusters; it should be noted that some schools may have participated more than once in the programme.



As evident in Fig. 4.5. Creative Clusters has grown steadily. A snapshot provided by Morrissey's report in 2021 (30) highlights the variety of projects and activities undertaken by clusters. In a sample of 49 projects over a two-year period (2018-2020), 19 related to well-being, the environment, and the arts, 11 to STEM/STEAM, nine to local history, six focused on multidisciplinary arts, and four did not fit into any broad category. Aligned with the aims of the Creative Ireland Programme and Creative Youth Plan, Morrissey (2021) found that the Planning Model Documents demonstrated a "range of creative activities" and planning for the arts "not just as curriculum subjects but as instruments for education more generally" (30 p. 37).

#### **d) Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYPs)**

Action 14 of the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022) specifies that Local Creative Youth Partnerships will be established on a pilot basis within the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Providing 'out of school' activities for children and young people with particular focus on marginalised cohorts, their remit goes beyond the arts, and includes culture and creative activity in all spheres. The partnership brings together the local infrastructure of Youth Officers, Local Authorities, Education Centres, representatives from the early years sector, and local cultural resources such as arts centres (4). Growing from an initial three pilot partnerships to six demonstrates their success. The work of the LCYPs is supported by Hub na nÓg to ensure the voices of children and young people remain core to the partnerships. A snapshot analysis of three of the LCYPs in 2021, shows approximately 5,000 children and young people participating in projects/workshops or event. Most participants came from disadvantaged, deprived or migrant communities and a diverse range of creative activities was offered from cookery, upcycling, storytelling, murals and drama, to crafts, circus and song.

#### **e) Local Authorities Project Output**

Collaboration between Local Authorities (LAs), the Creative Ireland Programme and creative practitioners has been central to the delivery and success of Creative Youth (83). LAs are uniquely positioned within the community to provide access to cultural and creative experiences across Ireland. More than

7,000 creative and arts-based projects have been delivered by the 31 LAs to date, addressing issues around people, place and identity, and social, economic and environmental challenges. In the following chapter we discuss how the development of strategic partnerships and networks through cross and intersectoral collaboration can be considered a major outcome of the Creative Youth Plan. Many projects have been directly provided for children and young people, and the LAs oversee the roll out of the National Day of Creativity for children and young people, Cruinniú na nÓg, presented next.

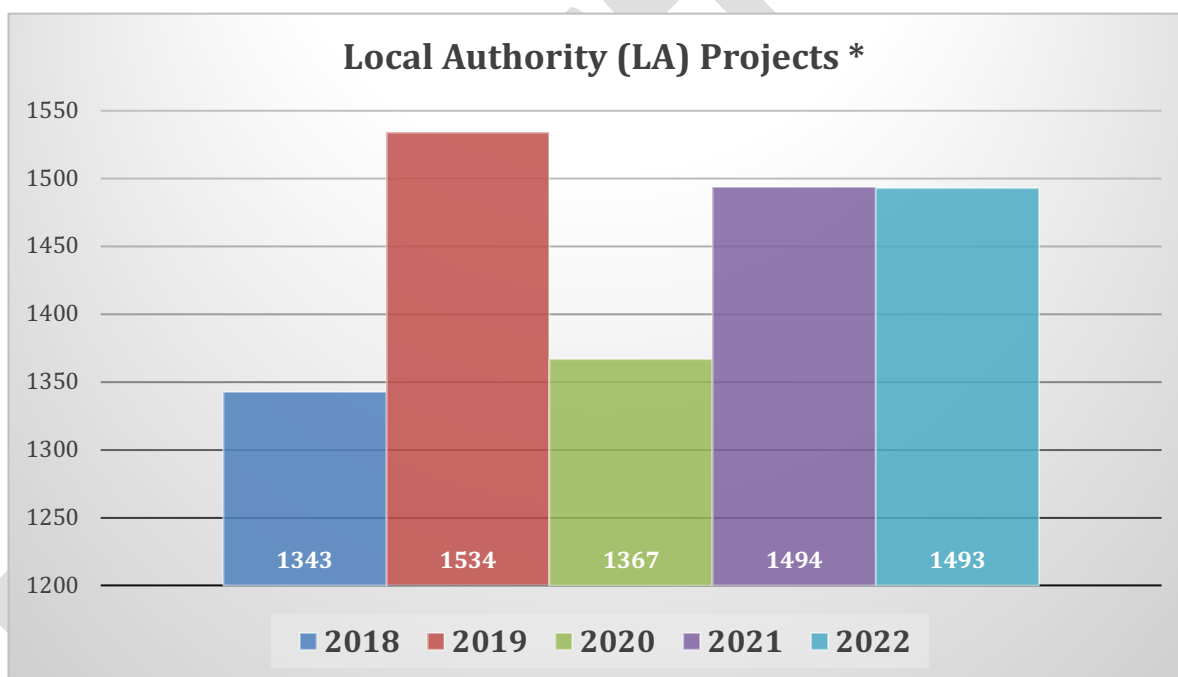


Fig. 4.6. Local Authority Projects (Data sourced from Creative Ireland Progress Reports, 4, 58, 93, 94; Creative Ireland office 2023). Numbers include Cruinniú events.

#### **f) Cruinniú na nÓg**

Cruinniú na nÓg is the National Day of Creativity for children and a flagship initiative of Creative Youth. Run in partnership with the Local Authorities and supported by RTÉ, Cruinniú organised almost 3,000 events between 2018 and 2022, featuring 20 genres including Music, STE(A)M, Theatre, Dance, Biodiversity, Architecture, Crafts, Literature and so on. This reflects the cultural democracy approach identified in Chapter Three.

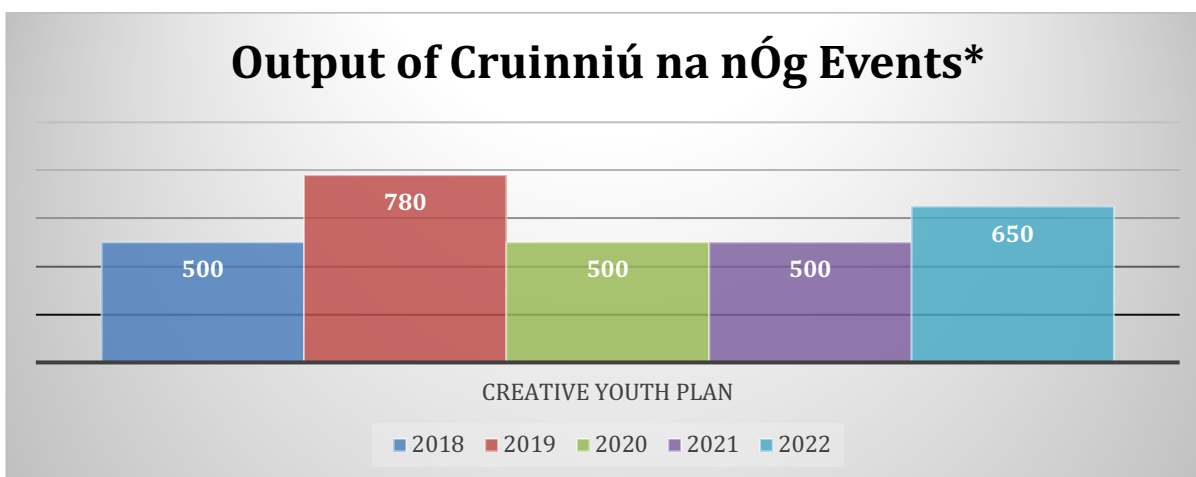


Fig. 4.7. Output of Cruinniú na nÓg Events (Data sourced from CI Progress Reports 58, 93, 94, 157)

\*Cruinniú was moved online in 2020 and 2021, with the number of events reduced to offer more meaningful and impactful activities.

#### **g) Growth in other Creative Youth Initiatives**

Evidence suggests that Creative Youth is investing in innovative and diverse creative activities from large scale projects such as Music Generation and Fighting Words to smaller scale initiatives like the Lullaby Project. Innovative leadership is shown in the range of projects funded, from Le Chéile's contemporary ways of music making, to multidisciplinary arts projects and storytelling initiatives like Narrative 4's project with Roma and Traveller communities (see Chapter 6, Fig. 6.7) for distribution of the range of Creative Youth and NCF funded activities). Substantial growth in the diversity and expanse of initiatives in both formal and non-formal settings since 2017 demonstrates the success of the Creative Youth Plan in its second and third objectives: collaboration and innovation (see Chapter Three). Through strategic support and funding by the Creative Youth Plan, the growth and development of well-established organisations (see below) illustrate the value of cross-sectoral partnership and capacity building within a 'joined up thinking' approach to creativity.

- **BLAST** (Bringing Live Arts to Schools and Teachers) In May 2021, the Minister for Education announced a new arts in education residency initiative for both primary and post-primary schools called BLAST. In 2021, 488 schools were awarded grants through this scheme and a new round

of applications was launched in 2022. Presently there is no report on BLAST to evaluate to what extent progress has been made in relation to CY objectives and aims.

- **Music Generation** is now a key action within the Creative Youth Plan in the belief that it is every child and young person's right to have the choice of access, and the chance to participate as a musical citizen. Music Generation expanded from 11 locations in 2017 to 28 in 2022. An evaluation report on this initiative is forthcoming and will provide further insights and information on progress across this scheme.
- **Fighting Words** has expanded, and now operates in 23 centres nationwide prioritising working with DEIS schools in each region. The Story Seeds project, an extension of Fighting Words which targets primary schools offering a collaborative creative writing programme focused on local community forms part of the success of this programme. Young people from almost 250 schools and youth groups across Dublin, Cork city, Limerick city, Bray, Co. Wicklow, Drogheda, and Co. Louth will have new creative writing opportunities.
- With the support of the Creative Ireland Programme, **Youth Theatre Ireland** (YTI) can roll-out a new nationwide expansion programme, providing a new group in Dublin as well as in Offaly and Westmeath – two counties where there had previously been no formal youth theatre. YTI will provide a structured training programme (including QQI accredited training in youth drama facilitation practice) to support the development of high-quality youth theatre practice.
- **YouthSing Ireland** Phase 1 of this project was undertaken in 2018 in which a piece of research was commissioned (included as additional documents in this review) to consult and build the case for sustainable engagement with singing and choral music for young people as articulated in Action 9 of the Creative Youth Plan. In 2019 Sing Ireland with the support of Creative Youth and funding from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media commenced YouthSing Ireland.

The project supports teachers through enhanced CPD, new resource material in Irish and opportunities such as Sing Space which brings together teachers, musicians and children to work collaboratively.

- **Kinia** published a needs analysis report in June 2021 which highlighted the need of youth settings to provide technological opportunities for young people. Kinia have been working with the organisations that responded to the needs analysis along with others identified by Tusla, CYPSCs, ETBI, and Local Authorities in the form of training and equipment. The development of micro-credentials such as QQI accredited Digital Youth Kinia alongside ETB partners is providing a progression route for creative technology skills and a pathway to further education, career pathways and apprenticeships. To date 220 educators completed training as part of Kinia's Creative Technologies programme, and 24 creative technologies educators were awarded Kinia credentials in the first round. Informed by the Educator Advisory Group and the young people's advisory group, in March 2023 Kinia launched a Creative Technology Toolkit.

### 4.3. Summary

The Creative Ireland Programme is described as a 2016 legacy project, which was “inspired by the extraordinary public response to the Centenary: the thousands of events, largely culture-based, and unprecedented public participation that brought us together in shared reflections on identity, culture and citizenship that combined history with arts, heritage and language” (1, p. 6). Underpinned by the values and principles of Culture 2025 (91) and previous arts and cultural policies and reports<sup>11</sup>, the insights and expertise reflected in these documents can be considered a significant input into the Creative Ireland Programme's policy development. Although heavily descriptive owing to a lack of empirical data, the evidence here supports that the Creative Ireland Programme has invested significantly in the Creative Youth Plan since its launch and continues to do so. In terms of citizen engagement, digital content, and academic research, investment is substantial. The Creative Youth Plan has

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<sup>11</sup> 1979 Arts in Education Benson Report (89); Points of Alignment 2008 (40); The Arts in Education Charter 2013 (57); Culture 2025 (91); Smyth (42, 43).

grown significantly in schools and youth centres through the LCYPs, Creative Schools, Creative Clusters and TAP. Teacher CPD has also expanded through several of these initiatives, supported by Hub na nÓg's training to enable child voice and participation. The Creative Youth Plan has also grown in the community (non-formal settings) since its launch, demonstrating its commitment to expand access to creative activities in both formal and out of school settings. The available evidence strongly supports successful cross-sectoral collaboration with Local Authorities through funding local projects and collaboration with previously established organisations such as Fighting Words and Music Generation. A more in-depth analysis of the impact of the Plan will be discussed in the following chapters.

DRAFT

# Chapter Five

## Findings and Outcomes in a National and International Context



### 5.1. Introduction

In this chapter we take a closer look at the commonalities and trends evident in the Creative Youth (CY) (n=13) and National Creativity Funds' (NCF) (n=11) reports (i.e., the findings and outcomes they reported). Included amongst the 13 CY initiatives<sup>12</sup> are large scale programmes such as Creative

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<sup>12</sup> We use the term initiative, project and programme interchangeably throughout the review to refer to all creative activities, programmes, initiatives and workshops under the Creative Youth Plan and National Creativity Fund.

Schools which has involved over 650 schools since 2018, Creative Clusters in which 376 schools have participated since 2018 and Teacher Artist Partnership which has impacted over 40,000 children since its inception in 2014 as a pilot scheme. As detailed in Chapter Two, reported outcomes, challenges and recommendations were coded and grouped into overlying themes employing NVivo 12 Plus. We used Classification Attributes, Matrix Queries and Excel in order to disaggregate the data where necessary (see appendix 4 and 5 for a sample of the codebook and matrix queries generated). Throughout the chapter, additional documents (see appendix 2) which had been made available to the research team from 2021-2023 but did not meet the inclusion criteria feature in the discussion.

In summary, an increase in 'creative skills'<sup>13</sup> is reported in almost all initiatives, and an increase in creative activities throughout the country is evidenced. A majority stress the importance of developing and consolidating inter and cross sectoral partnerships through connecting creative practitioners, youth workers and arts organisations with young people and teachers both in and outside formal educational settings. The success of cross-sectoral collaboration in maximising resources and encouraging learning through what could be considered an 'apprenticeship' model is another key finding in this area. Intersectoral collaboration in which teachers form a community of practice and develop skills through learning from colleagues is highlighted. Fostering a cross curricular approach is a reported outcome across most initiatives, as is the value of continued professional training amongst teachers, youth workers and creative practitioners. Importantly, supporting inclusivity in the form of expanding access to creative skills across the country and targeting seldom heard communities is reported as an outcome by a majority of initiatives. The experience of enjoyment is highlighted, and evidence of how creativity is being employed strategically to improve self-confidence, foster social cohesion, and enhance well-being is extensively documented.

In the discussion below, we highlight where reported outcomes present significant divergences between the typically larger Creative Youth initiatives and the smaller NCF initiatives. This allows for a more distilled understanding of

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<sup>13</sup> Creative skills were interpreted somewhat differently in each project, e.g., musicianship, painting, storytelling, arts appreciation, song making, theatre skills, writing, using technology creatively, craft making etc.



the data and more effective and targeted recommendations to inform the second [Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027](#). The outcomes are grouped under three main themes, and for ease of reading, major findings are depicted across three figures (5.1a, 5.1b and 5.1c). Discussion about each of the major findings is presented below, accompanied by representative participant quotations where qualitative data were available, and illustrated by selected examples of funded projects.

### 5.1.1. Common Trends in Creative Youth and NCF Initiatives

#### **Social Outcomes: Supporting Creativity**

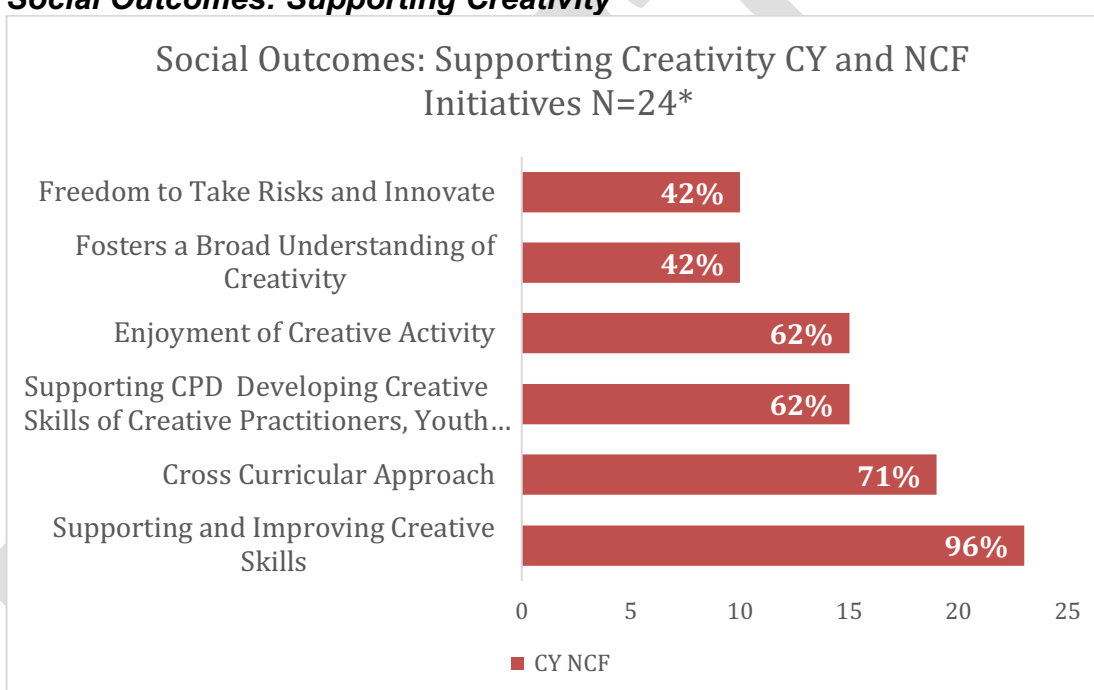


Fig. 5.1.(a) Social Outcomes Creative Youth and NCF Initiatives

\* Number scale represents number of initiatives

\*Percentages with decimals are rounded to nearest whole number.

#### ➤ **Enabling and Increasing Creative Skills**

*The skills I learned in terms of dance/movement and a renewed sense of self confidence and belief in my own abilities. (NYT Young Ensemble member, 2019)*

*I introduced wet felting and 2D and 3D needlework to my classes as a result of the confidence I gained from undertaking my course. I will also reintroduce large-scale exploratory drawing to my Junior Cycle students, and I am now aware of the potential for doing glass casting with some of my classes. (Teacher, Arts in Junior Cycle, 2022)*

*As a lecturer at 3rd level in first year fine art and design, we often see reluctance from students to experiment through various methods of research. They are more concerned with producing a finished work, rather than letting the research inform the outcome. I feel that having this programme introduced to students this early is really valuable, encouraging curious learning. (Designer Maker, Kate O' Kelly, Design SKILLS, 2020)*

96% (n=23) of Creative Youth and NCF reports included in this study, rate enabling creativity and increasing creative skills as an important outcome of their project. Given that engagement in arts activities can foster child social development, enhancing prosocial skills and socio-emotional development (42, 43, 95, 96), enabling and increasing creative skills in young people is a valuable outcome. In the Department of Education consultation with schools for the Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027 (DE, 2022), 71.6% of 303 primary and special schools reported Arts and Creative Skills as a benefit of participating in Creative Youth initiatives. As part of the same consultation this category was also highlighted most by post primary schools. In a recent Adobe skills assessment of creativity in the workplace (97), the role of creative skills in shifting priorities and making changes when unexpected events occur (such as during the pandemic), prepared respondents to undertake creative changes in their projects, empowering positive change in incorporating real-world issues and developing creative projects with positive societal impacts. 81% of respondents in that study (n=2,516) reported that the events of 2020 had reinforced more than ever the necessity to expand creative skillsets. In a previous Global Creativity Gap survey in 2016 (n=5,026), Adobe found that while global respondents believed being creative was valuable to society (70%) and to the economy (64%), only 41% percent described themselves as creative and 31% percent reported they were living up to their creative potential (98). Respondents recognised that businesses who invest in creativity are more likely to foster innovation (83%) and be financially successful (73%). They reported that governments and schools have a creativity imperative, perceiving that a government which invests in creativity is more likely to foster innovation (82%), increase productivity (79%), be competitive (78%), and have happier citizens

(76%). About two-thirds (65%) believed that creativity is being stifled by their educational systems and to foster creativity, education should prioritize:

- Learning by 'doing' versus direct instruction (84%)
- Creativity over memorization (75%)
- Time for creative activity versus a fully structured school day (74%)
- Developing a wide variety of student skills (72%).

The Creative Youth data compare favourably with international comparators in this regard and were evidenced in numerous projects such as a youth orchestra where young people commented on how much they had learnt about music and instruments played; a visual arts project where children considered they discovered artistic skills they didn't know they had; the theatre project quoted above where participants claimed to have developed theatre and creative skills. The Creative Youth flagship initiative, Creative Schools, found that "This initiative provides opportunities for children and young people to build their artistic and creative skills; to communicate, collaborate, stimulate their imaginations, be inventive, and to harness their curiosity" (Murphy & Eivers, 2023, p. 12). From circus skills, weaving and landscape gardening to crafting and outdoor sculptures using tyres, creative skills were fostered in a variety of ways through the Creative Schools initiative. TAP found that the programme "enabled teachers to develop new practical creative skills and experiential learning techniques; to become more expressive and 'think outside the box' in delivering the formal curriculum; and to foster creativity among children" (Roe & Egan, 2023, p. 3). Fighting Words<sup>14</sup> another prominent initiative funded by the Creative Youth Plan, found that through expanding their Story Seeds programme, they opened "new and ongoing opportunities for young people in the targeted areas to engage with creative and cultural pursuits" (Lehane, 2023, p. 7). Skills such as story writing, song writing, scriptwriting, poetry, playwriting and graphic fiction were enhanced through this programme. No divergence was

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<sup>14</sup> Fighting Words is a creative writing centre established by Irish writer Roddy Doyle and Seán Love in Dublin in January 2009. 'Fighting Words helps students of all ages to develop their writing skills and to explore their love of writing' (Lorenzi & White, 2013). Fighting Words aim to reach every child and adult in the country. To support this objective, the Creative Ireland Programme partnered with the organisation since 2019 to assist in realising national coverage. Story Seeds is an extension of Fighting Words and targets primary schools in the local catchment area of Dublin 1 to Dublin 7 – the north east inner city – offering a collaborative creative writing programme focused on local community and place.

found in the data in this category between larger and smaller scale projects.

### ➤ **Cross-Curricular Approach**

*Teachers spoke about developing new practical creative skills, experiential learning and new ideas to bring back to the classroom. A number of teachers reported benefits of participating in the course such as becoming more expressive, realising there is no right or wrong way to work creatively and “thinking outside the box” more in terms of teaching the arts and creativity. Teachers reported greater ability to present, teach and manage creative activities in the classroom and how to foster creativity among children. (TAP, 2023)*

*Integrating creative art processes as a learning methodology across the curriculum. (Artist from TAP, 2023)*

*Evidence shows that the Fighting Words model has a positive impact on personal, social and academic development of participants who demonstrate increased levels of engagement not just with creative writing but also with the entire school experience, leading to improved motivation, confidence, self-esteem, pride in creative ability, a greater ability to work collaboratively, and improved literacy. (Fighting Words, 2023)*

*74% consider the picture books a tool with which to address the Aistear framework. (Survey results from Early Years Educators, Small Print, 2020)*

71% (n=17) of reports reported adopting a cross-curricular approach as an outcome of their projects. In the *Preamble to the Draft Principles for Arts Facilitation in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care Settings* (Stokes, 2021), arts as a means for learning across multiple domains is advocated. Fostering language, literacy and numeracy skills, and enhancing social, emotional and physical development are highlighted. An Inspector’s Report on TAP observed “The content also makes meaningful links with literacy and is underpinned by the aims and pedagogical principles of The Primary Language Curriculum 2019” (Inspection Report, 2021, p.1). UNESCO (2021) (118) define the importance of cross-curricular learning and cooperative learning advocating that “Interconnectedness and interdependencies should frame pedagogy”. *Children’s Experience of Teacher Artist Partnership* bears this out

(Buggie, 2023), reporting “high levels of creative and arts-based learning in all residencies as well as strong cross-curricular learning across five of eight” residencies (p. 12). TAP highlighted that the relationships between teachers, students and knowledge are located in a wider world: “All learners are connected to the world and all learning takes place in and with the world” (Buggie, 2023, p. 60). Arts integrated approaches are acknowledged as supporting student learning in meaningful ways, developing critical perspectives and fostering critical thinking (119, 120). For example, musical vocal interaction promotes infants’ language learning (121), and music training improves phonological awareness and reading skills in children with dyslexia (122). Both dance and cultural engagement are associated with higher verbal scores and music training can enhance literacy development because of changes in brain mechanisms which support music and language cognition (123, 124).

