
Culture Connects - UK Ireland

Research Specification

July 2024

Overview of the British Council

We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. We uniquely combine the UK's deep expertise in arts and culture, education and the English language, our global presence and relationships in over 100 countries, our unparalleled access to young people and influencers and our creative sparkle.

We work directly with individuals to help them gain the skills, confidence and connections to transform their lives and shape a better world in partnership with the UK. We support them to build networks and explore creative ideas, to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications.

We work with governments and our partners in the education, English language and cultural sectors, in the UK and globally. Working together we make a bigger difference, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world.

We work with people in over 200 countries and territories and are on the ground in more than 100 countries. In 2022–23 we reached 600 million people.

Read more about our work in our [annual reports](#).

British Council Ireland

British Council Ireland supports the relationship between Ireland and the UK where Arts and Education are the critical components. We champion insight, broker connections and build opportunities for engagement, trust and mutual understanding between people and organisations to build a more inclusive, informed and sustainable future on these islands.

Find out more about the work of British Council Ireland [here](#).

Request for Proposal (RfP)

British Council Ireland are commissioning research to better understand the connections that exist between the UK and Ireland in arts and culture.

This research will provide a mapping of the connections between the UK and Ireland in arts and culture; it will understand geographic specificity and attraction; the motivations (and barriers) associated with this attraction, and it will generate recommendations for the type of interventions, initiatives or supports that could create, or enhance, mobility and stronger connection across the four devolved administrations and Ireland. Of interest are the connections and linkages across the islands – North South, East and West and the flows of artists and cultural practitioners between the UK and Ireland.

It is envisaged that this study will comprise a mixed methods study - analysing available quantitative data (to be sourced) in addition to a series of semi-structured interviews with artists and key cultural stakeholders in the UK and Ireland.

This research will be of interest to government agencies, policy makers, analogue organisations, resource agencies and arts and cultural practitioners along with those interested in arts and culture in a bilateral, UK Ireland context.

Context

Research and insight on the connections, mobility and networks of arts and cultural professionals across these islands is limited. It is known that there are informal personal connections, as well as formal institutional relationships. It has been suggested (anecdotally) that once strong relations in arts and culture, between practitioners and agencies, appear to be falling away. This change in relations is the result of a number of factors, including the UK leaving the EU, instability and political tensions in the bilateral relationship, increasing asymmetry in the arts funding landscape in different jurisdictions and differing strategic priorities of funding agencies across the UK and Ireland. It is unclear to what level, and in which sectors, this has occurred and there is an opportunity, for the British Council, as a research-led and research-informed organisation, to make a significant contribution to research and insight in this space.

The value of cultural links to the UK, and to Ireland, is significant. Access to arts and cultural opportunity in both countries is facilitated by a shared language, history and ease of mobility across the five nations. This is underpinned by the Common Travel Area (CTA) which ensures the free movement of goods and people across Ireland and the UK. As a result, artists and cultural workers move easily between the UK and Ireland sustaining a livelihood by the porous and open border provided by the CTA. It is not unusual to work in one jurisdiction and live in another. See *Building Capacity for Cultural Industries: Towards a Shared-Island Approach* research [here](#).

For many Irish writers, musicians and creatives entering the UK market is often an early or mid-point in their career path while many writers have UK publishers and agents, and musicians are signed with UK labels. Many media personalities and celebrities in the UK are Irish (Graham Norton, Dara Ó Briáin. Angela Scanlon) and year on year, Irish artists are winning significant awards such as the BAFTAs (Cillian Murphy: *Oppenheimer*; Element Pictures for *Poor Things*), Literature awards such as the Booker Prize (Paul Lynch 2023) and the Granta Shortlist (Sara Baume and Thomas Morris,

2023) along with London Fashion week, November 2023 opening with Irish designer Paul Costelloe. A significant number of Irish individuals lead arts and cultural organisations in the UK, for example, Dublin-born Fergus Linehan was appointed Director of the Edinburgh International Festival in 2013 (vacating post in 2022) and ex-Director of Arts Council Ireland Mary Cloake, runs The Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts. Conversely, Róisín McBrinn from Clean Break Theatre company in London has just been appointed Artistic Director of the Gate Theatre, Dr Caroline Campbell, recently appointed Director of the National Gallery of Ireland came to this role from Director of Collections and Research in the National Gallery in London and Robert Read, CEO of the National Concert Hall in Dublin, was latterly Managing Director at King's Place, London. Indeed, bi-location is not uncommon and artists are known to have residence in one jurisdiction and work in another.

