



Dublin City Council

# BIODIVERSITY ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE 2024/5

*Creative*  
Climate Action



Clár Éire Iddinach  
Creative Ireland  
Programme



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council



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# FOREWORD

Throughout my 35-year career in local government I have been a champion of nature. Providing people with spaces to connect with nature, to learn from it and to enjoy its beauty, is a key part of the work of local government.

Ensuring people have access to spaces where nature thrives is challenging.

Often it is not a priority, it is not seen as critical or essential to our economic growth, even though it is. Nature's benefits are not easily tracked by key performance indicators. We can undertake biodiversity counts to monitor the number of birds, bats, and other fauna and flora. If we assess the costs of doing the counts, someone might argue that it is not value for money. The value of nature is invisible to the eye. How do we make what is invisible - Visible?

The arts bring vibrancy to the city, create connections, and strengthen the social fabric of the city. Creative Ireland has been a partner in shaping Dublin's cultural infrastructure.

In recent years, Creative Ireland has provided funding for us to have conversations with people around topics that feel too big. Projects like Eat the Streets, and Crumlin Creative Climate Action have made climate action tangible; from something that you can do three times a day, to launching a social enterprise Change Clothes Crumlin.

In 2023 when our new local authority climate action plan being developed and we became an EU Mission City; we saw an opportunity to look inwards and innovate. The idea to embed artists into the city council became a reality through the Ignite Strand of the Creative Climate Action Fund. Alongside the work we were doing with the OECD to embed systems thinking and the Dublin Story Slam to foster a culture of collaboration through storytelling, the Biodiversity Artists in Residence programme would disrupt ingrained patterns of thinking and working. The artists with their deep understanding of the essential role of nature would through their unique practices make the invisible – visible.

As the residencies come to an end, it is time for reflection.

Rosie O'Reilly, Luke Casserly, and Louis Haugh have left an imprint on the city council. Abhainn has given a voice the city's rivers, their life-giving power and the gratitude and respect we owe them. For so long we have sought to control, rather than work with the rivers that have darned together the villages that have become Dublin, our home. Pesky Nature has challenged us in a time of otherness to reflect on relationships in nature; our connections to place defined by the nature around us, how we use plants to not only feed our bodies, but to create culture and identity that binds us. What Do Words Mean asks us to consider the language that defines the city, the city motto, and how we define our relationship with nature and biodiversity through language.

I have used the word nature rather than biodiversity to reflect this important insight. Nature evokes a sense of care for a dynamic living part of us; biodiversity is something to be counted and controlled.

The words we choose to reflect our home, shape how the city is treated. As care takers of the city for future generations, the residencies have planted seeds of change that the artists and Ruth Carroll have nurtured into seedlings. My role now is to tend to these seedlings, to understand the insights brought forward by the residencies and how they can be nurtured to support the vision for Dublin to be a city that is clean, green, safe, thriving, inclusive, vibrant and liveable. A place where everyone can live healthy full lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Shakespeare', with a stylized, flowing script.

Richard Shakespeare,  
Chief Executive, Dublin City Council

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dublin City Council (DCC) is the largest and most urban local authority in Ireland. Providing services to over half a million citizens and thousands of businesses, DCC is responsible for housing and community services, roads and transportation, urban planning and development, culture and the environment, Dublin Fire Brigade and more. They keep the city living, working, playing and safe.

In 2024, the Council adopted a new climate action plan, Climate Neutral Dublin 2030, that: “takes an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to climate action, and builds on our corporate vision of a dynamic, sustainable city, that is future-ready, built on thriving, inclusive neighbourhoods and communities, a strong economy, a vibrant cultural life and compact, connected growth. A foundation of this plan – a Resource-Full City – is particularly important. Nature is vital to our survival. Dublin has a rich natural environment and our plan is striving to insure all people living in Dublin have access to nature, and have opportunities to learn about the importance of biodiversity, whether it is through the Dublin Mountains Partnership or the Dublin Bay UNESCO Biosphere, or simply our parks and greening strategies.”

The DCC Biodiversity Artist in Residence Programme was imagined as part of this plan, a new way to interrogate how the Council held and respected nature in the city and how to embed unique artist voices into a solution based approach for biodiversity and climate action.

Over 18 months, three artists worked in the council, under the guidance of the Climate Action Team and with support from the Arts Office, with full access to the 6,000 staff and numerous departments that make up DCC and provide over 500 services to the citizens of Dublin. They met, they walked, they listened but most of all they asked questions, about how things are done, but more importantly, why? How does Ireland’s largest local authority value, protect and enhance biodiversity in the face of ecological destruction? Could artists help find solutions to solving this crisis? Could artists hold a mirror up to attitudes within the council towards nature and biodiversity?





IMAGE: Abhainn walk, DCC staff and Oslo city staff, Deputy Mayor Donna Cooney, Spring 2025

# 1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2023 as the new local authority climate action plan was being developed and the council was working towards the receiving its EU Mission Label, DCC saw an opportunity to look inwards, to look at things differently. One idea to embed artists into the city council became a reality through this Ignite Strand of the Creative Climate Action Fund.

Together with the council's OECD collaboration that looks at how to embed systems thinking through a challenge led approach and storytelling with the Dublin Story Slam that fosters a culture of collaboration and knowledge exchange, the Biodiversity Artists in Residence programme was designed to disrupt ingrained patterns of thinking and working. The artists with their deep understanding of the essential role of nature would through their unique practices make the invisible visible and tangible and help to offer solutions to the biodiversity crisis that Ireland faces.

The ambition was that artist-led projects would originate from working within the council, exploring ideas and ways of thinking that will lead to innovative outcomes, from intimate encounters to building robust structures that support community engagement, empower and instil information sharing and project visibility by harnessing the transformative capacity of art for change.

This programme was unique for DCC in that it placed artists in the heart of the council, not outside in artist studios or in the arts department, but in the headquarters of the local authority with full access to staff, communication channels and departments. The initial proposal from 2023 stated "DCC is aware and prepared for positive disruption in its working practices around biodiversity and climate change and through its research on Artists residencies in non-Arts settings know that new ways of working and foregrounding creativity will at times be uncomfortable. But without leaving the comfort zone no real change or development can occur." The onboarding and support scaffold was vital to the integration of artistic practice into a place where it could be considered as "other" and the communication strategy vital as to the success for the project.



## 2. PROJECT CHARTER

### Project Purpose

- To transform Dublin City Council's Executive and Elected Members' ability to incorporate Biodiversity as an embedded value in their aims

### Project Description

- To deliver three artist residencies and artistic outputs that will use the transformative power of the arts as a catalyst for conversations and thinking about Biodiversity within DCC
- To bring about systemic changes in how Biodiversity is valued and celebrated within DCC
- To deliver an impactful experience of embedding artistic values within a large and diverse organisation

### Project Justification

- Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 – Climate Neutral Dublin 2030
- EU Mission for 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities – “Dublin City's participation in the EU Mission for 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities, calls for innovation and radical collaboration that leads to climate action....”
- Opportunities to enhance and improve DCC's work in the area Biodiversity
- New organisational thinking about how to value and harness artistic practice as a means to creating workable solutions
- Opportunities to improve public perception around DCC's work in Biodiversity and Climate Action

### High Level Project Deliverables

- Three artistic residencies that are community facing (DCC employees) and that initiate and enable conversations about the need for biodiversity to be woven throughout all DCC work
- Organisational change – leading to policy change
- Deeper understanding of the solutions to addressing the biodiversity crisis on micro and macro levels
- High impact, highly visible projects in a key national urban organisation
- Provide key learnings and template as to how to weave artistic thinking into a local government organisation using a creative solutions based approach to problem solving

### Acceptance and Future Adoption Criteria

- Project revenues minus project costs should be zero. Evaluation process as key to future adoption of similar projects
- Sign off by Executive Manager, Environment and Transportation Department
- Sign off by Assistant Chief Executive Environment and Transportation Department

### Objectives:

#### *Financial*

- Overall budget not to exceed €350,000
- Each artist production project not to exceed €30,000 (fee exclusive)

#### *Time*

- Artists in place March 2024
- Project plus final evaluation completed by Nov 2025

### *Staff engagement*

- DCC staff to be given opportunity to meet artist and engage with art projects
- DCC staff to be asked about current views of their work in the area of biodiversity and repeated at project end to evaluate project impact
- Executive level buy-in key to policy and organisational change

### *Artist role*

- Artist to lead projects based on their area of interest
- Artist to be onsite in DCC three days a week as part of Climate Action Team
- Artist project to engage with staff (community focus)
- Artist to be supported in role especially in comms/work plan

### *Compliance*

- All artist projects to be guided by DCC health and safety, child protection, social media, animal welfare, HR guidelines and any other compliance areas not to listed

### *Organisational*

- Artist to be supported in projects by all DCC staff
- Artist to be given access to areas of interest
- Both staff and artist adhere to the values of the project

### Project Exclusions

- Project does not include existing DCC projects under the arts office
- Project does not include existing DCC projects currently in process

### Project Constraints

- Artist to work specifically in the area of Biodiversity
- Artist to work specifically in the DCC area and with DCC staff

### Project Assumptions

- That DCC has organisational desire to incorporate biodiversity as an embedded goal
- That DCC has capacity to adopt solutions based in artistic thinking
- That DCC has appetite for change driven by artistic solutions

### Initial Risks

- Lack of staff support
- Lack in capacity to incorporate artistic based solutions into projects
- Lack of interest in the arts
- Scepticism
- Lack of resources to bring about organisational change – can three voices persuade 6,000?
- How to empower the powerless?
- Objectives too broad
- Shared values too hard to define
- Change in political interests

### 3. ARTISTS AND ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

#### Selection Procedure

Dublin City Council undertook a two-stage limited nomination process with 27 artists shortlisted by Irish Museum of Modern Art, Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Common Ground, Dublin City Council Arts Office and Dublin City Council Climate Action Office.

Seven artists were short-listed by the selection panel and invited to further develop their proposals for presentation to the selection panel. One artist withdrew and six submitted proposals and presented them to the final selection panel, along with an interview.

The selection panel included representatives from DCC Arts Office and DCC Climate Action Office, and IMMA, along with an independent curator.

Three artists were selected for the six month residencies, Rosie O'Reilly, Luke Casserly and Louis Haugh.

#### Rosie O'Reilly

Rosie is a contemporary visual artist based in Dublin experimenting across sculpture, sound, writing and drawing. Current research projects include (2024) Environmental print residency at Cork Printmakers, Research residency at Cambridge University and Artist in Residence as part of Energy Transition Narratives project IE-NARR at UCD. Named as Irish Times 'One to Watch' 2022, relevant projects include 2023: Athrú; An Invocation Luan, BBC Radio 3; The Year of the Corvids, Mirror Lamp Press; Rust, Tread Softly; Barnavave, Molecular Revolutions; The Lab Gallery, 2022: Leitrim Sculpture Centre LEER, Tréimhse; IMMA, Idirlinn; Lab Gallery Dublin (Solo Show). Recent funding includes Arts Council Bursary 2023 & 2022 & Agility 2021, Carlow wedge funding 2021. Recent residencies include 2021 UCD Parity Studio, LSC. Projects include: 2022-23 Roots for the Future, Project Arts Centre, 'Feminist Counter-Topographies' collective of artist-scholars.

She completed an MA in ARC in 2018 with a term in marine research institute, CIIMAR PORTO. She has a BA in Philosophy and Sociology at TCD and has taught 'Circular Thinking and Making' at NCAD. She is currently developing an agroforest & embedded art project, coill na mara, on 2.5 acres of land in Waterford. Previously she founded international environmental & human rights projects CCC Ireland, We are Islanders and Fashion Revolution Ireland.

#### Luke Casserly

Luke is a multidisciplinary performance maker originally from Longford, Ireland. His work weaves together environmental research, documentary, sound art, and site as a way of carving out space for new possibilities to emerge between live performance and physical landscape. To date, his projects have brought audiences through city streets, back gardens, train stations, beaches, and a bog in the Irish midlands. These works have led to the creation of a network of wildflower meadows across Ireland and the UK (1000 Miniature Meadows, 2020-23) and the planting of 1000 indigenous trees in the Irish Midlands (Root, 2021).

His most recent project Distillation (2023) was a performative journey to the Irish bog landscape through scent, which involved Luke working with an organic perfume maker to create a unique distillation of the Irish bog as the starting point for an olfactory encounter which investigated our human relationship to place. The project premiered as part of Dublin Theatre Festival 2023 and will tour extensively throughout Ireland, the US & Canada in 2024. Luke was awarded the Arts Council's Next Generation Bursary Award in

2023, and was selected for the Norman Houston Multidisciplinary Commissioning Award with Solas Nua in Washington DC, in addition to being chosen to participate in the International Forum as part of Theatertreffen (Berlin Festspiele) 2023. He holds a BA in Drama and Theatre Studies from Trinity College Dublin, and a Professional Diploma in Art and Ecological Practice from the National College of Art and Design (NCAD).

Luke is also an experienced facilitator who has worked extensively with a number of organisations including the Abbey Theatre, the Ark, Dublin Theatre Festival, and Dublin Fringe Festival to deliver workshops as part of wider community-engagement programmes. He also mentors artists, and has worked as a script reader for both the Abbey Theatre and Druid since 2021.

## Louis Haugh

Louis is a visual artist based in Dublin with an MFA in Fine Art from NCAD (2021) and a BA (hons) in Photography from IADT (2011). The work he makes is process driven, socially engaged and community facing. It deals with issues relating to ecology, biodiversity, landscape, identity, community and our collective response to the climate crisis. As a queer, working class artist he welcomes opportunities to work with diverse and marginalised community groups when making work.

He received a Young People, Children and Education (YPCE) Bursary from the Arts Council in 2023 which supported ecological & educational research with pupils attending the Central Model Senior School on Marlborough Street in Dublin 1. This was also supported by DCC and The LAB gallery through in-kind support. The research looked at global food production and supply systems, through the process of growing, harvesting and cooking potatoes on his allotment on Earl St in Dublin 8. Through this research, topics such as; ecology, the environment, climate change, food supply systems, and forestry were discussed creatively and openly with the students.

He is currently engaged in an ongoing series of ecological commissions with Project Arts Centre in various projects including Artist in the Community for their public program of RHIZOME, which was presented as FUTURE FEAST in June 2022 where project collaborators from NCAD, Trinity College, Project Arts Centre and Fatima Groups United could come together under the invitation of hospitality to share ideas and conversations. Other projects include a series of ecological workshops with RADE (Recovery through Art and Drama Education) in Dublin 8 and LGBTQIA+ youth group Belong To.

## 4. ARTISTS' PROJECTS

### Rosie O'Reilly - Abhainn

Rosie O'Reilly's residency began in April 2024. An artist and researcher, her starting point was to research the hidden water systems and the people who care for them within the council. A point of reference was the book *Rivers of Dublin*, written by Clair Sweeney in 1991 and revised and reissued in 2017 by Gerard O'Connell, Senior Engineer, DCC Flood Projects and Water Framework Directive Division. This book, along with research within the council and the wider city, started to form a project, Abhainn, an embedded research project, that views Dublin through its inseparable relationship to water and its rivers. Abhainn grew slowly within the Council through a series of conversations, findings and encounters, research within the city in the areas of flood defence, river maintenance, biodiversity and parks, the city archive and a public call out for wider community stories. The artist created space for conversation and research with a wide range of DCC staff, from executive managers and department heads to river operatives and depot managers, all to get a sense of the measures of care that DCC undertakes on a daily basis. Abhainn also called for river stories from the public, as a way to gauge the part in how the rivers help form collective and personal narrative and memory.

Abhainn, as a project, took the form of a walking tour through Dublin's city centre, with seven distinct episodes that create a love letter to Dublin's rivers, to the life they hold and make possible and the people who care for them. Abhainn is available and hosted as a digital download via the Dublin Discovery Trails app and also as an analogue version with episodes on cassette and encased with a newly imagined city crest and city motto that has been led by the artist's research.

Abhainn was designed to take its participants on a unique journey through the city of Dublin, a journey through both liminal and covert places, their stories woven together to create a walk through the city through a distinct hydro-lens. Abhainn asks what happens when we shift the focus and talk about the city through its water and hydrological systems? What can water and the rivers and their inhabitants teach us when we acknowledge water is the continuum that holds the city together?

Through interviews, field recording, texts and sound responses, this series of water-walks have been composed with musician Colm O'Cíosóig to tell Dublin's hydro story. Photography for Abhainn was by Sean Breithaupt.

Abhainn was walked by elected members, staff and management from the Council, a group from San Francisco city government, the Oslo Lord Mayor's office and embassy staff, along with Dubliners using the opportunity to see their city water in an altogether different way. The project team took all opportunities to engage with a wider staff in Transformation Week, led tours through the city for Heritage and Climate Action weeks and used all channels available to talk all things river.

Abhainn, the analogue version, will be included in exhibitions in 2026 and the stories collected to be included digitally in the City Archive in 2026, to create a space for rivers where none previously existed.

[Abhainn app link](#)

[Abhainn website](#)





Cliath from Abhainn, image Courtesy of Rosie O'Reilly and Sean Breithaupt

*"As the origin of all life, water provides us (humans and more than human) with everything we need, without it, there would be nothing. In Dublin, this couldn't be more true. A coastal city and a port, it grew around dozens of rivers with many miles sent underground so human settlement could spread."*

*Rosie O'Reilly*



Image: Abhainn, analogue testing, Spring 2025



Image : DCC staff, River Poddle, Mill Street, Rivers as Storytellers episode



## Luke Casserly - Pesky Nature

The second artist was Luke Casserly who started his residency in October 2024. Luke is a performance maker and has been working in climate responsive theatre and community focused practice for a number of years. He understood the council as a place of community, but also a place where silos exist and began to research how to bring inter-departmental exchange and communication by designing weekly walks, where he invited two council employees, who had not met before, to walk the city with him, an invitation to slow down, and sharpen senses when it comes to noticing the presence of biodiversity within the city's landscape.

These exchanges took place over three months, along with one to one conversations and research within the council. These "Commons Walks" became spaces for reflection, collaboration and questioning, also growing from small groups of three to larger groups for specific DCC themed weeks and endeavours.

A theme that became apparent to Luke was the notion of invasive species, and the idea of 'invasiveness' – in both ecological and cultural terms – seemed to be everywhere.

He asked if there was something to be learned from their resilience. This isn't to overlook the damage these species can do to native ecosystems, but rather to ask what our responses to them reveal about our broader relationship with the natural world. At what point does a non-native species become local? Could we refine the value that these species hold?