In this category there was a notable difference between CY and NCF initiatives, with 85% (n=11) of CY initiatives reporting cross curricular approaches as an outcome, in comparison to 54% (n=6) of NCF initiatives. Unsurprisingly perhaps, Creative Clusters, Creative Schools, TAP and Arts in Junior Cycle are the principal strands of Creative Youth which tackle cross-curricular approaches to learning, as they are ideally placed within the school framework. In addition, teachers often form a central part of these initiatives and can therefore quite skilfully connect creative skills to the national curriculum. For example, 93% of responding teachers (55 out of 59) asserted that the Creative Cluster model had generated a cross-curricular impact and 86% (50 out of 58) felt Creative Clusters had enabled creative pedagogies, such as adapting their teaching to accommodate the inclusion of pupils as decision makers, collaborative learning, incidental learning, context-based learning, exploratory learning and so on. Similarly, data from Creative Associates (CA) participating in Creative Schools demonstrated a noted increase in teachers’ willingness to try new pedagogies across a range of topics/subjects, and an increase in creativity employed to support learning across the curriculum (Murphy & Eivers, 2023). Findings from the Arts in Junior Cycle also highlights the benefits of a cross curricular approach fostered through teacher training and is exemplified in the words of one of the course providers:

It was great to see Science teachers engaging with a dance section in an opera (discussing how movement could be used to teach concepts like states of matter, or the spread of a virus), or language teachers seeing how foreign language opera might be another medium through which students can gain fluency. (McCarthy, 2022, p. 44).

The TAP evaluation (Roe & Egan, 2023) reported supporting teachers to integrate art and creativity into other subjects and to enhanced learning in these areas as a significant benefit of the programme. Interestingly, TAP artists also reported on opportunities to incorporate their creative practice into the curriculum as an outcome. LCYPs were established in conjunction with local Education Training Boards to provide opportunities for creative engagement out of school, particularly amongst seldom heard communities. As such their aims/objectives can often lie outside the formal school curriculum, though they also successfully employed creative skills to enhance learning and development across different learning domains.

Several smaller projects in this analysis also cite the importance of cross-curricular learning. For example, Children's Books Ireland curated a selection of ten excellent picture books for young children (aged 2.5 to 6), drawing on the principles of early learning and development and the themes of Aistear. Bridging the gap between the arts and education was cited as a significant outcome in a theatre programme (Tenderfoot, 2020), and in an arts appreciation project, critical pedagogy provided children with collective ownership of knowledge and activities undertaken (Better Words, 2019). Reference to cross-curricular work emerged as being largely school-oriented and pertaining to the CY initiatives in this study, whereas apart from the work by the LCYPs, the out of school dimension appears underdeveloped. This could represent somewhat of a missed opportunity as the benefits of cross-curricular activity in out of school settings could enable identification of patterns between different activities, and a creative way to stimulate knowledge, interest and curiosity in areas such as sustainability and the societal/ethical/moral dimensions of learning (125, 126, 127). It is noteworthy that in the Department of Education Consultation (2022) approximately half of primary and special schools reported curriculum development as a benefit of participation in CY initiatives in contrast to just 8% of post primary schools. This could indicate

a lack of understanding around creativity as a cross curricular tool across all school ages, but particularly pronounced at second level. In the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DE, 2023), creativity and the arts will be embedded within the vision, key principles and competencies guiding a new framework where integration within and across curriculum areas is mooted:

Children live their lives in an integrated world, and, for most real-world problems, children need to apply knowledge and skills from multiple areas. Consequently, they need opportunities in school to develop the disposition to use knowledge and skills flexibly, and integrated learning experiences can provide that context. ... the curriculum recognises that the teacher's interactions with children and their lived experience enable the identification of fruitful themes, interdisciplinary skills, big ideas, and real-world problems that are starting points for integrated learning and teaching. (p. 26)

However, in the Post Primary curriculum there seems to have been a lack of attention to this aspect of learning to date and the role of creativity and the arts have been downplayed.

### ➤ **Supporting Continuing Professional Development: Developing Creative Skills of Teachers, Youth Workers and Creative Practitioners**

*This was a very emotional journey. In fact, it was the single best most important and impactful thing I have ever been involved in in my lengthy music career. I not only have developed professionally, but I have learned so much as a human being from these exceptional musicians and realized that creative potential has no boundaries for anyone. (Music Practitioner from Le Chéile)*

*I've enhanced my knowledge of the creativity process and reflected on how to incorporate it into classroom life. Artists provided great ideas of how to develop skills and improve creative experiences within each area of the arts which I found really helpful as each residency will only focus on one area (mostly). (Teacher, TAP CPD face-to-face, 2023)*

62% (n=15) of reports cited improved skills for creative practitioners, teachers and youth workers as an outcome. There was very little variance

between CY and NCF reports on this outcome. Creative practitioners and youth workers cited improved skills as an outcome, identifying improved knowledge and skills in working with children, growing professionally and emotionally; others felt it developed and strengthened their arts practice. Teachers expressed satisfaction in learning new arts-based techniques, an opportunity to nurture and develop their own creativity and foster a greater appreciation of the arts. The level of satisfaction with *Arts in Junior Cycle* was particularly high in relation to how the initiative supported teaching and learning, personal wellbeing and appreciation for the arts (McCarthy, 2022). Similarly, the evaluation of Creative Clusters found that the programme excels as a model of teacher CPD and highlights the positive impact of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) comprised of clusters of schools focused on a common concern and peer learning (Morrissey, 2021). In the Creative Schools report, CAs expressed satisfaction with their initial induction training. Satisfaction levels were also high for training related to the Lundy Model/Children's Voice, and for preparing CAs to work with children or young people. *Small Print*, a story books initiative for early years reported that professionals had been upskilled with creative strategies to engage young children in reading. In relation to artists, evidence of acquiring and/or improving creative skills was strong. Artists in TAP consistently cited the value of learning new arts techniques, methods and approaches to incorporate into their practice in the classroom. Artists spoke about the benefits of learning new practical skills, "providing artists with the knowledge and skills needed to marry their creative interventions to the curriculum and to work in partnership with teachers" (Roe & Egan, 2023, p. 5). In the Department of Education consultation, 41% of teachers in primary and special schools highlighted CPD for staff as a beneficial outcome of participation in CY initiatives (DE, 2022).

Programmes providing adequate staff preparation and training, especially training in creative and flexible problem solving for effective programme delivery, has been shown to support programme longevity (106). A lack of adequately trained personnel is presented as a major barrier to the sustainability of community programmes (151, 149, 180). Therefore, the creative, emotional or physical development of practitioners, teachers and youth workers who are, due to their profession caring for and teaching children and



young people, should be a priority for creativity and wellbeing programmes such as CIP. Socially engaged creative work needs to be acknowledged, supported and sufficiently remunerated (181) and will be discussed in the recommendations section. As previously noted, the Creative Youth Plan (3, 4) considers the development of a critical mass of creative practitioners, teachers and youth workers as central to implementation and mainstreaming. It would appear from the data that supporting continued professional development during Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan has been well received by teachers, artists and youth workers alike and is strongly encouraged in the next Plan.

➤ **Enjoyment of Creative Activity**

*Normally people think writing's boring but doing this you realise that it's fun and you can enjoy doing it... It's like when anything pops into your head and you say it, you can't really do anything wrong because it's what you're thinking and what you have to express [yourself]... (Participant in Story Seeds, 2023)*

*'It was so much fun.' 'Exciting times and full of fun'. 'I had fun ... with my friends.' 'I enjoyed ... with my friends.' (Comments from children participating in Creative Clusters, 2022)*

62% (n=15) of reports cited enjoyment as a positive outcome of their interventions. The evidence supports that both Creative Youth and NCF initiatives introduced something 'novel' and 'exciting' into participating children and young people's lives. Activities were reported as being fun, enjoyable, alleviating boredom, breaking school routine and providing a stimulating experience. In addition to the fun experienced from participating in cultural activities, happiness appeared to come from building relationships and friendships as a consequence of participation in the project. Story Seeds participants enjoyed working in collaborative and democratic spaces where their voices were valued and they were invited to express themselves and their ideas (184). 'The girls absolutely loved it. They were falling around the place laughing... It's just that sense of fun and freedom that keeps you coming back' (Lehane, 2023, p. 13). Morrissey's (2021) (30) report on Creative Clusters cited

numerous comments from children and teachers in which enjoyment, fun, making new friends and connecting with different schools were rated highly. Based on 82 responses, 60% of CAs from Creative Schools very much enjoyed their role on the programme. The additional documents made available to the researchers also confirm the joy experienced from participating in creative activities. In *Children's Experience of Teacher Artist Partnership* (Buggie, 2023), the voice of 128 children was captured through creative participatory methods and demonstrated primarily their enjoyment of creative practice. TY students from the Tenderfoot apprentice theatre programme located in The Civic Theatre Tallaght, described the happiness and joy they felt when participating in the programme.

Interestingly, the enjoyment factor was reported marginally more often in the NCF initiatives (n=8, 73%) as opposed to CY (n=7, 54%) which could appear to signal the fun factor of smaller-scale initiatives, often operating outside the boundaries of the school curriculum and in 'out of school' environments. Enjoyment is habitually linked with creative engagement, happiness and well-being among children and young people (104, 185). Well-being (discussed in more detail below) includes emotions such as a sense of competence or belonging, and satisfaction with life, and is positively correlated with mental health and happiness (104, 105, 186).

There is a three-letter word which I cherish in the education process, but is rarely expressed, and that is 'joy'. I consider that education is a joyous, fulfilling activity, and this dimension of joyous engagement should be more emphasised. At its heart, learning is a mode of exploration and should be cherished. (Hyland, 2018, p. 87)

An overly prescriptive activity can leave less room for risks and less space for enjoyment. The argument for just being present and experiencing the joy of creative activity (187) should not be entirely overlooked or displaced by intellectual aims, curriculum concerns or educational objectives.

- **Freedom to Take Risks and Innovate**

*We tend to be creatures of comfort and usually aren't too self-assured to try new ideas. This project put teachers out of their comfort zones and this, I believe, made them*

*stronger and more competent teachers. (Teacher Creative Cluster, 2022)*

*Having that space that was theirs ... that they could do whatever they wanted. Every idea was going to be considered, I think that was just hugely valuable. (Story Seeds Artist, Drogheda, 2023) You get there and write whatever you want on the page, just have fun with it. (Secondary School Student, Story Seeds, 2023)*

*Design Circle in particular gave me the courage to risk take and engage more fully with students in creating and developing success criteria. (Teacher, Arts in Junior Cycle, 2022)*

42% (n=10) of initiatives reported freedom to take risks and innovate as an outcome, which is relatively low considering these aspects constitute one of the key principles of the Creative Youth Plan (2017-202). Winchester University's Centre for Real World Learning (CRWL) and the definition of creativity in the Chief Inspector's Report (2022) inform CY's definition of creativity and highlight the importance of challenging assumptions, playing with possibilities and taking risks. Creativity as defined by the Creative Ireland Programme 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" (4 p. 4). Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that not more reported this as an outcome. Those projects who did report this as an outcome, signalled artistic integrity, problem solving, divergent thinking, risk taking and experimentation as important aspects of their initiatives. Employing new music technologies, exploring contemporary issues, or focusing on the artistic process as opposed to the finished product were cited as important in this regard. Creative Clusters (30) highlighted the importance of risk taking in the creative process and teachers reiterated the benefits of moving outside their comfort zones. Their evaluation highlighted how clusters went beyond the arts, with many topics selected outside of traditional art forms. Similarly, Creative Schools observes that "the initiative encouraged, or allowed, schools to try new ways of doing things and new ways of thinking...there was a perception that school staff had greater freedom to experiment than might otherwise have been the case" (Murphy & Eivers, 2023, p. 102). Story Seeds teachers and participants commented on the freedom to explore their ideas

outside a grading system and how this built their confidence and voice.

One of the central roles of art in society has consistently focused on art as social criticism, as O'Hagan and Zieba (2010) note "Functioning as agents of social disruption and change, the arts may intrude rudely upon our everyday sensibility, force us to consider the most extreme possibilities of the human condition, and prod us to think more profoundly than is comfortable about ultimate matters of life, death, and our own contingency" (130 p. 156). Art and creativity have never been just about conforming to the status quo (129). It would appear from the data, that the initiatives reviewed could capitalise to a greater extent on the funding available to take more risks and gain added understanding of risk as integral to the creative process. Saying that, the ability to take risks and innovate in an all-of-government initiative may be affected by a number of issues: notably, policy alignment, and going through the motions of ticking boxes for evaluation and policy purposes may limit creative freedom (129). The creative 'wastage' O'Hagan (2015) (23) refers to, which in an increasingly cost conscious and accountability culture in which subsidised art resides, can be difficult to justify. Other risks involve 'taboo' issues which some of the projects in this review alluded to, resulting in a delicate balancing act which can prove restrictive for the intrepid artist/creative associate, but possibly too risky for schools and/or teachers involved. Moving out of comfort zones may not suit or indeed be appropriate for everyone. The importance of prior training, briefing and debriefing must be emphasised to ensure everyone is on board and comfortable with the intervention (188).

- **Broad Understanding of Creativity**

*Teachers also observed that their understanding of creativity had been broadened and extended beyond the arts to include all subjects and even everyday activities. They reported too, that they had learnt to value the creative process as much as the product. (Creative Clusters Report, 2022)*

*A second round of training commenced in November 2021. The aim of this training was to introduce new people and organisations to the Kinia network and the possibilities of using technology as a creative tool in their work with young people. (Kinia Interim Report, 2021)*

Similar to 'freedom to take risks', 42% (n=10) of initiatives reported a broad understanding of creativity as an outcome. The Creative Ireland Programme wishes to mainstream creativity by highlighting the cross-curricular and interdisciplinary reach of the arts both within and beyond the traditional arts sphere. Creativity is also employed as a strategy contributing to individual and community well-being, social cohesion and economic development. As discussed in Chapter Three, we have identified that 'broadening' and possible fusing of the arts with the more generic concept of creativity appears to be an accepted approach of cultural policy worldwide. "Through the Creative Ireland Programme, we are helping schools to embrace creativity as an activity in itself and as supporting the holistic development of future generations" (93 p. 22). As creativity is a bedrock upon which the Creative Ireland Programme is built, it seems surprising that more initiatives do not report on this. It is important to note, that even though reporting was generally modest, the CY initiatives score higher (n=7, 58%) than NCF (n=3, 27%) on this outcome. This may indicate greater alignment of the CY creative activities with the objectives and core principles of the Creative Ireland Programme. For example, the Creative Schools report claims to have had a positive impact on the integration of creativity into teaching and learning practices in schools.

The Kinia Interim Report focuses on employing technology as a creative tool for young people, using robotics, animation, coding, mobile filmmaking, sound production, visual design, augmented/virtual reality and makerspaces to support skills development for young people in out-of-school settings. Design Skills, a programme which links professional designer makers with teachers to develop a six-hour mini project, reports focusing on the 'front end' of the creative process. The report highlights the importance of problem solving, divergent thinking and experimentation and fostering an understanding of creativity beyond the arts.

The Big Idea, a free multi award winning creative educational programme for 15- to 19-year-olds, focuses on connecting industry and education and empowering students through inquiry based learning and critical thinking skills. One of the themes emerging from the Department of Education Stakeholder Consultation was the importance of creative activities to stimulate important 21<sup>st</sup>

century skills and that “Future curriculum development should prioritise how creativity can complement every subject so that creative approaches and practices can be embedded in all aspects of teaching and learning” (DE, 2022, p. 25).

Overall, this review finds evidence that initiatives are increasingly broadening their understanding of creativity beyond the arts to include a diverse and wide-ranging set of activities when looking at ways to embed creativity within learning. Nonetheless, as in the case of freedom to take risks and innovate, there is scope for improvement regarding this aspect of the programme. As mentioned in Chapter Two, debates surrounding the definition of creativity, the dissipation of the arts, and distinguishing creativity from purely arts-based activities is a common concern for numerous international programmes similar to CIP and is discussed later in greater detail. Incidentally, these concerns were also raised by the EAG, and while tentative, the evidence in this review appears to demonstrate the continued association of the arts with creativity in the context of the Creative Youth Plan. There is a dominance of arts-based activities across initiatives offered in the name of enhancing creativity, with far fewer references to other forms of creative practice. The new Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027, launched in March 2023 has renewed and strengthened its commitment to embed creativity both in and out of schools. Offering a two-page explanation around the meaning of creativity within the new plan, it is clear that the question has been given thought and consideration and is likely to permeate to a greater extent the numerous initiatives funded over the next five years. As the foreword of the new Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) acknowledges, “Creativity is moving from the fringes to the centre; however, there is a great deal more to be done” (CY, 2022, p. 1).

### **5.1.2. Common Trends in Creative Youth and NCF Initiatives**

## Social Outcomes: Fostering Inclusivity and Building Capacity

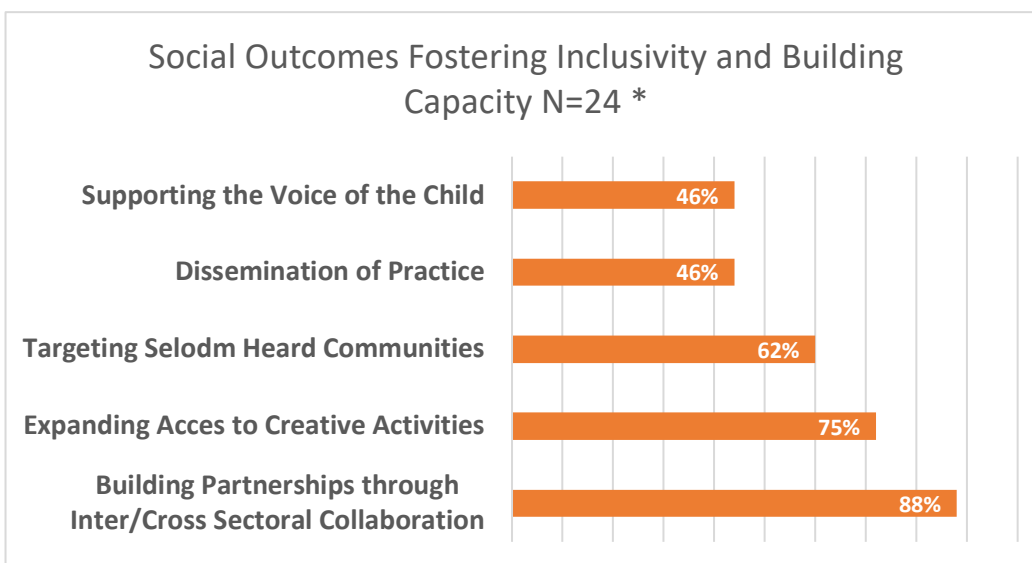


Fig. 5.1.(b) Social Outcomes Creative Youth and NCF

\*N=24 (this number represents the number of initiatives which met the inclusion criteria. All additional documents which did not meet the inclusion criteria are discussed separately for the sake of clarity and accuracy).

### ➤ Building Partnerships and Learning Opportunities through Inter/Cross Sectoral Collaboration

*The Youth Officers have great links with youth organisations. The Youth team opens doors for us if you can't get in touch with groups. They work with the same groups of young people. (Limerick and Clare LCYP, 2023)*

*Many also recognised the importance of the partnership and connections between the CA [Creative Associate] and the school, and potentially the wider artistic community in the area. To a certain sense this was flagged as a synergy rather than just a partnership, in that the various parties contributed to a whole that was more than the sum of its parts. (Creative Schools Report, 2023)*

With 88% (n=21) of reports citing the importance of building inter and cross sectoral partnerships and connections between teachers, artists and communities as a way to learn new skills and maximise resources, this was the second most frequently reported outcome across all CY evaluations included in this review. During initiatives, young people worked alongside experts, such as theatre artists, writers, directors, designers, and architects, to develop their art or skill. Over the past decade, interest has grown in such resources (or 'assets')

within communities and how they foster health and well-being (95, 189). This method of sharing knowledge, aptly identified as an apprenticeship model by several of the Creative Youth and NCF projects, proved a useful way of capturing the approach to learning adopted by different vocations. It reflects social interaction with significant others in which the important pedagogical role of the 'significant other' contributes to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (99). In the *Preamble to the Draft Principles for Arts Facilitation in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care Settings*, Stokes (2021) emphasises the importance of a creative environment for children in which the teacher/facilitator is scaffolding learning in a nurturing and encouraging way. In addition to the role of the teacher/facilitator as significant other in nurturing creative encounters with children, Morrissey (2021) highlighted the value of linking specialised expertise with schools:

The inclusion in Creative Clusters of the informal education sector, the arts and cultural sectors, artists and broader creative subject specialists serves to reinforce the importance of creativity in schools and in the wider community. (30 p. 96)

Creative Clusters' teachers signposted a range of collaborations with the informal education sector as important, including local artists working across a range of art forms and media, links to cultural institutions, local arts organisations, museum curators and subject specialists (30). Numerous initiatives valued cross-sectoral collaboration as an effective way in which to bring together knowledge and skills and take full advantage of already existent infrastructures. Examples included teachers in the Chester Beatty report (2021) which acknowledged the intercultural benefits of connecting with artefacts in museums; others such as the Classroom Museum (2019) cited the excitement of learning directly from artists as the highlight of the project. As one teacher in TAP observed "I think it's important for the children to meet a real artist and it really inspires them and they sit up and listen and are motivated to learn new skills" (Roe & Egan, 2023, p. 72). Better Words, an arts appreciation project highlighted the benefits of bringing school children into direct engagement with artists, creative writers and leading galleries across Ireland. In a visual arts project students reported listening and learning from the artist as being significant for them; in the National Theatre



project young people cited training alongside theatre experts as a 'real' opportunity; in an outreach orchestra programme young people expressed their appreciation of opportunities to learn from world class professional musicians. Across the Creative Schools' report, CAs believed they had a particular set of skills and expertise that they brought into schools: expertise that may otherwise not have been readily available to many. The Creative Clusters' report highlights the benefits of intersectoral collaboration in which schools build connections with each other and teachers build 'communities of practice' through which to learn and develop professionally. In TAP the learning was synergistic, in terms of teachers gaining innovative creative skills and artists gaining experience and knowledge of the educational system. Similarly, in Arts in Junior Cycle teachers highlighted learning new creative skills as an important outcome of participation in the programme:

I learnt new skills that I shied away from trying for years because I just didn't have the know-how! As teachers it is vital that we continue to learn and develop in order to keep our subject alive and exciting. (McCarthy, 2022, p. 31)

The development of partnerships with a diverse range of artists and organisations was also considered a compelling feature of Arts in Junior Cycle, as was the intersectoral collaboration between teachers exemplified in one teacher's observation "The practical workshops give an opportunity to develop or learn new skills but also helps to connect teachers and foster relationships, sharing of ideas and stories and forming a network that can last far beyond the workshop itself" (McCarthy, 2022, p. 34). As their name suggests, Local Creative Youth Partnerships performed particularly well against this outcome. The modus operandi of an experienced facilitator working with several local partners within the community and facilitating the running of independent standalone projects has meant strengthening and developing an extensive cross sectoral network (Finneran, 2023).

The current coordinator has an extensive knowledge of and passion for the community arts sector and people working in that field as well as a huge 'contact book' built up over years of practice in the field and a knowledge of working artists. (Finneran, 2023, p. 34)

The combination of a facilitator's grassroots knowledge with local organisations' commitment and connection to their community, meant LCYP initiatives often resulted in successfully reaching diverse and seldom heard cohorts where other larger scale, top-down initiatives were less successful. Another positive outcome of cross and intersectoral collaboration is that of maximising resources. For example, the establishment of LCYPs within ETBs means the support and resources of larger organisations are available, whilst previously developed links and networks can also be accessed (Roe, 2022). Teachers from Creative Clusters commented favourably in this regard as well, citing shared finance, time and space as key enablers for successful implementation of programmes. Other Creative Youth initiatives such as Fighting Words, have built up and established "non-financial partnerships with libraries, arts centres, theatres and other appropriate local organisations....to expand the reach of Fighting Words programmes and ensure the organisation is as inclusive as possible" (Lehane, 2023, p. 4).

In the additional documents reviewed, this outcome also featured prominently. The Department of Education Consultation (DE, 2022) revealed that creating and developing relationships with professionals and organisations outside schools was highly valued. 92% of primary and special schools' respondents reported developing learning relationships with professionals and organisations outside school as a beneficial outcome of participation in Creative Youth initiatives. The theme emerging from the data is one of recognition of the role of partnership in extending the 'reach' of schools and organisations in creative practice. This is found not only in the education sector, but more broadly in calls across society for greater integration and collaboration. For example, the policy considerations from a recent scoping WHO Health Review (2019) note the importance of the arts in "strengthening structures and mechanisms for collaboration between the culture, social care and health sectors, such as introducing programmes that are co-financed by different budgets" (51).