Other UK Ireland cultural connections to note are: the Liverpool Irish Festival is the UK's largest Irish arts and culture led festival and celebrates its 21st birthday this year; Culture Night is a UK and Ireland-wide initiative that celebrates arts, culture and creativity; Ireland will jointly co-host EURO 2028 with the UK; UK TV channels are widely available in Ireland and co-production in film and television as well as the performing between Ireland (North South) and (East West) the UK is common.

Of these instances noted here, the connection East West tends to be driven by personal motivation and is intermittent while North South connection is arguably more strategic, and has been fostered through formal mechanisms and the context of shared geography. A number of organisations are established as all-island entities or have sister organisations in Northern Ireland, creating strong links between the two territories. Examples include The Tyrone Guthrie Centre, the Heritage Council, Visual Artists Ireland, and the Irish Museums Association. In May 2024, the Arts Council of Ireland launched Luail, the new all-island dance company, which will provide a 32-county platform for dance, collaboration and development on the island. There is also a close working relationship between national bodies in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales, such as the Arts Councils and National Theatres as well as not-for-profit agencies such as Business to Arts and Arts & Business NI. Running parallel to these entities are six all-island bodies overseen by the North South Ministerial Council which were set up as a result of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. While not necessarily focussed on arts activity, they are a good example of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland all-island, cross-border working across the island. These are: Waterways Ireland, Intertrade Ireland, Food Safety Authority, Foras na Gaeilge, Ulster-Scots Agency, the Irish Lights Commission and SEPUB.

In cultural policy studies, the lived experiences of artists and their mobility across borders has been increasingly studied and show that borders impact artists' livelihoods and practice (Durrer, McGrath and Campbell, 2022,¹ p. 116, 121). Research also shows that cultural practice and production are interconnected on the island of Ireland, with cross-border movement and mobility, an expectation (Durrer, McGrath, and McAlister, 2021,² p. 3, 5). From the limited research available, it is clear that there are strong 'North-South' connections existing in terms of professional development, co-productions, and touring while information on East West connection is lacking. The available research highlights artist mobility as influencing transnational diplomatic ties, professional networks, as well as regional identities and transnational communities (Durrer, McGrath and Campbell, 2022, p. 116, 118, 121). Researchers have further highlighted the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the UK leaving the EU, have been profoundly felt across the artist community with resulting

¹ <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.14361/zkmm-2022-0205/html>

² <https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/publications/how-might-we-nurture-a-shared-island-approach-to-supporting-the-p>

consequences including increased costs, emotional stress as well as confusion around legal complexities and mobility requirements (Durrer, McGrath, and McAlister, 2021, p. 5).

Of the studies noted here, it is important to highlight, that the focus has lain primarily on a 'North-South' axis on the island of Ireland, and not captured 'East-West' concerns between Ireland and England, Scotland and Wales. This rapid evidence review of available research suggests a significant gap in the existing research field and one which speaks to the need for additional knowledge and insight on UK Ireland cultural connection and flows – one which captures the structural and interpersonal mechanisms that influence cultural connection and artistic mobility across Ireland and the UK. This was also noted in the recent Royal Irish Academy AIRNS research study which highlighted the importance of, and need for, additional research on the perceptions of the artists engaging in cultural mobility (Hadley and Woodley, 2023,³ p. 66).