Pesky Nature grew into the form of a publication and performance that took place in June 2025 for an invited group of participants and wider DCC staff. The publication launched in October that year, both as a printed book and downloadable pdf for DCC staff and the wider public. We worked with colleagues in NCAD, who hosted a launch event for staff in the NCAD field, creating space for wider project engagement and future inter-organisational collaboration.

### Pesky Nature publication

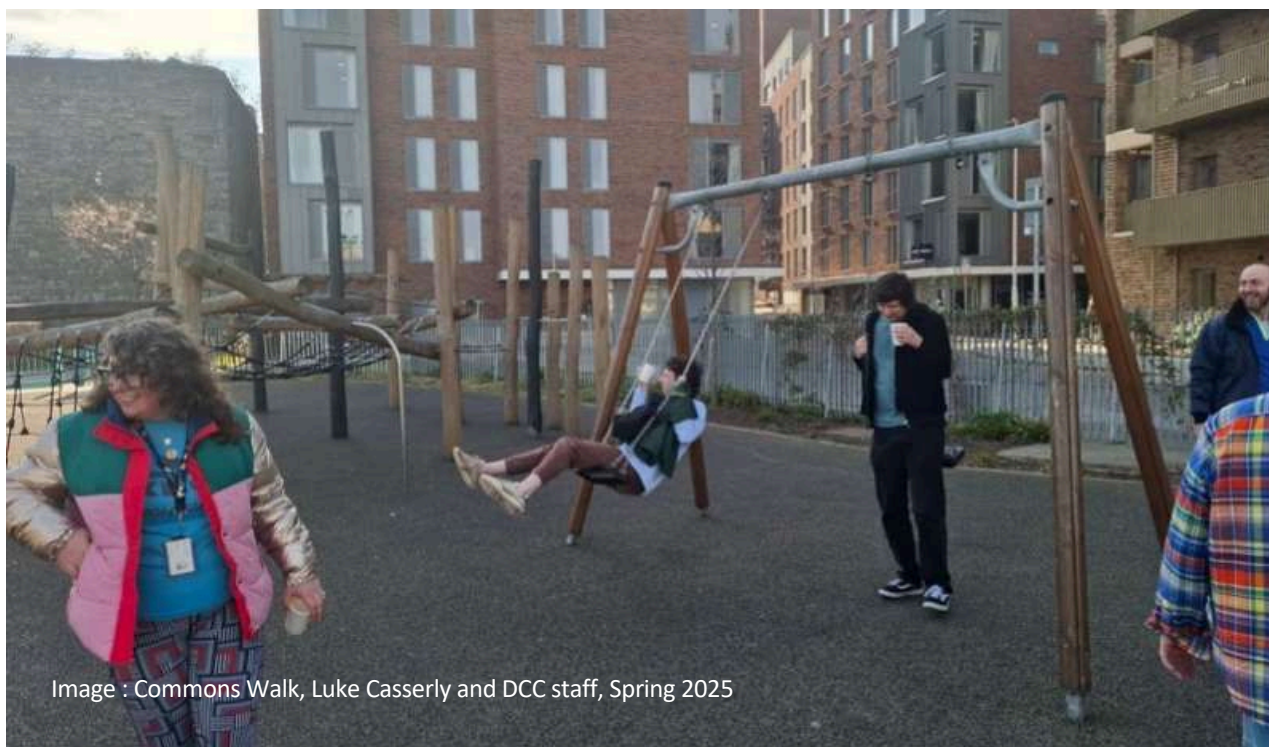


Image : Commons Walk, Luke Casserly and DCC staff, Spring 2025





## Louis Haugh – What Do Words Mean

The third and final artist Louis Haugh came from a practice of community engagement and photography. He started work in April 2025 and in October, we launched his project which took the form of a publication and public artwork.

What Do Words Mean was the result of six months of artist-led engagement between the artist and the community of staff members working in the Council, which focussed on how language and its use can impact the way in which we relate to nature in the city.

Participants were invited to engage with different aspects of the interior architecture of the Council's buildings, by imagining the scale of some of Dublin's tallest trees within the built environment. Using specific lengths of ribbon representing individual trees' heights, as defined by the Council's Tree Officer, Ludovic Beaumont.

Through this exercise, they moved through and occupied the Council's buildings in new ways, with the purpose of playing a game of word association as a closing exercise. In this game, participants were asked to respond to a list of six words; city, citizens, obedience, happy, nature and biodiversity, four of which were taken directly from Dublin City's Latin motto *Obedientia Civium Urbis Felicitas* or Happy the City Where Citizens Obey.

Collectively, a lexicon of new terminology and interpretations was generated, from which new translations of the motto are possible. Happy becomes Joyous, City becomes Land, Citizens becomes People, Obey becomes Collaborate, and so on and so forth. In this manner, infinite translations in both Irish and English become possible, which reflect the ever evolving spirit of Dublin.

In October 2025, a series of thirty six flags flew along the north and south banks of the river Liffey, from O'Donovan Rossa Bridge to the Millenium Bridge, highlighting some of these new translations in both languages. A publication was also made which, along with the other printed materials, will go to project stakeholders, including all elected member of the council, the executive management team and other key project stakeholders.

In addition to this, the artist made a series of photographs, *Imagine a Tree Fell Here*.

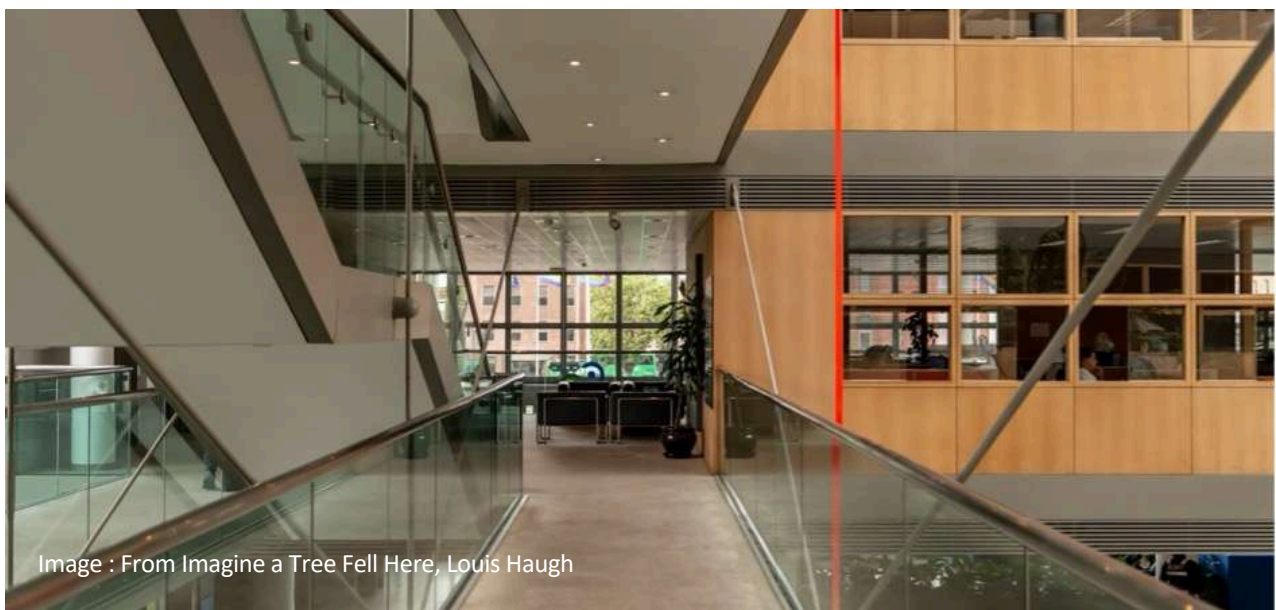


Image : From *Imagine a Tree Fell Here*, Louis Haugh





Image : Lord Mayor Ray McAdam, Louis Haugh, artwork and publication launch, Autumn 2025



Image : What Do Words Mean, Louis Haugh, Installation Image, Dublin Quays, Autumn 2025

## 5. EVALUATION REPORT, JOHN O'BRIEN

### Introduction

In 2024, Dublin City Council launched its Biodiversity Artist-in-Residence (AiR) programme with support from the Creative Ireland/Creative Climate Action Fund, with the aim to embed artistic practice within the organisational culture and to shift how staff think about nature and biodiversity.

The programme was structured as three consecutive six-month residencies, with each artist working inside council departments to cultivate new vocabulary and possibilities for cross-departmental collaboration.

DCC framed this residency as more than a conventional arts commission: it aspired to be a vehicle for organisational culture change, by inserting artists into everyday workflows, facilitating staff engagement, and helping to translate biodiversity into civic thinking rather than just policy rhetoric.

Over the course of their residencies, the three artists led encounters, workshops, and speculative investigations, they met and spoke with staff from multiple departments, and they created public artworks that reflect back to the institution how it understands nature, how it understands the city it serves, and how it understands itself.

The programme was explicitly aligned with DCC's publicly stated aim is to weave the language, attitudes, and practices of biodiversity more deeply into the council's functioning — thereby supporting the Climate Action Plan 2024–2029 (Climate Neutral Dublin 2030) via cultural means.

In an evaluation of an artist in residence programme designed to deliver a cultural change within the host organisation we need to consider not just the residency and the potential efficacy of artists and residencies as agents of change, but also the nature of the organisational host. We need to reflect both on the nature and effectiveness of art, artists, and artistic practice as agents of change in relationship with a host, and we need to reflect on the nature of that which they are asked to change. Far too often we consider the former but neglect the latter.

In this report, we explore what the residencies discovered about the organisational culture of DCC and evaluate what kinds of shifts have been achieved (in awareness, discourse, relationships) and where the limits remain (in structure, capacity, and institutional inertia).

We draw attention to the gap between symbolic visibility and systemic embedding, and propose how future iterations can move from art as intervention to art as foundational infrastructure within Dublin City Council.

## Executive Summary

### Purpose and Context

The Dublin City Council (DCC) Biodiversity Artist-in-Residence (AiR) programme was conceived as a cultural intervention within a complex bureaucratic system, seeking to explore how creative practice could illuminate and influence organisational culture, staff engagement, and institutional understanding of biodiversity. The project was conceived by Dr. Sabrina Dekker, then head of DCC's Climate Action team and Ray Yeates, Dublin City Council Arts Officer. Ruth Carroll, an independent curator and producer was contracted by Dublin City Council to manage the project.

This residency framed the artistic process as a diagnostic and developmental method - a way of revealing how people, policies, and systems interrelate, as opposed to a simple communication tool or an education and awareness campaign.

The project ran for 18 months across 2024 and 2025, and saw three artists "embedded" into Dublin City Council for three days each week. The first artist in residence was Rosie O'Reilly, followed by Luke Casserly, and then Louis Haugh.

### Summary of Findings

#### *Culture and Structure:*

The project surfaced a significant gap between DCC's espoused values (innovation, collaboration, sustainability) and its underlying assumptions (risk aversion, procedural rigidity, hierarchical control). The residency exposed these contradictions rather than resolving them, offering a mirror to the institution's own limits.

#### *Awareness and Attitudes:*

Survey results revealed strong consensus on the importance of biodiversity (100% positive agreement) but low operational awareness. Between 2024 and 2025, understanding of biodiversity deepened qualitatively - more nuanced definitions, stronger emotional engagement - yet participation remained low (under 1% of staff engaging with questionnaires and interviews).

#### *Behavioural and Relational Shifts:*

Staff who engaged directly with the artists reported experiences of connection, curiosity, and reflection. Departments such as Parks, Climate, and Comms demonstrated new cross-departmental relationships. However, these shifts were episodic rather than systemic - often dependent on individuals rather than embedded processes.

#### *Narrative and Symbolic Change:*

Internal communications and media materials reflected a shift in tone from awareness to kinship — from speaking about biodiversity to speaking with it. Yet the discourse remained institutionally framed, privileging visibility over structural change.

**Limitations and Barriers:** Absence of feedback loops or evaluation mechanisms to capture the project's ongoing impact. Underrepresentation of frontline staff, Finance, and HR in engagement activities. "Time poverty" cited as the main obstacle to reflection or innovation. Institutional tendency toward performative sustainability - activity over reflection.

### Key Insights

The residency operated less as a discrete project and more as an organisational probe or piece of action research. It revealed DCC as a system of competing values - committed to climate and creativity in rhetoric



but constrained by hierarchy and process. Cultural change was observable in language, relationships, and emotional tone, but not yet in systems or decision-making. This residency framed the artistic process as a diagnostic and developmental method - a way of revealing how people, policies, and systems interrelate, as opposed to a simple communication tool or an education and awareness campaign.

The project ran for 18 months across 2024 and 2025, and saw three artists “embedded” into Dublin City Council for three days each week. The first artist in residence was Rosie O’Reilly, followed by Luke. The artist’s process - relational, durational, and embodied - modelled an alternative organisational logic: one based on trust, attentiveness, and reciprocity rather than control or output. The process demonstrated that the process of art, its specific perspective and sensibility cannot be treated as instrumental, as an optional addition; it must be foundational – a part of the organisation’s DNA and present in every department, and evident in every process and decision rule. It must be understood as a way of reshaping relationships rather than delivering solutions. The same is true for climate and biodiversity.

### Recommendations for Future Development

**Leadership Endorsement and Modelling:** Senior managers need to actively participate in creative processes (e.g., walks, workshops) to signal legitimacy and model reflective leadership.

**Time and Design for Reflection:** Embed structured reflection sessions within project workflows (e.g., post-meeting 10-minute debriefs). Allocate time, not just resources, for sense-making.

**Creative Infrastructure:** Establish an internal fund or “creative lab” to support staff-led cultural initiatives that build on the residency’s learning and facilitate cross departmental work. This is a vital component in all learning and innovation organisation.

**Cross-Departmental Collaboration Framework:** Develop a light-touch collaboration tracker or dashboard to map and maintain new interdepartmental connections sparked by the project. Create a “time allowance” – a fixed number of days per year for staff to collaborate on innovative, creative ideas.

**Inclusive Engagement:** Extend future residencies to allow time to include all staff and embed creative practice. Consider a participatory approach to the residency.

**Narrative Continuity:** Use storytelling as an organisational learning tool - capturing staff and artist narratives of change to sustain visibility and shared meaning beyond project timelines.

**Strategic Alignment:** Integrate creative practice into DCC’s climate and transformation strategies as a foundational mode of thinking, not as an external intervention, and integrate climate action as foundational and not a departmental responsibility. Developing a design thinking approach throughout the organisation will support this.

### Conclusion

The DCC Biodiversity AiR demonstrated that cultural change begins not with directives or campaigns but with the creation of space - temporal, emotional, and relational - within which people can see their work and values differently. Its greatest achievement lies in its exposure of how bureaucratic systems encounter creativity: often defensively, sometimes curiously, occasionally transformed.

Future progress depends on institutional willingness to recognise that the ability of people to change is determined and constrained by the culture of the organisation itself, and that cultural change must be embraced at all levels of the organisation. Future progress also depends on the understanding art is not a

tool for communication or reform, it is a means of thinking together differently - an essential capacity for any organisation facing complex ecological and social challenges.

## Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation was not built into the project from the outset and this is a significant gap in the overall project design. Consequently the first residency was complete before formal evaluation commenced and the evaluation process concluded at the end of the residencies. The methodology evolved over time as it had to play catch-up, and it cannot capture medium or long term impacts as in order to do so evaluation would need to be ongoing for at least a 12 month period after the completion of the residencies.

This evaluation used a mixed-method, multi-source design to capture both the tangible and intangible dimensions of change:

- Document and Discourse Analysis: Internal documents, contracts, charters, meeting logs, and publicity materials (2023–2025) were examined to trace the evolution of language, participation, and institutional framing of biodiversity.
- Surveys: Two staff questionnaires (2024 and 2025) provided quantitative and qualitative data on awareness, attitudes, and engagement.
- Interviews and Artist Reflections: Semi-structured interviews with the artists, and with staff who engaged and/or supported the project. These were recorded, thematically coded, and analysed.
- Observation: The evaluator discussed the ongoing development of the project with the curator, attended events, and participated in public walks to understand lived organisational behaviours and informal practices.
- This triangulated approach combined ethnographic and analytic lenses to identify both behavioural indicators (e.g., collaboration, participation) and symbolic or narrative shifts (e.g., new ways of talking about nature, creativity and responsibility).

## Project Inception; Intended Logic And Underlying Assumptions

The Dublin City Council Biodiversity Artists-in-Residence Programme was conceived as a two-year initiative intended to embed artistic practice within the operations of a large public authority, positioning artists and their practice as a catalyst for organisational culture change leading to new thinking about biodiversity and climate action.

The programme was funded through the Creative Ireland Creative Climate Action Fund and delivered in partnership with Dublin City Council's Climate Action Team. The residency was developed under the guidance of Dr. Sabrina Dekker of the Climate Action Team and the Dublin City Arts Officer Ray Yeates. An experienced curator and arts producer, Ruth Carroll, was contracted by Dublin City Council to manage the project.

The project appointed three artists-in-residence, namely Rosie O'Reilly, Luke Casserly, and Louis Haugh. According to the inception documents the artists were required to work sequentially and across all departments, engaging Council staff and elected members in creative dialogue about nature, place, and sustainability.

The contract with Creative Ireland specified a number of key activities, reiterated in the project charter. Essentially the residencies were required to:

- Conduct research and engagement with staff across departments on biodiversity themes.

- Initiate conversations, workshops, and creative interventions aimed at integrating biodiversity awareness into daily work practices.
- Develop artistic outputs - ranging from zines, public events, and archives to participatory artworks - that would make biodiversity visible within the Council's "culture".
- Link internal organisational activity with Dublin's broader environmental and climate strategies.

The Contract and charter both specify the intended outputs, and these included

- Three high-profile artist residencies embedded within DCC.
- Staff workshops, "creative consultations", public presentations, and internal communications materials.
- Documentation, learning templates, and models for embedding "artistic thinking" into local government systems.

The intended result or outcome of these activities and outputs were imagined along a short-to-long term axis.

In the short term the project was expected to:

- raise awareness of biodiversity across DCC staff and to
- increase the number and quality of conversations about sustainability and creativity between departments.

In the medium-term there is an expectation that the residencies will:

- provoke shifts in organisational behaviour that will lead to an organisational understanding of biodiversity as a shared civic value as opposed to a specialist domain. As foundational as opposed to departmental

The long-term aspiration of the programme is:

- that artistic, imaginative, and systems-based approaches will be integrated into DCC policy development and decision-making.

It is important to state that this evaluation can only speculate as to the efficacy of the project in the medium or long term as the evaluation process was concluded at the end of the residencies.

