

# Arts income pilot lucky for some, unlucky for others

Cantillon: Random selection a curious aspect of warmly received scheme

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Minister for Arts Catherine Martin has championed the Basic Income for the Arts pilot scheme. Photograph: Alan Betson

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The Government's Basic Income for the Arts pilot scheme, which will see artists and creative sector workers receive a weekly payment of €325 for three years and is open for applications from today until May 12th, is something of a curio. This is not least because of one key facet of how it will function: random selection.

The reception within the arts sector for such a scheme – championed by Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Catherine Martin – has been warm, even enthusiastic.

During the pandemic, the difficulty that artists had in sustaining a living in precarious creative sectors was thrown into sharp relief. Here is a €105 million scheme born of the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce report that embraced, as its starting point, the Barack Obama quote that "the arts are what makes life worth living . . . they aren't extras" and then actually managed to make its main

recommendation – this pilot scheme – happen. With so many pulls on the public purse, this is no mean feat and should be applauded.

It might be wise to reserve judgment, however, on the next twist in this fascinating plot.

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Applicants must provide evidence of a track record in the arts to be eligible, with the Government publishing an “illustrative” list of who might qualify (actors, composers, screenwriters, choreographers, puppeteers, many others) and who won’t (full-time students, full-time PAYE employees, jewellery designers, furniture makers, theatre critics).

### **Randomiser software**

But because Martin’s department is expecting “a high volume” of applications and only has funding for 2,000 people, those who satisfy the eligibility criteria will then have their applications anonymised and randomiser software will be used to select the participants, with the sample checked “to ensure adequate representation”.

This will inevitably lead to much disappointment, dismay and cursing of the randomiser software.

For those not lucky enough to win this arts lottery, the one small consolation will be swerving the obligation to provide continual data for three years. Pilot participants will be asked to maintain a weekly journal keeping track of their activities and income, supply information on their wellbeing, and perhaps attend seminars and focus groups. If they don’t fulfil the reporting requirements, their payment may be withdrawn.

Truly nothing in this life comes without some catch.

Source: [https://... www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/arts-income-pilot-lucky-for-some-unlucky-for-others-1.4850226.....](https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/arts-income-pilot-lucky-for-some-unlucky-for-others-1.4850226)

....and the follow-up

## **Artists hopeful €105m basic income pilot will lead to sector-wide rollout**

The 2,000 artists selected randomly will receive €325 a week for three years

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Steven Tynan: 'It's nice to now have the time, the energy and the head space to sit down and work on building up a reputation as a musician.'

Ellen O'Riordan

Tue Sep 13 2022 - 05:00

For the first time in his adult life, musician Steven Tynan can devote the majority of his time to playing and producing music.

After hearing last week that he would receive a basic income as part of a €105 million pilot scheme for the arts, the 28-year-old told the local radio station where he worked that he would be significantly reducing his hours.

The Limerick musician is among 2,000 artists and creatives who were randomly selected from 8,200 eligible applicants to receive a €325 weekly payment from the Department of Arts.

For Tynan, a consistent income, guaranteed for the next three years, allows him to step back from low-paid office work to “really make a go” of music, which he has been playing and making since he was 16.

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“During Monday to Friday I get to work as an artist, which is just incredible,” he says.

“If you’ve had a hard day’s work, it doesn’t matter how much you love something, sometimes you come home and you are foggy visioned ... It’s nice to now have the time, the energy and the head space to sit down and work on building up a reputation as a musician,” he adds.

Faith

The Department of Arts’s three-year Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) scheme shows the Government and the country have “faith” in Ireland’s artists, says Tynan.

“To be fair, there are great supports out there, and this is another example of that,” he adds.

Data collected from BIA recipients, as well as from 1,000 artists in a control group, will determine the pilot’s success. Knowing this is “extra motivation” for Tynan to “put everything” into making his musical career a success.

“I want to be successful so this can be kept up ... I want every artist to be able to avail of this,” he says.

A Department spokesman said researchers will be assessing the impact of the payment on participants' other income, their hours worked, family life, wellbeing and mental health.

Of the 9,000 applicants, 8,200 were considered to be eligible for the programme. A lottery system was used to select 2,000 artists, including 707 visual artists, 584 musicians, 204 film workers, 184 writers, 173 actors and theatre writers, 32 dancers and choreographers, 13 circus artists and 10 architects.

A basic income was the top recommendation of the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce established by Minister for the Arts Catherine Martin in 2020 to examine how the sector could adapt and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Average earnings in the sector, according to the taskforce, are €585 per week. The €325 weekly figure, which will be reckonable for income tax, was based on a 32-hour week working the national minimum wage of €10.20 an hour.

This compares to €208 for the maximum weekly disability allowance and the jobseeker's allowance for adults aged 25.

BIA applicants had to provide two proofs of eligibility for the scheme, such as income earned from the arts, evidence of creative practices in the form of published or exhibited work, or membership of a relevant representative organisation.

They were not required to supply details of their current income. The Department spokesman said changes to participants' incomes, and the financial circumstances of those in the control group, will be monitored and evaluated during the pilot.





Singer-songwriter Edel Meade is hoping the basic income will be rolled out to more artists when the pilot is complete

'Piece of cake'

While it anticipates “some level of attrition” due to changes in participants’ situations, the Department intends for all participants to remain on the BIA research programme for the full three years.

The spokesman said there is no requirement for those participating to reduce the hours they spend working in roles unrelated to the arts, but work patterns will be measured as part of the research project to determine the impact of the payment.

Although full-time singer-songwriter Edel Meade was not selected for the programme, she is “delighted to see people getting it”.

“Finally the arts and artists are being valued in a meaningful way in society,” she says.

She does not feel at a disadvantage compared to those who have been awarded the financial injection, she says, although she believes the scheme would have been fairer if applicants were selected based on their income level and merit.

Without this assistance, her biggest financial concern at present is the lack of affordable accommodation for when she is touring. There is no accommodation available for under €200 in Dublin, she says, adding: “For musicians performing outside their locality, I don’t see how that can continue.”

Meade, from Clonmel, Co Tipperary, says she has been fortunate to be awarded Arts Council funding for various projects over the years, but, she says, these merit-based applications are “very taxing and very time consuming”.

By comparison, the application process for the BIA programme took about 15 minutes and was a “piece of cake”, she says.

Meade is optimistic the “landmark” initiative will boost the careers of the 2,000 creatives selected. “Here is hoping it will be rolled out for the rest of us in three years time,” she adds.



## **Ellen O'Riordan**

Ellen O'Riordan is an Irish Times reporter

