

UK-Ireland Strategic Culture Partnership

At the 2025 UK-Ireland Summit, a strategic partnership between the National Cultural Institutions (NCIs) of Ireland and the equivalent 'leading cultural institutions' of the UK was agreed by the Taoiseach and Prime Minister. Paragraph 31 of their Joint Statement of 6 March 2025 reads:

We value the extraordinary influence and contribution of British and Irish cultures and heritages to the artistic and cultural wealth of the public realm and creative industries and institutions in both our countries. In recognition of this, today, we agree to establish a strategic partnership to deepen and amplify co-operation between our leading cultural institutions and to support wider public engagement with the contemporary culture and heritage of both our countries. Over the coming five years, this will comprise a range of measures to support collaborations in programming, professional exchange, research and policy, and an annual joint meeting of our leading cultural institutions each autumn.

While this paper concerns collaboration between major cultural institutions, both countries remain supportive of initiatives that facilitate new and deepened cultural cooperation between a broader range of institutions and practitioners in the UK and Ireland.

Programme Structure and Scope

The initiative is to comprise a five-year work programme to 2030 with three thematic strands and dedicated funding, and has been the subject of detailed consultations since last autumn between the two Governments and with Irish and UK institutions. The Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (DCCS) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) have led on the proposal, in consultation with the Department of the Taoiseach, and with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on the UK side. A joint working group is being established to oversee implementation of the initiative as part of the wider *UK-Ireland 2030* process.

This initiative is intended to build on and amplify the strong collaboration many UK and Irish institutions already enjoy, while also supporting further institutions to develop and benefit from such links.

The programme is to consist of the following three strands, with a focus on strategic projects which are ambitious, inter-disciplinary, future-focussed, and achievable only through collaboration:

A. Joint Programming & Curatorial Collaborations (in Ireland and the UK, and jointly in other territories);

B. Professional Exchange & Development (for staff at all stages of their careers, and across a range of functions, e.g. curation, cataloguing, conservation, education, visitor services, capital projects, development, etc);

C. Joint Research & Policy Initiatives (across a range of areas from genre specific research and policy, to cross-genre (e.g. archiving in national theatres), and common themes such as digitisation, ethics, restitution, climate transition and sustainability, access and diversity, disinformation, cyber security, etc).

These three strands have many points of convergence, and some projects may well combine elements across two if not all three of the strands. Some collaborative projects may relate to the specific bilateral relationship between Ireland and each constituent part of the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales); others may address a wider curatorial or global theme, while exemplifying bilateral partnership in the nature and structure of the institutional collaboration. The initiative will also showcase collaborations which strengthen and exemplify joint Ireland-UK leadership in the global cultural space. Particular macro thematic priorities of the Governments may also be reflected in certain projects (e.g. innovation, digital, diversity and inclusion).

It is envisaged that the first slate of confirmed joint projects will be announced at the next UK-Ireland Summit in Ireland expected in spring 2026.

Participation

The Joint Statement defines the partnership in terms of ‘our leading cultural institutions’. 11 institutions comprise the Irish Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCIs) who are eligible to participate. There is no defined list of named UK institutions eligible to participate in funded collaborative projects. Instead, it is proposed that UK and Irish institutions identify each other as relevant partners for each collaborative project. DCMS can support Irish National Cultural Institutions to identify suitable partners, should they need it, encouraging out-of-London partnerships where appropriate, without being prescriptive. Institutions will agree a lead partner for each project.

Cultural institutions in Northern Ireland have been full participants in the process from the start, reflecting the 6 March 2025 *UK-Ireland 2030* Joint Statement provision that bilateral cooperation will include and benefit Northern Ireland. Recognising that there are already existing partnerships in place with Welsh and Scottish cultural institutions, the Government of Ireland and the UK Government would welcome the engagement of Welsh and Scottish institutions in strategic partnership initiatives. Recognising that culture is a devolved competence, this would be in clear consultation with the Welsh Government, Scottish Government, and Northern Ireland Executive.

Both governments will circulate outline terms of reference for the initiative over the summer to enable substantive discussions on collaborations to move forward prior to the annual joint meeting late this year, and to maintain momentum with the development of a substantive programme of cooperation between Irish and UK counterparts.

Funding

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Supported by the Government of Ireland Shared Island Fund, the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport will make funding available to the UK-Ireland strategic culture partnership programme for the period 2025-2030. These funds will be provided via the Irish National Cultural Institutions to support the delivery of approved projects by UK and Irish partner institutions, and may be used towards agreed joint costs incurred by the Irish and UK partners in each case.

Where relevant, organisations looking to deliver joint projects shall apply to further sources of funding in their respective jurisdiction, for example, their national Arts Council or equivalent funding body (n/a in Ireland).

All projects funded under the programme will be required to demonstrate additionality and non-duplication of activity and resources.

The terms and modalities of the Government of Ireland funding are to be finalised by the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, in consultation with the Council of National Cultural Institutions, the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Given the relative order of costs across the three work strands, it is anticipated that public facing programming collaborations under strand A could receive approximately 75% of funds available, with 25% for Strands B and C collectively.

Annual Joint Meeting

The Joint Statement also announced an annual joint meeting of the institutions each autumn. This in-person gathering at Director level is intended to follow on the initial meeting of the Directors of Ireland and UK institutions hosted by Ambassador of Ireland Martin Fraser in London last September, and hence to rotate to Dublin in late 2025.

The choreography of arrangements including invitees, format, agenda, chairing, locations etc will be agreed by the UK-Ireland working group.

Future meetings would ideally be hosted by the institutions themselves.

Government of Ireland: Department of Culture, Communications and Sport / Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

HMG: Department for Culture, Media and Sport

1 August 2025