## Underlying Assumptions and Tensions

It is vital to state at the outset that the aspirations in the original contract document are based on a commonly held but deeply flawed assumption that "art" and "creativity" can be used like some kind of medical intervention. That a limited period of exposure to artists and their practice will somehow alter how an organisation functions. This flawed assumption indicates a critical misunderstanding of both the nature of art and artistic practice and the complex workings of organisational culture. It is a tribute to the climate action team and the residency team that they produced such excellent results despite this fundamental design flaw.

The extent of this design flaw can be felt in the optimistic assumptions underpinning the projects logic as set out in the contract and the subsequent charter:

1. That embedding three artists within a 6,000-person bureaucracy could trigger systemic cultural change.
2. That DCC staff and managers would have both capacity and appetite for engaging with art as a form of problem-solving.
3. That artistic inquiry could be aligned with - and influence - bureaucratic processes without being subsumed by them.
4. That “autonomy of artistic practice” could effectively coexist with compliance, risk management, hierarchical sign-off structures, and departmental silos.

These assumptions point toward the contradiction at the heart of the project’s inception documents. While the stated purpose emphasised “organisational transformation,” the mechanisms proposed - residencies, workshops, artistic artifacts - are symbolic in nature and small-scale in practice. They are ideally suited to generating reflection within participants but are not appropriate tools by themselves for large scale organisational reform.

The language of “win/wins” and “creative solutions” within the project documents reflects a managerialist, utilitarian optimism; a belief that “art” is an optional additive, an “add-on” that can somehow bridge entrenched divisions between culture, policy, and operations simply through proximity and dialogue; that attending a single workshop, witnessing an artist’s work, or having a “creative conversation” can somehow change a vast and complex organisational ecosystem in the short term. “Art”, or artistic practice, or “creativity” - like Climate and Biodiversity - are not optional extras that can be strapped onto an organisation. They are foundational. If they are to be effective, they must be embedded in organisational culture at the deepest level across all departments and levels, and they must be ever present.

## Critical Reflection

From an evaluation standpoint it is important to acknowledge that the programme’s inception as expressed in the contract was conceptually ambitious but operationally under-defined. The description of the project in this document grafted the language of systemic change onto the structure of an artist’s residency. The resulting logic model arguably confused the outputs (the creative engagements, the workshops, walks and conversations) with the desired outcomes (institutional transformation), without acknowledging the need for an intermediate framework of executive buy-in, organisational learning or accountability.

The idea of deploying artists and art-work in this hyper instrumentalised way is popular within several policy agendas, and is mostly well intentioned given the emphasis on creativity and collaboration. However, the approach set out here in the language of the inception documents reveals a broader dilemma in these kinds of experiments: the expectation that aesthetic (or artistic) labour can repair institutional systems.

The logic model underpinning the project design assumed that creative presence alone could reconfigure a vast bureaucratic culture, yet provided few mechanisms for translating artistic insight into institutional change.

It is interesting to note that theories of innovation popular in business schools have already identified the necessary changes that need to be made to organisational structure and culture if creative innovation and continuous learning is to take place. These theories understand that creativity and innovation practices must be matched by organisational restructuring if they are to have any meaningful effect. It is

remarkable that this body of knowledge tends to be ignored when we ask artist's residencies to effect organisational change.

Consequently, the challenge for this evaluation has been to separate the genuine achievements of the artists' work from the inflated policy narrative that framed the project and surrounded their appointment. In this context, the residencies can be understood as tests of possibility - practical experiments or action research in how art might, or could, enter the daily life of a local authority. The questions then are, what did the residencies learn about the organisation, and what is their evaluation of the organisation?

## Evaluation Of Delivery

If we evaluate the project against the required deliverables, that is the activities, outputs and outcomes established before the residences began and set out in the Creative Ireland contract and the subsequent Project Charter, we can ascertain the extent to which the project "succeeded".

In summary they are:

Category	What's Required / Expected	Fulfilment Summary
Activities	3 residencies; staff engagement; conversations, encounters and consultations; research across departments; benchmarking; documentation; participation in comms/PR (inward and outward facing); operate within DCC systems and regulations	FULLY MET. 3 artists embedded in DCC; extensive staff and cross-departmental engagement. Over 90 meetings, 250 participants, 18 departments and more. Demonstrates clear collaboration and reflective exchange
Outputs	Residency projects; artistic artefacts/events; workshops; formal meetings; PR assets; evaluation & learning materials; final report	FULLY MET. multiple artistic and documentary works including River Walk with cassette tape and app, archive development, 30 immersive performances, presentations of work, flags, videos, photographs, books, new design assets, public and digital dissemination.
Outcomes	Organisational/behavioural change; deeper understanding of biodiversity with staff, management and elected officials; evidence of learning; models for future practice; policy influence; improved perception by the organisation of significance of biodiversity and role of artistic/creative practice.	PARTIAL/LIMITED. Evidence in interviews of conversational shifts within DCC among individuals, pointing toward a growing interdepartmental awareness. Organisational/policy-level change not yet visible. Evidence of organisation wide culture change not yet visible.

A full, detailed list is available in Appendix II

An analysis of project records indicates that:

Over 90 formal and informal meetings were logged by the curator involving herself, the artists and staff throughout DCC. These included Project briefings, staff consultations, artist introductions, research exchanges, policy discussions, site visits, and conference participation.

Over 250 individual participants were directly engaged through these meetings.

Almost 60% of meetings included participants from multiple departments, indicating consistent interdepartmental engagement.

There were regular research and information-sharing meetings indicating potential internal learning loops. The meeting agendas included biodiversity mainstreaming, greening, rivers, archives, communications, organisational change, food systems, EU Net Zero Cities, creative engagement, and interdepartmental collaboration.

Over 18 departments and sections in DCC, including Climate Action, Parks, Active Travel, Planning, Roads, Housing, Communications, HR, Corporate Services, Flood Projects and others were engaged.

There was significant cross-sector collaboration with academia including UCD, TCD, and NCAD, with international partners in San Francisco, EU, and OECD, and with the Office of Public Works and various NGOs and community groups.

There were some meetings logged with Assistant Chief Executives, Executive Managers, indicating that the project had internal legitimacy, however the number of meetings indicate a low level of effective buy-in. An observation supported by interview data.

So, in terms of the desired activities and outputs the requirements for both were fully met.

However, as stated in the above table the evidence for the desired outcome of organisation-wide culture change and related changes in behaviour, understanding, policy etc. is partial and limited.

It is possible that the impact will grow over time but that would require a longer evaluation period. It is important to state that this partial and limited success is not a shortcoming or a failure of the residencies. It is the result of the underlying assumption that three artist residencies could effectively alter an organisation the size of DCC by challenging and inspiring individual staff members. The assumption that experiencing how an artist thinks and works will somehow add to each individual's capability and motivation to such an extent that their behaviour will change and thus lead to wider organisational changes. This assumption ignores the fact that the dominant character in this drama is the organisation itself: its structure, culture, processes, and artifacts compose a powerful personality that will remain dominant if it is not addressed directly.

## **The COM-B Model and Organisational Culture**

The COM-B model is deployed in Creative Climate Change II (Nyhan et al UCC) which presents key insights and learnings from UCC's engagement with Creative Climate Action projects. In the interests of consistency and adding to the body of knowledge it is important that we address the model here.

The COM-B model proposes that for any behaviour (B) to occur, three conditions must be met: Capability (C) – are we psychologically and physically capable of the desired behaviour? Opportunity (O) - are the



external social and physical conditions that make the behaviour possible in place; and Motivation (M) – are the internal reflective and automatic processes that direct our behaviour in place? The model suggests that individual behaviour can be shifted by making changes in one or more of these areas.

The COM-B model is a popular framework in change programmes. It's a clear, simple heuristic and it allows us to design interventions that target specific areas. For example we can deliver programmes that aim to build knowledge and skills (capability), change environments and incentives (opportunity), or shift attitudes and values (motivation).

However, when we apply COM-B to cultural or organisational change we run into some problems. COM-B asks us to focus on individual actors as opposed to organisational culture, power structures, institutional routines, or hidden assumptions. It treats behaviour as individual agency controlled by three levers, rather than as embedded in, defined, and constrained by collective cultural systems.

The model acknowledges external opportunity but frames it in terms of external constraints and enablers, as opposed to the deeper organisational logic, norms, time systems, hierarchies, or structural inertia that sub-consciously define and shape many behaviours as well as individual sense of capability and motivation, inside large institutions.

The model lacks an explicit picture of organisational culture and so it makes no allowance for the way that behaviours become normative or routinised within a culture. In local government contexts especially, where procedural rules, risk management, and hierarchical logics dominate, simply increasing capability or altering immediate opportunity may not shift underlying assumptions or collective meaning.

### What We Learn From the Residencies about Behaviour Change

The interviews conducted in the course of this evaluation suggest that "Opportunity" is determined by culture, and this cultural determination shapes both "Capability" and "Motivation" in subtle ways. The interviews with staff and artists referenced the "30-minute attention economy", hierarchies of access, and departmental silos as constraints. Despite capability or motivation the culture of work-time and visibility constrains potential behaviours. As one respondent put it:

"If you stop to talk about something that isn't your task, it looks like you're not working."

The interview and questionnaire data indicates that staff value biodiversity and creativity so we could say they are "motivated". However, the work of the residencies was perceived as self-contained or as "extra" or "optional". Individual motivation was certainly present but institutional pressures - meeting schedules, role expectations- undermine it. As one respondent put it:

"We already have scientists and planners; what we don't have is the pause - the reminder that nature is emotional, not just data."

The interview responses suggest that the Artists modelled new ways of thinking, but those same respondents point toward a lack of clarity about how biodiversity related to their roles, about what counts as "work," or about responsibility beyond a job description. These barriers are not only about training or experiencing new ways of thinking, rather they indicate deep assumptions that situate artists and their way of thinking and being as "...external, not embedded."

Even where capability and motivation existed, the desired behaviour (cross-departmental collaboration

biodiversity-informed decision-making) remained limited or constrained, suggesting again that culture determines which behaviours become feasible or normalised, not simply whether capability and opportunity exist.

Perhaps one of the most significant achievements of the residencies is that they demonstrated that organisational culture shapes all three COM-B components, but is not accounted for in the model. It is the culture that determines what counts as “opportunity” (time, permission, resources), what counts as “capability” (who is allowed to act), and how “motivation” is expressed (what is rewarded or valued). COM-B is a good model for thinking about individual behavioural levers, but organisational change asks us to focus on culture, structure, and power. The residencies point us toward three strategic and diagnostic lenses to assist with this:

- Permission-time: “opportunity” inside an organisation means sanctioned time and access, not just environmental tweaks.
- Relational capability: how can people connect across silos? Are there effective formal or informal pathways or are such connections blocked by power structures, time pressure, definitions of work etc.
- Narrative and logic change: how can we shift underlying assumptions (what counts as work? who counts as collaborator?) so that motivation is experienced as legitimate, and is rewarded.

If we think of these residencies as Action Research, designed to understand and surface the elements of the organisation’s culture and not as behavioural interventions, then we can identify the actual outcomes of the project.

The residencies demonstrated that artistic practice matters because it disrupts norms, surfaces hidden assumptions, and enables dialogue, not simply because it nudges individuals toward new behaviours. In short, the key learning is that culture determines the Opportunity, and without addressing it and changing the nature of the Opportunity, Capability and Motivation alone cannot deliver change.

In short, the residencies did not just build capability or tweak opportunity; they highlighted that capability, opportunity, and motivation are primarily determined and constrained by culture. It follows that we cannot simply outsource organisational culture change to individual actions: rather we need to recognise and acknowledge the shape of the culture, identify its drivers, and set about redesigning them.

## **Residency Narratives – Art, Bureaucracy And Biodiversity In Dialogue**

Although the proposition underlying these residencies is compelling - that embedding artists within the day-to-day machinery of local government could act as a catalyst for new ecological awareness, cross-departmental collaboration, and organisational change - the contract and charter offer no definitions, no models of organisational culture or organisational change, and no clear statement of what the reciprocal role of the organisation was to be in this creative relationship. Rather - to use a metaphor from one of the residencies - the assumption appears to have been that these residencies would enter the organisational system like an invasive species and take permanent root, altering the system quickly and permanently. By not setting out the active role of the organisation the proposition ignores the anti-bodies of bureaucratic processes, structure, function, leadership, culture, internal definitions of work, the economy of time etc.

Despite these limitations, the artists themselves grasped the opportunity granted by “...autonomy of artistic practice” established in the charter and each artist - Rosie O’Reilly, Luke Casserly, and Louis Haugh - entered the organisation with their own methods of inquiry, shaped by their own artistic practice and professional experience. Each of them worked within the same structural conditions (limited duration,

partial access to staff, etc.), but their methodologies offered different forms of engagement, reflection, and research.

Among the key learnings from this project is the understanding that residencies of this kind are primarily a form of research, valuable for what they can reveal about the organisation to itself, and that there are specific research models that can be drawn on and adapted in service of such residencies (such as embodied research, action research, auto ethnography, etc). This model of residency as research is an essential first step in designing organisational change, but is not the principal mechanism of change.

#### Rosie O'Reilly- Abhainn - Listening To The Hidden Waterscape

Rosie O'Reilly's work on this residency was built on rigorous and sustained research into the buried and visible rivers of the city - the Poddle, the Bradogue, and others - asking what those rivers might tell us about how Dublin governs its natural systems.

The research allowed her to build strong relationships with staff members in operations and flood-defence, with parks and drainage divisions, and with the city archivists. Alongside this she engaged the wider public, collecting stories, field recordings and personal memories of waterways as a means of identifying the archival "silences" that persist in the city's record of its own waterways.

The approach treated water not as subject matter but as collaborator. The rivers were imagined and related to as witnesses - sources of collective memory. For example, every fragment of the Liffey's flow, every culverted stream, carried a record of decisions as well as neglect. What seems to have emerged from this creative research practice was that if we attend to water in this way we enter into an ethical and political relationship with the city itself.

This research informed the final artistic work: Abhainn.

Abhainn is an innovative artistic experience that treats the city as both canvas and gallery; it is a narrated, "sound-inflected" eleven-kilometre walk through the city, composed of seven distinct "episodes" developed in collaboration with musician Colm Ó Cíosóig.

The artist described the work in an Irish Times interview as "...a story being told, a song being written, and a walk being done". This narrated walk invites participants to slow down and experience the city as a living organism rather than a built surface. The audio is available both through the Dublin Discovery Trails app and in analogue cassette form on request. For the artist the existence of both digital recording and cassette tape appears to be deliberate, a hope that an object exchanged by hand will build trust and might endure across decades, whereas an app is both impersonal and ephemeral.

If we look at the residency in total as a form of research we can see how the artist's journey through the various departments, her connections with individuals at all levels of the organisation, was both a provocation and a diagnosis. Mapping hidden waterways, tracing culverts beneath streets, and sharing those maps with staff in different departments exposed the gaps in the Council's own internal picture of the city.

The research also surfaced the organisational reality that departments responsible for parks, drainage, heritage and planning all operate along parallel lines, with no significant mechanisms for joint reflection. It raised questions about where responsibility for the city's natural systems actually lies, and how care is distributed - or disavowed - across departments.

The artist's process was described by staff as “disarming” and “quietly persuasive,” and built on small acts of reciprocity - walking together, exchanging knowledge, returning to sites, deep listening etc. These behaviours and values demonstrated what an art-led organisational encounter looks like when it's more concerned with trust, care, and depth in relationship over spectacle or immediate outcomes.

The artist herself has made the point that the people she encountered - the engineers, operations crews, biodiversity officers etc. - demonstrated a real environmental awareness, but felt constrained by departmental remits.

However, by circulating archive queries, convening site visits, and connecting colleagues who rarely met, the residency enacted the very relational labour that the Council's siloed structures inhibit. The artist's work produced what we can think of as a temporary “infrastructure of attention.” Bringing people with different resources and expertise together to attend to a specific cross departmental issue. In some ways this momentary reorganisation of attention is just as valuable an output as the soundwalk itself.

As a public artwork, Abhainn is an immersive experience: it reimagines the city as both canvas and archive, and the listener as both witness and participant. Abhainn does not intervene in budgets or planning protocols; it intervenes in perception. It renders the city, and by extension the organisation that manages it, visible to itself as a living system. Whether that perceptual shift can translate into institutional change remains uncertain - but the residency's quiet persistence, its analogue tactility and its insistence on duration, suggest a more patient politics at work: one that understands culture not as intervention but as foundation.

This residency achieved all its formal outputs: digital and analogue media, soundscapes, public walks and high-profile launch events.

It is a tribute to the work that to many of the people interviewed in the course of this evaluation, the artist Rosie O'Reilly is now known within Dublin City Council as “the River Lady.”

### Luke Casserly – Walking, Listening And The Temporality Of Change

Luke Casserly's original plan was to shake hands with everybody who worked in DCC.

However, this simple ambition met with a range of organisational challenges, from architecture through organisational structure, and culture.

Casserly is a theatre artist and his practice is built on performance and what can be described as “environmental dramaturgy”. His solution to the initial challenge was elegant and deceptively simple. The commons walk was a series of slow, guided walks through city spaces undertaken with Council staff.

Two people from different departments were invited on each walk and in many cases these people were strangers to each other. When they met with Luke they were given a choice of possible walks they could go on. Luke shared a secret instruction with each person (e.g. pay particular attention to seagulls), and in the course of the walk through gentle conversation, paying attention to the environment, and some guided reflections and performance practices (closing our eyes and listening for distant sounds, being conscious of breathing etc.) built connections between the participants and revealed the city in a different way.

The walks can be understood as soft interventions into an everyday work routine. (Interestingly many staff were concerned that they would have to “clock out” to take part because they couldn't see how this kind of reflective practice could be considered “work”). Staff members found themselves walking, listening,

and noticing in parts of the city they would normally travel through in a hurry. Casserly is skilled in pointing out the poetry in this experience, the sound of trees against masonry, the temperature changes between hard surface and grass, or the smell of the river after rain, all of these were used as prompts for conversation, forging relationships between people who may never have met before, and knew little of each other's work.

This seemingly ordinary experience was built on the principles of immersive and site responsive theatre, and executed with a skill that rendered the "performance" invisible. Casserly's role was part host, part ethnographer, part dramaturg: essentially he "staged" attentiveness, creating a collective noticing that made the habitual strange again. The simplicity of this design and the ease of its execution belied the depth and range of theatrical practice informing it.