One of Creative Youth's core principles is collaboration across government and with stakeholders in schools and community settings. Findings suggest this approach supports a more meaningful place for the work of creative practitioners and arts organisations in the community (Murphy & Eivers,

2023), and confirms the role and significance of cross and inter-sectoral collaboration as an important outcome from Phase One. Furthermore, it seems continued emphasis will be placed on this approach as the new Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) prioritises partnerships which will be:

centred on continued, strategic collaboration among all Creative Youth stakeholders – between government departments and agencies; between public, creative and voluntary/community sectors; between educators and their students; and between children and young people themselves. (CY, 2023, p. 10)

- **Expanding Access to Creative Activities**

*The Creative Schools initiative supports schools/centres to put the arts and creativity at the heart of children's and young people's lives. This initiative provides opportunities for children and young people to build their artistic and creative skills; to communicate, collaborate, stimulate their imaginations, be inventive, and to harness their curiosity. (Creative Schools Report, 2023)*

*The BIG Idea is democratising access to creative education ensuring that it is accessible and free to all students, including students experiencing educational disadvantage and young people with additional educational needs. (The Big Idea Report, 2022)*

75% (n=18) of reports rated increasing access to creative activities as an outcome of their projects. Expanded access has also been recorded in the output section (see Chapter Four) and as such we will not repeat that data here. Suffice to say, that expanded access is demonstrated across several creative youth initiatives such as the expansion of the LCYPs from three pilot partnerships to six, now reaching across ten counties including (i) Kerry, (ii) Laois and Offaly, (iii) Limerick and Clare, (iv) Cork, (v) Mayo and Sligo, (vi) Roscommon and Limerick. Expanded access is also evidenced by substantial increases in the Creative Schools initiative, with 850 schools invited to participate from 2018 to 2022. The Creative Clusters initiative commenced in the 2018/2019 academic year with the establishment of 23 clusters comprising 68 schools countrywide. In September 2021/2022, 81 schools joined the programme with a further 78 schools who joined during the 2022/2023 academic year. Music Generation, Ireland's National Music Education

Programme provides access to high quality performance music education at a local level. Music Generation is co-funded by U2, The Ireland Funds, the Department of Education and Local Music Education Partnerships. In December 2017, as part of the Creative Ireland Programme, Music Generation was rolled out nationwide to include Kerry, Kildare, Meath, Longford, Tipperary, Dublin City, Fingal, Limerick County, and Cork County. Cruinniú na nÓg, is Ireland's national day of free creative activities for children and young people under 18 years of age. Delivered by the 31 local authorities Cruinniú offers a programme of activities for local areas nationwide. Since 2019 the Creative Ireland Programme has partnered with Fighting Words to deliver free tutoring and mentoring in creative writing across 23 venues nationwide. In addition, with added support from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Fighting Words has initiated an Irish language version of the programme. TAP, as previously documented has also expanded since 2014, reaching some 1,468 teachers and 3,655 artists between 2017 and 2022. In addition, there have been over 800 residencies which impacted directly on in excess of 40,000 students nationwide (averaging 24 students per class).

As illustrated above, expanding access through Creative Youth initiatives is a crucial aspect of the Creative Ireland Programme and data indicate that this is happening. From design thinking to working with contemporary art, from CPD to artist residencies, from playwriting to music tuition, from multi-sensory learning to technology based creative activities, the available evidence suggests that access has been expanded both in schools and in the community.

However, as discussed later in this report, offering and expanding access to creative activities does not necessarily mean initiatives are successful in reaching/targeting all communities. Following the educational principle of equality of opportunity, providing equal access does not guarantee equal participation, and ultimately, equal achievement. Demographic data in many of the reports reviewed are only partially recorded, and incomplete demographics can undermine findings, a point which will be elaborated on later in the review.

### ▪ Targeting Seldom Heard Communities

*The Story Seeds programme of creative writing has been specifically designed to provide targeted support to children and young people at risk of marginalisation and disadvantage across Ireland. The priority has been on working with DEIS schools and “additional needs” organisations in the seven identified regions. (Story Seeds Report, 2023)*

*The profiles of the groups selected include: Traveller Visibility Group, ChildVision Cork, Ashbourne House Direct Provision Centre and Paistí at Kinsale Rd Roundabout Direct Provision Centre. (Graffiti Final Report, 2020)*

*There is a need to bridge the divide between settled and travelling young people. Prejudice, segregation and negative stereotypes persist and cause harm to young travelling people. The youth workers feel that an extensive amount of work needs to be implemented nationwide that addresses these issues so that young people from Traveller/Roma gypsy background feel included and can reach their full potential. (Narrative 4 Report, 2020)*

62% (n=15) of initiatives report targeting seldom heard communities as an outcome, with CY and NCF scoring equally. Research reports participation in sporting, cultural and community activities can have significant emotional, physical and social benefits for children (189, 190). Studies also observe cognitive stimulation when engaging in the arts can provide opportunities for learning and skills development, acting as a safeguard for development of different types of mental illness (96, 34) something we discuss in further detail below. Unfortunately, engagement in creative and cultural endeavours is in many instances socially patterned. Research has repeatedly shown that people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are less able to access the arts and other types of cultural activities (Smyth 2020; OECD, 2019). Most of the available literature has found that ethnicity, minority status and poverty act as barriers to child participation in structured cultural activities (111, 191). In Ireland, a marked social gradient exists which shows people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are less able to access the arts and other types of cultural activities (42, 52). A number of studies informed by the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) database, show children born outside Ireland, who are non-Roman Catholic or on social benefit have different participation rates in cultural

activities (178, 52). In the additional documents included in this review, the research on inclusion and engagement of Muslim children in creative activities<sup>15</sup> echoes many of these concerns, where findings highlight cultural barriers such as language, dress code and religious belief as barriers to participation in cultural life which may ultimately negatively affect their educational outcomes and wellbeing (192). From a population health perspective, the problem of reduced access to the arts is redoubled by the fact that those from lower socio-economic positions are also generally at higher risk of poor health and are therefore the communities which would benefit greatly from these activities (190, 195).

The Creative Youth Plan was published in December 2017, confirming the Government's commitment to ensuring that every child in Ireland has practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, arts, and coding by 2022. Aligning with Emer Smyth's findings (42), in which gender, age and social differences were found to greatly influence cultural participation in children and young people, the launch of the Creative Ireland Programme highlighted the importance of inclusivity and targeting underrepresented cohorts and seldomly heard voices currently not engaging in cultural or artistic activities. This systematic review found the CY objectives and strategy reflected in numerous Creative Youth and NCF initiatives from Phase One of the Plan. For example, Kinia in partnership with the Creative Ireland programme has been delivering creative technology projects in 'out of school' settings since 2019. They have been working with Tusla, Children and Young People's Service Committees (CYPSCs), Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), and Local Authorities in the form of training youth workers and providing equipment to "support diversity and inclusion to become key pillars in a society where every child has the vision to set their dreams and the pathway to achieve them" (Kinia Interim Report, 2021, p. 5).

An Early Years bursary programme was developed in 2019 with 4 organisations who successfully bid for the scheme, Children's Books Ireland, Graffiti Theatre Company, The Ark, and ReCreate, targeting seldom heard communities. The profiles of the targeted groups included: Traveller Visibility

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<sup>15</sup> This research was funded by the Irish Research Council and Creative Ireland via a grant to UCD School of Psychology in collaboration with Poetry Ireland and the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council.

Group, ChildVision Cork, Ashbourne House Direct Provision Centre and Paisti at Kinsale Rd Roundabout Direct Provision Centre, and children with additional needs such as visual impairment or global development delay. In 2022 the Creative Schools initiative is expected to expand to Oberstown Children Detention Campus School, Ballydowd High Support Special School, Crannóg Nua Special School and St Canice's Special School. The Irish Chamber Youth Orchestra targets young people who are living in areas of urban, physical and social regeneration with a history of poor access to Arts and Culture. Narrative 4 Ireland in partnership with Creative Ireland, trained 14 youth workers, from a range of organisations working with Traveller and Roma youth to become Story Exchange facilitators.

In March 2022 the Creative Youth team made us aware of 81 projects which had taken place across Local Creative Youth Partnerships in 2021, involving 4,830 participants which were explicitly aimed at disadvantaged and seldom heard cohorts, such as travellers, migrants and early school leavers. Based on this and evidence from available reports, particularly the most recent reports such as the LCYPs, Creative Schools and Fighting Words, it appears that a majority of Creative Youth and NCF initiative are purposefully targeting seldom heard communities.

Nonetheless as previously noted, the sociodemographic data from Phase One of the Plan are partially recorded, therefore further analysis is required to ascertain the extent to which creative activities have successfully reached seldom heard/disadvantaged communities. It is recommended that this work should continue across Phase Two. The fundamental importance of ethical and sustainability factors integral to creative work with seldom heard communities will be explored below. The Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) reiterates and stresses the importance of targeting the seldom heard as demonstrated in its objectives and strategies. It is intended that overarching Creative Youth Evaluation Guidelines (176) and standardised pre- and post-recording forms to be introduced, alongside well-designed qualitative research and evaluation methods in individual initiatives, will encourage more robust socio demographic mapping in Phase Two. This will allow for greater understanding of what is happening on the ground and what needs to be done to extend the reach to seldom heard communities over the coming five years.

➤ **Building Individual/Organisational Sustainability Beyond the Lifetime of Creative Youth/the Creative Ireland Programme**

*To support expansion plans and sustain our growth in 2022, we built up our team with two new full-time employees, with further plans (funding dependent) to onboard two more in 2023. (The B!g Idea, 2022)*

*The stages of Creative Schools, from Understand to Implementing a school plan allow for a unique model to be crafted around the needs of the school. This enables a sustainable approach to planning that extends beyond the tenure of the programme. (Creative Schools, 2023)*

*The success of the Creative Clusters model in embedding the creative process in schools is highly dependent on the skill of the Creative Cluster Facilitator and/or the Creative Cluster Coordinator. (Creative Clusters Report, 2022)*

62% (n=15) of initiatives identified aspects of organisation sustainability, sometimes referred to as capacity building, as an outcome. Issues relating to this aspect of the programme are discussed in further detail in the next chapter. In the podcast *Tapping into Creativity* (Eland, 2022), Tania Banotti, Director of the Creative Ireland Programme, made reference to this, citing the importance of mainstreaming creativity within all government departments. She highlighted the importance of creativity as a core part of learning and training, and not just as an optional add on. Both CY and NCF initiatives reported on this outcome to a similar degree. In a study on programme sustainability in community and healthcare settings in the US, it was found that sustainability was much more likely to occur when a financial plan had been established, such as looking into additional or alternative sources of funding (108). Programmes which were championed by key stakeholders were also more likely to successfully sustain their activity over extended periods of time. Banotti comments on the central place 'buy in at a senior level' (Eland, 2022) occupies in order to instigate new initiatives and maintain political and economic support behind a programme.

Similarly, findings from the Department of Education Stakeholder Consultation (DE, 2022) confirm the importance of school leadership through key figures in schools but particularly having the school principal 'on board' - considered essential to the success of initiatives in schools. Several initiatives in



this review mentioned the crucial role of coordinators, leaders and key figures in initiating and developing projects. “The evaluation also showed the crucial role of the LCYP Co-ordinator in the establishment, development and management of LCYP programmes. LCYP Co-ordinators were central to the success of LCYPs” (Roe, 2022, p. 37). The Joint Teacher Artist Reports from TAP, frequently identify support from the host school, in particular the school principal, as crucial to the success of in-school residencies and embedding the creative process within the school environment (196). Building capacity also involves looking into alternative and/or additional sources of funding, effective dissemination of practice (discussed below) and effective planning (108). “Capacity-building is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world” (United Nations Academic Impact, 2023).

In our review both CY and NCF initiatives are, to some degree, engaging in capacity building tasks. Some organisations discussed plans to sustain and expand initiatives, others have expanded their team, some are interested in embedding and aligning their activities to the national curriculum and some have looked beyond the Creative Ireland Programme for financial support. For example, in 2022, The BIG Idea secured an EU KA2 education project partnership with four other partners across Europe. To support sustainability, the LCYPs focus on embedding initiatives in already established youth-based arts activities and aligning initiatives where possible with training options offered by ETB and Further Education Colleges. As part of their early years initiative, ReCreate developed a tailored webinar series for other clients, including workshops on *Creativity on a Shoestring* and *Introduction to Creative Reuse*, to support sustainability beyond the lifetime of the CY funding. During the implementation of their project, EVA International had to expand the organisational capacity of the team and appointed a freelance programme coordinator. The Chester Beatty Learning and Education Department has initiated the first of a series of Continuous Professional Development programmes with the Junior Cycle Religious Education team. Research suggests the quality of staff and good leadership are also critical to programme sustainability (108). As previously mentioned, several initiatives mentioned

expanding collaboration across geographical boundaries, modifying their programme and/or integrating it into the school curriculum. Evidence suggests that these initiatives are cognisant of the need to build capacity and sustainability beyond the lifetime of the Creative Ireland Programme. However, the onus for such capacity building lies very much with the organisations and individual artists, only a few had secured alternative sources of funding to ensure viability and sustainability *beyond* Creative Youth. In fact, the findings from this review indicate a level of concern around funding, especially for the smaller-medium sized initiatives. These and other issues around sustainability are further explored in Chapters Six and Seven.

- **Dissemination of Practice**

*In the lead up to Creative Tech Fest 2021, we hosted the Creative Tech Fest Partner Party. This was an opportunity to give key stakeholders a glimpse of Kinia's work, the people and projects we are involved with, and to highlight how our stakeholders' involvement has positively impacted the lives of thousands of young people. (Kina Interim Report, 2021)*

In this review 46% (n=11) of initiatives reported dissemination of practice as an outcome, though arguably as the Creative Ireland Programme enters a second phase this outcome will more than likely gain momentum and help build national and global awareness of the programme. Evaluation and dissemination of practice are also linked to sustainability in that mobilising resources required to sustain a programme beyond its initial grant, means it is not enough that the programme attains its objectives. The programme must be able to document its success and disseminate the evidence among stakeholders (149, 150, 151). Some studies confirm that advertisement of a programme's effectiveness not only to its stakeholders but also to the general public serves as a meaningful predictor of its sustainability (152, 153) in that it enhances and leverages community support (106). Despite the modest numbers recorded, the difference between NCF and CY was noticeable and is worth mentioning. 64% of NCF (N=7) and 33% of CY (n=4) reported dissemination of practice as an outcome. Taking into account the sustainability concerns discussed previously, the figures may well reflect the confidence of larger initiatives under CY, which tend to be

more aligned and embedded within schools and government departments and therefore may not feel the need to disseminate and publicise their outputs to the same extent as smaller initiatives. Saying that, it is worth noting that a lack of clarity and awareness around the Creative Ireland Programme was signalled by a number of CY initiatives throughout their reports, something which wider and targeted dissemination would improve.

Several initiatives reported successfully disseminating their practice, for example, the National Youth Theatre received good press coverage for *Ask Too Much of Me*, including features in *The Irish Times*, *Sunday Times* and *RTÉ Culture*, as well as excellent online and video content. The Creative Technology initiative Kinia submitted 34 projects to the national Creative Tech Fest in 2021. In January 2020 a nationwide campaign was launched to give every school in Ireland a free copy of EVA international's *Better Words: A Field Guide to Contemporary Art and Culture Communication*. Promotion of the book included education networks and resources, Scoilnet newsletter, Arts in Education portal, newsletter and social media coverage and coverage in the *InTouch* professional journal. The Big Idea culminate their programmes through an online showcase of students' projects, alongside teachers and mentors. In 2019 the Empathy project released a short promotional film which featured a Narrative 4 trained teacher from Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh with her students. The film reached 32,428 people with 2192 social media engagements including 89 shares on Facebook and was also promoted on Instagram and Twitter.

The data from this systematic review indicate some dissemination of practice, particularly by smaller initiatives funded under CIP, however there seems to be a gap in dissemination within the larger Creative Youth projects. Improving this aspect of the programme may impact practitioners, organisations and the wider Creative Youth Plan.

- **Supporting the Voice of the Child and Young People**

*Young people have great ideas and should be given a voice more often. (The Big Idea, TY Student, Lusk Community College, 2022)*

*My deepest intention is to foster a space where the children are seen, heard and greatly valued, where their ideas are embraced and respected. I believe that a nurturing*

*environment allows for learning to come naturally, that it is through a sense a play that we humans learn more readily and deeply. (Artist, Graffiti Report, 2020)*

The Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022; 2023-2027) as part of an all-of-government programme and partly embedded in the DCEDIY, champions the voice of children and young people in both the development and delivery of programmes. Amongst the infrastructural resources promised by Ireland's first *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015) (7) was the development of a hub (now Hub na nÓg) to provide information, guidance and practical support to Government departments and agencies in delivering commitments outlined in the strategy's Action Plan. In Creative Youth, Hub na nÓg provides bespoke training for teachers, organisations and creative practitioners through Creative Schools, Creative Clusters and the LCYPs. It is therefore surprising that only 11 out of 24 (46%) initiatives report supporting voice of the child as an outcome from Phase One. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the data are distilled where differences need to be highlighted. Within this, 67% (n=8) of CY initiatives in contrast to just 27% (n=3) of NCF initiatives report supporting voice of the child as an outcome. Interestingly, the CY initiatives report targeting seldom heard groups and supporting the voice of the child in equal measure demonstrating an understanding of the expectations and core policy objectives of the Creative Ireland Programme, but also indicating room for improvement. It seems that all funded initiatives working on small to large scale projects, may benefit from engaging with the available bespoke training and guidance around voice of the child and child participation. Prior to delving deeper into how initiatives reported this outcome, it is important to mention that Phase One took place during the Covid 19 pandemic in which schools were closed for part of the 2020 academic year and when opened were operating under tight restrictions regarding close contact until well into 2022. The challenges of delivering in person activities during the pandemic was repeatedly mentioned throughout the reports. Outcomes such as supporting the voice of the child and young people was adversely impacted by the pandemic and therefore, is borne in mind when analysing the data. Those initiatives who reported supporting the voice of the child include Creative Schools who:

offered participants specific training on ways in which the voice of the child (VotC) could be developed and elicited democratically in school settings. This training was designed and offered at a separate day/time by presenters from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The training was based on the Laura Lundy (2007) model of child participation. (Murphy & Eivers, 2023, p. 63)

In the National Youth Theatre survey most young ensemble members felt that the programme was successful in having their voice heard as theatre artists (197). The LCYPs are supported by Hub na nÓg, during which “The LCYP Co-ordinators receive training and coaching which places children and young people at the centre of decision-making through development, implementation and evaluation of creative activities in the Creative Youth Partnerships” (Roe, 2022, p. 6). Late in 2022, Hub na nÓg presented to the Culture and Creativity Teams in Local Authorities on Voice of the Child for delivery of Cruinniú na nÓg 2023. Another example of fostering the voice of the child was evidenced in The Ark’s Festival of Children in 2019, which witnessed Ireland’s first ever Children’s Rally celebrating children’s rights in words, music, banners and flags. The rally concluded a 4-week rights education programme to prepare children to express their rights visually and in song. Similarly, Story Seeds, the Fighting Words programme for young children explains how “participants enjoyed working in collaborative and democratic spaces where their voices were valued and they were invited to express themselves and their ideas” (Lehane, 2023, p. 2).

Evidence supports that many Creative Youth and NCF initiatives were *aware* of the need to include the voice of children and young people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their project. Morrissey (2021) notes that:

Teachers, pupils, and facilitators attested to the inclusion of pupil voice and to some of the ways in which it was included. But, in the absence of case studies, it was not possible to provide a more comprehensive account of learner engagement in the design, development, and evaluation of the outcome-based projects at the heart of Creative Clusters. (p. 100)

While there is evidence that some CY and NCF projects endeavoured to include voice through different methods (e.g., Lundy Model, Creative Research Methods, Artefacts, Videos, Focus groups, Surveys), all initiatives particularly small-scale projects may need targeted support in how to centralise the voice of the child in planning, implementation and pre/post-project evaluation stages. There was a general lack of awareness about the National Participation Framework and its applicability, and several reports suggested the need for further training.

In the Creative Schools report, satisfaction was low regarding training on the Lundy model. A similar finding in TAP, reports that decision makers and teachers had not received formal training in how to facilitate children in expressing their views and decision-making. In the report on children's experience of TAP, Buggie (2023) highlights several challenges regarding collaborative decision making throughout the residencies and emphasises the importance of integrating the National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (DCEDIY, 2021) into the TAP programme as a means to support teachers and artists in the development of democratic processes for decision-making with children.

The second Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) reiterates the importance of centralising the voice of child through its first guiding principle: "Children and young people must have agency and a voice in decision-making on the implementation of the Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027" (CY, 2023, p. 13). Strategic Objective 1 comprises training on the Participation Framework across all Creative Ireland programmes, by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Between late 2022 and early 2023 several child and young people consultations were carried out by DCEDIY and the Arts Council. Consultations with primary school children and young people in Comhairle Na nÓg were undertaken in order to ascertain which creative activities children and young people would like to see in the second Creative Youth Plan (Palmer, 2022). The consultations took place with 78 primary school children from 1st to 6th class in three primary schools in three counties. Consultations with 653 children and young people to explore arts and creative activities on behalf of the Arts Council were also undertaken, using a range of creative research methods such as storytelling, drawing and writing, surveys,

focus groups and observational research (Roe, 2022).

Similarly, Buggie (2023) aimed to address a lack of voice from the 40,000 children who had participated in TAP from 2014 to 2023. Creative participative methods such as photographic imagery, focus group interviews, poetry, and collaborative collage were employed to capture the experience of children engaged in TAP. In the following chapter we discuss the importance of evaluation as a cycle and the value of creative evaluation methods to encourage child and young people's participation and voice in that process.

As observed in Chapter Three, the voice of the child and young person is a core principle of the Creative Youth Plan and vital to its development and implementation. The data suggest that during Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022) the voice of the child was accessed and supported to some extent, but not sufficiently. There is a renewed emphasis on ensuring this aspect of the programme is given due regard throughout the CY initiatives in Phase Two. Going forwards this aspect of the Plan may need to be explicitly embedded to a greater extent and training extended to all initiatives, large and small. Only then will child participation move increasingly from a theory-based idea to a practice-based reality.

### 5.1.3. Common Trends in Creative Youth and NCF Initiatives Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing

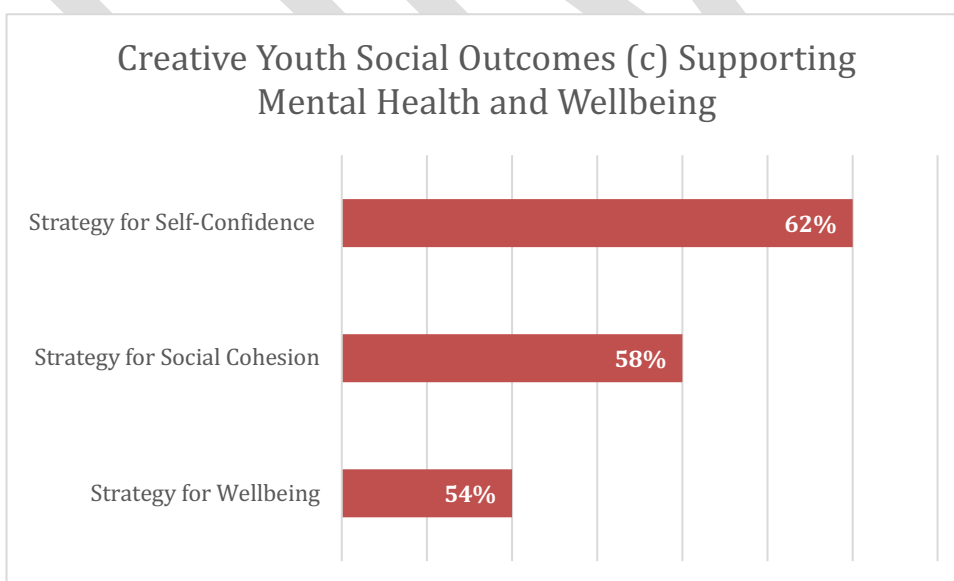


Fig. 5.1.(c) Social Outcomes Creative Youth and NCF Initiatives

## ➤ Strategy for Self-Confidence

*I gained the skills that allowed me to safely lose my inhibitions and be creatively open with those around me. (NYT Young Ensemble member, 2019)*

*Their confidence grew as the creative process developed, e.g., the young people were not afraid to ask for help from creative team members, particularly the Director. (NYT Report, 2019)*

*The inclusive nature of the Story Seeds programme brought joy and fun to some of the most marginalised young people across the country, instilling confidence and pride in their abilities and in their communities. (Story Seeds Report, 2023)*

*It made me more confident and able to communicate better through the drama. Communication and confidence and speaking, it has helped me. We were in our own bubble in the drama speaking with each other and it was very enjoyable. (Young person in LCYP initiative, 2023)*

*I got a real sense of achievement after completing two pieces of work to a high standard and felt I had the confidence to do this with my students... These are skills that many teachers have little experience of leaving College and courses like these give them the knowledge and confidence to use them in their classes and develop the skills within their own students. (Teacher from Arts in Junior Cycle, 2022)*

62% (n=15) of initiatives reported increased self-confidence and self-management as an outcome. No significant differences were identified between CY and NCF initiatives regarding this outcome. Self-confidence is a primary contributing factor to well-being and good mental health (114). Levels of self-confidence in the early years of life are positively associated with self-esteem in later life (198). Self-confidence of those educating children and young people is also key (199). Stoke's (2019) discussion paper on arts in the Early Years classroom, addresses teachers' lack of confidence in arts facilitation skills and how this can hinder children's arts experiences. Self-esteem is regarded as crucial to the social and cognitive development of children (115). Research suggests that building a good foundation for self-esteem is key to supporting children through adolescence, an important life stage during which self-esteem



can easily decline due to peer pressure and social comparisons (116, 52). Data from GUI flags an additional concern here, finding the decline of socio-emotional health steeper in young women throughout adolescence, as is their participation in sports activities, also associated with enhanced physical and mental health outcomes (43). Nolan and Smyth (2021) found that young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in Ireland are more likely to display unhealthy behaviours and poorer mental health (52), with consequent implications for levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. These findings merit further consideration as possible policy and practice priorities in the second Creative Youth Plan.