Therefore, this research call is set within the context of limited extant research on cultural connections between the UK and Ireland and rich anecdotal and informal awareness of the strong bilateral connections across these islands. As such this research report can make a significant contribution to the policy, practice and research fields by illuminating the relations and connections in arts and culture, North South East West across these islands. The findings and recommendations of the report will provide valuable research and insight for the British Council, government departments in the UK and Ireland, policy makers, resource agencies, academics and others interested in this space.

Methodology

We envisage that this cultural mapping research comprise a mixed methods study: analysing available quantitative data (to be sourced) in addition to a series of semi-structured interviews with artists and key cultural stakeholders in the UK and Ireland.

Qualitative interviews consisting of the following:

- 12-15 interviews with arts and cultural practitioners located in Ireland and the UK. The researcher should aim for a representative balance of gender and geography (across Ireland and UK's devolved administrations) as well as artform.
- 8-10 interviews with key stakeholders in the arts and cultural sector in Ireland and the UK.

The researcher will work together with the British Council to secure data that will enable the research study to map trends over time. We hope to access data from one or two key stakeholders which will provide a valuable quantitative backdrop to the qualitative research. Taken together the mixed methods approach will provide a benchmark study to illuminate the arts and cultural connection between the UK and Ireland.

Key Research question

- What is the state of play in arts and cultural connection between the UK and Ireland and what initiatives would foster greater connection in arts and culture in a UK Ireland context to specifically build enduring relationships through a cultural relations approach?

³ <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/423/article/886124/pdf>

Target Audience

This research is intended for an internal British Council audience as well as external audience.

- It will be used by the Country Director and EU Regional team to inform our cultural engagement work in Ireland in Arts across the next three years.
- It will be of interest in a national context to Ireland government agencies, policy makers, analogue organisations, resource agencies and arts and cultural practitioners interested in the bilateral UK Ireland context.
- It will also be of interest to UK agencies, government departments, policy makers and organisations who find this research of interest.

Deliverables

The outputs of the project are to be delivered by the end of March 2025. The core team at the British Council will work closely with the appointed bidder to deliver the outputs.

The following outputs will be required:

Output 1	Full report with recommendations, following British Council research brand templates and reporting guidelines.	By 31 January 2025
Output 2	A PowerPoint slide deck presenting key findings, which the British Council can use within internal/external presentations, using the British Council PowerPoint templates provided.	By 31 January 2025
Output 3	Briefing and presentation of research to key stakeholders (online or face to face).	February or March 2025

Research Ethics

All contracted or commissioned research organisations must have an operational policy and procedure for assuring ethical conduct in research practice and publication and submit this to the British Council upon application as an appendix. This must be approved for the research contract to be awarded and reviewed prior to the research project commencing.

The needs of participants are a high priority and use of participants' data must always comply with the British Council's policies, and any local governance and regulations. A culture of integrity and openness is central to monitoring and evaluation, and conflicts of interest should be avoided. This is to support our credibility and transparency in this area and ensure that we maintain the British Council's values.

The Research / Project Manager(s) must take measures to ensure confidentiality, privacy and data protection and retention during and beyond the end of the project – including in data sharing and

linkage, and that all participants are informed if and for how long their data will be archived for. The British Council requires this in alignment with the European Social Research Council's (ESRC's) Research Data Policy.

Key timelines

A minimum of 3 progress meetings with the British Council core team will be required across the duration of the project.

Activity	Date / time
Circulation of research call	By 5 July 2024
Deadline for clarification questions	By Wed 17 th July 2024
Expressions of Interest (Eoi) received	By 5 August 2024, midnight
Appoint researcher and contracts circulated	By 16 August 2024
Agree research approach incl. identification of key stakeholders	By 30 August 2024
Progress meetings x 3	30 August to 6 January 2025
Completion of research interviews	By 29 November 2024
First draft of research report	By 6 January 2025
Final draft of research report & ppt	By 31 January 2025
Briefing and presentation	By end March 2025

Budget

The total budget available to deliver the research is up to the **value of £12,000 inclusive of VAT**, incentives, travel and all other expenses incurred in the research.

Further information

For further information including any questions, please contact:

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