These walks attempted to "reframe" conversation. People from different departments and different grades simply went for a walk together, away from desks and departmental boundaries. Engineers, planners, administrative officers, architects, communications experts spoke together about the sensory and emotional dimensions of the city with a surprising ease. As one participant put it "It was the first time I'd spoken about biodiversity without feeling I was in a meeting,"

The simple act of slowing down became a critique of bureaucratic speed. Several respondents spoke about how there is "no time" in the organisation for this kind of reflective, considered, personal engagement, and many others expressed anxiety over how this activity could be considered "work". These twin elements of "bureaucratic speed" and the economic experience of time are among the key findings of this work.

These walks had an immediate, emotional impact on participants. They described feeling "refreshed," "reconnected," and "unguarded". The responses suggest that careful attention can become an organisational method, that simply walking together can become a new way of working. Casserly's subtle piece of immersive, site responsive theatre allowed him to navigate the institution through hospitality; even his concluding performance where he performed the "voice" of Japanese Knotweed and discussed the language of "invasive species" culminated in a sharing of home brewed Kombucha (made from knotweed).

#### Louis Haugh – Rewriting The Motto: Disruption, Language, And Local Agency

Louis Haugh approached Dublin City Council as both participant and provocateur, using language, play, and visual gesture to explore the codes of civic identity and bureaucratic habit. He noticed a level of confusion and uncertainty initially about what an artist does and what an artist is. However he also identified a "willingness to engage with something that they weren't quite sure what it was or where it was going"

His work articulated that we don't need to be 'creative' or to 'understand art' to be involved and that the context in which we engage with art changes over time, and therefore the way we view or read art also changes. He states that the residency gave him "...the opportunity to work and collaborate with people at the top of their field working in the council across areas of biodiversity, ecology, climate science, city architecture, parks and planning, etc... Was immensely valuable and a key component of my time on the residency."

Multiple staff members over the course of the residency asked to have a conversation about flags, national identity, and personal connection to the city because of what they were seeing happening around

the country and the connections they made to the work that they were collaborating on with Louis. Within Dublin City Council, the project unfolded as a sustained exercise in institutional ethnography, diagnosing the organisation's rhythms, reflexes, and symbolic vocabulary. Haugh embedded himself among staff in City Hall, Wood Quay, and satellite offices, running short 30-minute participatory workshops designed to fit around work schedules and test the limits of attention. These sessions began as small acts of disruption: a length of brightly coloured ribbon stretched across a corridor, a question posed in passing, a clipboard exchanged. These simple, physical invited staff to pause, to reflect, and to talk.

Working from data provided by the city's Tree Officer, Haugh translated tree measurements into bodily time and space: participants compared the height or circumference of Dublin's oldest trees in walking seconds rather than metres, discovering that an oak's girth might take 45 seconds to walk around. In these moments of embodied scale, the city's ecology entered the workplace as something tangible rather than abstract. As one staff participant put it, "I didn't know what biodiversity felt like until I could walk it." The workshops then turned toward language. Through word-association exercises, participants explored five civic terms — city, happy, citizens, obedience, and either nature or biodiversity. The resulting responses revealed a striking pattern: "biodiversity" provoked technical, multi-word descriptions, while "nature" elicited emotional, sensory, and communal ones. This linguistic divide, mirrored across multiple sessions, exposed how policy language can distance people from the living systems it seeks to protect. For Haugh, the exercise became an index of the Council's cultural ecology — an organisation fluent in systems and metrics, but less practiced in the language of feeling and care.

These micro-encounters culminated in a public artwork entitled *What Do Words Mean*, installed in October 2025 along thirty-six flagpoles on the River Liffey. Each flag bore fragments of new mottoes suggested by Council staff during workshops — poetic alternatives that imagined a city defined by reciprocity, ecology, and collective agency rather than obedience. The installation inverted the visual grammar of civic authority: instead of proclaiming compliance, the flags fluttered with words of curiosity, stewardship, and interdependence.

Haugh's approach balanced irony and generosity. He did not reject the old motto outright but treated it as an archaeological find, a text through which to read the city's inherited hierarchies of power and value. By inviting staff to rewrite the motto, he transformed a symbol of control into a participatory act of redefinition. In doing so, he also illuminated the conditions that limit change: the bureaucratic "30-minute attention span," the difficulty of accessing senior management beyond Grade 8, and a procurement system that "prioritises monetary value over ethos." These observations, delivered without rancour, expose how structures of control persist even in an institution that aspires to climate leadership.

Haugh's artistry lies in the precision of his disruptions. His "busking model" of engagement — spontaneous, minimal, and mobile — turned the corridors of DCC into a site of civic reflection. The playful ribbon and the clipboard became tools for reorganising space and hierarchy, creating encounters where curiosity could outweigh protocol. His insight, distilled from months of fieldwork, is that agency begins locally: the belief that small, situated actions - not cutting grass, leaving leaves for insects, noticing a tree's scale - are the true building blocks of ecological culture.

*What Do Words Mean* thus operates on two registers. Publicly, it offered a spectacular yet humane rebranding of the city's civic identity — flags of resistance and care fluttering above the river. Internally, it offered a mirror: an invitation for the Council to see itself anew, to recognise the affective and linguistic infrastructures through which it governs. In both, Haugh's work demonstrates that transformation in local government will not come through slogans of innovation but through the slow, patient work of redefining words, habits, and gestures.



## What Do We Learn About The Organisational Culture

The work carried out by the three artists clearly demonstrated that public officials can engage with biodiversity not only as a regulatory or technical issue, but as an aesthetic, emotional, and ethical relationship.

The experiences of the artists bring into sharp focus the tension between symbolic visibility (encounters in corridors, lunchtime walks, workshops, presentations etc.) and real systemic change. The artifacts they created during the residency attracted significant media and public attention, however there were no mechanisms in place as part of the residencies for integrating these insights into operational frameworks. The assumption is that the presence of the artists alone will change individual behaviours, and so responsibility for integrating biodiversity is outsourced to individual actions and behaviours without acknowledging that individual actions and behaviours are constrained by the structure and culture of the organisation.

From an evaluation perspective the residencies achieved their required outcomes as set out in the contract and charter. They raised awareness for the duration of their stay, they sparked cross departmental conversations, and produced excellent artistic artifacts. However, they did not deliver the fundamental changes in organisational culture, imagined in the project's logic model. Such a transformational change requires the organisation itself to engage with and embrace the change process, rather than inserting three people into an organisation and letting them get on with it.

Having said that, these residencies, as well as producing excellent artistic results, can be understood as research laboratories within a civic context, a sustained experiment in developing a cultural infrastructure for climate action that values imagination and connection. Each residency, in its own way, reframed the Council's relationship to the living systems it governs.

The real challenge for DCC lies in translating these artistic insights into institutional learning, making these practices foundational to work and decision making, and not additional or optional.

## Artists' Perspectives - Learning From Inside The Institution

The following section is based on interaction with the artifacts produced, attendance at workshops and presentations, and interviews with the staff, climate action team, and the artists themselves. It is an attempt to understand the lived experience of the residency and to capture the perceptions of the organisation and its culture. All quotes are anonymised.

Each of the artists spoke about a sense of cautious curiosity, excited by the opportunity to embed their practice within a large civic organisation and curious as to what that could look like. When prompted to consider the task of organisation culture change the response ranged from scepticism that three residencies could rewire organisational culture to a surprise that that was even part of the brief.

Taken together there is a collective sense that the role of the artist is not that of the internal reformer or biodiversity campaigner envisioned in the project's inception documents, but rather of what one participant called an "embedded disruptor" - someone working within the system to create "micro opportunities" for reflection and alternative ways of seeing.

"I really just see my role as embedded in that council system... to provoke thought... to create micro opportunities... to stop somebody in their tracks... there's not just an A and a B way... there's also C, D, F and G."

This reframing is important because it illustrates how the artists redefined both the purpose and the scale of their artistic work. Rather than transforming the organisation wholesale, the artists imagined their contribution to be the creation of small, sensory, relational openings in the everyday life of the bureaucracy. The artists' focus is not a managerial focus on measurable outputs, but a creative focus on interrupting habits of thought, creating and holding spaces for imaginative attention inside a system structured around efficiency, compliance, and delivery.

It was noted in the course of the interviews that many of the staff they encountered assumed initially that they were "...there to promote biodiversity." We can understand this as illustrating a fundamental misunderstanding between artistic inquiry and public communications within DCC's municipal culture. As was stated clearly in the interviews.

"People assume you're there to promote biodiversity... which is not what I'm there for. I'm an artist. There's a tension between activist promotion and making creative artwork."

This was a recurrent theme: the artists understood themselves as bringing ways of thinking, not messages to disseminate. Their work sought to reveal new textures of institutional life, not to broadcast policy slogans or "paint a mural".

### Nature Vs Biodiversity

The interviews all mention the use of language - how words shape inclusion, meaning, and engagement. They discovered that, in their interactions with staff, that the term biodiversity, although accurate, was interpreted as a technical or scientific term and elicited an emotionally distant response, whereas using the word nature generated warmth and immediacy.

"Responses to 'biodiversity' were technical — multiple words, lists, things more than people — whereas 'nature' brought out plants, animals, air, earth, and community."

This linguistic distinction is not minor. Biodiversity belongs to the vocabulary of regulation and compliance; nature belongs to the realm of feeling, relationship, and care. The artists' experiments with language suggest that effective internal engagement requires moving from scientific abstraction to relational language, moving from talking about ecosystems to talking about belonging and connection.

Within institutions that pride themselves on technical expertise, this kind of reframing is almost a political act. It challenges the assumption that professional knowledge is always rational, measurable, and detached. This would suggest that if DCC wants to engage its workforce deeply with environmental values, it must first re-humanise the organisational language - which in itself is a significant cultural change.

### Tactics Of Engagement – The 30 Minute Bureaucracy

A striking feature of all three residencies is the relationship between the artist's ideas and the rhythms of DCC's organisational culture - what was described in the interviews as "...the 30-minute bureaucracy." The Council's work culture was experienced by the residency teams as characterised by packed schedules, meeting-heavy days, and departmental silos, with little room for extended engagement. Staff members were, in some cases, uncertain if they had to clock out if they were engaging with the artists, not fully convinced that these engagements could be described as work. The artists responded by designing short, portable, low-barrier interactions: quick encounters that could fit into coffee breaks, corridors, or lunch hours.

The “busking model,” performed brief creative sessions in high-traffic areas rather than waiting for formal invitations. Workshops were intentionally capped at thirty minutes because “people said they couldn’t spare more.” Walks, encounters and presentations were scheduled for lunchtime, and so on. These micro-formats were necessary responses to the time constraints of bureaucratic life.

“The 30-minute mobile sessions were chosen because most staff say they can’t spare more time... longer sessions only attract the already converted.”

This insight is significant for future programme design as it suggests that organisational learning within public bodies may depend as much on how we structure time and attention as on content. In other words, if the Council’s learning windows are small, then its change processes must also be designed to fit that scale. What is also interesting here is how unprepared the ground was for the artists - why were so many staff unclear as to the purpose? Why was there anxiety around time and participation?

### Structural Resistance And Support

The interviews paint a picture of DCC as a complex, hierarchical system whose size and procedures both enable and limit creative engagement and experiment. The interviews note with admiration the dedication of individual staff and the openness, energy, and imagination of the Climate Action Team, but they also capture a frustration at structural barriers and procedural frictions: inaccessible senior leadership, procurement systems that privilege cost over value, payment delays, HR confusion, uncertainty over access permissions, and buildings that physically embody rank and separation.

“Struggled to engage senior staff above grade 7 or 8...”

“...procurement prioritises monetary value... payment delays... lack of professional support for freelancers...”

“The building’s labyrinth design, small lifts, desk placement by grade... restrict informal exchanges.” Having said that, the interviews all express real appreciation for the administrative and communications support provided. The Climate Action Team and the curator provided real support and advocacy. It was noted that it was the first time work in this context had been effectively scaffolded rather than merely tolerated.

“First time I’ve had this kind of system of support... emails, press, all previously on me.”

Having said that there was also an element of procedural friction leading to payment delays, HR confusion, and uncertainty around access permissions.

### What Do We Learn About Artists In Residence

From an evaluation perspective what emerges from the interviews and the work produced is that the artists acted collectively as institutional ethnographers, mapping how the organisation’s culture operates inside DCC. The interviews capture the rhythms, hierarchies, and emotional undercurrents that shape organisational behaviour.

What we can learn from their reflections is that artists-in-residence programmes need to be understood as research or diagnostic practices as opposed to instruments of transformation. They are ways of learning how and what an institution thinks and feels, and how it changes.

In this sense, the residencies’ contribution lies not in altering DCC’s policies but in documenting its internal

ecology. Their experiences invite a redefinition of success: not culture change as compliance with new norms, but culture change as increased institutional self-awareness — the capacity to see one's own systems, metaphors, and limitations more clearly.

All art work is relational, and in the case of these residencies the artists built relationships with staff but also with the organisation itself. The key learning is that if the organisation does not have the systems in place to support and sustain that relationship then the impact of the residency will be limited. It is interesting that the observations captured in the interviews echoes the broader literature on public sector innovation and organisational change, which has long recognised that hierarchical systems are not change-friendly, and organisational structure determines its culture to a very large extent.

## **Staff Perspectives - Inside The Organisation's Response**

The evaluation of the artists' work and experiences over the course of the residency characterises them as institutional ethnographers, or to put it another way as people embedded in an organisational culture observing and documenting the everyday elements and processes of that culture from within: its hierarchies, how it defines work and manages time, its languages, its emotional texture, its values and atmospheres.

The responses from the staff on the other hand, captured through interviews and questionnaires, describe how the elements and processes of the culture are rationalised, maintained, and occasionally subverted by those working inside it.

From the staff perspective the organisational culture emerges as a large and complex organism that is good-hearted, and socially committed, occasionally adaptive, but constrained by inherited rhythms of bureaucracy and managerialism, and a structure that silos knowledge and expertise, resisting cross boundary thinking and deep collaboration

### **How The Residencies Were Experienced And Understood**

Interview responses from available staff members suggest a broadly shared understanding of the residency programme as an internal experiment in making climate and biodiversity conversations feel "more human, more interesting, and more reachable." The residencies were described as "a gentler, more interesting approach that draws in people who wouldn't otherwise be in that climate space," and "a new dimension for the Council — embedding creativity into how we think about biodiversity."

This kind of understanding contrasts with the ambitious rhetoric of "organisational transformation" in the original project charter. Rather than experiencing a transformational culture change, staff experienced a modest and grounded awareness-building through creative encounters. This reflects how the artists themselves defined their roles — as catalysts for reflection, not policy reformers or organisational change agents.

Staff also identified language as a key barrier as well as an opportunity. Several remarked that "people switch off when they hear 'biodiversity,'" preferring the warmth and familiarity of "nature". This matches the artists' feedback, that found biodiversity evoked technical distance, while nature activated care and community. Both groups seem to point toward the same insight: engagement begins with emotion and an affective language that invites people in, not with instruction.

### **The Shape Of The Work – Adapting The 30 Minute Bureaucracy**

The staff interviews paint a picture of an organisational environment governed by what one respondent

called “a 30-minute attention economy” (no doubt the inspiration for the artist’s “30 minute bureaucracy” observation). Meetings appear to be constant; the calendar is full; time is the scarcest resource. One interviewee stated that, “There was this 25-minute workshop limit — any longer and people feel like they should clock out.” Another admitted that colleagues were initially unsure whether attending a workshop “counted as work.” Just simply engaging with the artists constituted a subtle cultural transgression: to step away from the desk, to walk, to taste, to listen, was to question what “work” looks like inside the Council. We can see how, in this context, the artists’ choice of quick workshops, lunchtime encounters, corridor conversations etc., were strategic adaptations as well as creative choices.

A key theme that emerges from these interviews is that DCC’s dominant metric of productivity appears to be visible busyness: meetings, spreadsheets, deliverables, deadlines, etc. The residencies operated in stark contrast to this, establishing and sharing activities such as reflection, conversation, and sensory exploration, that resist easy measurement. The staff responses show both discomfort and quiet excitement with these forms of work, acknowledging that they disrupted entrenched norms of how time and attention are valued, yet described the sessions as “fun” and “refreshing”

### Challenges And Constraints – Hierarchy, Time And Legitimacy

The staff interview reinforced many of the observations made by the artists about the structure of the culture in DCC. A rigid hierarchy preventing ease of access and collaboration was a central theme. One respondent described communication chains that must “go from your line manager to theirs,” noting how such layered reporting and access “...kills spontaneity.” Another observed that colleagues outside DCC “couldn’t believe this is still how it works.” These remarks point to a bureaucratic design that favours accountability over agility. In fairness this is a pattern familiar across local government and other large bureaucracies, however it is especially challenging for projects premised on cross-department collaboration.

In addition to this there is a felt obligation to appear busy, to occupy one’s desk, to maintain the optics of diligence (this apparently remains strong despite hybrid working”. This was summed up by the comment “The idea of stepping away from your computer still feels risky, like you’re stealing time.”

When asked directly to describe the culture in DCC the responses flickered between pride and frustration, best captured in the phrase “a place full of good people inside an old structure.” What we get from these interviews is a dual picture: a legacy culture of hierarchical stability coexisting with an emergent culture of experimentation and cross-department collaboration.

As if in counterpoint to the way the staff described the culture of DCC, they characterise the residencies not in terms of outputs but atmospheres. They talk about a “different energy” in the building, a sense of curiosity and a permission to talk and think in less formal ways. The residencies they said “...made biodiversity feel part of everyday conversation,” and they “...drew in people who’d never engage otherwise.”

The cumulative impact of these small shifts is significant. As one manager put it, “People take it back to their teams — that’s how it spreads.” This is a diffusion model of impact, akin to what social scientists call contagious curiosity: the spread of ideas through informal networks rather than formal mandates. In evaluation terms, these are soft impacts: shifts in perception, confidence, and vocabulary rather than measurable behavioural change. But they are the preconditions for deeper organisational adaptation. The truth of the matter is that - statistically speaking - staff engagement was numerically quite low. One respondent estimated that perhaps five percent of DCC’s 6,000 employees encountered the project directly. Despite this residencies’ influence operates at a subtler scale: changing the texture of

conversation, introducing new metaphors, and modelling forms of interaction that blend play, inquiry, and care. Staff repeatedly said that projects like this work “bit by bit” — slow, accumulative, and memorable. The residencies exposed how creative ideas are welcomed in principle but struggle to circulate in practice. They also highlighted an appetite for new ways of learning — experiential, affective, relational — that remains structurally unsupported.

