

**SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARTS, HERITAGE,
GAELTACHT AND THE ISLANDS**

FROM THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S COUNCIL OF IRELAND

***Towards a New Framework for the Arts – a Review of Arts Legislation / The Arts
Plan 1999-2001***

The National Women's Council of Ireland welcomes the initiative by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands to prepare a consultative paper on the arts and to invite submissions from interested bodies concerning the future direction of arts policy in Ireland.

The National Women's Council of Ireland notes with concern, however, the absence of any reference to gender either in the Department's consultative paper – *Towards a New Framework for the Arts – a Review of Arts Legislation* - or in *The Arts Plan 1999-2001*. The Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands has not mentioned, for instance, the commitment to gender proofing, which is an established feature of Government policy formulation and a requirement for all policies prepared under the National Development Plan and for cabinet memoranda. Furthermore, it does not take into account the requirement on the Government, as a consequence of the Treaty on European Union, that a process of gender mainstreaming be undertaken with regard to all policies formulated and implemented by the Government.

Both documents ignore the commitment undertaken by the Government under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness to advance the process of producing gender disaggregated data in respect of all policies which have an impact on women's lives. This is a key concern of the National Women's Council of Ireland as the absence of adequate gender disaggregated data renders it impossible, for instance, to ascertain the extent to which women are benefiting, or being excluded, from current arts provision in Ireland. The absence of any reference to gender disaggregated data is all the more remarkable since the Second Commission on the Status of Women made a specific recommendation that there should be a gender breakdown of grants and expenditure by the Arts Council.

Other recommendations by the Second Commission on the Status of Women with regard to women and culture remain outstanding, namely :

- The development and implementation of a women's arts policy
- The appointment of a women's arts officer to promote artistic endeavours by women

The National Women's Council of Ireland considers that the process of reviewing current arts structure and determining future arts policy provides a unique opportunity for the Government to implement the recommendations of the Second Commission on the Status of Women. It asks, therefore, that the Commission's recommendations be included in the Department's revised plan for the future direction of Irish arts policy.

The National Women's Council of Ireland underlines the importance of underpinning arts policy with the equality commitments and anti-discriminatory provisions of current equality legislation, including the Equal Status Act. It requests the inclusion of a commitment to gender proofing of measures undertaken by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands and by the Arts Council in the consolidated review of arts policy. It also asks that policy in relation to the arts be mainstreamed in a manner which recognises the importance of equality as a key principle in policy formulation. It reminds the Department of the Government commitment to produce gender disaggregated data in respect of existing and projected policy measures.

As cultural expression is a fundamental element of each individual's identity, the National Women's Council of Ireland requests that an analysis be prepared of the manner in which the cultural diversity of women from minority ethnic groups, including Travellers and refugees/asylum-seekers could be adequately reflected in the arts activity sponsored by the Arts Council. While conscious of its status as a consultative document, the reference to cultural diversity in chapter 7 of *Towards a New Framework for the Arts* needs to be strengthened considerably if future arts policy in Ireland is to reflect truly the experiences of minority groups in a culturally diverse country. Additionally, the NWCII would recommend that consideration be given to targeting women experiencing multiple disadvantage such as women with disabilities.

National Women's Council of Ireland
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