Several studies positively correlate engagement in the arts with self-esteem (114-116). Mak & Fancourt (2019) posited two explanations why the arts may support self-esteem in young people. Firstly, in terms of self-identity, the arts validate individuality fostering a feeling of self-accomplishment and self-worth, providing healthy challenges to improve skills which can support the empowerment of young people. Secondly, engagement with the arts can cultivate feelings of social identity and social cohesion, help to improve pride, encourage goal-directed behaviours, and enhance social resilience which allows individuals to solve other social issues and establish self-esteem (115). In the reports included in this systematic review, there were many such instances cited, for example, the National Theatre Programme reports that the majority of young people surveyed reported “positive improvements in self-esteem in terms of feeling better about themselves and feeling more valued by others” (Gorman, 2019, p. 11) as a consequence of their participation. In an initiative involving a young people’s orchestra, growing levels of confidence and a positive sense of identity at a critical transitional point in adolescent lives was noted (Irish Chamber Youth Orchestra). Teachers commented on how an Objects-Based Learning programme allowed students viewed as ‘not academic’ to flourish (Chester Beatty Intercultural Project, 2021). Story Seeds reported not only instilling confidence in children to trust their creative ability to write but also building pride and confidence in their communities. Teachers across Creative Clusters report increased confidence in their ability to try new techniques and methods in their classrooms. The TAP report signals an increase in children’s self-confidence particularly important for non-academic children, children with additional educational needs

and children from multi lingual backgrounds. The B!g idea reports that an overwhelming majority of young people have gained confidence in using creative thinking to address future challenges. Transition Year students on the programme report feeling empowered to come up with meaningful ideas for the community and more confident in expressing themselves.

Data from Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan corroborates findings from studies worldwide which associate development of self-confidence through artistic and creative engagement (93). Reported in almost two thirds of evaluations, data suggest that the Creative Youth Plan is supporting and enhancing self-confidence through the initiatives on offer. This is of particular importance in seldom heard communities. However, of potential concern is the lack of reporting in over a third of reports about this outcome.

### ➤ Strategy for Social Cohesion

*The places that these characters adventure through, the familiar sights and sounds of local areas, from schools, shops and cafés to football grounds, parks and secret gardens, are all important to the young authors involved in the Story Seeds programme. These new stories celebrate and bring their local areas to life. (Story Seeds Report, 2023)*

*I have found it really beneficial, it opened up new lines of communication between my parents and me, I got to know their background in a more meaningful way. (Early Years Educator from Small Print Report, 2020)*

*It allowed certain families the freedom to talk about their families and background in a relaxed environment. (Parent from Le Chéile)*

The essential features of social cohesion can be defined as “(1) the quality of social relations (including social networks, trust, acceptance of diversity, and participation), (2) identification with the social entity, and (3) orientation towards the common good (sense of responsibility, solidarity, compliance to social order)” (100 p. 20). Research suggests that engagement with the arts may contribute to the development of social relationships, networks and a heightened sense of community (101, 102). 58% (n=14) of reports cite social cohesion as an outcome. This was evident in feedback, interviews and

case studies reviewed. Factors highlighted were bringing young people together from different backgrounds and geographical areas, making new friends, initiating creative networks, and fostering a sense of belonging. A number of international RCTs, qualitative and quantitative studies have found reading, music, mixed arts, theatre and singing to improve social isolation, social acceptance and connection, and to build resilience in young people (93, 199). Singing projects in Direct Provision centres, storytelling techniques within the traveller community and music instruction for people with disabilities are some of the novel initiatives reporting outcomes in this category. In one of the vignettes cited in Finneran's (2023) report on creative capacity and wellbeing, the LCYPs initiatives are highlighted as particularly strong in dealing with issues of identity, inclusion and belonging. The Story Seeds Programme from Fighting Words, works not only on instilling pride and confidence in children's creative writing abilities but also attachment and pride in their communities. As one participant observed:

It's memories of childhood and going to Stephen's Green on Sunday mornings to feed the ducks with my sister, then going on to visit granda. It's feeling safe walking home from town after dark at night in my teenage years. It's feeling this is where I belong. I'm at home. (Lehane, 2023, p. 5)

An early years programme discussed how picture books developed children's understanding of their own identity within the world around them, this was particularly cited in the case of children from migrant families (Small Print, 2020). Intercultural respect was reported in Graffiti's early years cross disciplinary project, which involved exploring the grounds of a direct provision centre in which children are temporarily accommodated and participating in multi-sensory activities. In Business to Arts AR Programme, one of the outcomes reported was establishing links between businesses and the local community in which they are situated thereby strengthening social cohesion. Similarly, through its work with 400 mentors, The Big Idea supports connecting industry with school settings and offers students the opportunity to connect in a very practical way to their local area making new discoveries which can improve their community. The Empathy Project developed understanding between different cultures, and both students and facilitators felt it helped build empathy

and tolerance amongst diverse communities. Creative Clusters also reported creating cooperation, resource sharing and social cohesion between schools, educators and artists.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe notes that:

access to the arts and free artistic cultural expression contribute to the development of critical thinking, to enhanced mutual understanding and to mutual respect. Thus, they contribute to reinforcing democratic citizenship and social cohesion.... (Council of Europe, 2016)

The Creative Ireland Programme as a legacy initiative response to the extraordinary public participation during the Ireland Centenary celebration, recognises the central role culture and the arts played in maintaining national identity and in driving the revolutionary generation of the Gaelic League, the Irish National Literary Society and other important cultural institutions of the time. It underpins the inspiration for this new cultural initiative: “We have been reminded of the centrality of the creative and participative arts to our sense of national identity and purpose” (CIP, 2016, p. 13). As a country we understand how culture can be employed to subordinate and colonise a nation but also to liberate and unite. It is encouraging to see how the newly launched Shared Island Fund employs creativity and culture as a vehicle to foster cross border creative initiatives amongst children and young people, such as Story Seeds, which will engage children and young people in collaborative, cross-border creative writing activities in Belfast, Coleraine and Derry. There will also be funding for cross community climate action projects, cross border traveller wellbeing and mental health programmes. The Shared Island Fund hopes to “Position Ireland as a global leader in demonstrating the value of creativity and mental health including in post conflict societies” (CIP, 2023, p. 2). Based on the evidence, this review finds that initiatives from the Creative Youth Plan are well situated and appropriately funded to foster social cohesion in and out of schools and amongst children from diverse national and cross border communities. Available data from Phase One support the orientation of the second Plan in continuing to fund creative engagement to build understanding between Irish nationals and migrants, and between socially diverse communities across the island.

## ➤ Strategy for Well-being

*It is important to build awareness and understanding at senior level to ensure that health and wellbeing policies embed arts and creativity, rather than just relying on local champions to promote and deliver at local level. (Tania Banotti, Director of the Creative Ireland Programme, National Symposium, 2022)*

*The fundamental point of this course is that it addressed me as a thinking, creative, imaginative PERSON, not just a teacher. The teacher is not simply a cog in a wheel, which unfortunately is how I have felt on many if not all of the in-service offered up to this point, particularly around the Junior Cycle. If you address and develop the person of the teacher then it follows that what has been developed and nurtured in that person will intrinsically flow into all they do, including their professional work. (Teacher, Arts in Junior Cycle, 2022)*

Just over half (54%) (n=13) reported increased well-being as an outcome of their intervention. Well-being can be understood “as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole” (104 p. 6). An expanding body of evidence supports the view that cultural engagement contributes positively to health and well-being (51, 104, 105, 193, 200). In the last two decades, a growing evidence base around the benefits of arts<sup>16</sup> in health demonstrates an increasing interest from health and arts professionals, researchers, and policymakers into how engagement with the arts can influence population health (76).

The Creative Ireland Programme has shown considerable vision in this regard. While Health and Well-being featured prominently in Phase One, they have been considerably reinforced in the second 5-year Plan, through funding and particularly in the Creative Health and Well-being pillar: “Creativity is being put at the heart of public policy because we understand that participation in cultural and creative activity promotes the well-being of the individual, the community and the nation at large” (2 p. 1). The Creative Ireland Programme,

<sup>16</sup> This research adopts a broad and flexible understanding of the arts, informed by the definition outlined by the World Health Organisation's *Health Evidence Networks Synthesis Report 67* (2021), in which the arts in relation to health consist of five categories, including both active and receptive engagement: •performing arts (e.g. activities in the genre of music, dance, theatre, singing and film) •visual arts, design and craft (e.g. crafts, design, painting, photography, sculpture and textiles) •literature (e.g. writing, reading and attending literary festivals); •culture (e.g. going to museums, galleries, art exhibitions, concerts, the theatre, community events, cultural festivals and fairs); and •online, digital and electronic arts (e.g. animations, film-making and computer graphics) (Fancourt & Finn, 2021, p. 1).

Healthy Ireland, the Health Service Executive and the Arts Council co-hosted a national symposium entitled *The Art of Being Healthy and Well* during which “policy-makers and practitioners from the health, arts and culture sectors considered how best to harness the powerful contribution creative engagement can make to our health and wellbeing” (National Symposium, 2022, p. 2).

A recent study by Nolan & Smyth (2021) (52) based on the GUI data from children born in 1998 and 2008 revealed social patterning across several dimensions of health and well-being, “In particular, young people from more disadvantaged social backgrounds were more likely to display poorer health behaviours and to report poorer mental health and well-being” (p. 6). This is significant in terms of the well-established correlation between health/well-being and participation in creative and arts-based activities (51, 95, 96), albeit acknowledging that well-being does not provide sole rationale for an arts programme. In Ireland, a marked social gradient exists which reveals rates of disease and risk factors for ill health and diminished wellbeing persistently higher amongst lower income groups (Healthy Ireland, 2013) and similarly shows that people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are less able to access the arts and other types of cultural activities (42, 52). The aesthetic and emotional components of arts activities afford opportunities for emotional expression, emotion management and stress reduction (110).

For those experiencing disadvantage or isolation, such as residing in direct provision centres, living in inner city areas and experiencing social disadvantage, and young people with disabilities, creative activities as reported in this systematic review provided a valuable lifeline connecting children to the ‘outside world’, alleviating issues and contributing to maintaining good mental health. Young people from the National Theatre Programme reported positive improvements in self-esteem in terms of feeling better about themselves and feeling more valued by others. The Fighting Words project, SOWS, reported a positive impact on participants across several facets of personal, social and academic development, improving levels of engagement with creative writing and school experience and fostering general wellbeing amongst children. Teachers felt the TAP programmes were particularly beneficial for children’s well-being particularly following the return to school after the Covid-19 pandemic, fostering socialising and mixing with other children in the classroom

during the Tap in-school residencies, and meeting people in their communities. The Irish Youth Orchestra working with socially disadvantaged communities reported that the programme had allowed young people a space to relax and heal.

Equally the wellbeing of those who educate, plan, evaluate and deliver creative activities across the Creative Youth Plan, should be prioritised in government programmes of this scale and scope. Finneran (2023) in his report reminds us of “the onerous demands on them in undertaking work in this area and the extent to which they draw upon their own well-being to do so” (p. 71). In analysing the hidden costs of socially engaged labour, Belfiore (2022) similarly discusses “the unacknowledged costs shouldered by socially engaged practitioners working on publicly subsidised participatory projects” (p. 61). These costs do not just include the many hours dedicated to planning (and evaluation) prior to, during and after the creative activities (which are often not factored into funding), but also the emotional and psychological burden which teachers, artists, youth workers, coordinators and facilitators bear when involved in wellbeing programmes. Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan was to some extent engaged with caring for the wellbeing and creativity of these cohorts, through programmes such as the Arts in Junior Cycle, TAP and several training courses offered throughout the Creative Schools, Creative Clusters and LCYPs. As one teacher poignantly observes, “The fundamental point of this course is that it addressed me as a thinking, creative, imaginative PERSON, not just a teacher. The teacher is not simply a cog in a wheel...” (McCarthy, 2022, p. 39).

In a society in which positive mental health is prioritised, and particularly as we emerge into a post-pandemic world, health and well-being are significant concerns for governments and policy makers globally. A recent report (March, 2022) from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) in the US revealed devastating results from the impact of Covid-19 both economically and on people’s mental health and well-being. However, the report finds that the arts sector was still stronger in 2020 than many other sectors such as transportation, mining, or agriculture. The report’s authors highlight this as a reminder of how underappreciated the contributions of arts and culture are to the economic health of the US (111). It found that despite enormous levels of stress during this period, artists,

creatives, and arts organisations were inventive and resourceful, a finding also reflected in other studies (112, 113). The report concludes that despite three major economic setbacks this century so far (post 9/11 recession, the 2008 recession, and Covid-19), artists regrouped after each crisis, drawing on their resilience and creativity to build new audiences, source new funding, and do “what they do best—use their creativity to make sense of a shared trauma” (112). Resilience such as that described above was also evident in the data for this review, in which artists and organisations, teachers and facilitators reinvented and modified initiatives in order to adapt to the catastrophic situation created by the closure of schools and the aftermath of the pandemic. Creative Associates across the Creative Schools initiative reported favourably on the diversity of tools employed to maintain contact and training throughout the pandemic, including meeting rooms, breakout rooms, digital slideshows, digital voting, and interactive digital meeting spaces. Across the data, there is evidence that artists, teachers, youth workers and schools acquired digital skills in record time, adapted activities to outdoor environments, and maximised resources at hand.

Against the international evidence and data from this systematic review, Ireland’s Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022) can be viewed not only as a significant policy strategy but a workable practical programme which is contributing to happiness and well-being, with potential to lead to resilience, innovation, and ingenuity in the younger population, when addressing challenges in their lives and in wider society and in those delivering activities. This aspect of the Plan should continue to be a priority in Phase Two.

## **5.2. Summary**

In summary, the data indicate that the Creative Youth and NCF initiatives included in this analysis increased and enabled creative skills in children and young people. A strong contributory factor was found to be connecting creative practitioners and organisations directly to schools, teachers and communities, capitalising on the skills already available on a national level. This cooperative ethos was represented in 88% of projects who identified cross and inter-sectoral collaboration as a valuable outcome, maximising resources through people, public spaces and/or partnerships with established organisations, in other words



mobilising community assets. 71% of initiatives report fostering a cross curricular approach as an outcome, with evidence demonstrating arts integrated approaches across several learning domains. 62% of creative practitioners, teachers and youth workers cited enhanced creative and educational skills as an outcome, identifying improved knowledge and skills in working with children, growing professionally and emotionally, and developing and strengthening their arts practice. Teachers expressed satisfaction in learning new arts-based techniques, and the opportunity to nurture and develop their own creativity. Continuing Professional Development and training is considered crucial for the successful continuation and embedding of the principles and objectives of the Creative Youth Plan. 75% of initiatives report expanding access and 62% targeting the seldom heard as outcomes, aligning with the core principle of the Creative Youth Plan of access and inclusivity particularly of those cohorts less likely to engage with cultural or creativity activity. Several projects involved participants from seldom heard cohorts in society such as children in direct provision, and young people with disabilities, young people from the Traveller community and refugees. However, explicit attention to principles 1 and 4 of the Creative Youth Plan, notably the voice of the child and inclusivity need to feature to a stronger extent in Phase Two. Employing creativity as a strategy to address social challenges was also reported, with 62% of projects reporting an increase in self-confidence as an outcome, an equally strong 58% linking Creative Youth initiatives to social cohesion and 54% reporting an improvement in personal well-being.

# Chapter Six

## Gaps and Challenges in the Research Findings



### 6.1. Challenges and Gaps in the Research Findings

This chapter discusses the main challenges reported by the Creative Youth and NCF initiatives, followed by challenges and gaps which emerged inductively throughout the data. The data are considered in light of relevant national and international research. 18 reports (75%) presented at least one challenge arising from delivery of their creative activity. However, across all initiatives there is a distinct lack of reporting on challenges, negative outcomes, or gaps. This is particularly true of the NCF initiatives who reported fewer challenges across all categories. This may be a consequence of artificial or excessive alignment with government objectives (24) and/or underreporting of challenges due to apprehension around continuation of funding. The literature indicates several shortcomings in research involving the arts, amongst which,

criticisms centre on the over dependency on expected and assumed impact and benefits (24, 133) and lack of accurate reporting (201). This continues as a common criticism directed at cultural organisations and governments whose premise for investing in culture can often be based on expected benefits and assumed impact rather than real outcomes (16, 24, 198). The CY initiatives (especially the larger and more embedded ones) were more likely to report challenges, though again not to a great extent. The challenges cited were analysed to determine if common concerns had emerged across the datasets, and to identify future priorities. Following on from the challenges reported across CY and NCF reports, we identify other difficulties and gaps which emerged inductively from the data and findings. In some instances, these converge with those reported, in others they signal new findings resulting from the systematic review. In all instances they aim to provide a context for the recommendations presented in Chapter Seven.

## 6.2. Challenges reported across Creative Youth and NCF initiatives

All challenges outlined in the Creative Youth and NCF reports were analysed and classified using NVivo 12 Plus to identify common themes and trends across the reports. A total of 13 codes were identified, and later collapsed to four main themes (see Fig. 6.1.).

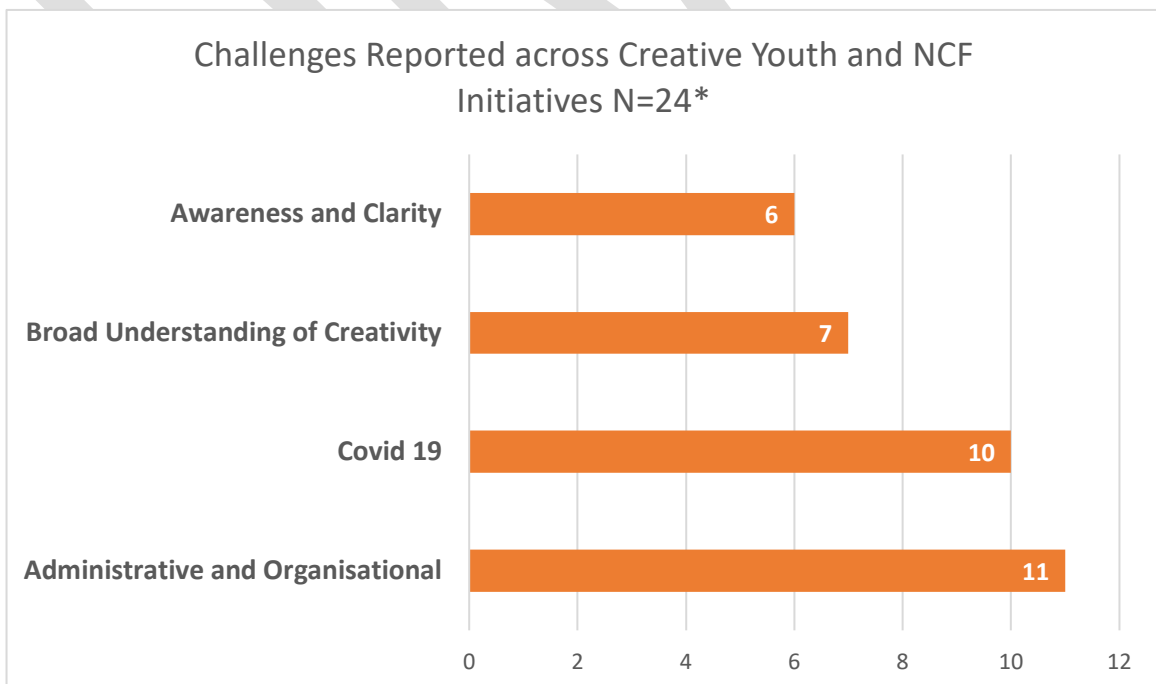


Fig. 6.1. Challenges reported across Creative Youth and NCF initiatives

\*N=24 (Additional documents which did not meet the inclusion criteria but reported challenges will be discussed further on in the review)

### 6.2.1 Administrative and Organisational Challenges

Apart from the exceptional and unprecedented circumstances and difficulties which the world faced during the Covid 19 pandemic, which is reflected in the challenges reported in this systematic review, the biggest challenges for CY (n=7) and NCF (n=4) initiatives centred around administrative and organisational issues. Almost half (46%) of all initiatives reported difficulties around these aspects of their projects with many citing cumbersome and heavy paperwork as an issue. On several occasions, the Creative Schools report (Murphy & Eivers, 2023) highlights the heavy paperwork and invoicing system involved in applying for funding and strongly recommends that the 'time-consuming' process "would benefit from streamlining, clearer instructions for applicants, and stronger targeting" (p. 54). CAs also complained about a 'cumbersome' application process, observing that it would be preferable that schools could concentrate more on running the programme rather than dealing with invoicing. Similarly, Creative Clusters reported "that Budget and administration [was] draining, complicated and confusing, though support from Tralee was excellent" (Morrissey, 2021, p. 47). Different issues around human resources such as lack of substitute teachers or a lack of experienced artists/youth workers in remote and rural areas and high turnover of directors was cited by LCYPs. There was concern around staff overload in some initiatives, whilst others felt the time needed to plan various aspects of a programme was not factored into costs. In some instances, overlapping of services was reported and on other occasions the timing of training in evenings or at weekends was considered an inhibitory factor. In the Department of Education Consultation (2022), in which a total of 433 schools responded to an online survey about Creative Youth, the administrative burden was considered inhibitory. This is of importance especially within an environment in which the majority of schools are already reporting curriculum overload (73% primary, 63% post primary) and lack of time (71% of primary, 77% post primary) as the main barriers to creative practice. The Creative Youth Plan forms a central pillar

of the Creative Ireland Programme, all-of-government modus, involving grassroots partnerships with community organisations and local authorities. The programme is larger and more ambitious than previous cultural policies and holds the potential to provide a coordinated all-encompassing approach to culture and the arts across the island of Ireland. Based on the evidence from Phase One, the administration in terms of costs, paperwork, human resources and synchronisation between government departments, partners and LAs needs to be carefully and consciously structured and planned in Phase Two. New and established relationships between artists, organisations, schools and youth workers should be developed and expanded in order to capitalise on established networks, and initiatives should be synchronised appropriately in order to avoid cross over of services.

### **6.2.2 Impact of Covid 19**

Many of the CY and NCF initiatives during Phase One took place during the global health crisis of COVID-19 in which governments worldwide closed schools in order to reduce transmission of the virus (202). Unsurprisingly then, just over 42% (n=10) of initiatives reported Covid 19 as a challenge to planning, delivering or evaluating their programme. Interestingly, NCF initiatives reported this challenge to a lesser extent than CY projects (CY, n=7) and NCF, n=3). Examples of challenges identified as a result of the pandemic included one early years reading initiative in which they describe restricted communication with parents and also restricted interaction between staff members due to the establishment of pods, which negatively affected both the smooth implementation and evaluation of the project (Small Print, 2020). Books had to be left out for 72 hours before reuse and evaluations which should have occurred over several months were reduced to five weeks. Larger initiatives such as Creative Schools and TAP had to completely rethink and restructure many aspects of their programme and much of the training was moved online which resulted in poor attendance. In terms of evaluation, the original objective of Creative Schools “to use a range of creative and participatory methods in site-specific contexts as part of the case studies....to elicit the voice of the child in particular” (Murphy & Eivers, 2023, p. 42) had to be abandoned. Similarly, Creative Clusters (Morrissey, 2021) describe that restricted or no access to

schools meant the voice of pupils was difficult to capture and was ultimately reported on, by a purposive sample of teachers employing learner-based research tasks.

