

Creative Youth



Interim Report 2023–2025



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme





Creative Youth

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Forward

As part of the all-of-Government Creative Ireland Programme, Creative Youth aims to increase opportunities for activity and participation, and to influence public policy around creativity in both formal education and out-of-school settings. Working with the Department of Education and Youth, the Department of Children, Disability, and Equality, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Arts Council, Creative Youth wants to create a place where knowledge and creativity are equal partners in the formation of our young people, giving them an opportunity to become creative, active citizens.

Building on the success of the 2017 Creative Youth Plan, the Creative Ireland Programme published the Creative Youth Plan 2023 – 2027. It aims to provide everyone from birth to 24 years with more opportunities for creative engagement in every aspect of their lives. Across seven strategic objectives, the Creative Youth Plan ensures children and young people retain a key voice in decision-making on its implementation and will prioritise those that are seldom heard and most at risk of disadvantage. Parents & caregivers, educators, artists, and creative practitioners are supported to recognise the centrality and value of creativity to their lives.

As we have reached the milestone of the midway point of the Creative Youth Plan 2023 – 2027, it has gone strength to strength and had a far reaching impact. This report details the key highlights from the past two years.



Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027: Progress Overview June 2025

- 1 Facilitate and provide creative opportunities for children and young people.
- 2 Strengthen equity of access to creative activities for the most seldom heard children and young people.
- 3 Supporting the implementation of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.
- 4 Promoting the value of creativity across the Education system and supporting Curriculum Frameworks in schools.
- 5 Further promote and nurture the development of creative skills in Further and Higher Education, including apprenticeships.
- 6 Supporting the enhanced wellbeing of children and young people.
- 7 Establish a programme of research.

1

Facilitate and provide creative opportunities for children and young people.

Creative Schools: Since September 2023, over 500 schools and Youthreach centres have completed and/or commenced participation in Creative Schools. The programme has expanded to **Creative February**; a nationwide opportunity to celebrate creativity, open to all schools. Its development is ongoing with high levels of engagement evident to date.

Creative Clusters Programme: Since September 2023, over 420 schools and Youthreach centres have completed and/or commenced participation in the clusters. Examples of past themes include: “Unity in Diversity”, Artificial Intelligence, “Back to Nature in the Garden of Ireland”, “Biodiversity – Delving into the World of Wonder”, celebrating cultural diversity and biodiversity.

Bringing live arts to students and teachers, **BLAST** supported 425 artist residencies in both the 2023/2024 and again in the 2024/2025 academic year. BLAST provided pupils with the time and the space to work with a professional artist/creative practitioner on imaginative and joyful projects. These have included visual arts, crafts, music, dance, drama, literature, heritage and film.

Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP): Ensuring that a broader definition of creativity, beyond the arts, is embraced, TAP has in recent years broadened to TAP+, extending into areas such as archaeology. The summer course runs in the 21 Education Support Centres across the country, approved by the DE, and is followed by residencies. TAP+ training also underpins the delivery of BLAST and the BLAST register of artists and creative practitioners. TAP+, which is aimed at primary school teachers, was extended to post-primary schools in 2024 through collaboration with Oide Creativity, with a training focus on creativity and Education for Sustainable Development.

I am Creative, a pilot initiative of the Department of Education and Youth, is the first programme that was developed specifically for special educational settings to train teachers, artists, Special Needs Assistants and school leaders together in supporting an artist residency in such settings. The training is followed by residencies in special schools or special classes. An evaluation report and video have been published demonstrating the impact of this programme in supporting children in such settings to embrace creative opportunities.



Kilconly National School Kerry, Teacher Artist Partnership

Following the pilot in 2023, a further phased roll-out took place in 2024. It is intended to run the programme again in 2025, following strong positive feedback from special schools involved in the pilot.

Kinia's Creative Technology Programme 2023-2024 saw 111 educators/youth workers trained across 57 organisations in courses such as Robotics, Podcasting and Mobile Filmmaking. In addition, two new courses were developed with the funding: “Smart Energy” and “Green Technology”.