The artists described DCC as an ecosystem of tributaries and flows; the staff interviews confirm this image, recognising the need for stronger connective tissue across departments and for leadership to act as the “sunlight” that sustains it. What they ask for, implicitly, what is required is not more creative content but creative infrastructure: systems that make collaboration, reflection, and innovation ordinary rather than exceptional. The residencies have shown that staff are receptive, curious, and proud of the Council’s role in the city’s environmental future. What they need are structures that validate and support that curiosity as part of their job, not as an extracurricular indulgence.

It was also mentioned across the interviews that leadership visibility - for example an email from an Assistant Chief Executive, an attendance at a workshop - would have legitimised participation throughout the organisation. . In bureaucratic systems, permission is often performative, and culture shifts only when senior figures signal that new forms of engagement are not only allowed but expected. This observation aligns with the artists’ experience that getting engagement beyond a certain paygrade was next to impossible

## Survey Analysis

Survey response rates were low throughout the project (people are too busy) and the first survey was run before the formal evaluation process began (15th July 2024) and secured 13 responses.

Participants on the walks with Luke Casserly were asked to complete a questionnaire. Again the design of this was completed prior to the formal evaluation process.

A final questionnaire was distributed to the whole staff in the final fortnight of the project, from September 29th to October 17th. This questionnaire recycled some of the questions from the first questionnaire in an attempt to track changes over time. It secured 102 responses

The curator’s meeting log captured the reach of the project and the depth of engagement across follow up meetings and agreed actions.

All these datasets were analysed and a final questionnaire was distributed in the concluding weeks of the residency programme. This final questionnaire secured 102 responses.

In terms of the total population size of the Dublin City Council (circa 6,000 employees) the response rates for these questionnaires are not large enough to support any kind of statistical inference. However, they can be useful as a kind of qualitative pulse, surfacing ideas, language and interests.

If we take this approach to these questionnaires then the signals are remarkably consistent with the interview data. For example, we learn from the initial survey and the post-walk questionnaires that:

- Respondents endorsed the importance of biodiversity and expressed strong interest in learning more.
- They gravitated to warm, relational language (nature, care, place) over technical terms,
- They connected the walks to mindfulness, collegiality and “noticing” the city anew.

- Staff suggestions for future actions clustered around foundational thinking (“embed biodiversity in all projects”), communication clarity (make initiatives legible at task level), and staff engagement (voluntary clubs, short sessions)

The value of this original dataset lies in the language of the responses, in phrases that normalise a gentler vocabulary and validate participation ( “**I realised I could talk about this at work**” ). The initial questionnaire does not tell us how many people “think differently”; they help us ask better questions of those who are ready to do.

The closing questionnaire does provide an interesting snapshot of perception and engagement within Dublin City Council (DCC) at the end of the residency period. `Again, the response rate (n=102) is very low and so statistical inference is not possible. However, the data does appear to corroborate the qualitative insights gathered through interviews and meeting documentation. It captures an organisation in which awareness and goodwill toward the residency are growing, yet participation, systemic understanding, and practical integration of biodiversity remain uneven.

The data analysis has been categorised under the following themes:

#### Perceived Purpose of the Residency

The dominant sense of the purpose of the residencies is “...**awareness raising**.” Answers describe the residency’s role as to “**create awareness**,” “**get staff thinking about biodiversity**,” and “**promote biodiversity in the workplace**.” A smaller number recognise a deeper function — “**to bring creativity into the workings of DCC**” or “**to connect staff and departments around a shared issue**.”

This language confirms what earlier analysis identified: that within institutional settings, art is primarily legitimised as communication or outreach, not as structural critique or internal learning. The survey responses mirror that position - biodiversity is to be championed and understood, rather than embedded in decision-making systems.

However, the presence of more reflexive comments — “**to bring creativity into the workings of DCC and provide another way of thinking**” — suggests that for some participants, the residencies opened a window onto organisational possibility: art as a way of working differently, not merely talking differently.

#### Reported Change and Impact

When asked what, if anything, had changed for them, the majority of respondents offered low-intensity reflections: “hard to say,” “no change,” or “I am happy to know the residency exists.”

A smaller but significant minority reported subtle behavioural or perceptual shifts, such as “...slight changes to my habits while in work” or “it made me think about how biodiversity could feature in my daily tasks.”

These responses align with the staff interview analysis, which described the residency’s impact as affective and perceptual rather than procedural - creating small “**moments of noticing**” rather than direct operational change. One respondent summarised this distinction clearly:

“It changed how I see the city — not as roads and buildings but as something living underneath.”

From an evaluation standpoint, these comments suggest that attitudinal change is occurring, but institutional support mechanisms (time, authority, metrics) are still missing. Without them, awareness remains a form of ambient support rather than operational transformation.



## Memorable Moments

When asked to describe a single memorable moment, several respondents cited the city walks and artist-led conversations:

- “I really enjoyed the walks in the city.”
- “The walk I took part in with Luke.”
- “My first discussion with Ruth Carroll — it was inspiring to hear how art could change how we work.”

These reflections reinforce the idea developed earlier in the evaluation: that embodied, social, and place-based encounters were the residency’s most powerful format for organisational engagement. The act of walking together - outside offices, in a shared rhythm - temporarily displaced hierarchies and allowed for a different kind of collegial talk. As one respondent put it, “It was the first time I’d talked about biodiversity with colleagues unguardedly.”

These experiences also embody a kind of “institutional ethnography in motion” - a live process through which employees experience the organisation as an ecology rather than a hierarchy.

## Barriers and Challenges

The open-ended responses identify a remarkably consistent set of barriers to cultural change:

- Time — mentioned most frequently (“Lack of time” appears in over half of the answers).
- Limited organisational champions — “Not enough people pushing it internally.”
- Absence of examples or training — “No easy examples to help with the integration.”
- Lack of clarity about responsibility — “Not sure whose job it is.”

These barriers echo the structural challenges identified throughout the evaluation: a procedural culture oriented toward efficiency and throughput rather than reflection, and an absence of mechanisms to connect symbolic initiatives with operational frameworks.

In short, staff do not resist biodiversity or creative work — they struggle to locate it within their existing definitions of work. The issue, as noted in earlier chapters, is less about attitude than architecture: the need for time, authority, and templates to make participation legitimate.

## Suggestions for Improvement

Respondents offered pragmatic and constructive suggestions for increasing the residency’s impact:

- More visibility and promotion (“More marketing, events, encourage engagement”).
- Departmental engagement (“More involvement with Planning and Engineering sections”).
- In-house events and talks (“In-house events with staff from our section would help”).
- Stronger integration with policy and training (“Link outcomes to our procedures and SLAs”).

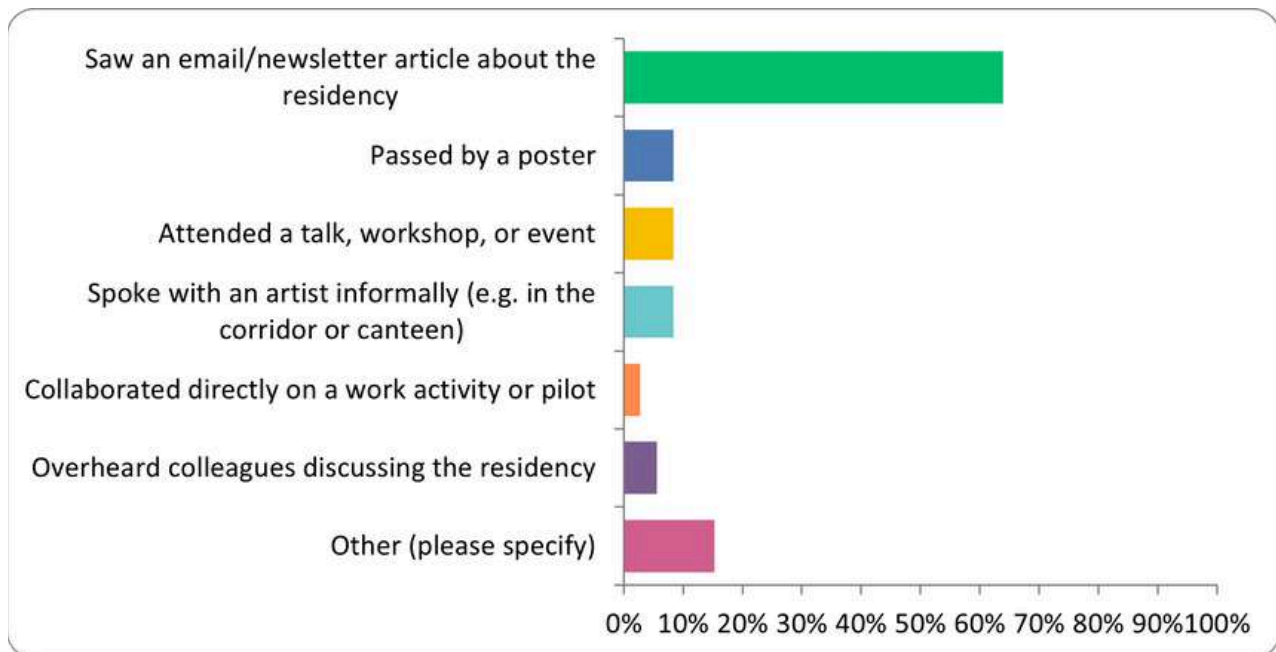
The tone of these responses indicates an appetite for more participation. Even where respondents reported minimal personal change, they often recommended ways to strengthen the programme - a sign of constructive engagement rather than rejection.

## A Drop in the Ocean

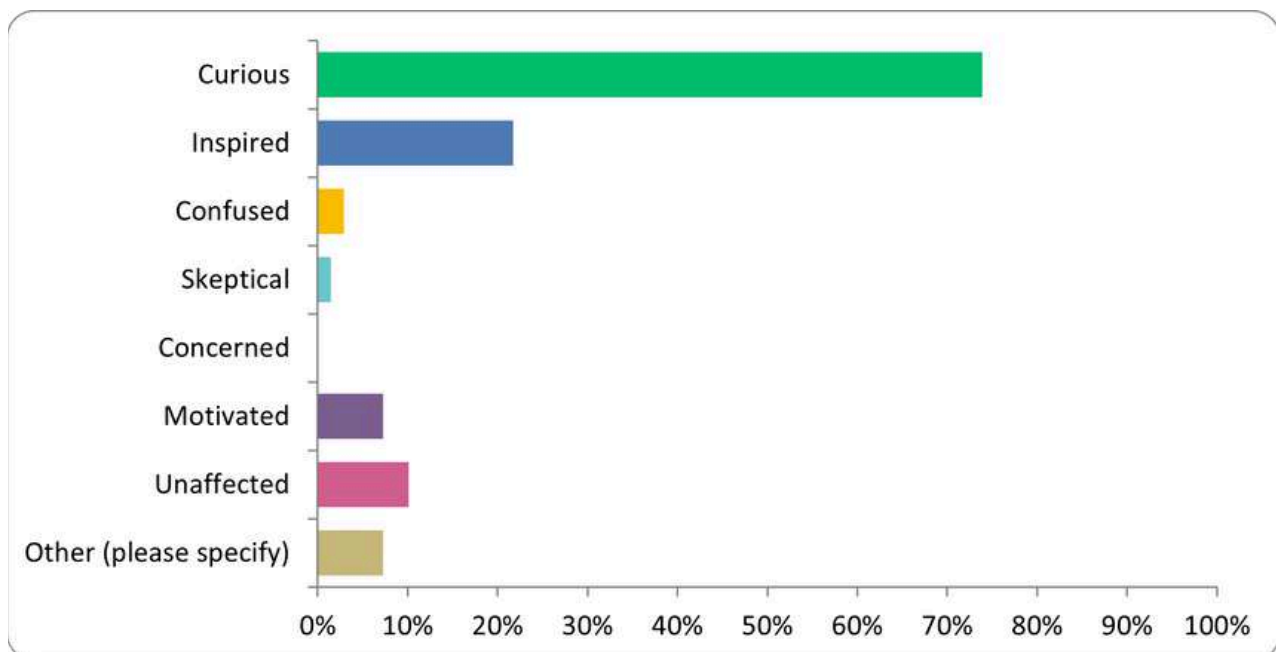
The absurdity of the expectation that three artists could change an organisation is captured in the responses to the second survey. This survey was distributed to all the staff and received a total of 102

response, however approximately 70 respondents completed all the questions.

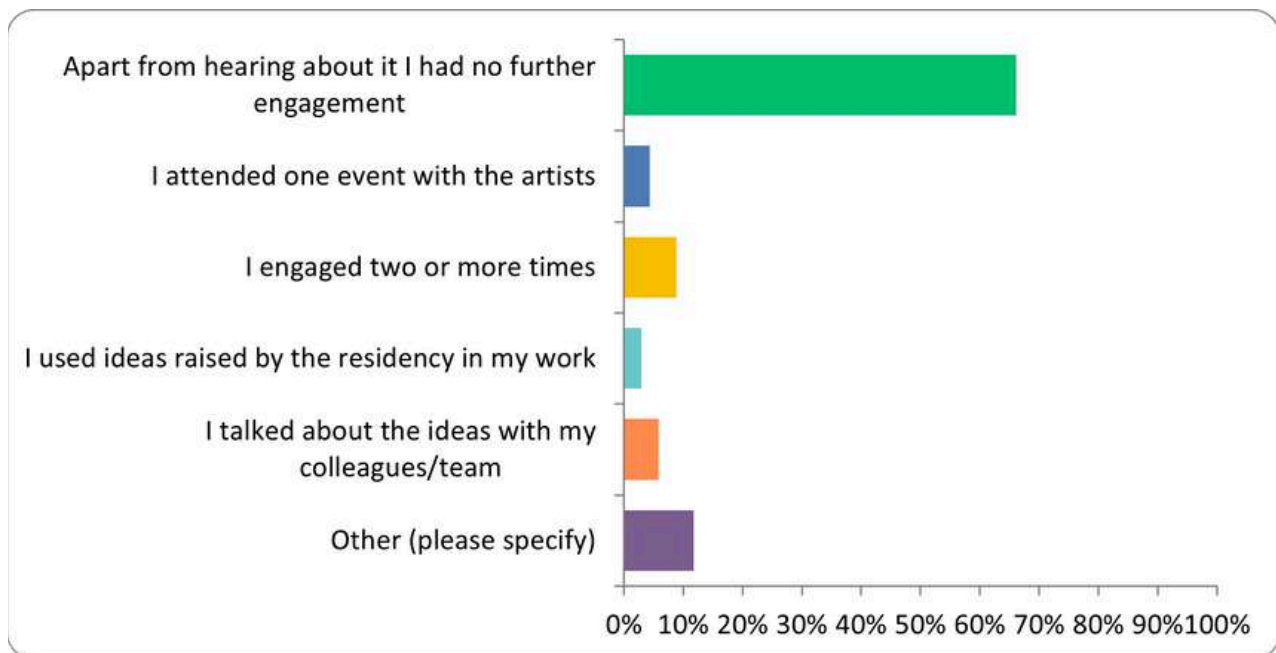
The responses tell us that 64% of respondents heard about the residencies via email.



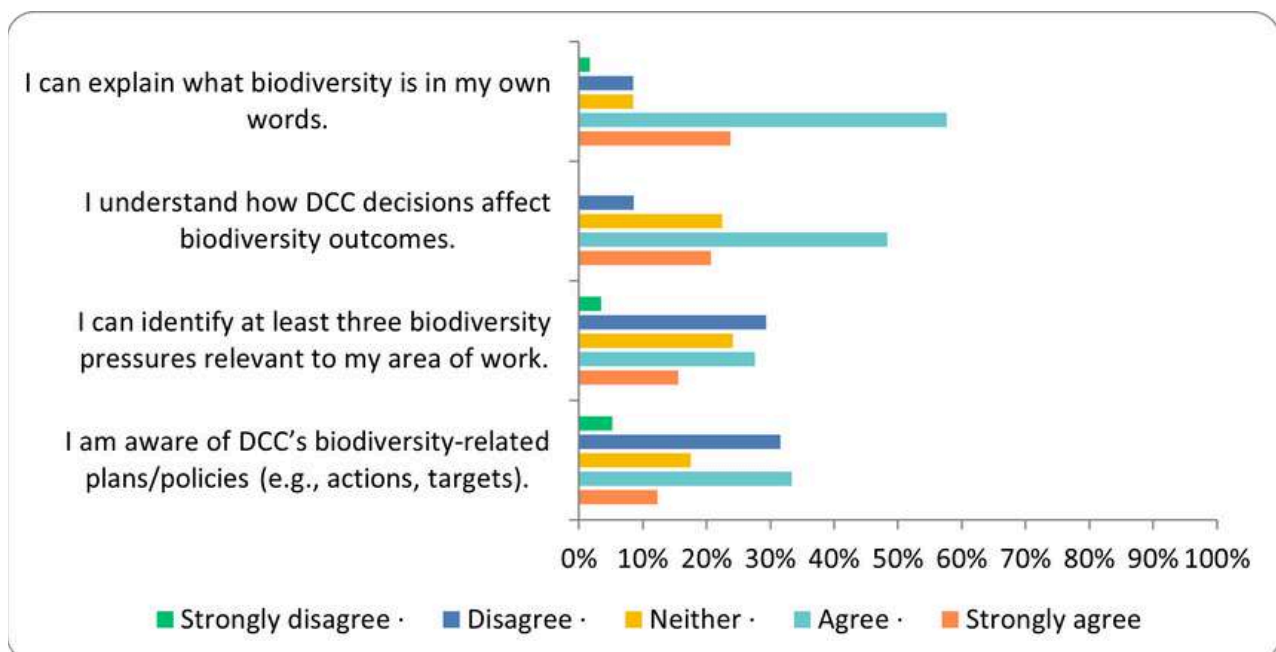
73% of respondents felt curious and 21% felt inspired by the idea of the residencies.