“Extensive international research has shown that children’s social class background is one of the most significant predictors of their educational success” (Darmody, Smyth & Russell, 2021, p. 367). This became evident throughout the pandemic when due to school closure and disruption, the equalising strength of schools was severely diminished. Evidence suggests that the pandemic has aggravated already existing socio-economic inequalities with the scale of impact differing across social strata (165). Covid 19 has resulted in both a learning loss and a broadening of the learning gap between those from lower income families and those from affluent backgrounds (165). This was reflected in some of the data analysed for the systematic review. The LCYPs for example, commented on issues with broadband, access to digital devices and lack of spaces to engage in learning: “Some groups of disadvantaged and marginalised young people such as young Travellers were less likely to engage in online activities” (Roe, 2022, p. 5). The Ark engaged with two settings located in areas of socio-economic disadvantage where they felt the impact of Covid 19 would be greater and children might not have access to art and creativity. The initiative consisted of introducing two interactive sculptures *Out Of My Shell* and *Into My Hive* into the early years settings and allowing exploration, imagination and play to take place. Educators and staff in the settings were provided with CPD and activity packs to support learning.

### **6.2.3 Broadening the Understanding of Creativity**

The Creative Ireland Programme aspires to mainstream creativity by highlighting the cross-curricular and interdisciplinary reach of the arts both within and beyond the traditional arts sphere. Creativity is also employed as a strategy contributing to individual and community well-being, social cohesion and economic development. As discussed in Chapter Three, we identified that ‘broadening’ and possible melding of the arts into the more generic concept of creativity is a focus of government cultural policy worldwide. “Through the Creative Ireland Programme, we are helping schools to embrace creativity as an activity in itself and as supporting the holistic development of future

generations” (CIP, 2022, p. 22). However, this approach is not without risk, and is reflected in several reports in Phase One. Just under 30% (n=7) of initiatives report the current trend towards a broad understanding of creativity as a challenge. Creative Schools dedicates an entire chapter to discussing the concept of creativity and the creative process in the classroom extending it to incorporate diverse domains of learning. In practice however, creativity in schools is still typically arts based. This is evident, for example, in the main art forms pursued by Creative Associates in their practices, namely visual arts followed by drama or theatre and crafts, with three-quarters of CAs indicating that visual arts featured in at least one of their assigned schools. CAs’ primary motivation for involvement in Creative Schools was a desire to “accord status to the arts in schools” (Murphy & Eivers, 2023, p. 91) and the most common type of school environment was a primary school, with (95%) of the CAs surveyed attached to at least one primary school, in comparison to 54% attached to a post-primary school.

As mentioned earlier, a perception evident in the data that creativity aligns better with the primary school curriculum and less to secondary schools demonstrates a lack of understating around the cross curricular value of creativity. This is also acknowledged in the Arts in Junior Cycle Report (McCarthy, 2022) which reports a “perception that as students move towards examinations and then on to senior cycle and yet more examinations, creativity must somehow be abandoned (p. 19). The LCYPs also comment on the over representation of arts-based organisations on the Steering Committee and recommend a wider definition of creativity in the LCYP guidance. It should be pointed out that, as aforementioned, the challenge of moving creativity to span all domains of the curriculum and to non-formal learning contexts poses a challenge certainly not limited to the Creative Ireland Programme. Arts subjects have always been closely related to creativity “in the freedom of exploration, interpretation and creation of ideas, and the avoidance of reductionist, binary approaches to form, provides a way of understanding that differs from the sciences and other academic subjects” (Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013, as cited in Murphy & Eivers, 2023, p. 21). The second Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) has developed its definition of creativity to a greater extent than in Phase One and dedicates two full pages to a discussion around

creativity and the creative process. This will likely inform future funding requisites and guidance. In addition, research into creativity, inclusion and wellbeing (165, 188) has been supported by the Creative Youth Plan and its findings will inform the programme going forward.

#### **6.2.4. Lack of Awareness and Clarity**

A quarter of initiatives (n=6) commented on the lack of awareness and insufficient guidance around different aspects of the Creative Ireland Programme. Challenges included lack of clarity regarding instructions for applicants, lack of understanding amongst school management as to what was involved in some of the programmes. Creative Schools Coordinators and Creative Clusters facilitators complained about an initial lack of clarity around their role. National Youth Theatre and LCYPs felt there was a lack of awareness nationwide around what their programmes offered. LCYPs also cited lack of promotion within the ETBs as an issue. Both TAP and Arts in Junior Cycle raise similar concerns. Lack of awareness appeared in several of the additional documents feeding into this review. In the research and reflection document from Tenderfoot theatre company (197), a survey of 15 teachers from 15 different South Dublin secondary schools found that 80% had not heard of Creative Ireland and 60% of the teachers had heard of the Arts Council but, to their knowledge, their school had never engaged with it. In the Department of Education consultation (DE, 2022), lack of awareness and information about creative initiative opportunities was also cited as a challenge by 35% of primary and 50% of post primary schools. In the same consultation lack of clarity and transparency was cited in the application process.

Taking on board this evidence, Phase Two should continue to focus on promotion and raising awareness of the different creative opportunities available in formal and non-formal educational contexts, improve dissemination of practice, and uphold maximum clarity around all aspects of the Plan but particularly the application and funding processes. As Finneran (2023), observes “Over the first period of CI, this work was of necessity expansive and exploratory. With the advent of the second period of CI, greater clarity is called for in some facets of its operation” (p. 69).



### **6.3. Summary**

It is interesting that apart from the exceptional challenge which Covid 19 presented for many creative practitioners and organisations, teachers and youth workers, most challenges fell along the axis of administrative and organisational difficulties. Broadening the understanding of creativity was also signalled as a challenge, as was the lack of awareness and clarity around different aspects the Plan. Additional challenges reported ranged from the difficulty of including the voice of the child, either due to the lack of training, Covid restrictions or lack of time. Achieving inclusivity was also noted as challenging, in that successfully reaching and including some cohorts was cited as an issue. It is particularly worth repeating an under reporting of challenges across all initiatives, but especially within the smaller NCF initiatives. As touched upon previously, this could relate to evaluation being viewed as a box ticking exercise or apprehension around jeopardising future funding. In general, the systematic review demonstrates a lack of critical voice in the evaluation of funded initiatives, and evidence that outputs and outcomes may have been inflated in some circumstances to align with policy objectives. Reports and evaluations on different initiatives may be foregoing quality in the name of accountability and are at risk of producing advocacy-based evaluation rather than robust independent findings. This finding reflects criticisms which have been voiced in the literature regarding the a priori assumptions of 'public good' and 'public value' implicated in research around the impact of creative and cultural interventions, particularly when framed against a limited and technocratic understanding of 'impact' in policy fora (67, 186). The Creative Ireland Programme would do well to continue to encourage independent research and robust evaluation in order to ensure an objective assessment of initiatives whilst striking a balance between innovation, risk and more policy driven initiatives.

### **6.4. Challenges and Gaps Emerging from Analysis**

In addition to the challenges reported by the CY and NCF initiatives themselves, a number of challenges and gaps emerged from the data through inductive analysis (203). The challenges identified here do not aim to be exhaustive, but serve to highlight the principal areas for development, whilst setting a context for policy recommendations during Phase Two of the Plan.

#### **6.4.1 Evaluating Engagement and Participation in Creative Activities**

Currently there is extensive research providing evidence on social outcomes acquired through cultural engagement (196), however, evidence supporting such benefits is heterogenous in methods, expanse, and precision (96). The literature indicates several shortcomings in research involving the arts. Criticisms centre on the lack of rigorous measurement methods, failure to measure longer term impacts and over dependency on expected and assumed impact and benefits (24, 133). The Canadian Alliance for Healthy Hearts and Minds (CAHHM) commissioned a report on evaluation practices from the Health Development Agency (HDA). The report found that although most people working in community-based arts for health appreciated the need to evaluate their projects, they struggled to find appropriate methods for doing so (Angus, 2002). Evaluations were frequently inadequate, and many did not articulate clear aims (134). On a similar note, the UK Creative Health Inquiry (2017) (95) asserted that research into community-based arts is commonly based on small samples and not gold standard random controlled trial (RCT) groups routinely expected in medicine. Therefore, claims about the health benefits of art-based interventions can often be disregarded as anecdotal or lacking substance. The literature is replete with concerns about a culture of scholarship in health which bases its claims on limited forms of analysis (87). Nonetheless, more recently, with increased interest in evidence-based policy worldwide and a growing canon of research into arts and health (204, 205, 206, 207, 199) the field is gaining credibility. Qualitative methods are progressively being accepted as reliable and attempts to denounce arts-based research on methodological grounds are becoming jaded and have lost currency as the field of research methods celebrates a promising future for arts-based research and research in and about the arts (137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142). In truth, positioning the arts within a culture of RCTs, signals an alarming failure to understand the nature of arts processes and engagement, and inappropriately elevates one research methodology above all others. Hodges and Garnett (2020) (135) found that the evidentiary basis of health claims can reveal quite different and complex perspectives when different methods drawn from the medical humanities are employed, such as close reading and scrutiny, 'reading against the grain', and

fine-grained analysis. Small sample sizes should not be an issue, and qualitative social science research can draw successfully on case study data and focus groups, to build, develop and test empirical and theoretical claims (136).

Increasingly, literature around evaluation of engagement with the arts and creativity generally supports a mixed methods approach; to insist on solely quantitative methods “may not do justice to the character of arts-based interventions” (Coulter & Nesbitt, 2016, 95 p. 34) as the difference they make to people’s lives may well go beyond economic or other quantifiable values. As can be seen from the distribution of evaluation methods in the Creative Youth and NCF reports included in this review (see Fig. 6.2.), a majority 67% (n=16) employed mixed methods in evaluations, with many employing several evaluation tools such as general feedback, surveys, interviews, case studies and observation notes. Several (n=10) relied on arts-based methods (e.g., respondents feeding back through collage, poetry, music), and many on uncontextualized anecdotal participant quotation to evidence findings. 33% (n=8) of projects used external researchers to evaluate outcomes (Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, TAP, LCYPs, Arts in Junior Cycle, Fighting Words, Business to Arts, and National Youth Theatre). Informal and formal feedback forms and surveys were the most popular choice for evaluation (n=14), followed by interviews which included semi structured, discussion interviews, online and phone interviews (n=10).

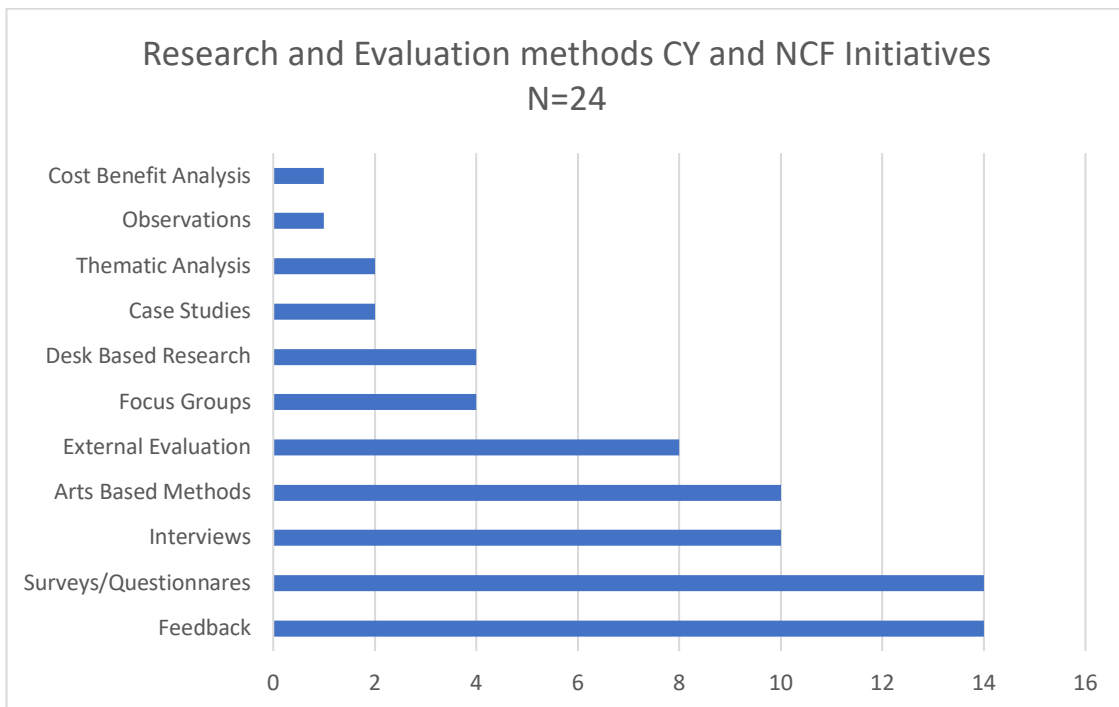


Fig. 6.2. Research and Evaluation Methods Employed in Creative Youth Evaluations and Research Reports

\*N=whole numbers as most initiatives employed several methods simultaneously to evaluate outcomes.

As Creative Youth is part of an all-of-government programme and benefits from public expenditure, all fundees are bound by a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in which they agree to report outputs, outcomes, findings, and recommendations. This analysis found a rich and appropriately diverse range of research and/or evaluation methods had been used, but issues around fidelity in presenting and applying those methods surfaced in many reports. Extensive analysis (at a granular level) was required to locate and extract findings in most cases, consequently reducing the reports' immediate impact and accessibility.

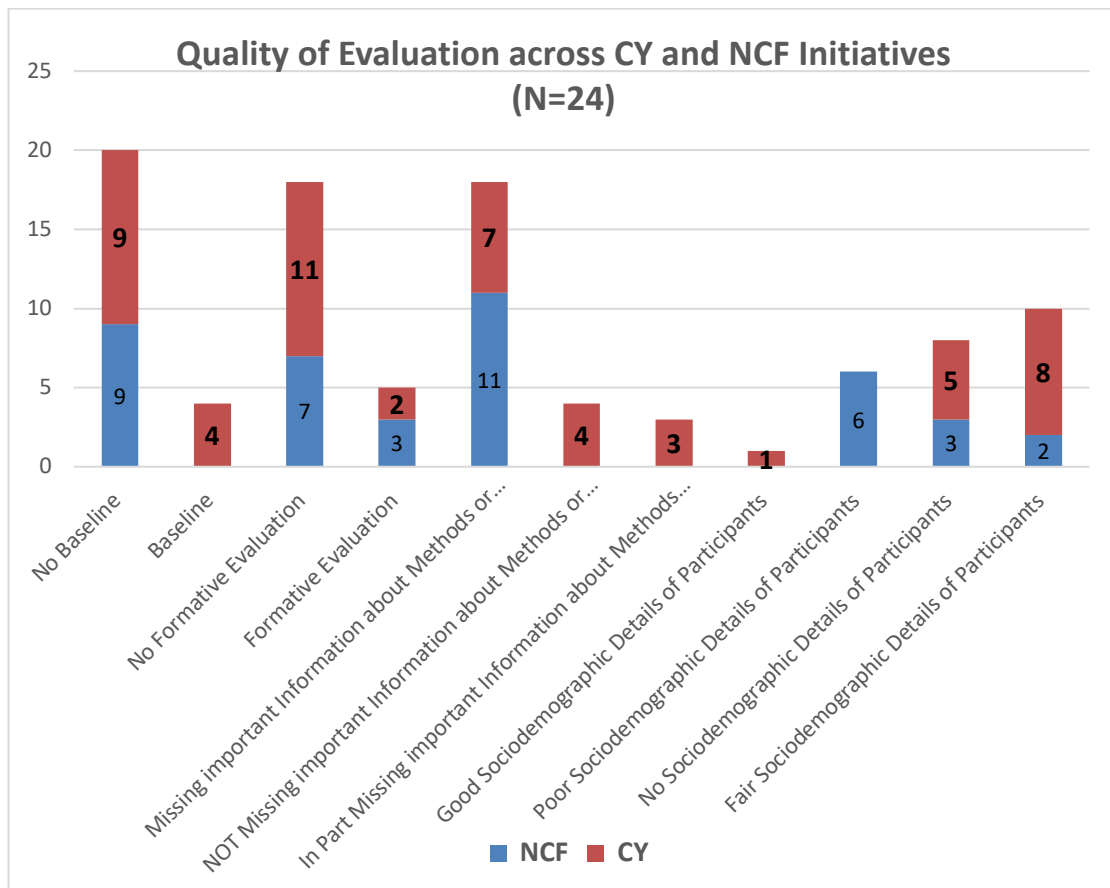


Fig 6.3. Quality of Evaluation across CY and NCF Initiatives (n=24)

If we examine the quality of evaluation across initiatives, there are several gaps in the findings which require attention. A large majority of reports (n=18) were missing important information about evaluation or research methods; this number comprised all NCF initiatives (n=11) and half of CY initiatives (n=7). The remaining seven CY initiatives scored favourably across this attribute. Regarding sociodemographic details of participants, 10 reports scored 'fair' on presenting socio demographics details, eight provided no sociodemographic details. Of the 24 reports, nine CY reports provided fair to good sociodemographic details, while the majority of NCF reports (n=9) provided poor to no socio demographic details. Only one report (Creative Schools) provided comprehensive sociodemographic details.

In addition to capturing relevant and appropriate sociodemographic information, initiatives might want to measure progress in certain skills, knowledge, attitudes or behaviour (in the understanding that progress will mean different things depending on the nature, scale and scope of an initiative). In order to measure progress, it is important to construct a baseline value. A

baseline is the situation just before or at the outset of a new strategy against which progress is measured or comparisons are made as part of the monitoring and evaluation process (206, 187). As evidenced in Fig 6.3, none of the NCF initiatives took a baseline measurement. CY initiatives scored low in this regard also (with n=4 reporting a baseline). However, Creative Schools (one of the four initiatives who did establish baseline data) comprises a large number of schools, teachers and creative associates, and therefore a baseline from an initiative of this scale provides a healthy data base for subsequent analysis.

Another area which requires consideration is the type of evaluation which takes place throughout the life time of an initiative. Formative evaluation complements summative evaluation and the best creative projects make use of both opportunities to review how an initiative is progressing in real time rather than wait to the end when opportunities for change may be minimal (207). Formative evaluation is a way of taking stock of what is happening *during* the project, assessing how the work is going, what participants' responses to it are, and identifying areas for improvement or adjustment if necessary, during the remainder of the project (e.g., 'What is working?' 'To what extent are the resources being used effectively?' 'Are the young people involved improving in the targeted skills?' 'Are participants engaged, and/or attending?' 'If not, what could be possible reasons for this, and what needs to change during the remainder of the project to address this?' As evidenced in the data, the majority of initiatives (75%, n=18) did not carry out formative evaluation. During Phase Two, this aspect of evaluation will likely benefit from increased attention, training and support.

Very few reports presented a clear evaluation strategy or design, nor could one be gleaned from the reports submitted. Distinction between outputs and outcomes as required under the terms of the SLA was not always clear, nor was there a discernible connection between the objectives of the organisation and outcomes reported, or an explicit alignment to the objectives and policy of Creative Youth. Advance preparation in this regard would inform the development of intended outputs and outcomes of an initiative, and support starting on the best foot possible, but above all, ensure that the project is relevant to the participants/community involved. It can be helpful to underpin

planning with a Theory of Change or Logic model<sup>17</sup> which can explain and map the connections/links between the area of interest being worked on, and the creative activities and interventions employed to explore these associations (e.g., in the area of technology skills, how might a creative dance intervention develop young children's mouse and keyboard skills?).

The above challenges around evaluation serve to reduce the reliability and validity of data reported during Phase One, hinder the accurate and real mapping of sociodemographic participation across CY, and impede a robust understanding of what is working and what needs improvement. It is acknowledged however, that an ambitious all of government programme of this scale, involving multiple partners and organisations needs time to put evaluation mechanisms and structures in place to map progress and development. As mentioned in Chapter Two, good evaluation should be regarded as both an accountability and learning exercise. Evaluation should present as honestly as possible what happened and what emerged/changed as a result of doing the project, so that teachers/facilitators and others can learn from the process to improve, sustain, and develop further successful creative practices (207).

Therefore, moving into Phase Two of the Creative Youth Plan, initiatives should be encouraged to consider designing, planning and embedding their approach to evaluation from the beginning (baseline), during (formative), and on completion of the programme (summative). They should be acknowledged and prioritised as being as important as planning the activities for the project itself: one informs and enhances the quality of the other. As Finneran (2023) observes:

If evaluation work is to be carried out within a project, it should have a clear formative and reflective function and bring value to the practitioner both in making sense of the project that has just taken place, but also in taking their work forward. (p. 67)

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<sup>17</sup> Helpful resources include: Finney (2020). *Developing a Theory of Change and Evaluation Plan for your Resource. A self-help guide from Young Money*. Social Research and Statistics. [https://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/YM-Self-Help-Guide-\\_\\_June-2020\\_FINAL-1.pdf](https://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/YM-Self-Help-Guide-__June-2020_FINAL-1.pdf)  
Taylor-Powell, & Henert (2008). *Developing a logic model: Teaching and training guide*. University of Wisconsin-Extension Cooperative Extension Program Development and Evaluation. <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/programdevelopment/files/2016/03/lmguidecomplete.pdf>

At the end of 2022 the Creative Ireland Programme commissioned Trinity College Dublin with the task of creating a set of evaluation guidelines and evaluation tools (176) with which to monitor the creative activities of the new Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027). It is intended that Phase Two will benefit from robust, flexible and creative evaluation mechanisms which guide and underpin creative activities whilst allowing for a clearer picture of the progress, development and gaps to be addressed.

#### **6.4.2. Voice of the Child and Young People**

A key point throughout the reports analysed was the insufficient presence of the voice of children and young people. This potentially limited the evidence base and prioritised other voices. Article 12, of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) asserts:

State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (5 p. 4)

The Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022) as part of an all-of-government programme and partly embedded in the DCEDIY, champions the voice of children and young people in both the development and delivery of programmes. Amongst the infrastructural resources promised by Ireland's first *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015) (7) was the development of a hub (now Hub na nÓg) to provide information, guidance and practical support to Government departments and agencies in delivering commitments outlined in the strategy's Action Plan. Across the Creative Youth Plan, Hub na nÓg provides bespoke training for teachers, organisations and creative practitioners through Creative Schools, Creative Clusters and the LCYPs. As noted previously, the inclusion of voice in the Creative Clusters report was severely affected by Covid 19 preventing case studies and direct access to children and young people. Similarly, Creative Schools had to undergo modifications to initial plans around inclusion of voice, though they report that eventually children and young people's views were successfully expressed through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and



surveys. Nonetheless, response rates for Phase One of research amongst primary and post primary children were very low (19.4% and 14.7% respectively), and though subsequent response rates improved they were beset by numerous hindering factors such as teachers' lack of time to administer questionnaires, lack of engagement from principals or coordinators, survey saturation or a back log of administrative work in schools. In the case of the LCYPs, case studies from three pilot areas presented some evidence of youth voice in their report, albeit to a limited extent. Though not included in the LCYP report (Roe, 2022) there was evidence of youth voice in the additional documents made available to the researchers. One such document detailed a consultation with 360 young people informed by the Lundy Model carried out by Mayo Sligo Leitrim LCYP. The researchers were also sent documents which described the Kerry LCYP consultations (2018-2022) with children and young people employing a wide range of participatory methods such as body maps, wall of ideas, life line and visual documentary.