1. Facilitate and provide creative opportunities for children and young people.

The Big Idea, initially a Transition Year initiative, was supported to further develop its programme on creative problem-solving and design thinking into Youthreach, Leaving Cert Applied and a pilot in Northern Ireland.

Cruinniú na nÓg, the national day of free creativity for children and young people in June, has continued to grow since it commenced in 2018. Over 800 events took place in 2023, increasing to over 1300 in 2024. Strategic partners delivered circus, rap and youth theatre across the island of Ireland. The Spark, produced by Rhyme Island at the Kabin Studio in Cork as part of 2024, became song of the summer with over 1 billion online views.

National Play Day : Delivered by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, the theme for July 2025 is “The Power of Play” - This theme highlights the many benefits of play for Children’s Development, including physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth. It should aim to raise awareness of the vital role that play plays in a child’s life.

Music Generation: As lead partners for the Local Music Education Partnerships, Education and Training Board (ETBs) have a key role in supporting the provision of access to Music Generation performance music education. The most recent complete statistics show that nearly 116,000 participants took part in Music Generation programmes in 2023. 45 musical genres taught on Music Generation programmes and 39 types of engagement in music making and learning were provided across all its programmes. These included performance, conducting, videography, recording, podcasting, instrumental/vocal ensembles songwriting and music production.

In 2024, thousands of children and young people from communities across Ireland took part in ‘**We are Music Generation**’ - a year dedicated to celebrating the transformative impact of performance music education on the lives of children and young people. The national events programme featured a conference, a children and young people’s day and a musician-educator gathering, as well as over 30 locally led performance projects. The voices of children and young people were integral to planning.



Hub na nÓg is the national centre of excellence and coordination on youth participation in decision making under the Department of Children, Disability and Equality. They have provided training and resources on the National Participation Framework to Creative Youth partners. This includes the Local Creative Youth Partnerships, the Creative Youth Nurture Fund, and Creative Youth on a Shared Island, Cruinniú na nÓg and school programmes such as Creative Schools, Creative Clusters, TAP and BLAST. This has ensured that young people have a significant role in Creative Youth. As an example, young people have participated in the evaluation of schemes such as the Creative Youth Nurture Fund and Creative Youth on a Shared Island.

In addition to the National Participation Framework, Creative Ireland has facilitated training to grantees in topics such as creative facilitation and creative pedagogy.



1. Facilitate and provide creative opportunities for children and young people.

Linkages between Creative Youth and the [Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\)](#) 2023 Strategy are reflected where possible in the Department of Education and Youth's work. For example, a series of exemplar Creative Clusters videos are being produced showcasing ESD and, separately, "Wellbeing". Many Cluster schools applied for further ESD funding in 2023 and 2024, prompted by their Creative Cluster Facilitators, who also link them with further resources and information to support their work.

Creative Youth has continued to encourage public engagement across its programmes. This is amplified through the Creative Ireland website, social media and the [Arts in Education Portal](#). In addition to providing an online space to showcase creative partnerships and initiatives, and professional development opportunities for teachers and creatives, the annual National Arts in Education Portal Day invites attendees to share, learn, network and inspire in person. In November 2024, 100 attended workshops on street art and participative learning and presentations including "The Power of Rap". The Creative Youth newsletter email has reached a significant number of people with a high average open rate.



Partner departments and agencies on Creative Youth have increased investment on other areas for artistic and cultural initiatives for children and young people. The DOEDIY's Youth Affairs Unit supports the [UBU Your Place Your Space Funding Scheme](#) to ETB's. Some of the projects funded include Galway Youth Theatre Project, Waterford Youth Arts and Little Red Kettle Theatre Project. In addition, the Youth Affairs Unit provides funding for the [National Youth Arts Programme](#), channelled through the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI).

1. Facilitate and provide creative opportunities for children and young people.

Shared Island Initiative;

[The Creative Youth on a Shared Island](#) funding scheme has awarded over €1 million across 6 projects that, between 2024 and 2025, will engage children and young people from communities across Ireland, collaborating in creative writing and story-telling, song-writing, parade, theatre and more.