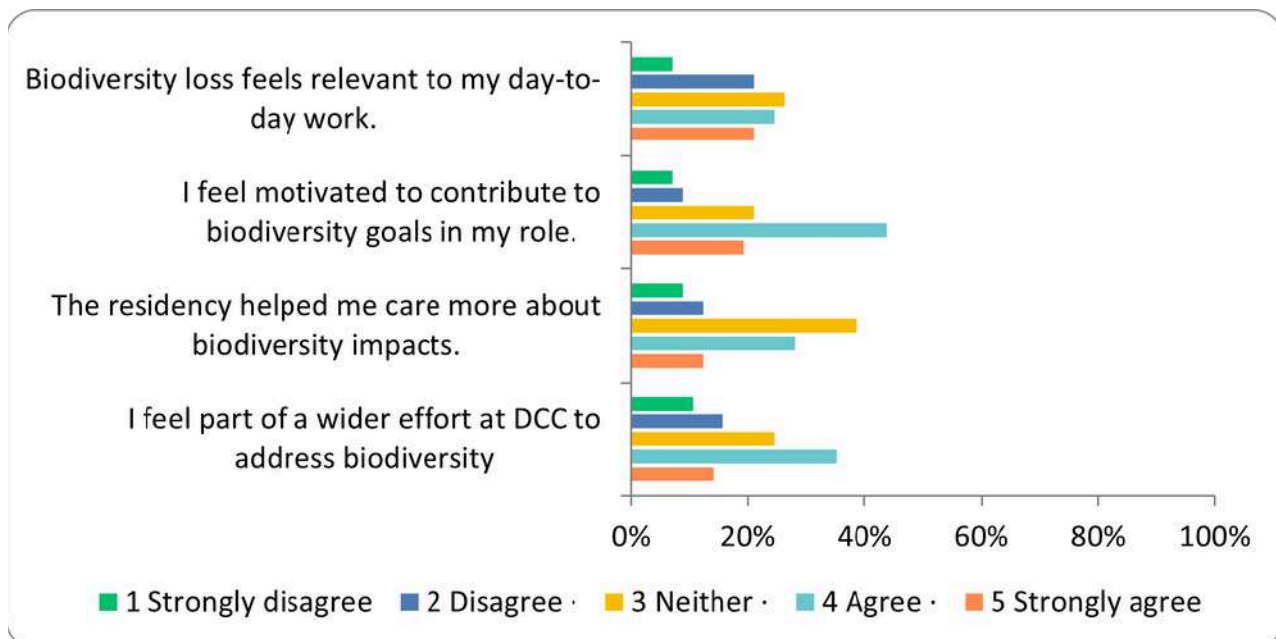
However, 66% of respondents had no further engagement with the projects and 8% reported that they engaged two or more times



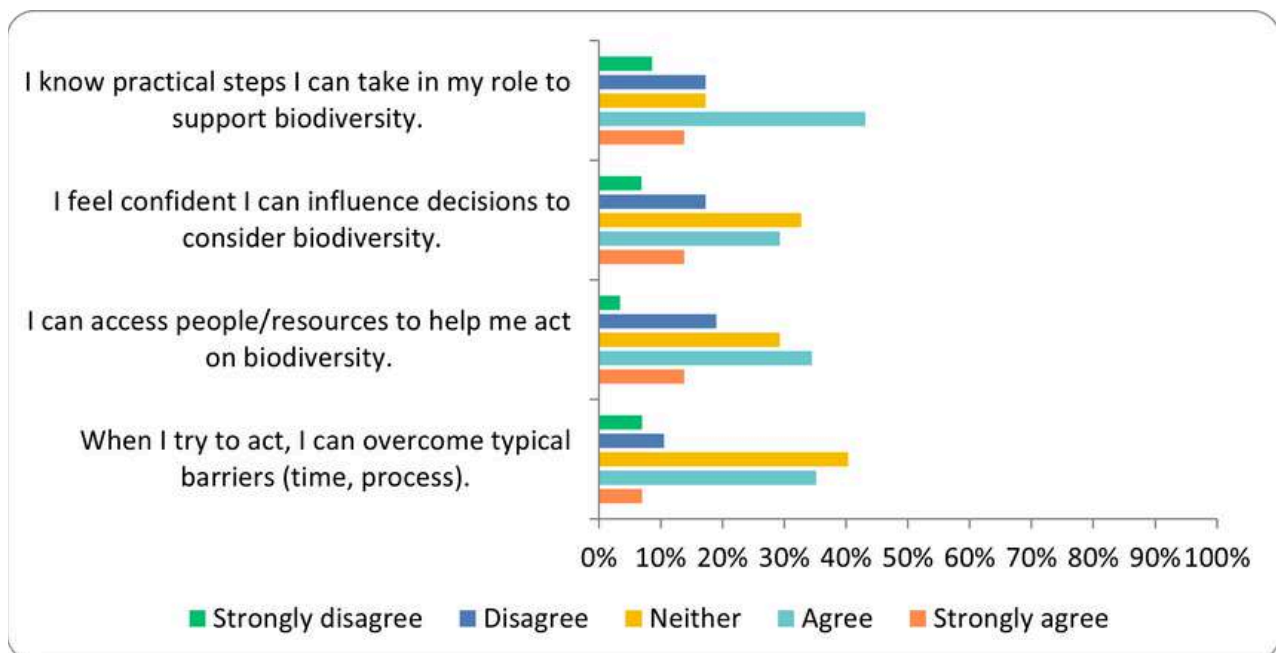
Staff are confident that they can explain Biodiversity in their own words, but are increasingly uncertain about specific plans and policies and precisely how it impacts their own area of work.



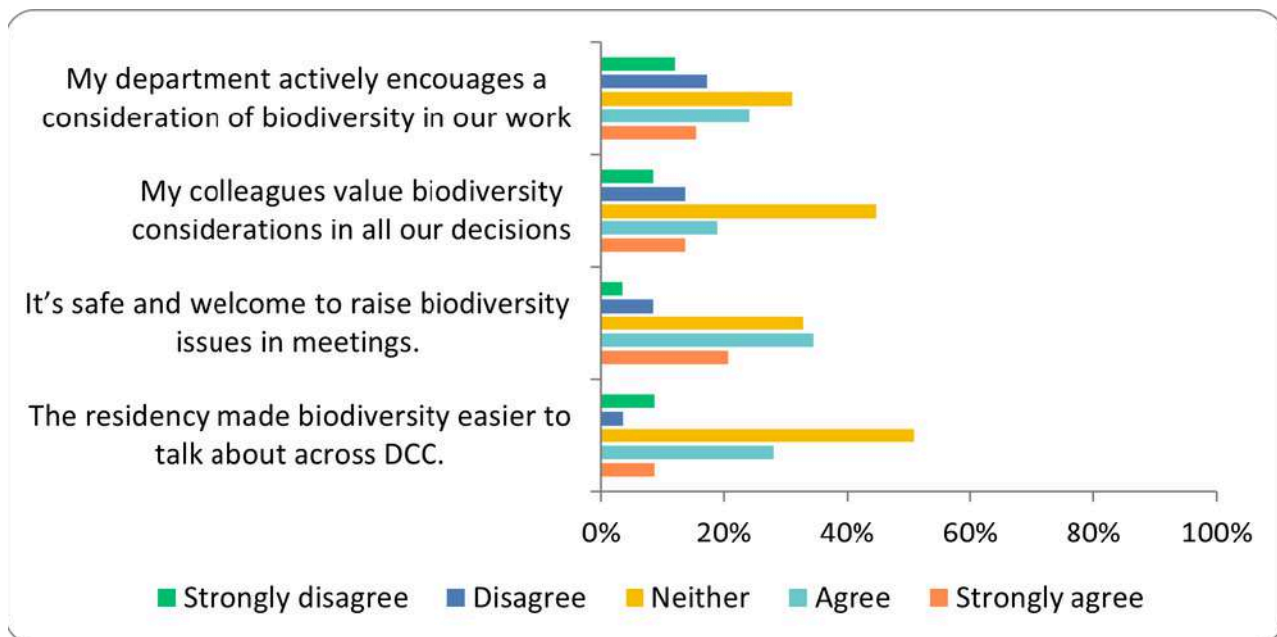
Although respondents feel motivated to contribute to biodiversity goals in their role, there is little evidence of significant support for that, and the impact of the residency, as expected, is low



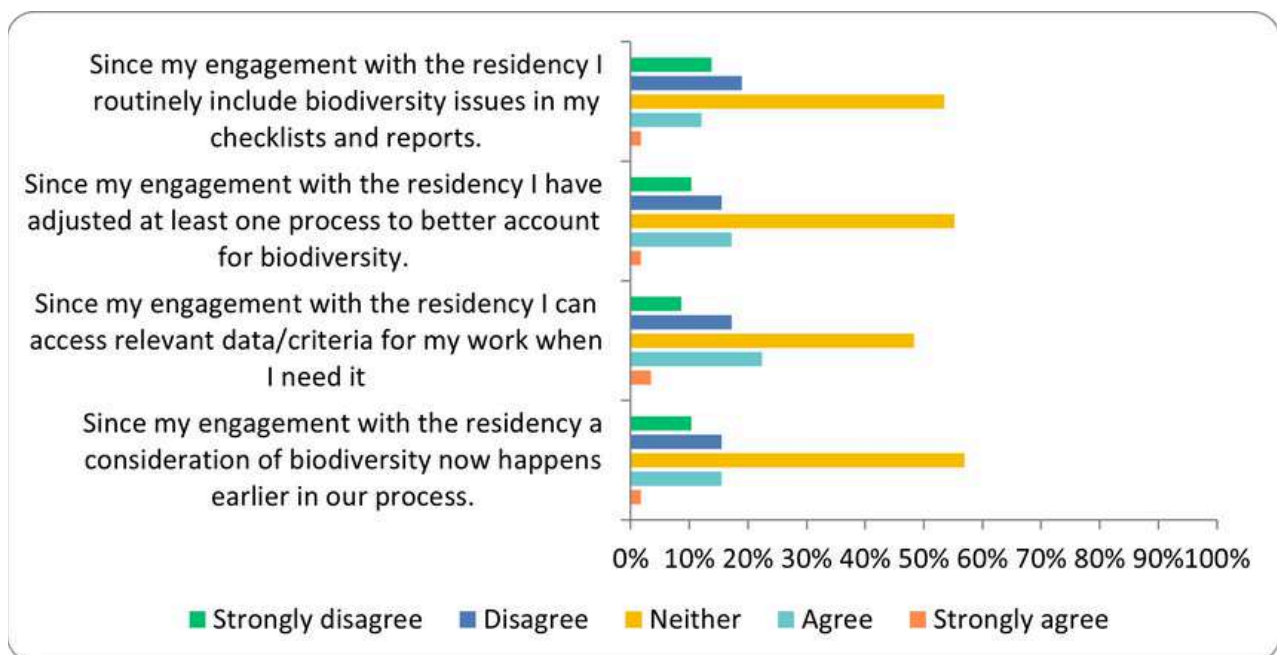
Approximately half of the respondents know what practical actions they can take, but confidence declines when asked to consider personal influence, sources of support and institutional obstacles.



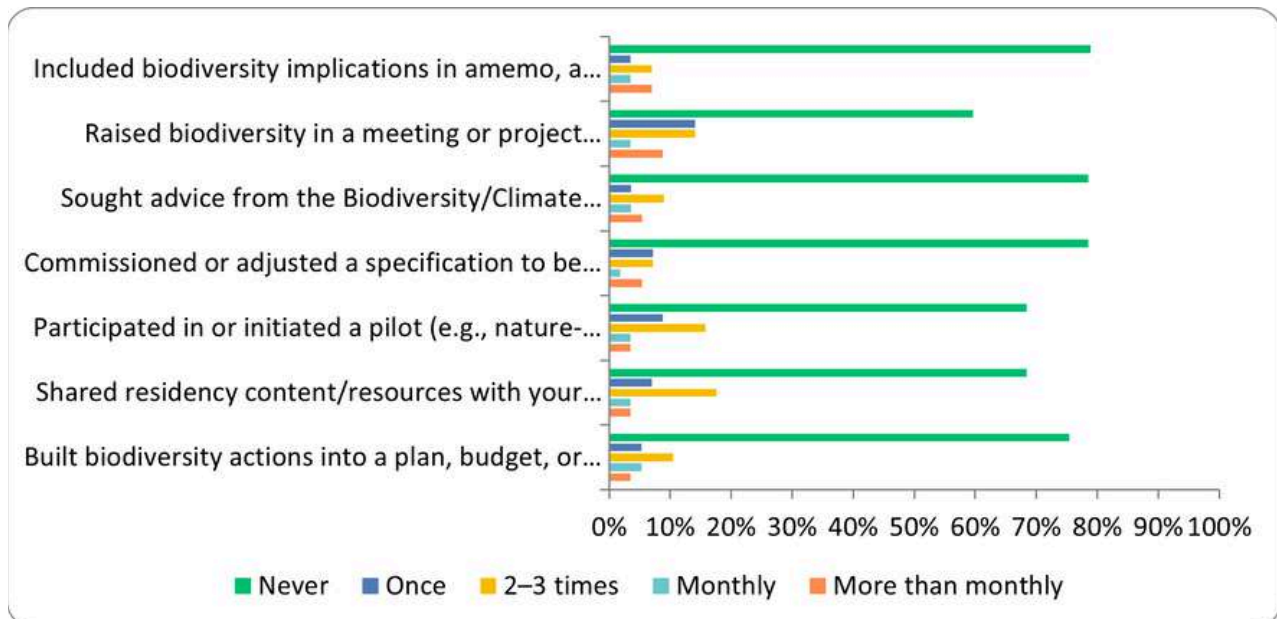
The responses indicate that overall biodiversity is not a consideration within day to day work and the residency had little impact on this.



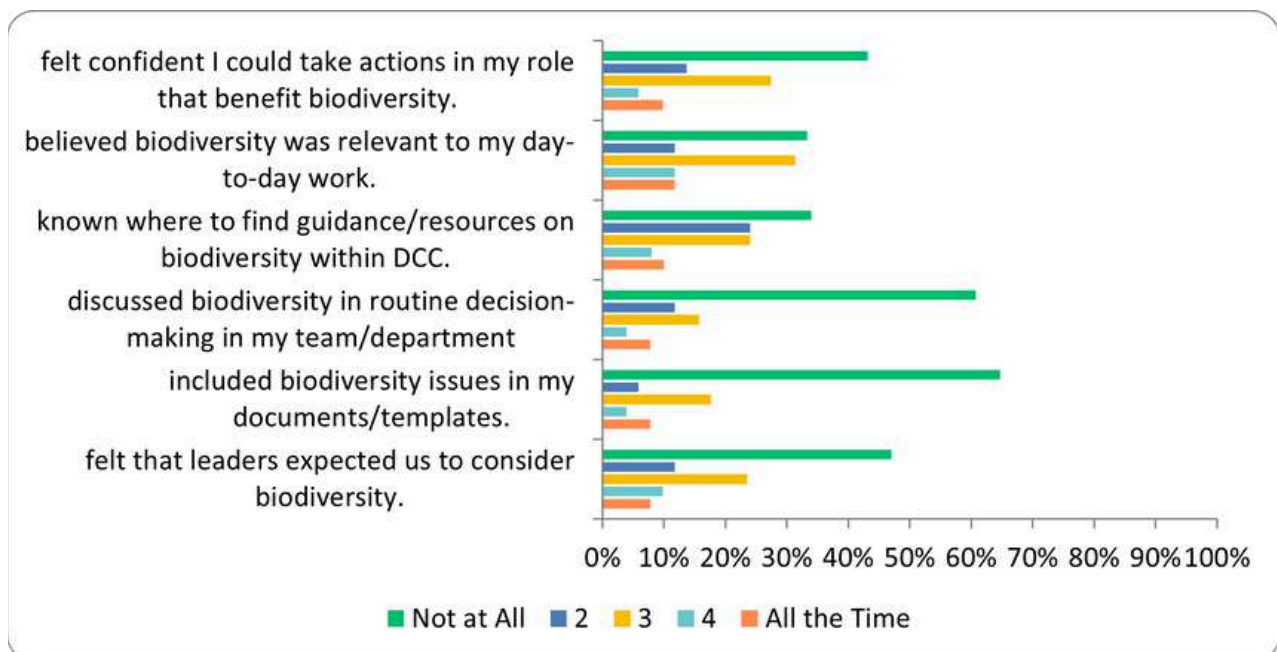
Responses indicate that the residency has not significantly impacted operations or decision making. Given our analysis to this point this is not surprising, however what is interesting is the approximate 20% who either Agree or Strongly Agree that they have made changes since the residency.



However, although the responses so far suggest an understanding and a desire to act (Capability and Motivation) the following indicates the impact of organisation culture. The “never” opinion in the following is overwhelming and speaks to an organisation block as opposed to an individual unwillingness



The following graphs again point toward the institutional resistance as opposed to the individual interest and ability. The responses to the question “before the residency I would have...” were

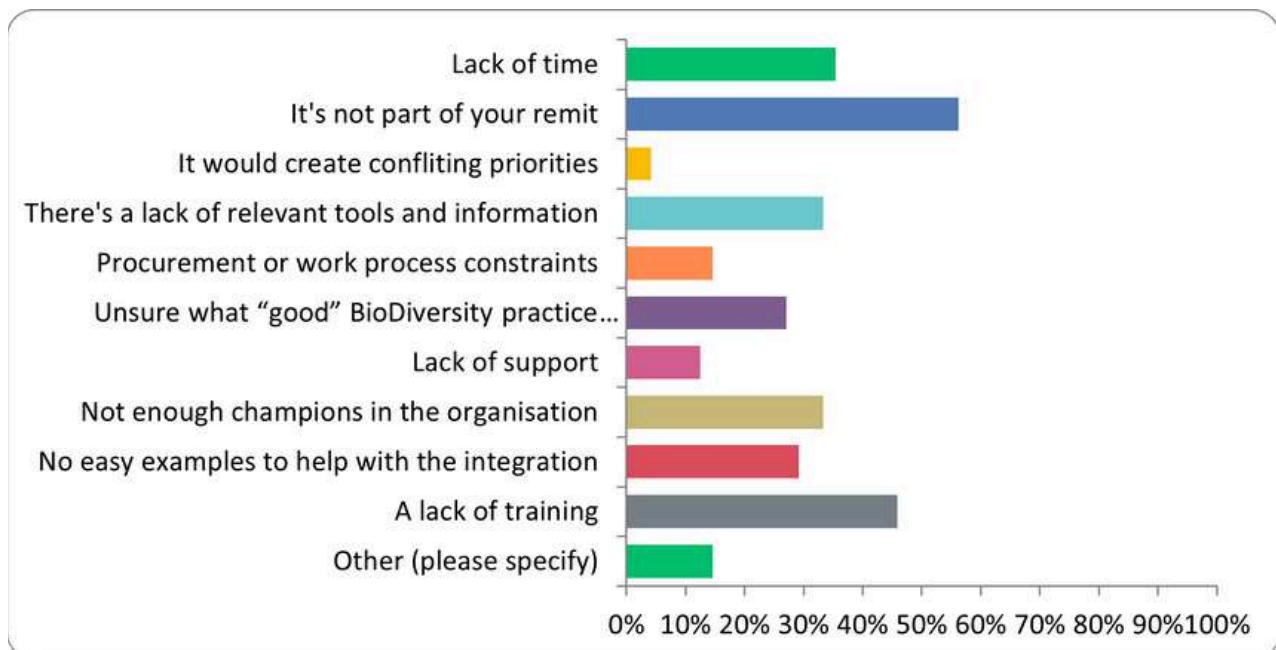




These responses all suggest that biodiversity was not felt to be on the agenda, however the response to the question “after the residency I now..” produced responses that, at the very least, suggest that incorporation of biodiversity into daily work is growing.