Generally, this systematic review identified a lack of child voice in many of the reports included for analysis, evident from the beginning of a project through to the final summative evaluation. As noted in Fig. 6.5., only a quarter of all reports (n=6), (this included four CY and two NCF reports) included the voice of the child or young person to a satisfactory extent in evaluation of the initiative, whilst 13 reports (54%) presented weak or in part evidence of voice inclusion. The data suggest that all projects under Creative Youth and particularly smaller projects such as NCF initiatives may need support in how to centralise the voice of the child in planning, implementation and post-project evaluation stages. In fact, several initiatives mention the need for additional training and guidance in this regard (56, 64, 75). The data demonstrate that other voices are also under-represented, such as the voice of artists and creative associates. This is an important point to address going forward. As Finneran (2023) observes,

To further enhance and develop professional well-being, the voices and experiences of practitioners and facilitators should be sought and engaged with in the development of policy and implementation of strategy. (p. 71)

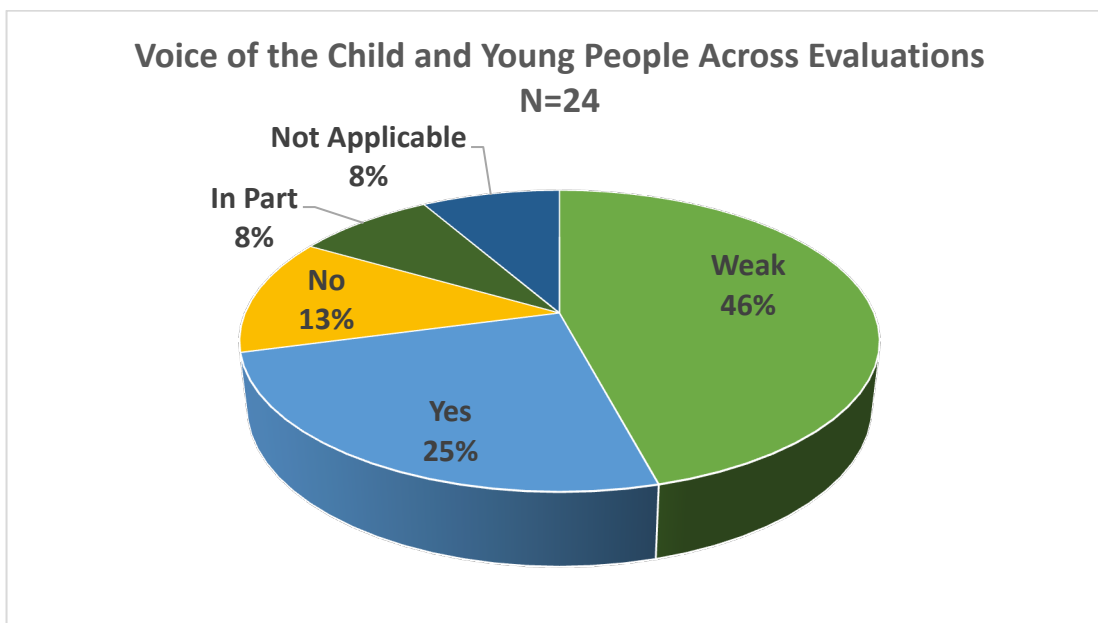


Fig 6.4. Voice of the Child Across Evaluations N=24

It should be noted that the inclusion of the voice of the child and young people is strongly advocated through the Creative Youth Plan's (2023-2027) guiding principle: "Children and young people must have agency and a voice in decision-making on the implementation of the Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027 (CY, 2023, p.13). Furthermore, several consultations with children and young people have taken place prior to the launch of Phase Two. In early 2023 children's experience of TAP (n=123) was captured through a series of creative participatory techniques which included photos, focus groups, and poetry (Buggie, 2023). Under the auspices of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Dr Angela Palmer carried out consultations with primary school children and young people in Comhairle Na nÓg for the Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027 (n=128). In addition, the Arts Council consulted with children and young people through workshops and focus groups, and through two surveys disseminated through schools and youth groups: one aimed at children aged 8-12 years and the second aimed at young people aged 12-18 years. It would seem that the lack of voice evident during Phase One is being addressed, and recommendations regarding this aspect of the Plan are outlined in Chapter Seven.

## 6.5. Summary

Analysis of the Creative Youth evaluation methods echo many of the issues raised about a lack of rigour in arts-based research and evaluation. “Lack of knowledge of impact and impact measurements and the lack of clear guidelines on how to measure and assess impact” (Vermeulen & Maas, 2020, p. 98), means that some cultural organisations (especially smaller ones) or lone creative practitioners may struggle to analyse and manage the social impact generated by their activities. This systematic review confirms the need to put in place more robust and accessible evaluation mechanisms which facilitate analysis before, during and after projects. Indeed, innovative frameworks which recognise the value of embedding research and evaluation design into the overall planning of projects from the original conception and design to implementation and evaluation might serve to better elicit the rich and multi-layered outcomes from creative and arts-based projects<sup>18</sup>. It is advisable that research and evaluation do not forego quality in the name of accountability. There is evidence throughout the reports that training and guidance in evaluation would be beneficial. The Creative Ireland Programme needs to build competence and confidence around evaluation whilst offering clear and concise guidelines to organisations, youth workers, coordinators and practitioners (Finneran, 2023). Discussion with all stakeholders involved in an initiative is paramount for successful ‘buy in’ and decisions around evaluation toolkits and research instruments should involve both bottom up and top-down participation. “Consultation with commissioners, funders, health partners, arts organisations, staff, project managers, artists, and service users will identify resources and support shared understanding and agreement about evaluation aims, priorities and methods” (Daykin & Joss, 2016, p. 8).

## 6.6 Targeting Seldom Heard Communities

As noted in Chapter Five, 75% of reports cited expanding access to creative activities as an outcome, in addition to 62% who reported targeting

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<sup>18</sup> See O’Sullivan et al. (2018). The wonder project: an early years arts education project with Traveller mothers and their children, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2018.1522773

seldom heard communities. Inclusion and expanding access to every child in Ireland form part of the five core principles of Creative Youth. The economic success of the Celtic Tiger transformed Ireland from a relatively homogenous population characterised by high levels of emigration to a more heterogeneous population in which by 2022, 12% of the population were considered non-Irish nationals<sup>19</sup>. Most of the available international literature has found that ethnicity, minority status and poverty act as barriers to child participation in structured activities (148). In Ireland a similar pattern has been detected showing that children born outside Ireland, who are non-Roman Catholic or on social benefit (specifically unemployment benefit) have different participation rates in structured activities (147). Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) data confirm that cultural engagement among nine and 13-year-olds varies by gender, family background and school experience (42). Smyth (2020) (43) notes a significant decline in arts involvement between 13 and 17 years, but particularly in boys, calling for added attention to this age group. In addition, young people who spent three or more hours playing computer games had consistently poorer outcomes at 17 (lower grades, lower self-esteem, greater socio-emotional difficulties, lower life satisfaction), and GUI data demonstrate that computer gaming is more prevalent amongst boys, particularly those from lower income families. Smyth's (43) report shows evidence of a marked social gradient in which "young people from professional/ managerial or graduate families were found to be more likely to read, make music and attend music/drama lessons and less likely to play computer games or watch TV/films (at least during the week)" (p. 67). The fact that well over half of CY and NCF initiatives evaluated (see Fig 6.5.) are specifically or in part targeting seldom heard communities is encouraging. Building on a solid foundation, the Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) aims to:

Prioritise seldom heard children and young people who currently experience low levels of participation in creativity, culture and the arts, by implementing equity, diversity and inclusion measures. (p. 17)

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<sup>19</sup> Irish and Non-Irish Citizenship, Central Statistics Office (<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/migrationanddiversity/>).

Fig. 6.6. presents findings from the sociodemographic data extracted from the reports, with 62%% of initiatives specifically or in part targeting seldom heard communities.

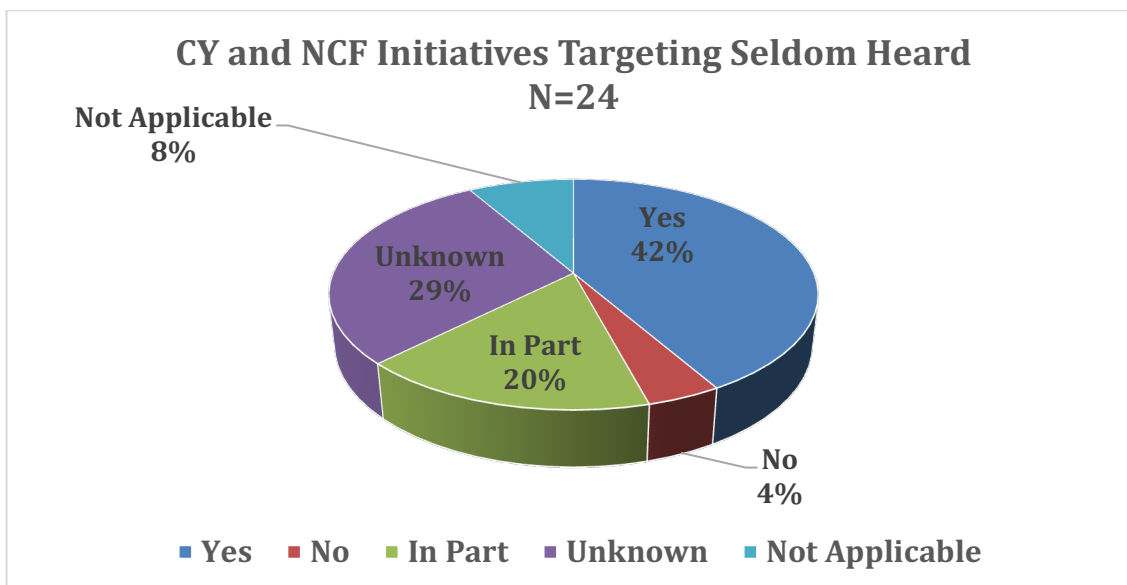


Fig 6.5. Distribution of CY and NCF initiatives targeting seldom heard communities

Within the data, there are important caveats to discuss regarding inclusivity and seldom heard communities. As mentioned above, reporting of demographic indicators was uneven across the initiatives and, in many instances, lacking in robustness and detail. Therefore, the conclusions around targeting and reaching seldom heard communities are tentative in many instances. Many of the evaluations provided little or no information on participants' age groups or gender, and the absence of any reference to the LGBTQI+ community is notable. This is particularly relevant when analysed against the literature above which points towards the value of cultural, creative and arts activities with boys, the emerging literature supporting its role with the LGBTQI+ community, and the extensive literature supporting its value in early years education. However, owing to gaps in the data provided, it is difficult to determine the extent to which these groups are represented in CY.

Furthermore, several initiatives mentioned challenges around reaching and working with seldom heard communities, from cross over of services, to prejudice, to entrenched attitudes, to the diversity of groups. In light of its poor presence in the data reviewed, greater clarity on how projects understood 'inclusivity' would be helpful, as would more accurate reporting on participants

and exactly who projects are working with. Embedding the Creative Youth inclusivity policy more explicitly into projects may enhance both project leaders' understanding of inclusion in the context of the Creative Youth Plan, and wider public awareness of the Plan and what it hopes to achieve in terms of engaging disadvantaged, marginalised and seldom heard communities. In same way that the Creative Ireland Programme has brought a new focus to creativity and the arts, the programme is in a prime position to lead discussions around inclusivity and make significant contributions to policy making. Considerable investment has already been made in academic and community-based research<sup>20</sup> which is providing valuable data for government and civil society, and this should be continued in Phase Two. The evidence also indicates that the new Plan is taking steps to ensure that seldom heard communities are prioritised through provision of resources such as the *Nurture Fund*. This will allocate half a million euro to support 8-10 youth-led initiatives for a period of 18 to 24 months, to “empower children and young people (from seldom heard groups<sup>21</sup>) between the ages of 6-24 to nurture their creative passions and ignite their creative potential” (CY, 2023). *Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity* is another Creative Ireland programme offering funding of up to €200,000, in partnership with the Department of Health (Healthy Ireland Programme), the HSE and the Arts Council. Considering the correlation between socioeconomic status and health (95, 207), and low participation levels in the arts (as discussed in Chapter Five), such targeted initiatives are to be welcomed. The relatively high incidence of projects (63%) in this review targeting groups outside the mainstream is encouraging and demonstrates awareness of barriers to inclusion, equality and diversity and a willingness to tackle these issues to provide access for all children and young people. However, nuanced and robust data are fundamental for the successful implementation, realisation and subsequent evaluation of CY principles and aims relating to access and inclusion across funded initiatives.

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<sup>20</sup> Finneran, 2023; Zaharani, Hennessy & Mbeve, 2023; Murphy & Eivers, 2023; Doyle, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Seldom heard cohorts for the purpose of this fund are defined as: Living with physical or intellectual disabilities; refugees and asylum-seekers; living with mental health issues; LGBTI+; Traveller and Roma; those within, or transitioning from, the care system; or engaged with the youth justice system/ incarcerated persons and ex-offenders.

## 6.7. Range of Creative Activities

As previously stated, almost all of the Creative Youth and NCF projects (96%) reported enabling creativity and increasing creative skills as an important outcome, and the range of activities through which this was achieved is presented in Fig. 6.7. 25% of projects reported being multidisciplinary, involving creative activities such as poetry, printing, playmaking, and arts and crafts. 21% involved arts based or storytelling CPD, 17% of initiatives comprised visual arts, and 13% involved music or singing. Theatre, design skills, storybooks and reading each constituted 4% of all projects, as did engagement with cultural institutions.

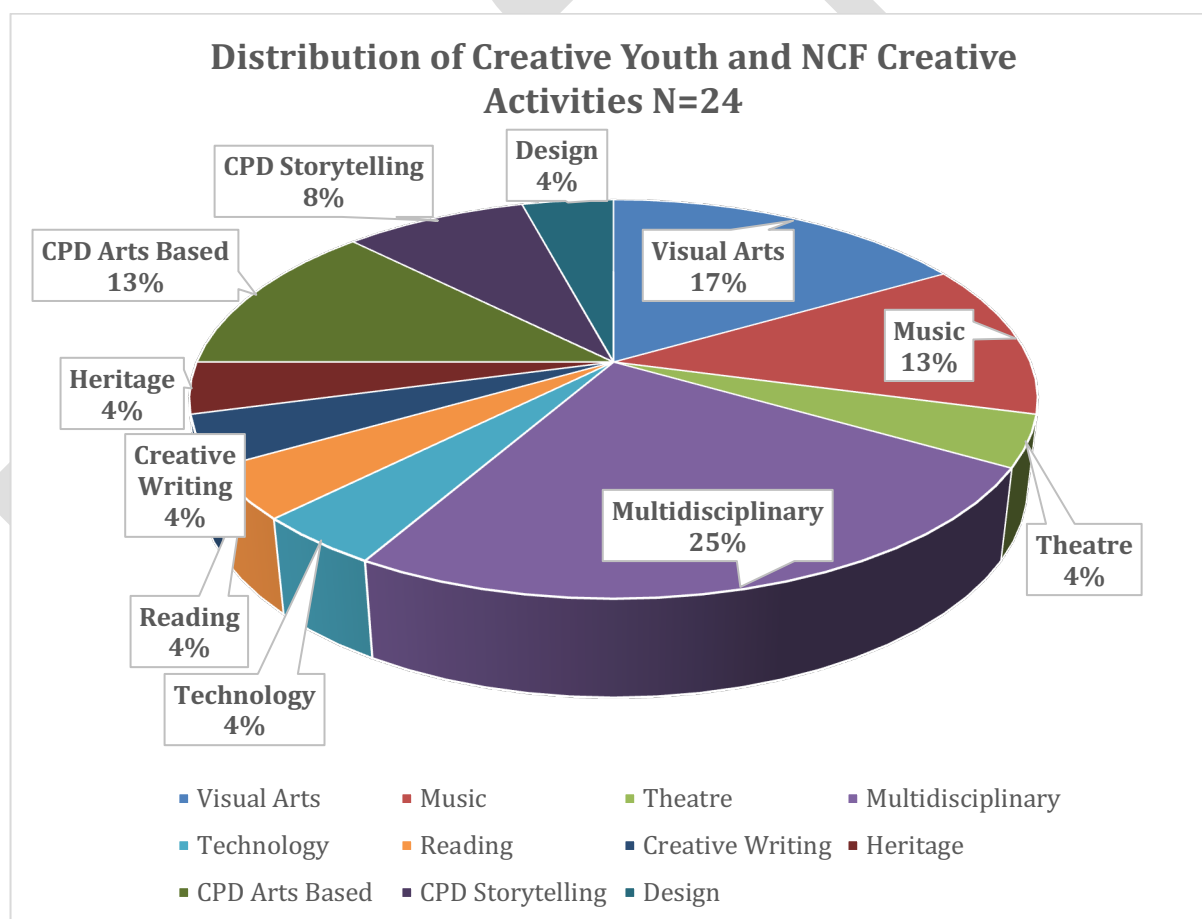


Fig. 6.6. Distribution of Creative Youth and NCF Creative Activities N=24

Although children and young people were offered a rich and diverse range of creative activities and events, deeper analysis of the data revealed that activities were heavily weighted towards the traditional arts forms. Over 70% (n=17) of initiatives were predominantly arts based, and largely comprised of

visual arts, theatre or drama and music. In fact, the larger initiatives such as LCYPs, Arts in Junior Cycle, Creative Schools and Creative Clusters comment on this in their reports. Several factors play into this phenomenon, not least the previously discussed challenges around broadening the concept of creativity. Creativity and the arts have always been interconnected (207, 208), as creative thinking and the creative process are the bedrocks of the arts (numbers), so it comes as no surprise that they feature prominently in the Creative Youth Plan. Nonetheless, increased clarity around a broader concept of creativity in Phase Two of the Plan will encourage creativity in and across all domains of learning. Another important aspect to consider here, is the gender patterning throughout the arts and visible throughout the data (McCarthy, 2022). This is confirmed by the Creative Schools Report in which the large majority of Creative Associates are female and two thirds of those are visual arts practitioners, helping to explain the dominant emphasis on visual arts (74%) in activities. Furthermore, at post-primary level, the role of Creative School Coordinator was usually filled by an art teacher (76%) and this was more than likely a woman. While gender emerged from the data as an issue, there is limited research to date exploring its role and significance in this field (209). However, gender was implicated in the much earlier Richards Report (1976) and Benson Report (1979) commissioned by the Arts Council, which identified an uneven exploration of different art forms across schools, citing gender and perceived gender appropriateness as a contributory factor. Study of the relationship between women, visual art and employment as teachers reveals gendered attitudes and gendered expectations which may limit the potential of both sexes, but particularly disadvantage women (210, 211). Further analysis of these data may serve to disrupt any unintended tendencies towards gender patterning and 'gender appropriateness' in the selection of creative activities as part of the Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027).

In general, a dearth of activity in the areas of dance, reading, technology and creative activities in Irish was identified. We were surprised to find that none of the Creative Youth or NCF initiatives included in this review engaged exclusively with dance, although it should be noted that dance featured, to some degree, in 40% of Creative Schools initiatives. Cruinniú na nÓg's programme has also offered a number of dance workshops (102 out of a total of



2,119 activities/events offered between 2018-2021; 33 out of 721 events in 2022). Nonetheless, the lack of dance projects across Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan echoes a wider concern surrounding provision of dance training in Ireland. Roche (2016) (53) in the Arts Council Dance and Education Report, asserts that over the years, several positive initiatives supported training for students outside the country, but there has yet to be a focused strategy establishing a professional training programme in Ireland with the institutional support required to compete at an international level. This gap in educational provision is anomalous among developed countries and arguably has a negative impact on the development of the art form in Ireland (53). A critical factor cited is the importance of 'advocacy' and 'champions' in securing and sustaining funding (106), which in Ireland's case has resulted in an underdeveloped national infrastructure, patronage and support for dance (53). In the UK's *Let's Create Strategy (2020-2030)* the Arts Council is supporting dance through the national sector support organization One Dance UK. One Dance UK "advocates for the value and place of dance in education due to its unique position as a curriculum activity that combines creativity with physicality" (155 p. 4). They highlight the importance of dance in whole school improvement, mental and emotional well-being, improving physical health and enriching cultural experience. Similarly recognising its contribution in the lives of its citizens, Creative New Zealand (78) conducted a review in 2019 and consequently increased the value of dance fellowships (to upscale research and innovation in the sector), improve funding and improve post tertiary professional development opportunities. In an increasingly sedentary world, dance provides a unique opportunity in the cultural ecosystem to combine arts practice, creativity and physical activity. Championing this through giving dance greater visibility in the high-profile Creative Ireland Programme and Phase Two of the Creative Youth Plan may help to redress the gap identified in this study.

Reading activities as a form of cultural and creative practice were also minimally evident in the data. Previous research in Ireland suggests that participation in structured cultural activities impacted positively on children's literacy and maths skills (147), with Smyth (43) reporting that reading for pleasure improved vocabulary levels and academic performance over time, and participation in music or drama was also associated with higher Junior

Certificate grades. Supporting additional provision in promoting storybooks and creative activities in reading for example, may yield beneficial results for children and young people. Appg (2017) (95) suggests that reading aloud to children stimulates progress in linguistic abilities, narrowing the attainment gap that persists across the social gradient. The Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027 presents a valuable opportunity for enhancing creative literacy practices amongst children and young people in and out of school, thereby extending participants' conceptions of creativity beyond the more traditional art forms. In view of its largely absent presence from the data, building more creative partnerships with local libraries and literacy champions could be prioritised during the new Plan.

Similarly, creative engagement with technology was underrepresented in the data, with only one initiative explicitly engaging with technology. What appears as a limited understanding around use and application of creativity in technology is being addressed by the Creative Ireland Programme working in partnership with Kinia. Based on the findings of a digital needs analysis conducted by Kinia (2021)<sup>22</sup>, a comprehensive programme supporting the delivery of creative technology projects in out-of-school settings is currently being rolled out in partnership with Tusla, Children and Young People Services Committees (CYPSCs) and the Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI). Kinia's strategy of adopting a triangulated approach (i.e., conducting a needs analysis, building appropriate partnerships, and national implementation), supported by adequate resources is likely to lead to significant improvements in the sector.

Data analysis also implies a lack of engagement with cultural institutions such as museums, galleries, historic buildings, natural heritage and libraries and an acute lack of creative activities in Irish. This may represent a missed opportunity to capitalise on national cultural resources, build pioneering partnerships and stimulate interest in the use and appreciation of the Irish language amongst children and young people in creative contexts. This trend was similarly reflected in Cruinniú na nÓg, which from 2018 to 2021 offered only 37 heritage related projects and 12 activities promoting the Irish language. In

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<sup>22</sup> See appendix 2 for link to the Needs Analysis Report.

2022 this figure increased slightly to 22 projects related to architectural and natural heritage out of a total of 721, with only one reported as promoting the Irish language. Potentially signalling a low level of applications from these sectors to host an event, it may also highlight a failure to capitalise on opportunities to promote our national heritage. There is a considerable amount of work being done in cultural organisations nationally so understanding why they have not been captured within the Creative Youth data is important. In a dataset of 24 projects, only one took place in a museum, one involved a museum visit, and one included visiting an art gallery. The appointment of creativity engagement officers within the 31 LAs nationwide, a budget of over €161,000 euro (over €236,000 euro for the four Dublin authorities), and a commitment from the LAs to the new Creative Ireland Culture and Creativity Strategies will encourage the reinforcement of networks and partnerships with heritage, community and cultural organisations. Initiatives such as the translation of the Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) and additional financial support from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to Fighting Words to initiate an Irish language version of the programme (CY, 2022) will go some way to redress the shortcomings identified during Phase One. It is noted however, that there was a well-funded partnership with TG4 in 2021 to promote the Irish language and whilst there may not have been many other activities in the language area, this partnership involved national usage of Irish across all media campaigns.

### **6.7. Achieving Sustainability**

On the one hand, 62% (n=15) of reports identified aspects of organisation sustainability or capacity building as a positive outcome in Chapter Five, however with evidence from many recommendations falling along the axis of capacity building it can equally be considered a concern. Organisations, artists, and youth workers voice a degree of apprehension around funding, training, administrative support and planning, signalling concerns about how to sustain activities beyond the life of the Creative Youth Plan. International evidence from the US, Israel and UK (106, 108) echoes related funding concerns for community based or creativity programmes similar to CIP. There are a number of organisational factors which should be taken into account when

considering sustainability and development of arts-based programmes (106) beyond their initial funding streams. This is particularly important for creative practitioners and organisations operating in the non-formal sector as they inhabit a well-documented unstable and fluctuating space outside of formal education. Estabrooks et al. (2011) (108) observed in their study on programme sustainability in community and healthcare settings in the US, that sustainability was much more likely to occur when a financial plan had been established, when the programme was championed by key stakeholders and when engaged partnerships were in place. International research suggests that sustainability should be a concern also for creative practitioners, associates and/or organisations in Ireland as evidence demonstrates around 40% of all such programmes terminate in the first few years after initial funding is discontinued (106, 107), leaving not only community needs unmet but creative practitioners and associates potentially redundant.

Of concern is the fact that many projects analysed in this systematic review were lacking in several additional organisational factors integral to sustainability and delivery of services. These include a strong programme theory with clear objectives, demonstrable effectiveness, flexibility, human and financial resources, and robust programme evaluation (108). Lastly, the issue of sustaining the effect/impact within individuals themselves (i.e., participants, artists, teachers, and creative practitioners) did not feature strongly in the data, and arguably should be targeted in the future. Identifying ways to sustain and develop both the activities in question, and also the effect/impact on participants/leaders post-project is key to building long term creative potential and capacity in Irish society.

Evaluation is also linked to sustainability in that mobilising resources required to sustain a programme beyond its initial grant, means it is not enough that the programme attains its objectives. The programme must be able to document its successes and disseminate the evidence among stakeholders (149, 150, 151). To this end, strategies for the dissemination of outcomes and good practice should be addressed early in the planning and design stages, particularly for larger initiatives and programmes. Some studies confirm that advertisement of a programme's effectiveness not only to its stakeholders but also to the general public serves as a meaningful predictor of its sustainability

(152, 153) in that it enhances and leverages community support (106). This type of capacity building can take time however, and arts organisations worldwide observe that demonstrating cost effectiveness is increasingly prevalent in evaluations required for funding (154). They also comment on the difficulties involved in demonstrating longer term impact such as changes to health or well-being (154). Eligibility criteria employed by independent panels of experts typically include consideration of the medium- to long-term sustainability of proposals in terms of development/scalability, inclusivity, or future partnerships. Chapter Five reported that a number of Creative Youth projects appeared to lack evidence of several of these support factors, implying sustainability may become a problem for the future delivery of these initiatives.