[Creative Connections](#), is a pilot programme launched in February 2025 and led by the Department of Education and Youth and Department of Education in Northern Ireland. It aims to improve outcomes in education for children impacted by social disadvantage. Building on the successful BLAST and Creative Clusters models, it will support schools in both jurisdictions to come together in creative projects, giving students the opportunity to work with professional artists. This programme works alongside RAISE, a Shared Island Initiative to deliver a range of education support measures to help address educational underachievement and tackle educational disadvantage through a whole community and place-based approach.

2

Strengthen equity of access to creative activities for the most seldom heard children and young people.

Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYPs) have increased from 6 to 8 ETBs across the country. The LCYP coordinator brings together a wide range of local structures and stakeholders and consult with young people to ensure greater provision in creativity. In particular, they target marginalised or previously less served cohorts. This targeted provision has seen them partner with youth services, family resource centres, early learning and care centres, community training centres, home liaison services, local authorities, arts and creative organisations and charities to reach and provide opportunities to young people in their communities.

In 2023, the **Creative Youth Nurture Fund** granted over €700,000 for 9 projects to engage with specific cohorts of seldom heard children and young people in creativity in which their voice is central. Running until 2025, the funding supports collaborative projects led by the Irish Refugee Council, Creative Spark, Ballyhoura Development Company, Helium Arts, Down Syndrome Ireland Waterford with Traces Dance Ensemble, Oberstown Detention Campus, Limerick Learning Hub, Foróige and the National Concert Hall.

Cruinniú na nÓg has highlighted specific inclusive events on its interactive website for young people with additional and/or sensory needs.

Since September 2023, over 440 DEIS schools, over 60 Special Schools and 29 Youthreach centres have commenced participation in Creative Youth school programmes, enhancing access to creative programmes for learners at risk of disadvantage or outside the mainstream education system.

In September 2022, Creative Schools welcomed 4 schools attached to Special Care Units or Children Detention Centres, providing them with greater allocated time with a Creative Associate and an increased grant up to 2024. Similarly, five new Youth Encounter Project Schools commenced the programme in 2023 and, given the particular needs of the young people within them, they were also offered enhanced supports. The next cohort of alternative settings will begin in September 2026 and will be informed by a review of the cohorts.



Traces Dance Ensemble, Creative Youth Nurture Fund

2. Strengthen equity of access to creative activities for the most seldom heard children and young people.

STAR (Supporting Traveller and Roma) models of **BLAST** and **Creative Clusters** are being piloted currently, and reflected in the **Traveller and Roma Education Strategy** exemplifying the strategic linkage that can exist between Creative Youth and other key strategies focused on children and young people.

One of the 6 **Creative Youth on a Shared Island** projects is specifically engaging with young people from Belfast and Dublin that have multiple and complex needs, providing a safe space for them to tell stories of their lived experience through theatre.

An online interactive map has been launched demonstrating the reach of Creative Youth across the country - by initiative, school type and year. This Creative Youth online map of school-based initiatives is utilised to address gaps in provision and allows for the targeting of Creative Youth initiatives.



Narrative 4, Creative Youth on a Shared Island

3

Supporting the implementation of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

Following research conducted by Dr Triona Stokes under the first Creative Youth Plan, **Draft Principles for Engaging with the Arts in Early Learning and Care** were published by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality. Artists, early learning and care (ELC) educators, school-age childcare (SAC) practitioners and other stakeholders were invited to use and explore these Draft Principles and test their validity in practice.

The pilot **Arts in Early Learning and Childcare Funding Scheme** in 2023 supported professional artists and arts organisations to work with ELC and SAC settings, utilising a variety of art forms including multidisciplinary approaches, visual arts, music, drama and dance. Eight artists worked with 10 Tusla registered ELC and SAC settings across the country, with children aged 0-3, 4-6 and 7 and over.

Creative Youth facilitated three regional awareness raising events in association with the City and County Childcare Committees, each including an overview of the pilot scheme and presentations by the artists and early years educators that participated, detailing their individual projects, their experiences and key learning. The Galway event was programmed as part of Baboró International Arts Festival for Children. International speaker, Rhona Matheson, Chief Executive of Starcatchers, Scotland's Arts and Early Years organisation, contributed to the Dublin and Cork events.



Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Early Childhood Arts Commission

Based on findings from the initial projects run under the scheme, the **Arts in Early Learning and Childcare Scheme** is continuing in 2025 through the Arts Council under 3 Strands: 1) Early Learning and Childcare; 2) International Protection (birth-6-year-olds); and 3) Combined Contexts. In addition, a series of promotional videos are being developed for the scheme.

Further resources have been developed under the Siolta Aistear Initiative focused on areas such as promoting positive play experiences and can be found online at www.aistearsiolta.ie

4

Promoting the value of creativity across the Education system and supporting Curriculum Frameworks in schools.

Oide Creativity (formerly Arts in Junior Cycle) is a specific creativity programme within Oide, the professional development support service for teachers. It supports teacher professional learning and development and is based on partnership and collaboration with key elective partners across the arts and education sectors. There is a focus on continuing to support embedding broader creativity through interdisciplinary professional learning experiences offered to teachers. This work is ongoing and involves the STE(A) M initiative, Teacher Write Club in collaboration with Fighting Words, integrating drama in education methodologies and modelling and promoting creative pedagogies. In addition, Oide Creativity is supporting the expansion of TAP+ into post-primary settings.

Oide, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Youth, is currently piloting the **School of Excellence in Creativity Award**, with nine schools initially awarded a place on this programme to develop and evaluate creativity in their school, reviewing the effectiveness for learning by taking a school self-evaluation approach. It is intended that Phase 2 will see 16 schools work together over a two year period from September 2025.



5

Further promote and nurture the development of creative skills in Further and Higher Education, including apprenticeships.

Work has commenced, led by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, to identify potential aims, principles, and features of a “creative campus” with input from further and higher education institutions through consultation.



6

Supporting the enhanced wellbeing of children and young people.

Across the Creative Youth programmes and schemes, enhancing the wellbeing of the participants has been a key focus. It has been included in partner training supported by Creative Ireland and is incorporated into the Creative Youth Evaluation Framework.

Ongoing evaluations, in particular for the BLAST programme and the School of Excellence in Creativity pilot initiatives, provide evidence of Creative Youth initiatives supporting wellbeing. Key outcomes identified post-initiatives include improved student confidence with collaborative, creative learning experiences helping students feel supported and more comfortable expressing themselves.

Overall, many findings accord with the Department of Education and Youth's Wellbeing and Policy Framework for Practice 2018-2023 which points to the 'reciprocal relationship between wellbeing and the accomplishments of children and young people'. Participants consistently link enjoyment to the creative process and social interaction, with 'enjoyment', 'creativity and self-expression', and 'learning and discovery' being prominent outcomes in the thematic analysis.

Creative Youth have been contributors to the Government's Child Poverty and Well-being Initiative, particularly in relation to Priority Area 6 "Participation in arts, culture and sport".



7

Establish a programme of research.

Trinity College Dublin's School of Education worked with the Creative Youth Research Group to develop an [evaluation framework](#) for Creative Youth partners as a key resource across the programmes. This includes a pre-project questionnaire and post-project questionnaire to gather data on ongoing projects. Creative Youth grantees receive training in the framework to ensure it's application in programme delivery. This data is now supporting a number of programme evaluations.

In 2024, [Youth Voice in Creative Schools: Reflections on Practice](#) was published to capture, celebrate and share ways of working that have been part of the Creative Schools experience.

A number of Creative Youth programmes have commenced high level evaluations and evaluation is a key criteria and requirement for many of the Creative Youth funding schemes, reflected in partner agreements.

Building on evaluations of [TAP](#), [Creative Clusters](#), [Local Creative Youth Partnerships](#) and the [Oide Creativity](#) predecessor, Arts in Junior Cycle, all completed over the period of the previous Plan, there is a focus on embedding evaluation from the outset in programmes such as I am Creative, the Shared Island Creative Connections pilot, the School of Excellence in Creativity and STAR pilots of BLAST and Creative Clusters.



Traces Dance Ensemble, Creative Youth Nurture Fund





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