When asked to identify the barriers to integrating biodiversity into daily planning and work routine, the impact of organisational silos is felt strongly: 56% of respondents feel that it is “not part of their remit”. The lack of time and training are the other big obstacles identified. Perhaps the only way to address this “remit” “time” and “training” problem is to reposition biodiversity not as an independent area of expertise and concern but as foundational to all work.





## Interpretation: From Awareness to Architecture

Taken together, the survey results underscore a key argument running through this evaluation: that individual awareness alone is insufficient for organisational transformation. The survey and interview data would suggest that a proportion of DCC staff now speak the language of biodiversity and creativity with greater ease, but the systems in which they operate have yet to accommodate that shift.

The data would suggest that in terms of the report's logic model, the project has successfully achieved its short-term outcomes (awareness, curiosity, initial engagement) and partially met its medium-term goals (cross-departmental dialogue), but now requires structural reinforcement to reach its long-term aims (organisational learning, policy influence, and sustainable behavioural change). The heavy lifting of organisational change cannot be outsourced to artists in residence.

The next phase must therefore move from cognitive and affective change to architectural change - embedding biodiversity and creative thinking within the Council's everyday processes, time structures, and success metrics. This means that both creative thinking and biodiversity must be understood as foundational to the organisation and not additional.

## Findings And Recommendations – From Reflections To Structural Learning

The data analysed in the previous section - the artists' external observation and the staff's internal reflection - appear to share an understanding of Dublin City Council (DCC) as an organisation rich in expertise, commitment, and care, but shaped by habits and structures that make cultural change slow and contingent.

The residencies appear to have surfaced this tension, by being both a creative experiment and an organisational mirror. They were an opportunity to observe how learning happens, how curiosity is supported or constrained, and how language and time define what is seen as legitimate work. As one staff member noted, **"People are open — they want to do the right thing — but the system isn't designed for reflection. Everything's scheduled to the minute."**

The following sections translates those insights into four interrelated findings: relevance, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability

### Relevance — Aligning Artistic Inquiry with Institutional Purpose

The residencies were clearly relevant to DCC's policy ambitions and the broader climate action and biodiversity strategies. Staff readily recognised the logic of bringing art into these domains, seeing it as a way to bridge technical and human understanding. One senior participant reflected:

**"This felt like a new way of talking about climate — gentler, more interesting. It reached people who wouldn't read a strategy or attend a formal briefing."**

Another understood it like this:

**"The artists weren't telling us what to think; they made space to think differently. That's important in a council — you don't often get that."**

The project also aligned with internal policy aspirations for innovation and interdepartmental collaboration. Yet, the type of relevance achieved was not instrumental but reflective. Rather than delivering biodiversity outcomes, the residencies reconnected participants to the human and emotional

dimensions of environmental work.

Several staff stressed that this was exactly what the organisation needed:

**“We already have scientists and planners; what we don’t have is the pause — the reminder that nature is emotional, not just data.”**

However, the programme also revealed gaps in institutional literacy around what artistic work entails. Some staff admitted that colleagues assumed the artists were there to “run campaigns” or “promote biodiversity,” reflecting a limited understanding of creative inquiry as a mode of organisational learning and work. In evaluative terms, the project’s relevance was therefore high in spirit but uneven in comprehension — valued for its intent, yet not always understood in its method.

#### Effectiveness — The Art of Working with Time and Culture

Effectiveness is not about policy changes or number of people involved. It lies instead in how well the residencies worked within the organisation’s ecology of time and hierarchy to open new forms of engagement. Staff interviews confirm that the artists’ “micro-formats” — 20- to 30-minute walks, tastings, or conversations — were highly effective at lowering barriers to entry. As one participant said:

**“Anything longer and people wouldn’t come. The fact you could do it on your lunch break made it possible.”**

This design sensitivity — matching the intervention to the temporal realities of bureaucratic life — was key to the project’s success. It enabled what another staff member called **“small moments of joy in the day — not a workshop, just a reset.”**

The residencies also created conditions for what staff described as **“permission to be curious.”** One noted:

**“Normally if you stop to talk about something that isn’t your task, it looks like you’re not working. But the artists gave you an excuse — you could say, ‘I’m part of a project.’”**

This observation reveals how deeply DCC’s culture equates productivity with visibility. In that sense, the project’s greatest effectiveness lay in briefly suspending that logic — legitimising reflection as part of work rather than its opposite.

There were clear constraints. Some participants pointed to **“lack of buy-in at senior levels,”** noting that **“a nod from the top makes all the difference.”** Others mentioned practical issues **“artist payments took too long,” “six months isn’t enough,” “space was hard to find.”** These comments highlight that creative effectiveness depends as much on administrative design as artistic skill. Without smoother logistics and clearer endorsement, such projects risk being effective only at the margins.

#### Impact — Shifts in Language, Connection, and Organisational Awareness

While staff recognised that “the majority of employees probably never heard of it,” those who engaged described palpable shifts in perception and conversation. The most tangible impact was linguistic: many noted a new comfort in using words like nature, care, or connection instead of technical jargon. One staff member reflected:

**“‘Biodiversity’ sounds like something you have to report on. ‘Nature’ feels like something you’re part of.”**

This linguistic shift is minor on the surface but significant in its implications: it humanises policy and reframes responsibility.

Another layer of impact was relational. Staff consistently mentioned meeting colleagues from other departments for the first time. One said:

**“You’d bump into someone from Roads or Housing on a walk and realise they’re thinking about the same issues — you’d never get that in a meeting.”**

These encounters extended beyond the formal boundaries of the residencies, creating what one participant described as “a ripple effect of connection.”

There were also affective impacts — new emotional textures in the workplace. A manager described being **“blown away”** by O’Reilly’s soundwalk, adding:

**“It changed how I thought about the city — not just as streets, but as something alive underneath.”**

Such comments point to cognitive and emotional reframing rather than behavioural change. The residencies made participants feel biodiversity rather than simply understand it, creating the preconditions for a more integrated environmental ethos.

However, the interviews also reveal how fragile such impacts are without institutional reinforcement. As one participant warned:

**“It fades. People move on, projects change. If it’s not built in somewhere, it just becomes a nice memory.”**

This candid reflection underscores that impact, while real, remains ephemeral unless carried forward by structure.

### Sustainability — From Pilot to Practice

Across interviews, there is consensus that the programme was a valuable prototype — “a proof of concept,” as one manager put it — but that its sustainability depends on formal embedding.

Participants repeatedly called for executive sponsorship:

**“If the Chief Executive or Assistant Chief said, ‘This matters,’ you’d see a queue out the door. Without that, it stays fringe.”**

Others proposed longer residencies or staggered cycles:

**“Six months is too short — by the time people know who you are, you’re gone.”**

These comments reinforce a finding already visible in the artists’ experiences: that structure is the medium of sustainability. Where the project succeeded, it did so through relationships and improvisation; to sustain it, DCC must translate those relationships into systems.

Finally, a few participants articulated a deeper, strategic form of sustainability: treating creativity not as an

occasional intervention but as a way of working. One summarised:

**“We have engineers, planners, scientists — we need artists too. Not to decorate, but to help us think.”**

This idea — art as a method of institutional reflection — aligns precisely with the project’s emergent value. The residencies demonstrated that DCC can learn from artistic thinking; the next challenge is to institutionalise that learning without extinguishing its spontaneity.

### Towards An Ecology Of Organisational Learning

If we look at the residencies across these four dimensions then we see that they achieved a quiet but meaningful success. It did not change policy or transform culture overnight, but revealed how that change might happen — through attention, language, permission, and connection.

The findings point to a simple but profound lesson: DCC’s greatest capacity for innovation lies not in new strategies but in its willingness to listen to itself. Both artists and staff have shown that reflection is not a luxury and art is not an optional extra; they are infrastructure. To sustain this work, DCC must design for reflection and creativity, allocating time, resources, and recognition to the slow processes through which learning becomes culture.

The following recommendations build on this insight, proposing ways to translate the residencies’ symbolic and experiential impact into a more durable, systemic practice of creative learning within local government. (see appendix I).



Image : Abhainn Analogue Testing, Spring 2025





Image : River Poddle, The Tenters, Dublin 8



## 6. PROJECT LEARNINGS

### Ruth Carroll, project manager and curator

When first approached to tender for this programme, it felt to me as an opportunity for something more important, more impactful than a usual residence approach. Artist residencies offered by local authorities are for the most part an opportunity for a place to work, a commission with a purpose that comes from a strategic need or in part, an object that mirrors the values and aspirations of the organisation. This programme was designed to see what would occur without these parameters – deliberately open ended in terms of outputs, regarding the research as the output, the conversation being the output of the artists' time in council.

At the initial kick off meeting with senior management (Anthony Flynn, Eileen Quinlivan, John Flanagan) at the start of the project was where approval for this approach was ratified, a mark of faith in an idea of an approach and indeed artistic practices that were far from the imagined of the object maker, the painter and the muralist. This approval gave us the space to work in a way that called for a radical approach to how we could bring this fluid artistic practice into a rigid, hard-working, results driven and citizen focused organisation. Would the fluid creative voice be subsumed by these values and respected within it?

The artists were selected from a number of climate focussed practices, 27 nominated by peer organisations, with seven shortlisted for interview and invited to interview and a proposal based on an idea, how would they approach a proposed idea to talk to an organisation about its own values around urban biodiversity and nature within an urban context? Proposals were ambitious and far reaching, from small intimate interventions to large infrastructure projects. What struck me was the intelligent and collaborative approach that the artists had imagined, hopeful that the work would sit easily into an organisation that would not necessarily think of artistic practice as part of the solution. How these artists would work and be supported within the organisation was key to the success or failure of the project. Could we nurture this ambition, find space for honest dialogue and would doors be open to questions around procedures, values and strategies that may disrupt current thinking and working practices?

One important initial work was how the onboarding process, and indeed that initial first welcome week, would set the tone for the entire residency and this was carefully designed with the artist's needs as a central focus. Introductions to the team were made, practical things like swipe cards, desks, building tours and location of the water cooler, the lift chats and staff canteen proved important, then came the work.

Introductions were key in the first stages. We (artists and I) were coming from a place of having no initial relationships within the council, so doors opened widely after introductions to us and the project. These first introductions were crucial in setting the tone to the overall residency, these first colleagues becoming key ambassadors for what we wanted to achieve over the 18 months. An organisation of this size is not for the faint hearted! Some unanswered calls for assistance were ignored and ways found to circumvent these found with tenacity and a bit of determination. 'Do you know someone who.....' a daily ask. Walking around the building to make a face to face connection worked better than an email. Walking defined this residency in more ways than one.

A major learning at the residency start of the project was that the existing organisational tools could be used to advantage rather than a block. We used existing internal communication channels to promote events and call for participants, colleagues in this department were key to how the project was perceived. Placing these artistic projects within the usual council business was important for visibility, projects



Image : Climate Action Team, Liffey Currach Rowing, Summer 2024



becoming part of the usual internal comms, not seen as other, hitting inboxes twice a month, with news or a call to action, the project embraced as a legitimate part of council work. We also took full advantage of special weeks of action that the Council organises, Transformation Week (a week to celebrate new strategies), Heritage Week, Marchathon (active travel week), Climate Action Week amongst others. This allowed the project to be part of the overall conversation and as these all fell into place, so did the artists' relationship with wider council staff.

Artists were involved in all work of the Climate Action Team, sitting in on weekly meetings, aware of the work that the team was strategising and planning, aware of bigger picture in terms of national and international climate work and more local problems, both within the council and the wider city. This was important as it quickly posited the project within the wider climate action work and a quick awareness developed of the challenges that the team would manage over the course of the residency. We also were included in meetings around Net Zero Cities and the EU Mission, also meetings with San Francisco city government on projects. This lent a legitimacy to the project, inclusion in these allowed for learning but also a mark of the project's place in the wider climate strategies of the council.

We met with staff from parks and biodiversity to water management, active travel to accounts and wages, mapping to river maintenance, heritage to roads, fire service and Irish language. We travelled to depots to meet operatives and ground staff, reached out to libraries and the city archive, went to DCC events, made a city wide call out via local newspapers for stories from the community – this project is defined by finding routes to and from information. Language was key in all communications, respectful and leaning less on the lexicon of language from the arts that can unknowingly create barriers.

We had challenges naturally. The local authority system is not without flaws. Payment delays, procurement rules, hierarchical decision systems, gatekeeping, lack of interest in the arts as a catalyst for change were issues that we faced at times, but at no time did we encounter anything but professionalism and respect from council colleagues at all grades. We were greeted at times with bemusement but without disregard. Curiosity was key, for us and our DCC colleagues.

The three projects that came from the residency leave a material legacy that wasn't our initial aim, an app, a series of recordings on cassette to be borrowed on trust, a start of a water archive, a performance, a book of recipes using invasive species as a starting point, a public art work of flags that stretched along the river in front of DCC HQ, another book of a conversation, photographs, field recordings all came from the work. But more importantly than this, we made connections and walked and talked about the power of artistic thinking as a way to change minds and find solutions, slowly but surely. Steps to something

For me professionally, this work was really important, allowing me to work slowly and intensively with three brilliant thinkers, learning about how the city works and all the people who are passionate about their roles within it. This residency is the start of an important blueprint on how to embed artists within organisations successfully, for all parties. Artistic thinking should be seen as an important part of the decision making practices and finding creative solutions. This residency is the start of a wider conversation about how this can happen.

Meander with [@rosie\\_oreilly](#) as part of Dublin Climate Action Week [#climateaction](#)



Image . Abhainn Walk, Climate Action Week 2025



## 7. FINAL REFLECTIONS

### Words from DCC employees and artists

"I thought the experience was great, Luke explained everything in great details. He made me think outside of the box. Normally I would walk along the river Liffey and notice the traffic noise but not the trees or plants outside Wood Quay but after the walk it made me rethink and now I tend to block out the city noises and I found myself looking at the greenery around the city and looking out at what has been done. I had never been in the new Bridgefoot Street Park so I will definitely visit it again." Workshop participant

"I was glad to hear the perspective of a colleague from a different department, to hear about their personal interests/experiences and to take time to pay particular attention (to traces a single species, to sounds in the city, to positive interventions of city council within the design of public space, to interventions and small actions of others along a short walk in the city). Luke has a wonderful way of quietly leading the conversation and creating shared space. I look forward to hearing what the collective picture of all those small conversations looks like." Workshop participant

"It was very relaxing and enjoyable, it would be something I'd be happy to participate in again with a more educational element of it, and remaining in small groups. It revealed that even with the hustle and bustle, it is possible to find calmness and connection to nature in the city." Workshop participant

"I love that there are resources specifically working in Biodiversity and Climate Action and I hope they have the means to make a real difference in the city though big and small projects." Workshop participant

"It was very enjoyable, gave me time to think about nature and how we as an organisation can make a difference to biodiversity and keep it on the agenda." Workshop participant

"It made me more aware of the biodiversity and nature around me. It highlighted the importance of stopping and being aware of my surroundings. Going forward this experience will encourage me to incorporate awareness of biodiversity into my work." Workshop participant

"My first project with Ray Yeates in 2021, he planted the seed for this project in my head. In the @me between I witnessed first-hand the transformative disruptive potential of the arts, in subtle ways from an image to a 120 meter mural, from a few notes, to a fully produced performance. Different forms of the arts all with the shared mission to change perspectives. The Biodiversity Artists in Residence, I hope, are the first of many. The past 18 months have hinted at what is possible when we bring artists in to work with us. We need to wholly embrace artistic disruption" Dr. Sabrina Dekker, Project Lead.

"Artists working inside and alongside City Council Departments was something we in the Arts Office had wanted for a long time. Innovation means trying new ideas and disrupting old ways of working. Who better to do this than Artists whose daily work it is. City Officials also have so much to offer in their own creative approaches that meeting Artists and collaborating with them can only enhance their work. The Creative Climate Action approach supported by Creative Ireland has yielded great outcomes for Dublin" Ray Yeates, City Arts Officer

“My experience as the first artist in residence for biodiversity in DCC allowed me to achieve a long standing dream of understanding the city through a hydrological lens and exploring the city's rivers; 60% of which are underground. Through the support of the city council workers across drainage to flooding and climate I was able to tell several stories for the public that connect the historic treatment of water by a city to the now critical state of biodiversity in Dublin and Ireland. I am very grateful for the opportunity to do this under the care of curator Ruth Carroll and with the support of DCC and Creative Ireland.” Rosie O'Reilly, artist

“Overall, the residency was a hugely valuable experience for me. It offered me space to think, research, and experiment over 6 months while deepening my understanding of how Dublin city functions from an administrative and ecological perspective. It enabled me to build meaningful connections with environmental experts, ecologists, and other artists - a network that continues to inform my practice today. The residency was an invaluable opportunity for knowledge-building, creative development, and public engagement with urban biodiversity” Luke Casserly, artist

“It's been such a privilege to work as one of three biodiversity artists in residence at Dublin City Council. Getting to not just see the incredible work being done within our city, but to collaborate with the people who make it happen has been a massive turning point in my career. I've felt such an incredible degree of support in my role as an artist in the Council, which has meant I've been able to work at a scale and level that is completely new to me.” Louis Haugh, artist



Image : Climate Action Team, Liffey Currach Rowing, Summer 2024

## 8. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Project Lead : Dr Sabrina Dekker

Project manager and curator : Ruth Carroll

Artists : Rosie O'Reilly, Luke Casserly, Louis Haugh

Project administrator : Jennifer Byrne

Project evaluator : John O'Brien

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# APPENDIX I

## A Note on Organisational Culture and How it Changes

Understanding organisational culture is crucial for evaluating whether initiatives like the Biodiversity Artist-in-Residence (AiR) project have real institutional impact. Without a shared understanding of what culture is, and how it operates within bureaucratic systems like Dublin City Council (DCC), claims of “culture change” run the risk of being superficial.

As our evaluation shows, change in DCC is not simply a matter of new programmes or awareness campaigns. It involves shifts in how people think, talk, and relate - slow and uneven processes that require both permission and persistence. The AiR residencies illuminated this reality, revealing deep cultural dynamics including departmental silos, performative enthusiasm, and the quiet emergence of new, more relational ways of working.