An additional concern around sustainability relates to engaging with vulnerable populations. As Finneran (2023) observes “There is understandable concern about engaging in work of a specific intent, building a relationship with a particular group of participants and then never turning up again, because the project has run its course” (p. 62). Apart from the economic question (job precarity for artists and organisations), a serious ethical question arises here, in that participants may not be offered follow up services or the support necessary to continue their development. Actively encouraging sustainability measures from the outset, especially in smaller organisations, is fundamental to sustainability in the sector. Without concrete and proactive measures, the Creative Youth Plan could be in danger of being seen as a ‘funding pot’, potentially leading to a dependency model, and inadvertently curtailing further growth, innovation and development in the medium- to longer term. Organisations need guidance and support in embedding sustainability and building capacity into projects, large or small. The Creative Ireland Programme could play a leadership role here. Sustainability is not just about funding; sustainability is best understood perhaps as an ecosystem, involving sustainability at an organisational, activity, and individual level.

## **6.8 Summary**

In conclusion, notwithstanding its prodigious success, analysis of the available data reveals some challenges and gaps in the first phase of the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022). In general, the underreporting of challenges reflect criticism in

the literature regarding the a priori assumptions of 'public good' and 'public value' related to the impact of creative and cultural interventions (numbers), and demonstrates a lack of critical voice in evaluation. It is advisable that research and evaluation do not forego quality in the name of accountability or policy alignment. The CY and NCF initiatives reported difficulties in relation to delivery and evaluation of their projects, not least the exceptional challenge which Covid 19 presented for many, requiring significant modifications in programmes and evaluation strategies. Administrative and organisational difficulties were most frequently reported as challenging, with excessive, burdensome and repetitive paperwork cited as a hindrance to service delivery. Issues around human resources, such as insufficient teacher substitutes or scarcity of artists were also mentioned and lack of clarity and transparency around applications was reported. Broadening the understanding of creativity to include cross curricular implementation and moving beyond traditional arts-based activities was signalled as a multifaceted issue in need of further attention. A lack of awareness around some aspects of the Plan and the need for further publicity and dissemination of practice were observed.

Through inductive analysis a number of other challenges and gaps in the data were identified. These included Creative Youth and NCF evaluation methods, which echo some of the issues raised about a lack of rigour in arts-based research and evaluation more broadly, and may indicate that some artists and organisations struggle to analyse and manage the social impact generated by their activities. This systematic review confirms the need to put in place more robust and accessible evaluation mechanisms which facilitate analysis before, during and after projects. There is evidence throughout the reports that training and guidance in evaluation would be welcome. The Creative Ireland Programme needs to build competence and confidence around evaluation whilst offering clear and concise guidelines to organisations, youth workers, coordinators and practitioners (Finneran, 2023). Reporting of demographic indicators was uneven across initiatives and, in most instances, lacking robustness and detail. Therefore, conclusions drawn around targeting and reaching seldom heard communities are tentative at best. Many of the evaluations provided little or no information on participants' age groups or gender, and the absence of any reference to the LGBTQI+ community is notable.

In light of its poor presence in the data reviewed, greater clarity on how projects understood 'inclusivity' would be helpful, as would reporting more accurately on participants and exactly who projects are working with. In relation to the genre of creative activities, although children and young people were offered a rich and diverse range of activities and events, deeper analysis of the data revealed that activities were heavily weighted towards the traditional arts forms with 70% of initiatives predominantly arts based, and largely comprised of visual arts, theatre or drama and music. Several factors play into this phenomenon, not least the previously discussed challenges around broadening the concept of creativity. Lastly, the review found that organisations need guidance and support in embedding sustainability and building capacity in the evolution of a new creativity ecology in Irish society. The Creative Ireland Programme could play a significant leadership role here.

# Chapter Seven

## Implications for Policy Development and Practice



### 7.1 Recommendations and Policy Implications

This chapter discusses the main recommendations and policy implications arising from the findings reported in Chapters Five and Six. It offers a first look at a substantial sample of Creative Youth and National Creativity Fund projects, initiatives and activities with children and young people in Ireland, covering participation from 2018 to 2022. As mentioned, the data were



disaggregated where significant differences occurred to distil findings. The review aims to present an overview of all initiatives without sacrificing the unique characteristics of each and acknowledging the different levels of quality in reporting. 24 reports met the inclusion criteria and allowed us to explore a broad selection of arts-based and creative activities in the context of research and evaluation, the voice of the child, social demographics, the impact of creative activity on health and well-being, sustainability, inclusivity, expanding the scope of creative activities, increasing CPD and policy alignment. Drawing from the learning extracted from the first phase of the Creative Youth Plan, this chapter makes a number of recommendations related to the main outcomes, the recommendations cited throughout the reports themselves, and policy implications from findings, identifying future directions and priorities for the development of Creative Youth research, policy and practice.

70% of reports presented a number of recommendations themselves and these were analysed to determine if common concerns emerged across the datasets. These are summarised in section 7.2 below.

## **7.2. Recommendations made by Creative Youth and NCF Reports**

All recommendations explicitly identified in the Creative Youth and NCF reports were analysed and classified using Nvivo 12 Plus to identify common themes and trends. A total of 22 codes were identified, later collapsed to six main themes (see Fig. 7.1.). Recommendations were read several times and cross checked by both researchers. As presented in Fig. 7.1., 42% (n=10) of CY and NCF projects recommended sustaining or increasing funding, pointing towards possible challenges around organisation sustainability of the activity beyond the lifetime of the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022). In the Department of Education Stakeholders and Schools Consultation (DE, 2022), this was also highlighted, with almost 60% of primary and post-primary schools citing a lack of funding as a barrier to sustainability and creative practice in their schools.

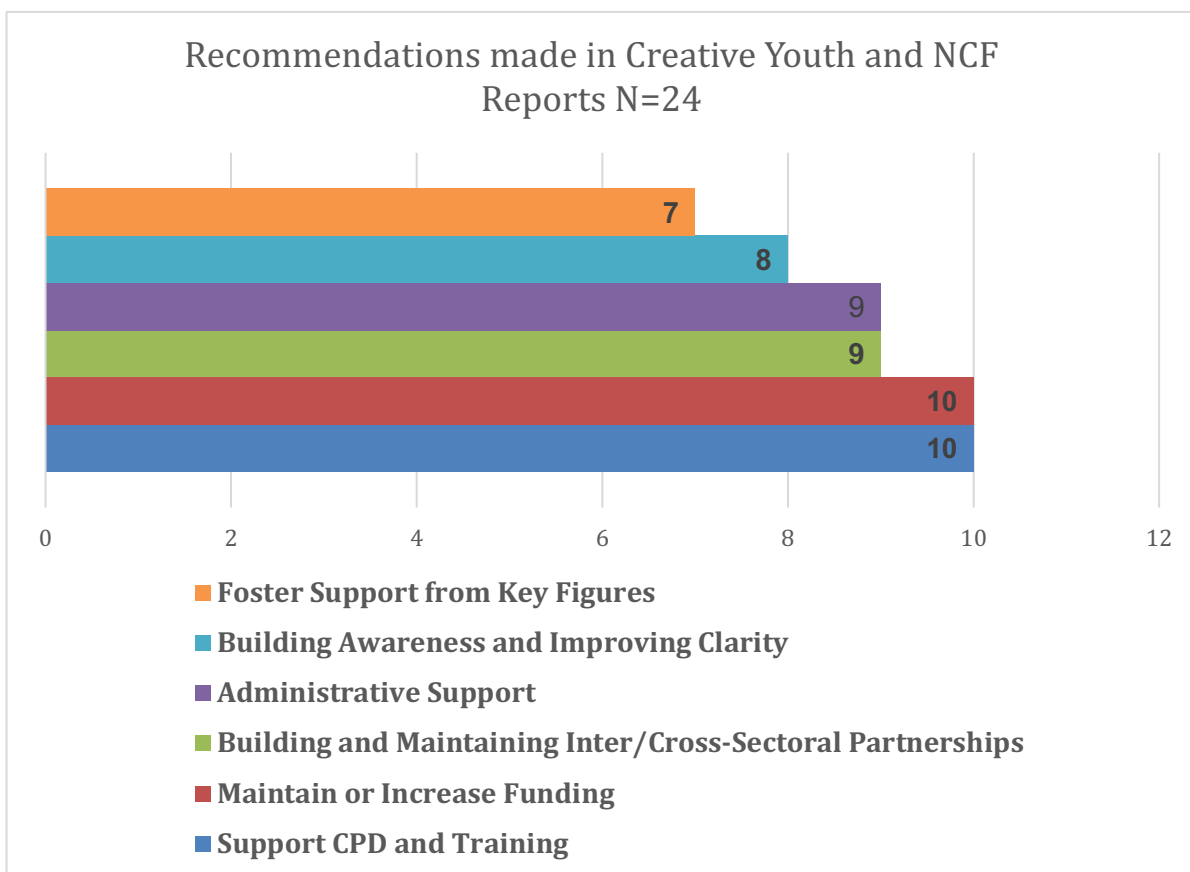


Fig. 7.1. Recommendations reported in CY and NCF Initiatives

An equal number of CY and NCF initiatives, 42% (n=10) made recommendations around maintaining or increasing levels of teacher training and CPD. On many occasions this specifically referenced training in the voice of the child. This recommendation was also evident in the additional documents analysed as part of this review (see Appendix 2). The importance of CPD was highlighted in the Department of Education consultation noted above, with almost half of the 433 schools consulted citing lack of training as an impediment to creative engagement. The consultation reiterates the vital importance of CPD for teachers to implement and embed creativity in schools. The importance of training for artists and creatives to develop their skills when working in educational settings was also highlighted. In the Needs Analysis carried out for the creative technologies sector, 95% (n=83) of respondents requested further training.

37% of CY and NCF initiatives recommended improving planning, transparency and increasing administrative support, to reduce time spent on paperwork and support medium- and longer-term sustainability.

Cross and inter-sectoral collaboration and partnerships were viewed as an important aspect of the Creative Youth Plan and 37% recommended maintaining a partnership approach. This was also emphasised in the Department's consultation, where creative collaboration and partnerships within and outside schools were considered crucial to the success of initiatives. The importance of building awareness of the Creative Ireland programme and the different opportunities available, of improving clarity (including clarity around the different roles in initiatives, expectations from funders and how creativity could be employed across all learning domains) were recommended in a third of reports (33%, n= 8). Finally, 29% (n=7) referenced the importance of leadership, recommending fostering additional support from 'champions', mentors, school principals and other key figures, to initiate and sustain the Creative Youth Plan, both in and out of school. In the Department's consultation "there was a recognition that school leadership is a key to fostering creativity across the school and integrating the provision of creative activities for learners" (DE, 2022, p. 30).

The recommendations above extracted from CY and NCF reports and reported throughout the additional documents reviewed, were largely in line with recommendations which emerged inductively from the data and findings. These are reported thematically in the sections below.

### **7.3. Recommendations which Emerged from the Systematic Review**

#### **7.3.1. Assessment, Evaluation and Research**

This report acknowledges the ongoing debate around differences between research and evaluation (158), and recognises that teachers, teacher artists and creative practitioners may also engage in assessment of participants' arts and creative processes and outputs. They are related concepts but operate at different levels. In broad terms assessment relates to measurement and processes to improve the quality of participants' learning and experiences. Operating at the micro level, assessment is one of the elements feeding into evaluation. Evaluation reflects the entire process of collection of evidence and

its interpretation, leading to a judgement about the value or merit of a creative educational endeavour or strategy, which goes far beyond indicating whether something has succeeded in reaching its goals, but reflects and makes judgements on the goals themselves. The process of evaluation is undertaken with 'a view to action' (leading to better policies and practices). Where evaluation is essentially a tool to improve an existing programme for a target population, research is generally intended to explore a theory or hypothesis and/or address primary questions around a well-defined topic.

Based on the evidence from this review, and accounting for differences in capacities and scales of Creative Youth and NCF initiatives, this report recommends:

- Research and evaluation be scaled up in Phase Two of the Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027), adopting flexible and varied but appropriate, robust and valid approaches to research and evaluation to substantiate/underpin claims made. This will support transparency, making findings more accessible to a wider audience. Research design could include a mixed methods approach, pre- and post-quasi experimental design involving baseline data, reflective practitioner action research, arts-based methods using visual sociological and embodied approaches, etc.
- Where appropriate encourage *formative evaluation* as a way of taking stock of what is happening *during* the project/initiative, assessing how the work is going, what participants' responses to it are, and identifying areas for improvement or adjustment if necessary, during the remainder of the project.
- Initial consultation with stakeholders (specifically including children and young people), teachers, creative practitioners, experts and the Creative Ireland team on how best to incorporate robust and appropriate evaluation mechanisms into Creative Youth projects (achieving maximum buy-in is key). In part this has been achieved through several stakeholder consultations and the development of evaluation guidelines and reporting tools for Phase Two (176).

- Capacity building with all stakeholders to discuss and explore 'the evaluation cycle' and a wide range of methods (e.g., through workshops/seminars/webinars in which organisations and creative practitioners discuss and plan how best to build evaluation into their project mentored by experts in the field). Evaluation needs to be universally accessible, and easily digestible to draw out conclusions.
- Development of a comprehensive evaluation toolkit which targets different types of outcomes, understands the complexity of evaluation in creativity, culture and the arts, and allows for diversity in methods.

Examples include:

- Arts Council England – Advocacy Tool Kit website
  - Arts Access Australia – Advocacy Tool Kit website
  - Creative New Zealand (2019-2029) community evaluation toolkit  
<https://www.creativenz.govt.nz/development-and-resources/community-arts-toolkit>
  - The Warwick Commission on the future of cultural value – research and policy documents
  - Arts and Health Australia – Advocacy website
  - IFFACA Good Practice Guide on Arts Advocacy (January 2014)
  - Americans for the Arts – Advocacy website
- Embedding research and evaluation explicitly into funding agreements identifying clear objectives, goals and strategies.
  - Research and evaluation bands (as employed by Arts Council England), could be introduced to reduce the administrative burden on organisations receiving lower levels of public investment, while making clear what is expected from those receiving the highest levels of public investment.
  - Recognising the importance of risk and innovation in creativity across all sectors of society from the arts to climate action, creative technologies to medical advances, novel projects which do not necessarily align with mainstream policy but explore original and unique avenues of enquiry and creative endeavour should be encouraged, funded, and appropriately evaluated.
  - Adopting a closed loop research and evaluation framework such as the DIEAC (Design, Implement, Evaluate Arts in Context) and DIEACC

models (Design, Implement, Evaluate Arts in Community Context)<sup>23</sup>, which position planning for research and evaluation at the outset of a project rather than at completion stage.

- Developing and incorporating an accessible and age-appropriate ethics policy into the structure of Creative Youth to guide and inform evaluation and research issues such as participant permission, recording of data, GDPR, etc.
- Commissioning a systematic macro-evaluation of the Creative Ireland Programme and Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) for the duration of Phase Two. The research could be developed into a longitudinal 5/10/20 year study.

Building on recommendations cited in our interim report, it is encouraging that some of these measures are reflected in the new Plan, particularly through Strategic Objective 7, which aims to sustain a programme of research including national and international systematic reviews and longitudinal studies and to “establish a framework, criteria and guidelines for the evaluation of all Creative Youth initiatives to provide ongoing monitoring and development, as well as summative evaluation” (CY, 2023, p. 22).

### 7.3.2. Voice of the Child

The National Participation Strategy is underpinned by a rights-based model of participation developed by Laura Lundy. In collaboration with Professor Lundy, a revised version of the model was developed for *The National Implementation Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making*<sup>24</sup>. It provides decision-makers with guidance on the steps to take to give children and young people a meaningful voice in decision-making. Against the findings in this study where child voice was modest at best in most reports, and missing from many, we recommend:

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<sup>23</sup> Developed by Carmel O’Sullivan and Sarah Tuck, the DIEAC model is proposed on the basis of providing an adaptive and flexible tool to be used by creative practitioners, teachers, funders, communities (and others) in the planning, implementation, evaluation and resourcing of collaborative arts in social, educational and community contexts. See Hayes et al., 2017.

<sup>24</sup> <https://hubnanog.ie/participation-framework/>

- Required participation in targeted and certified CPD/training on child voice for applicants and/or successful fundees.
- Potential fundees be required to demonstrate in their applications how child and young person voice is built into project design at all stages (planning, implementation and evaluation).
- Child and young person voice is embedded into funding agreements identifying clear objectives and goals to be achieved, supported by practical strategies identifying how child voice will be rooted in the funded project.
- Research and evaluation mechanisms need to measure the effective involvement of children and young people in decision-making. Stakeholders could follow guidance from the *National Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015) (7), using Lundy's voice model checklist for participation (see appendix 5) to measure the involvement of children and young people in all projects and programmes.
- Encourage creative approaches to evaluation as a way to improve response rates amongst children and young people, enable inclusivity and diverse ways of communicating.

### **7.3.3. Capturing Sociodemographic Characteristics**

This review found evidence that consultation and/or partnership with Local Authorities and community services in each county could enhance Creative Youth's targeting of disadvantaged, marginalised and seldom heard groups. Recording of appropriate sociodemographic data and characteristics will facilitate meaningful insight into the effect/impact of individual projects in achieving this goal, and support wider evaluation of data when looking across projects on a regional/national basis. This report recommends:

- the need to consult with children and young people to discover why certain cohorts of children do not engage in creative, cultural and artistic activity (42, 43, 52, 148) and what measures can be put in place to encourage engagement.

- Establishing ambitious targets for Local Authorities and other partner organisations/individual projects to redress gaps in provision of access/participation in creative activities for marginalised and underrepresented groups identified in this study, such as very young children, adolescent boys and those experiencing social and economic disadvantage.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the extent to which seldom heard voices and those in marginalised and disadvantaged communities have participated in Creative Youth activities and projects.
- Cross pollination of data (e.g., GUI and ESRI) could contribute to understanding not only the needs of disadvantaged communities but cultural participation across youth in general (with a particular focus on gender and age). Overly broad recommendations in policy implementation should be avoided where possible, and more purposeful targeting executed.
- Develop and embed an age-appropriate EDI policy into the core structure of Creative Youth.
- LGBTQI+ were not represented in the data analysed, and this needs to be addressed through targeted provisioning. Other groups such as the early childhood sector and those with disabilities who appeared underrepresented in the data should be prioritised in future provisioning.
- Where appropriate to do so, sociodemographic data (basic and/or more in-depth depending on the project) should be included in all evaluations and reports.

There is encouraging evidence that some of these issues are now being addressed, such as targeted funding for seldom heard communities, the ongoing development of sociodemographic recording forms, and increased consultations with children and young people (Buggie, 2023; Palmer, 2022). This approach should continue and be adopted throughout Phase Two of the Plan, contributing to an annual progress report monitoring this area.



#### **7.3.4. Building Individual/Organisational Sustainability beyond the Lifetime of Creative Ireland and Creative Youth**

To support and expand creative activities in non-formal and formal settings as set out in the Creative Youth Plan (2017-2022), research into different facets of funding and factors required to support individual/organisational sustainability needs to be undertaken to create the necessary structures and resources to embed and sustain creative practices in both *people* and *activity* post-funding. Therefore, this study recommends:

- Promoting and facilitating formal conversations and actions enabling sustainability early in the funding process. Targeted and certified CPD training could be developed to induct fundees into the principles and practices underpinning sustainability, such as developing a strong programme theory with clear objectives, demonstrable effectiveness, flexibility, managing human and financial resources, and developing robust programme evaluation.
- Identifying effective ways to sustain and develop the creative activity and embed the effect/impact on children and young people, teachers, artists, creative practitioners and others, both during and post-project, to build long term sustainable creative capacity in Irish society.
- Creating a dedicated 'one-stop' resources hub for (potential)/fundees on the Creative Youth website to house key practical resources such a short practical guide highlighting factors implicated in sustainability, and other resources recommended above (e.g., age-appropriate ethics and EDI policies).
- Ongoing engagement about funding, resources, and sustainability at the commencement of and throughout each project with the Creative Youth team, to ensure those funded have the best chance of delivering their programmes and continuing beyond the life cycle of funding if they so choose.
- The Creative Ireland Programme should ensure that information on available funding, including evaluation requirements, are clear and easily accessible. Funded organisations/individuals should be regularly informed about additional funding streams and potential

partnerships/collaboration, and how best to advocate for their programme.

- Practical strategies to support sustainability should be referenced in the guidelines for application and funding processes, and included in the guidance provided to support both interim and final project evaluation (where relevant).
- Previously successful organisations/individuals be invited to act as mentors for new creative practitioners. Best practice case studies could be included in the resources hub (proposed above).
- New and established relationships between artists, organisations, schools and youth workers should be developed and expanded in order to capitalise on established networks, and initiatives should be synchronised appropriately in order to avoid cross over of services.
- The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment could offer support for business development through training workshops for creative practitioners and organisations. Sharing of lessons from international best practice should be encouraged, such as Northern Ireland's *'Ambition for the Arts'* (2013-2018) (60) which aimed to build a sustainable sector through:
  - Providing regular cross-sectoral networking and collaboration events to take advantage of new opportunities presented by the growth of creative industries;
  - Delivering business development support and skills base; through training, coaching and workshops;
  - Building capacity in key areas such as audience engagement and utilising digital platforms and web-based technologies as a driver for growth (p. 17).

### **7.3.5. Expanding Scope and Access to Creative Activities**

The report highlights while that cultural and creative engagement yields many personal, social, psychological and cognitive benefits to children and young people, there was insufficient evidence to support the case that access and participation were evenly distributed throughout the population. Equality, diversity and inclusion did not feature prominently in most reports, and gaps in

scope of provision, such as in dance, reading, Irish and other languages, and creative technology were identified. This review therefore recommends:

- Consultation with dance communities and relevant stakeholders, including the DE and HEIs, particularly those who have expertise and a strong tradition in dance, to determine how the Creative Ireland Programme/Creative Youth can support the development of a transparent and robust road map for professional dance training.
- Youth setting providers and teachers (at all levels) require an awareness of the opportunities that exist in using creative technology to support educational outcomes. Continued support and engagement with technology partners is recommended.
- Expanding teacher CPD and other specialised training, with particular focus on the digital sector where a knowledge/skills gap appears to exist in relation to its potential to develop creativity.
- Development of creative partnerships with technology companies to support internships, webinars, training and build public awareness of the role that creativity plays in the technology sector (e.g., using case studies, a Creative Tech Fest, school visits, workshops).
- Engagement with cultural organisations and resources including libraries, galleries, museums and heritage buildings who were under-represented in the data, to understand the reasons for this; exploring ways to increase alignment between their work and Creative Youth.
- The Creative Ireland Programme (CIP) was launched in December 2016 as a legacy initiative response to the extraordinary public participation which took place during the Ireland Centenary celebration of the 1916 Easter Rising. The central role culture and the arts had played in maintaining national identity was said to underpin the inspiration for this new cultural initiative. “We have been reminded of the centrality of the creative and participative arts to our sense of national identity and purpose” (CIP, 2016, p.13). As such, this review recommends promoting and increasing the scale and scope of creative activities in our native mother tongue, Irish.

The Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) is addressing this issue through Strategic Objectives 4 and 5 which will support creativity across the educational system and curriculum through continuing professional development, future curriculum development, through the DE inspectorate and the creative use of technology. This review recommends building on the work already done and investing in research in this rapidly developing area.

### **7.3.6. Broadening the Definition of Creativity and Policy Alignment**

As findings demonstrate that an understanding of creativity in the broader sense was a challenge across the Plan, with most projects explicitly located in the domain of the traditional arts forms, and within formal/informal educational contexts, the following recommendations are made.

- Clarify/further expound the interdisciplinary understanding and construction of creativity in the Creative Ireland Programme/Creative Youth Plan, and its aesthetic, artistic, creative and strategic relevance across government departments and policy in areas such as health and well-being, social cohesion, economic development, cultural infrastructure, the creative industries, climate action and digital technologies in Phase Two of the Plan.
- Funded projects should maintain contact with the Creative Youth office team during project delivery to support and ensure wider policy alignment, but specifically in terms of supporting widening access priorities and broadening interpretations of creativity in practice.
- Targeting and engagement with broader sectors of society in areas such as agriculture and fishing, industry, housing, finance, retail, and hospitality, to encourage pilot initiatives involving children and young people in diversely embedding the principles of Creative Youth in sectors beyond the traditional remit of arts education and arts-in-education.
- Fundees should be encouraged to build public awareness of Creative Youth and the Creative Ireland Programme into their projects/activities through creative means and outputs, including use of more conventional

approaches such as social media messaging, banners, acknowledgments, publicity.

### 7.3.7. Cruinniú na nÓg

As an important vehicle for public engagement, raising awareness of creativity and the Creative Youth Plan, this study found that Cruinniú na nÓg has significantly increased access to and participation in creative activities throughout the country. Therefore, the report recommends:

- Continuing to fund and develop Cruinniú na nÓg throughout Ireland.
- Continuing to support a wide diversity of projects, representing all forms of creative activity, and targeting underrepresented groups.
- Providing detailed information to applicants and fundees around the policy and objectives of Creative Youth.
- Participation by successful applicants in compulsory workshops/seminars on evaluation, and collaboration with Local Authorities to assist in contributing to the 'bigger picture' evaluation of Cruinniú na nÓg events annually.
- Investment in research exploring the outcomes of Cruinniú na nÓg during the last five years and establishing an evaluation plan for the second five-year strategy.
- Exploration and evaluation of the extent to which short bursts of creative activity as typically experienced during Cruinniú na nÓg events impact participants in comparison to more sustained and longer-term Creative Youth projects.

# Chapter Eight

## Conclusions



### 8.1. Overarching Policy Context

This chapter summarises the main outcomes and policy implications suggested in this report and identifies future directions for research. As aforementioned, the overarching objective of the Creative Youth Plan is to give every child practical access to tuition, experience and participation in art, music, drama and coding by 2022. The key objectives of Creative Youth as expressed in The Creative Youth Plan – Policy Context and Briefing, July 2021, (4) are to:

- 1. Expand young people’s access to creative initiatives and activities;**
- 2. Focus on the inclusion of every child;**
- 3. Support positive and sustainable outcomes for children and young people through creative engagement across formal and non-formal settings (p. 3).**

In alignment with the United Nations (5, 6) and the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015) (7), Creative Youth identifies **the voice of the child** and young people as central to this programme. The other four core principles are **collaboration**, a **commitment to take risks** and try new things; **inclusivity** meaning the programme must reach as many children as possible (especially those in disadvantaged areas); and lastly, a **robust monitoring mechanism** which will capture data and ensure delivery of best practice and value for money (58).

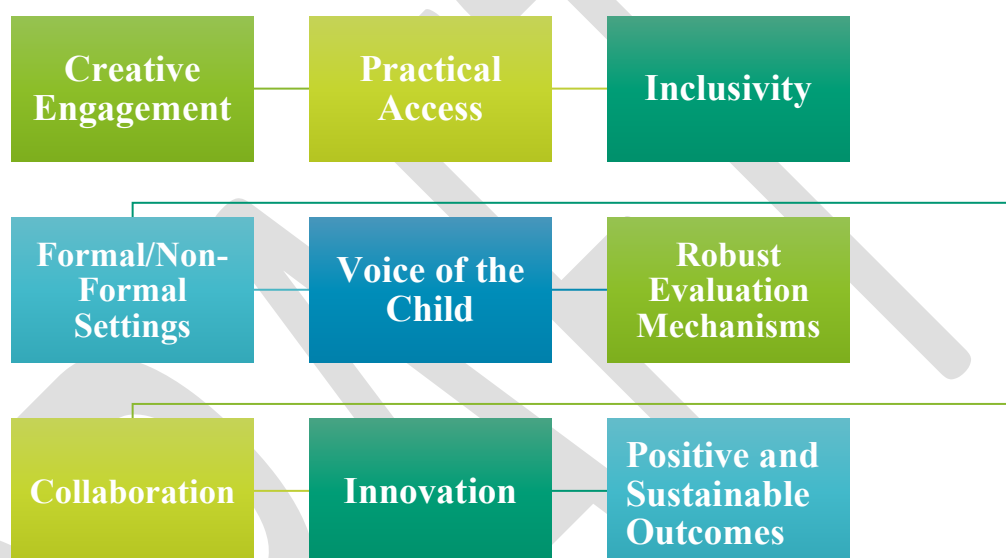


Fig. 8.1. Summary of Creative Youth Key Objectives and Core Principles (5, 58)

## 8.2. Evaluating Progress of Creative Youth's Objectives

From evidence provided in this systematic review we conclude that the Creative Ireland Programme is a breakthrough initiative, by definition, an ambitious all-of-government creativity and well-being programme which entered uncharted waters and needed time to take root in Irish society. The Creative Youth Plan has been successful in many aspects of achieving its goals. This report recognises that with the completion of Phase One and the new Plan launched in March 2023, it is timely to take stock of what occurred during the first five years and explore how it might be improved and expanded in Phase Two.

### 1. Expand young people's access to creative initiatives and activities.

Regarding the first objective, available data support that Creative Youth initiatives increased and enabled creative skills in young people and children.

Data suggest that a strong contributory factor was connecting creative practitioners and associates directly to schools and communities, capitalising on the skills already available on a national level: in other words, mobilising community assets. This cooperative ethos was also represented in productive cross and inter-sectoral collaboration, maximising resources through people, public spaces and/or established organisations, and was rated highly in reports. As regards innovation and risk, the wide range of creative activities offered is testament to this principle, however the lack of dance, technology and creative reading activities requires attention. Furthermore, engagement with cultural institutions and heritage related activities is recommended, as is an increase in activities related to Irish and other languages.

A significant caveat has to be drawn however in relation to the achievement of the first objective. Owing to data collection/reporting issues in most projects reviewed, it is not possible to mine the data adequately to determine 'who' was accessing 'what' creative initiative, when and for how long, and what their prior baseline levels of engagement were. This would assist in determining whether participants were routinely accessing creative and arts-based initiatives, or if access had been significantly enhanced through the Creative Youth Plan. In addition, as discussed earlier, accessing creative activities does not necessarily equate to meaningful participation and achievement. More robust research and reporting mechanisms involving both quantitative and qualitative data could contribute to understanding more about the objective of providing 'expanded access'.

As previously mentioned, in terms of the core principle around robust evaluation measures, difficulties identified in this report where extensive analysis of results (at a granular level) was required to locate and extract findings, reduces the impact of individual reports and their accessibility to a wider audience. More robust, transparent, and generic evaluation mechanisms are required to answer the questions which need to be asked.

## **2. Focus on the inclusion of every child.**

With respect to inclusivity, the evidence suggests that the Creative Youth Plan has extended access to creative activities across the country and continues to support initiatives explicitly aimed at marginalised and



disadvantaged groups. A large percentage of Creative Youth projects flagged increased access to creative activities as an outcome, with some reaching seldom heard cohorts such as children in direct provision, members of the traveller community, children living in deprivation, Irish language speakers, and young people with disabilities. While 62% of reports note inclusivity as an outcome, few (21%, n=5) reported it as a recommendation. This suggests that clarity may be needed around how projects understand inclusivity and specifically their role in addressing that priority. It is therefore recommended that the Creative Ireland Programme should explicitly embed EDI into funding calls. This study referenced other research which highlights significant gains accruing from engagement in creativity, the arts, and cultural activities for disadvantaged and marginalised groups, but such benefits did not appear to be available to all children in this study. Although the reported outcomes highlight expanded access there are issues with the scope and depth of the evidence base. Through a 'close reading approach', the evidence suggests that this objective has been partially achieved, but the lack of child voice may have exacerbated challenges around *how* to engage and include all children and young people.

### **3. Support positive and sustainable outcomes for children and young people through creative engagement across formal and non-formal settings.**

Regarding the third objective, there is evidence of positive outcomes for children and young people as a result of participating in creative engagement in both formal and non-formal settings. It is difficult to determine if outcomes have been sustained, as the data preclude this assessment. As previously mentioned, longitudinal studies which cross pollinate data could assist in evaluating to what extent the outcomes of Creative Youth have permeated the fabric of Irish society. If the Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027) aligns programme objectives with an appropriate research design from the outset, it should facilitate addressing such questions. Achieving sustainability (particularly in relation to non-formal settings) is an issue which needs to be tackled directly. Organisations/individuals require technical guidance and support to embed sustainability into projects, not least of which is to build capacity in people and encourage further creative growth/development. This may serve to counter

limiting notions of Creative Youth solely as 'a funding pot', inadvertently leading to a dependency culture, which by default could mitigate against creativity. Encouraging greater alignment between fundees' and Creative Youth objectives may serve to support more sustainable practices in the future.

### **8.3. Conclusion**

The Creative Ireland Programme is a self-proclaimed wellbeing and culture programme which aims to be inclusive and far reaching whilst at the same time providing space for innovation, excellence and risk-taking. The programme to date has triggered mixed responses from cultural policy experts, academics, educators, and creative practitioners (207 159, 78). Legacy programmes such as CIP, have been heavily criticised in other jurisdictions where issues such as poor planning, changes in government priorities and ineffective partnerships (208; 209) mean that these programmes often end up being a quick injection of new initiatives leaving few solid or lasting results (Davies, 2011). As Higgins (2019) remarks "A programme of events can never serve as an adequate alternative for a cultural debate, not to speak of a policy. Cultural policy-making is much wider than event management, which is but one component of what might be valuable, even authentic" (p. 2). In order to be considered a long-term success CIP and the Creative Youth Plan must continue to identify effective ways to sustain and develop creative activity, and embed the effect/impact on children and young people, teachers, artists, creative practitioners and others, both during and post-project, to build long term sustainable creative capacity in Irish society.

An additional challenge for a legacy initiative celebrating the rebirth of Irish national identity, will be the willingness to move beyond the tricolour, shed previous prejudices around arts and culture and embrace the increasingly diverse socio demographics of our country. We say this in recognition that the traumatic experiences of Irish history and Anglo-Irish relations will still need to be addressed, Brexit has only exasperated this. As Murphy (2018) observes when analysing challenging creative pieces made during the centenary commemorations "there is also the sense that the history represented here is not finished, not complete in terms of a national consciousness and understanding or even knowledge of these events" (p. 152). Nonetheless, if as Josepha Madigan claims "our culture is proudly ancient and confidently modern" (CIP, 2016, p.2),

then we must build artistic and creative practice sufficiently confident to balance past cultural concerns “whilst being receptive to aesthetic innovation” (Mulcahy, 2019, p. 254). We must begin to embrace a more diverse understanding of national identity. This is particularly important for North-South relations, and the Shared Island initiative ([Creative Ireland Shared Island Initiative 2023-2025](#)) is an encouraging move in this direction, as is the cross-border expansion of Fighting Words ([Creative Youth Plan-Final Progress Report](#)).

The Creative Ireland Programme and the Creative Youth Plan seem to offer concrete solutions to the attitudinal, structural and resourcing issues which John Coolohan (2008) underlined in his closing essay for the *Points of Alignment* report. On paper it represents a coming of age in Irish cultural policy rather than a wholly novel initiative, building on the shoulders of previous research, reports and initiatives whilst incorporating contemporary concepts. As an all-of-government initiative, with generous investment in the arts and other creative activities, cross sectoral partnerships, local authority collaboration and a clear message around equalising cultural and creative engagement the programme is a welcomed and much needed addition on the cultural landscape. The Creative Ireland Programme and the Creative Youth Plan can alongside and in collaboration with the Arts Council, government departments, and other stakeholders provide support for an all-inclusive, contemporary and diverse cultural sector, acting as an umbrella organisation which can accommodate new and previously under resourced initiatives, programmes and reports.

Finally, one of the key goals as stated in *The Future of Creative Ireland* (2022) (2) is to: “influence Policy to engage with decision makers and embed creativity in key policy areas” (p. 9). Erisman et al. (2021) (159) identify several key strategies in this regard, including direct engagement and seeking of evidence from researchers, and participatory and transdisciplinary research approaches through robust research partnerships. Through this systematic review, and the completed and ongoing research funded by the Creative Youth Plan, effective mechanisms are being built and supported to achieve this goal. Our objective as researchers has been not only to summarise the trends, outcomes and challenges faced during Phase One of the Creative Youth Plan, but we hope that the research carried out, the insights gained through contact with stakeholders, and the invaluable input from EAG members and the

research sub group will provide a set of recommendations which inform 'what comes next' in Phase Two of this ground breaking, national creativity programme for the children and young people of our country.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Creative Youth and National Creativity Funded Projects Included in this Systematic Review (met the inclusion criteria)

### Creative Youth Initiatives (n=13)

- Gorman, K. (2019). *Evaluation Report. National Youth Theatre Programme (2018-2019)*. Youth Theatre Ireland/Creative Ireland Programme
- Children's Books Ireland. (2020). *Small Print Project Final Report*.
- Kinia/Creative Ireland Programme: *Kinia Interim Report (2021)*. <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2022/04/Kinia-Interim-Report-2021.pdf>
- Morrissey, D. (2021). *Creative Clusters: A Collaborative approach to Cultivating Creativity in Schools. School Excellence Fund – Creative Clusters Initiative Research and Evaluation Report*.
- Murphy, R. & Eivers, E. (2023). *Creative Schools Evaluation*.
- Roe, S. (2022). *An Evaluation of the Local Creative Youth Partnership Pilot (LCYPs) across three Education and Training Boards: Kerry, Laois and Offaly, and Limerick and Clare*.
- Roe, S. & Egan, A. (2023). *An Evaluation of the Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP) CPD Initiative for Supporting and Enhancing Arts Education in Primary Schools 2017-2021*.
- McCarthy, K. (2022). *Arts in Junior Cycle A Review*.
- Graffiti. (2020). *DCYA and Creative Ireland Final Report*.
- The Ark. (2021). *The Ark's Early Years in Residence Project*.
- The Big Idea. (2022). *Impact Report 2021-2022*.
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs. (2020). *Recreate Ireland Bursary 2020 Report*.
- Lehane, O. (2023). *Story Seeds: An Evaluation A Fighting Words Programme of Creative Writing for Children and Young People*.

## National Creativity Fund Initiatives (n=11)

- Dr Denise White/Royal Irish Academy of Music/Ulster University/Creative Ireland Programme: *Le Chéile – Final Report. How ALL children, young people and adults can access and create high quality music.*
- Narrative 4/Creative Ireland Programme: *The Empathy Project Final Report (2018-2019).*
- Narrative 4/Creative Ireland Programme: *Story Exchange Facilitation Training for Traveller and Roma Youth Workers (an extension of the Empathy Project) (2020).*
- Chester Beatty: *Embracing Cultural Diversity in the Classroom. Building an Intercultural Schools Programme.*  
[https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2021/02/Chester\\_Beatty\\_RD\\_Intercultural\\_Schools\\_Project\\_Report.pdf](https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2021/02/Chester_Beatty_RD_Intercultural_Schools_Project_Report.pdf)
- The Ark/Creative Ireland Programme: *The Ark-Right Here Right Now. Creative Ireland Programme Scheme Report (2019).*
- Irish Chamber Orchestra: *Irish Chamber Youth Orchestra. Final Report for the Creative Ireland Programme.*
- Glucksman/Creative Ireland Programme: *The Classroom Museum – Creative Ireland Report (2018-2019).*
- Galway Childcare/Groundswell Arts/Creative Ireland Programme: *The Lullaby Project Creative Ireland Report (2019).*
- Design and Crafts Council of Ireland/Creative Ireland Programme: *DESIGNSKILLS Final Report (2018).*
- Business2Arts/Creative Ireland Programme: *Shining a Light on Artist Residence (AR) Programmes (2020).*
- EVA International: *Better Words Creative Ireland Report (2018-2019).*

## Appendix 2. Sources which did not meet the inclusion criteria but formed part of the discussion.

### a) Research Reports

- 1) Finneran, M. (2023). *Creative Capacity in Ireland Working Towards Wellbeing*.
- 2) Faharani, Z., Hennessy, E. & Mbeve, L. (2022). *Inclusion and engagement of Children of Muslim background in creative activities in Ireland*.

### b) Additional Documents

1. TENDERFOOT MOVING FORWARD: *Bridging the gap between the arts and education (2020)*.  
<https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2020/07/Tenderfoot-Moving-Forward-Bridging-the-Gap-Between-Arts-and-Education.pdf>
2. Department of Education: *Inspectors' Report on TAP Online Summer Course 2021*.
3. Youth Theatre Ireland/Creative Ireland Programme: *A Vision for National Youth Theatre 2020-2023*.
4. Department of Children and Youth Affairs /Dr Triona Stokes (National University of Ireland Maynooth): *Early Years Research- Preamble to the Draft Principles for Arts Facilitation in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care Settings*.
5. Kinia/Creative Ireland Programme: *Creative Technology - Digital Needs Analysis Report (2021)*.
  - i. <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2021/06/Creative-Technology-Needs-Analysis-for-Irelands-Youth-Settings.pdf>

### c) Examples of Evaluation Forms

- 1) The Big Idea. Student Questionnaire-Programme Start.
- 2) The Big Idea. Student Feedback 2022.
- 3) Creative Schools. Creative School Planning Framework 2021.
- 4) Kinia. CS Robotics Pre-training Survey.
- 5) LCYP Evaluation Template
- 6) Creative Schools Report Form (Final) 2021

## Appendix 3. Excerpt from the Framework Analysis Approach\*

Objective:	Evaluation:	Inputs: Int	Output: N	No. Of Cre	Recomme	Reported Outcomes
the Creative Ireland Programme and the County and City Management Association, this interim review examined the effectiveness to date of Creative Communities in embedding creativity within		Know Laois: DP centre. In Fingal, the 'STEM Saturday' initiative brought together the IT department, Building Facilities, Events Section, Libraries Section and the Culture and Creativity Team in developing taster	Target Audience No. Projects: 1207 Children/ Young Adults 723 Disability Groups 26	67 Artists/	Recommendation 1 The cross-cutting Culture and Creativity Teams should continue to be central to delivery of the Creative Communities initiative, meeting regularly	review concluded that Creative Communities has substantially enhanced the reach of local authorities, increasing impact and visibility, and creating opportunities for communities through 2,658
research findings then presented in this report aim to: • Inform policy, practice and research directions to ensure inclusion, relevance and access for arts and cultural participation in challenging	at the DP centres, reflective logs kept by the choral facilitators and composer (5), focus group interviews carried out with both adult and child singers (27), musical outputs (audio and	singing sessions took place over the course of the project across 6 Direct Provision centres. 10 sessions in each centre were led by a choral facilitator. In total, 5 Singln events were held during	100 singers in the DP Centres. 200 singers at the Big Sing			Provide increased and sustained access to

\*All data from reports, projects and research were extracted and transferred to the Excel sheet categorised under the framework analysis. A number of additional categories were employed such as: Voice of the Child, Voice of the Creative Practitioner, Reported Recommendations.

## Appendix 4. Excerpt from NVivo Analysis

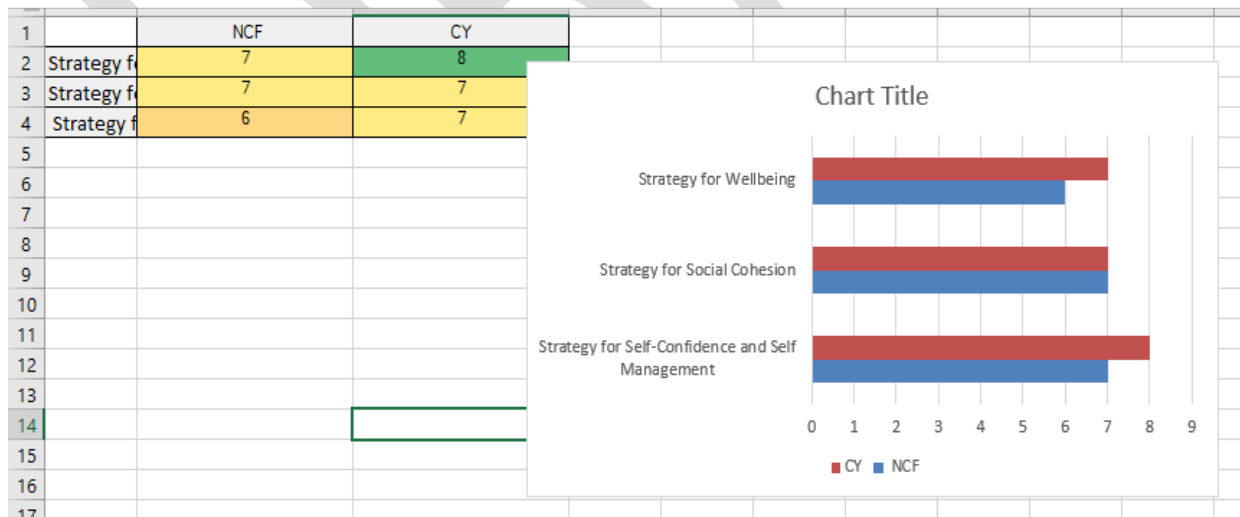
### Nodes

Name	Files	Referenc
Provided Cross Curricular Approach	1	11
Access for Disadvantaged or Hard to Reach Commun	1	7
Broader definition of Creativity	1	4
Building Sustainability	1	14
Built Awareness of Arts Provision	1	3
Connecting Artists or Creative Associates to Commu	1	17
Cross Agency Collaboration	1	15
Enjoying Creative Activity	1	15
Expanded Access to and Understanding of Creative A	1	19
Facilitates Pride of Place	1	3
Freedom to Take Risks and Innovate	1	8
Harnessing and Enabling Creativity in Young People	1	17
Highlights Cultural Assets in Ireland	1	4
Important Source of Funding	1	5
Improved capacity to cope with one's condition	1	1
Improved Relationships	1	2
Improving Skills and Employment Opportunities of A	1	15
Inclusivity	1	8
Increase Empathy and Understanding	1	7
Increase in Creative Skills	1	19
Informing Public Policy	1	8
Literacy Skills	1	7
Organisation Development	1	3
Pushing Boundaries and Exploring Sensitive Issues	1	2
Raising Awareness of Community Issues	1	3
Reduces Social Isolation	1	5
Sense of Self Pride and Self Confidence	1	13
Strategy for Economic Development	1	1
Strategy for Social Cohesion	1	15
Strategy for Wellbeing	1	14
Teacher CPD	1	5
Voice of Child	1	4



## Appendix 5: Excerpt from NVivo 12 Plus Classification Sheet and Matrix Query

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	All Report	Baseline	Broad Understanding of Creativity	Formative	Funding S	Genre	Missing important Inf	Qualitative Research Methods
2	Cases\\1.	No	In Part	Not Appli	NCF	Arts Basec	Yes	Not Available
3	Cases\\10	No	In Part	No	NCF	Contempc	Yes	Yes
4	Cases\\11	No	In Part	No	CY	Theatre	Yes	Yes
5	Cases\\13	Yes	In Part	No	CY	Reading	Yes	Yes
6	Cases\\15	No	No	No	CY	CPD Arts E	Yes	Not Available
7	Cases\\2.	No	In Part	Yes	NCF	Music	Yes	Yes
8	Cases\\3.	No	No	No	NCF	Music	Yes	Yes
9	Cases\\4.	No	Yes	Yes	NCF	Music	Yes	Yes
10	Cases\\5.	No	Yes	No	NCF	Design	Yes	Yes
11	Cases\\6.	No	In Part	Yes	NCF	Arts Basec	Yes	Yes
12	Cases\\7.	No	In Part	No	NCF	Writing ar	Yes	Yes (External)
13	Cases\\8.	No	Yes	No	NCF	CPD Story	Yes	Yes
14	Cases\\9.	No	Yes	No	NCF	CPD Story	Yes	Yes
15	Cases\\Ch	No	Yes	No	NCF	CPD Herit	Yes	Yes
16	Cases\\Ch	No	In Part	No	CY	Arts basec	No	Yes
17	Cases\\Cr	Yes	In Part	Yes	CY	Arts Basec	No	Yes
18	Cases\\Ea	No	In Part	No	CY	Arts basec	In Part	Yes
19	Cases\\Ea	No	In Part	No	CY	CPD, Arts	Yes	Yes
20	Cases\\Ea	No	In Part	No	CY	Arts Basec	Yes	Yes
21	Cases\\Fig	No	In Part	No	CY	Creative V	Yes	Unknown
22	Cases\\Fir	No	No	No	CY	Multidisci	In Part	Yes
23	Cases\\Fir	No	Yes	No	CY	Teacher C	No	Yes
24	Cases\\Ki	Yes	Yes	No	CY	Technolog	Yes	Yes
25	Cases\\LC	No	No	No	CY	Multidisci	No	Yes
26	Cases\\TA	No	In Part	No	CY	CPD Arts E	In Part	Yes
27	Cases\\Th	Yes	Yes	Yes	CY	Multidisci	Yes	Yes
28								
29								



## Appendix 6. Model of Participation

●●●●● NATIONAL STRATEGY ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING, 2015 – 2020

### 3.3 VOICE MODEL CHECKLIST

As part of the development of the present strategy, Professor Lundy, in consultation with a strategy development sub-group comprised of representatives from Government departments and agencies, has developed a checklist for participation (see Figure 3). This checklist aims to help organisations, working with and for children and young people, to comply with Article 12 of the UNCRC and ensure that children have the space to express their views; their voice is enabled; they have an audience for their views; and their views will have influence.

Although developed to assist in the implementation of Article 12 of the UNCRC, Lundy's model and checklist are applicable to participation of young people up to the age of 24.

Figure 3: Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation



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