### Defining Organisational Culture

Edgar Schein’s (2010) model remains the most useful framework for understanding culture in practice. He identifies three interdependent layers:

1. Artifacts – these are the visible expressions of culture such as symbols, language, and rituals (e.g., the public “biodiversity walks,” internal presentations, desk layouts, the size of the lid etc.).
2. Espoused Values – stated beliefs or goals (e.g., DCC’s emphasis on “climate action,” “sustainability,” and “community engagement”).
3. Basic Underlying Assumptions – the invisible, taken-for-granted beliefs that actually shape behaviour (“this won’t be resourced,” “risk must be avoided,” or “artists are temporary”).

Schein argues that culture is most resistant at the level of these underlying assumptions. As one staff member told us, “People are enthusiastic, but at the end of the day we return to the system — the forms, the deadlines, the budget lines.” The AiR programme made these assumptions visible, if not yet transformable.

When these three levels align, organisations operate coherently; when they diverge, dysfunction and inertia set in. DCC’s own internal dissonance — between progressive policy rhetoric and the limits of bureaucratic procedure - was one of the most consistent themes in our data

### Cultural Typologies in Context

Cameron and Quinn’s (2011) Competing Values Framework identifies four archetypal cultures: Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy.

DCC’s dominant form is clearly Hierarchical, prioritising control, compliance, and procedure. The residency sought to insert elements of Adhocracy - creativity, experimentation, ambiguity - and to foster Clan-like collaboration across departments.

This tension was evident in both interviews and staff questionnaires: respondents valued the residency’s “freshness” and “human energy”, yet felt “there’s no time in the system for reflection.” Such comments point to a latent cultural aspiration constrained by structure.

### Why Culture Matters in Change

Culture shapes not only what organisations do but what they can imagine doing. Denison (1990)

demonstrated that performance improves only when culture aligns with purpose. In DCC, a strong compliance culture secures procedural reliability but can stifle adaptive learning. The residencies created temporary spaces of reflection - what Monika Kostera calls “islands of meaning” - where imagination could coexist with bureaucracy.

As Justin O’Connor argues, art should not be “used” as an intervention or a tool of policy; rather, it must be understood as foundational - as a way of reshaping the relational and symbolic order through which work is understood. Rosie O’Reilly’s relational, durational approach exemplified this: her process of “walking and listening” invited staff to experience the city and their work differently, creating new relational circuits between people, policy, and place.

## Approaches to Understanding Cultural Change

### *Quantitative Indicators*

Surveys provide useful surface data. The DCC biodiversity questionnaires showed near-universal support for biodiversity values and increasing awareness of related work. However, engagement remained limited — a sign that cognitive acceptance had not yet become behavioural norm. Quantitative data therefore highlight readiness, not transformation.

### *Qualitative and Ethnographic Insight*

Interviews and artist reflections revealed subtler shifts. Staff described the residencies as “a reminder of why we came into public service” and “a moment of connection across teams.” Artists, acting as institutional ethnographers, documented the emotional texture of bureaucracy: the quiet pride, fatigue, and humour that formal reporting often misses.

Yiannis Gabriel (1999) reminds us that organisations are sustained through storytelling - myths, metaphors, and informal narratives. The artists’ work introduced new stories: of rivers speaking, of departments walking together, of maintenance crews as custodians of nature. These stories may prove more enduring than any formal policy output.

### *Indicators of Emerging Change*

Across our data, several modest but meaningful indicators of cultural movement appear:

- Language shifts – staff increasingly use words like “collaboration,” “reflection,” “possibility.”
- New rituals – biodiversity walks became a reflective practice linking staff identity to place.
- Cross-departmental ties – new relationships between Parks, Comms, and Climate teams emerged.
- Recognition of system limits – a growing awareness that “goodwill isn’t enough without time and structure.”

As one respondent noted, “It’s not that people don’t care — it’s that caring doesn’t fit into the workflow.” This articulation of constraint is itself a sign of learning.

### *Challenges and Limits*

Cultural change is slow, uneven, and often reversible. Our data highlight four key challenges:

1. Time Lag: Culture evolves at a slower tempo than policy cycles.
2. Attribution: Artists may open space for change, but the organisation must choose to occupy it.
3. Fragmentation: DCC’s subcultures vary sharply; openness in one team may meet indifference in another.
4. Symbolism vs. Substance: As Rosie O’Reilly observed, “visibility isn’t the same as change.” The risk of performative sustainability remains real.

## Conclusion

Organisational culture is not a backdrop but a living system of meanings. In DCC, the Biodiversity AiR programme acted less as an “intervention” and more as a diagnostic - revealing how people navigate contradiction, care within constraint, and find creativity in procedural space.

To quote one senior staff member: “The artists didn’t give us solutions - they gave us mirrors.” True culture change, then, lies not in the adoption of new slogans or metrics, but in the gradual alignment of what people do, what they say, and what they believe possible within public service.

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# APPENDIX II

## Desired Activities, Outputs and Outcomes

### Activities

- Deliver three artistic residencies that are community-facing (DCC employees)
- Initiate and enable conversations about the need for biodiversity to be woven throughout all DCC work
- Work intra-departmentally across DCC
- Design specific outputs that will engage DCC staff and councillors in the area of biodiversity
- Create conversation and information sharing within DCC
- Conduct employee workshops
- Hold consultations and meetings with employees of all levels
- Engage with social clubs, elected councillors, and Comhairle na nÓg
- Undertake research within the Council and the wider public
- Engage with relevant DCC policies and strategies (e.g. Climate Action Plan, Food Strategy, Greening Strategies, IURC Partnership, River Restoration, etc.)
- Benchmark at key stages to indicate attitude change and learning
- Adhere to DCC health and safety, HR, social media, and compliance policies
- Participate in evaluation processes and reporting .

### Outputs

- Three artistic residencies that are community-facing (DCC employees)
- High-impact, highly visible projects within a key national urban organisation
- Employee workshops, consultations, and meetings
- Intra-departmental and inter-departmental collaborations
- Social club and councillor engagements
- Public events
- Documentation and learning materials
- Evaluation and reporting materials
- Template for weaving artistic thinking into local government using a creative, solutions-based approach

### Outcomes

- Organisational and behavioural change leading to policy change
- Deeper understanding by DCC staff of solutions to the biodiversity crisis on micro and macro levels
- Increased awareness of biodiversity across DCC departments
- Evidence of attitude change and learning among staff
- Systemic change in how biodiversity is valued and celebrated within DCC
- Development of new organisational thinking about valuing and harnessing artistic practice
- Enhanced public perception of DCC's work in biodiversity and climate action
- Key learnings and a transferable template for future projects

# APPENDIX III

## Evaluation Matrix

Project Element	Category (Activity/ Outcome/ Output)	Contractual Deliverable / Expectation Matched	Comment/Assessment
Abhainn – 11 km walking trail on the Dublin Discovery Trails app (7-episode audio trail on Dublin’s rivers)	Output / Activity	High-impact artistic output; public engagement; initiate biodiversity conversations	Major creative deliverable achieving wide public reach and fulfilling visibility and engagement aims.
Analogue cassette walking kit for Abhainn	Output	Artistic artefact / editioned work	Extends accessibility and conceptual depth; complements digital trail with tactile form.
Public call-out for river stories (DCC staff + public)	Activity / Output	Research within Council and wider public; consultations	Engaged staff and community; built collective authorship of river narratives.
Guided Abhainn walks (Wood Quay)	Activity / Output	Employee workshops; public events	Participatory learning and situated engagement with place.
DCC Podcast – “What’s the Story Dublin?” episode featuring curator and artist	Output / Activity	Communications and public engagement deliverable	Increases visibility across Council staff and public audiences.
Residency embedded in DCC Climate Action Team	Activity	Artist onsite three days per week; embedded research	Core contractual requirement fully realised; enabled day-to-day staff interaction.
Media coverage (e.g. Irish Times feature)	Output / Outcome	High-impact, highly visible project	Contributed to public recognition of the residency and DCC’s biodiversity work.

15 Commons Walks (30 participants across departments)	Activity / Output	Employee workshops; consultations; intra-departmental engagement	Strengthened interdepartmental relationships and experiential learning.
10 workshops	Activity / Output	Employee workshops; consultations; intra-departmental engagement	Strengthened interdepartmental relationships and experiential learning.
Research-sharing / performance event (c. 80 attendees)	Output / Outcome	Public events; information sharing; organisational learning	Demonstrated cumulative project learning and fostered discussion across divisions.
Published book (Aug 2025) with NCAD FIELD; digital copy on DCC website	Output	Documentation; key learnings; template for future practice	Major dissemination and legacy deliverable; cross-institutional publication.
Public artwork (flags), video documentary (in edit), artist book (200 copies), lanyard (100), five photographs (3 + 1 AP editions)	Output	Artistic outputs engaging staff / public; documentation	Suite of physical works reinforcing visibility, craft, and thematic coherence.
c. 90 meetings across 18 + departments (c. 250 participants)	Activity / Output	Workshops, consultations, meetings at all levels; intra-departmental collaboration	Exceeds engagement deliverables; evidences depth of organisational reach.
Executive-level and international engagement (EU Mission/ NetZero/ San Francisco/ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade links)	Outcome	High-impact projects; cross-sector collaboration; organisational change foundations	Demonstrates institutional alignment with European and international partners.
Evaluation groundwork (questionnaires from walks; informal benchmarking)	Activity / Outcome (partial)	Benchmarking to indicate attitude change/ learning	Initial data gathered; formal evaluation still to be consolidated in final report.





Image : Liffey Currach Rowing, Summer 2024



# APPENDIX IV

## Media and Social Media Coverage

### Weblinks

[The Irish Times, Abhainn, Rosie O'Reilly](#)

[Abhainn app link](#)

[Abhainn website](#)

[The Dublin Inquirer, Pesky Nature, Luke Casserly](#)

[Pesky Nature publication](#)

[What's the Story, podcast with Ruth Carroll and Louis Haugh](#)

[DCC Climate Action Newsletter Q4 2025](#)

[DCC Climate Action Newsletter Q3 2025](#)

[DCC Climate Action Newsletter Q2 2025](#)

[DCC Climate Action Newsletter Q1 2025](#)



## BIODIVERSITY ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE



Image: Rosie O'Reilly

The Council is delighted to announce a new Biodiversity Artists in Residence programme, which will see three artists work for six months each, on creative solutions around biodiversity.

Each of the three artists, Rosie O'Reilly, Luke Casserly and Louis Haugh, will help create a substantial body of research and work to transform the Council's Executive and Elected Members' ability to incorporate Biodiversity as an embedded value in their aims. The artists will bring unique creative thinking, in-process problem solving and process enquiring. The first of the three, Rosie O'Reilly, has already started and will be working in the Council until September this year.

The artist-led projects will originate from working within the council, exploring ideas and ways of thinking that will lead to innovative outcomes, building robust structures that support staff engagement, empower and instil information sharing and project visibility by harnessing the transformative capacity of art for change.

They will assist the Council to transform thinking around the challenges of Biodiversity within the city and use the transformative power of the arts as a catalyst for conversations and new thinking about Biodiversity within the Council. The artists are supported by the Climate Action Team in the Environment and Transportation Department and outcomes and artistic values will feed into the Council's Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 – Climate Neutral Dublin 2030 and onwards.

## BIODIVERSITY ARTIST IN RESIDENCE



Image: Artist in Residence Luke Casserly

Have you ever wondered what might happen if we handed the microphone over to nature to hear what it might have to say? If so, join Biodiversity Artist in Residence Luke Casserly for a stroll through the city. These informal 45 minute lunchtime sessions will invite you to slow down, and sharpen your senses when it comes to noticing the presence of biodiversity within our city's landscape.

Each meeting will involve two participants, along with Luke who will facilitate the encounter. Expect a relaxed exchange, some gentle invitations to notice your surroundings, and maybe even a conversation with a grasshopper. Please get in touch with Luke on [lukecasserly@live.com](mailto:lukecasserly@live.com) or Ruth on [ruth.carroll@dublincity.ie](mailto:ruth.carroll@dublincity.ie) if you would like to take part.

Luke Casserly is a multidisciplinary performance maker originally from Longford and is the second Biodiversity Artist in Residence for the Council. Luke will work on Biodiversity responsive projects until March 2025, assisting staff to transform thinking around the challenges of Biodiversity within a city. To date, his projects have brought audiences through city streets, back gardens, train stations, beaches, and a bog in the Irish midlands.

This project is funded by Creative Ireland, through the Creative Climate Action Fund and is supported by the Climate Action team in the Department of Environment and Transportation. These Artist-led projects will originate from working within the council, exploring ideas and ways of thinking that will lead to



## BIODIVERSITY ARTIST IN RESIDENCE



Image: Louis Haugh

Dublin City Council is delighted to announce the third Biodiversity Artist in Residence, Louis Haugh, who will work within the Council on Biodiversity responsive projects, assisting the Council to transform thinking around the challenges of protecting and improving space for nature within the city. Louis Haugh is a visual artist with a background in photography and video making. His work looks for new ways to engage with and learn from ecology, while platforming public and community engagement in the process.

Over the duration of his residency at the Council, Louis will be looking at how language and systems of communication help to shape our relationship to the environment and will be offering different opportunities to the Council's community of staff to participate in this research. Louis will be working with the Climate Action Team until September 2025. This project is funded by Creative Ireland, through the Creative Climate Action Fund.

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## STAFF WALKS



Image: Historical Fruit and Vegetable Market (left) and Bridgefoot Street Park (right)

As part of 'Marchathon', council staff went on 2 lunchtime walks. A walking tour of the Fruit and Vegetable Market with Richard Shakespeare and Siobhan Maher (pictured left) and a 'Commoning' Walk to Bridgefoot Street Park with Biodiversity Artist in Residence Luke Casserly (pictured right). Look out for the Council winners of the 'Marchathon' competition in the next Bulletin and on Citidesk.

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## STAFF WORKSHOPS

If a tree falls in the council and we're all here to see it, what does it look like? Would it fill the corridor? Or could we still get from Block 1 to Block 2? You are invited to join Artist Louis Haugh for a 30-minute guided exploration inside the Council building where we'll reflect on these playful questions. Together we'll consider how we navigate public space, imagine nature within civic architecture, and think about our collective relationships with the natural world. This gathering forms part of Louis's ongoing residency research, and your input, presence, and collaboration will play a vital role in shaping the ideas and directions emerging from this work.



Everyone is welcome and no preparation or experience is needed. Workshops will take place in July and August. Email project curator [ruth.carroll@dublincity.ie](mailto:ruth.carroll@dublincity.ie) to book a spot!





Luke shared his experiences and some of the research he had been doing during his six month residency around the idea of 'invasiveness' and how we might reframe our relationship with non-native species. He invited participants to explore urban biodiversity through taste and touch, with moments of sharing and community and introduced a kombucha made from Japanese Knotweed.

Luke is currently working on an artist's book, exploring recipes and wider uses for invasive species. This publication will be launched in July with a free download for all staff.

## Luke Casserly



The 'Marchathon' Step Challenge is finished with hundreds of DCC staff taking part both in the step count competition racking up mind boggling weekly step counts! To help staff get their steps we went on some interesting staff lunchtime walks.

The Biodiversity or 'Commoning' Walk, led by Luke Casserly, our 2nd DCC Biodiversity Artist in Residence, saw us slow down and stroll through the city to our own Bridgefoot Street Park to tune into the nature woven into our urban landscape. Tea and biscuits were had as well as a go on the swings!

Tour of the Historic Fruit & Veg Market. A special lunch time Walking Tour led by Chief Executive Richard Shakespeare, to Dublin City's Historic Fruit & Veg Market on Mary's Lane. We explored inside the market, hearing about the retained and restored Victorian design and heard about the exciting DCC plans to regenerate and re-establish the huge Historic building as a vibrant city centre food market – and a place to 'meet and eat'.



*Power  
OF  
Words*

## WHAT DO WORDS MEAN



Image 1-r: Sabrina Dekker, Louis Haugh, Lord Mayor of Dublin Councillor Ray McAdam.

'What Do Words Mean' is an artwork made by Louis Haugh as part of his time as Biodiversity Artist in Residence programme in Dublin City Council. This residency programme is funded by Creative Ireland and curated by Ruth Carroll. The work is the result of six months of artist-led engagement between the artist and the community of staff members working in the Council, which focussed on how language and its use can impact the way in which we relate to nature in the city. Participants were invited to engage with different aspects of the interior architecture of the Council's buildings, by imagining the scale of some of Dublin's tallest trees within the built environment. Using specific lengths of ribbon representing individual trees' heights, as defined by the Council's Tree Officer, Ludovic Beaumont.

Through this exercise, they moved through the Council's buildings in new ways, with the purpose of playing a game of word association as a closing exercise. In this game, participants were asked to respond to a list of six words; city, citizens, obedience, happy, nature and biodiversity, four of which were taken directly from Dublin City's Latin motto "Obedientia Civium Urbis Felicitas" or "Happy the City Where Citizens Obey". This October a series of 36 flags will be flown along the north and south banks of the river Liffey, from O'Donovan Rossa Bridge to the Millennium Bridge, highlighting some of these new translations in both languages. There is also a staff survey on the Biodiversity Artist in Residence Programme, closing on Friday, 17th October 2025, that can be completed through this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DCCBioDX1>. Your insights will directly influence how we shape future artist-led biodiversity projects.



## CALL FOR RIVER STORIES

# A B H A I N N

our river stories

A public art project that will reawaken an ancient kinship between Dubliners and our rivers. Rivers tell stories about Dublin's relationship to water, past and present.

Have you a river story that we can hold?

Have you followed one from source to mouth?

Have you seen the Liffey salmon smolt, the brown trout or the lamprey, smelt water mint on a stroll or heard mayflies buzz?

Have you bailed water from a basement, remember a flood or watched the ground water rise?

Have you seen a river disappear, found an old city well, swam on a hot day?

Are you a fly angler or a river rower?

Have you sat by one and felt at home?

2024 will be the first year Dublin's river stories are collected, stored and our water courses animated through our stories.

**POST TO:**  
A B H A I N N  
c/o Rosie O'Reilly  
Biodiversity Artist in Residence  
Dublin City Council  
Civic Offices Wood Quay  
Dublin 8  
D08 RF3F  
**EMAIL TO:**  
abhairndublin@gmail.com

Creative  
Climate Action



Our River Network  
Biodiversity  
Programme



Creative Climate  
Action  
Dublin City Council



Creative Climate  
Action  
Dublin City Council





Image : Abhainn Walk, Spring 2025