

INTERFACE

Where Science meets Art.

Strategic Plan 2021 -2024.

A New Phase.

March 2021

Introduction.

Interface is a studio and residency programme for visual artists, dancers, writers and musicians, situated in the Inagh Valley, in the heart of Connemara. Our mission is to provide catalysing opportunities for artists in residence to engage with others through a unique platform within outstanding natural beauty that explores the intersections between scientific research and art.

The studio is located in premises shared with the Inagh Valley Trust, which drives a number of innovative scientific research projects in the Inagh Valley. Interface offers artists an opportunity to engage with a unique environment and to be inspired by the exciting research taking place in a spectacular landscape.

Residencies take place over periods of between two and six weeks. The resident artist has the use of a private space as well as access to shared studio space. The place is equipped with a solid fuel stove, some basic hand tools and audio-visual equipment.

Interface is coordinated by the artistic director Alannah Robins together with a producer and reporting to a board of directors.

2021 Strategic Review and 2021 to 2024 Plan.

With the achievement of Arts Council funding in 2021 Interface decided it was timely to seek support in moving into a new phase of development. On securing Capacity Building Funding Fiona Neary was contracted to support Interface in the delivery of this Report.

Interface is grateful to the Arts Council for the funding to undertake this review.

March 2021.

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1. Origins and Achievements.

1.1 Brief History.

In 2016, Artist Alannah Robins acquired a lease on the plant room of an old salmon hatchery in the Inagh Valley on the West coast of Ireland, traditionally occupied by scientists working in commercialised research into aquaculture.

Robins leased the facility with the mission of creating a sustainable residency programme for international artists and titled this project Interface. A member of ResArtis, Interface is curated with an emphasis on intersections between science and art and fits best the description of what ResArtis describes as micro-residencies: small scale, artist run, independent, with a high level of support for artists and taking special care of human relationships.

Interface is deeply embedded in its surrounding community and strives to offer the artists a chance to forge lasting engagements in the region, and to return if so wished. This should result in enabling deeply responsive experiences.

In March 2017, the first artists arrived from Australia and throughout that year, ten artists came from as many countries.

The leased space has been gradually improved and with the award in 2018 of a grant from the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, the addition of a waste wood burner and further insulation have created an excellent workspace.

1.2 Achievements.

To date Interface has:

- Hosted 30 Artists in Residence
- From 14 countries
- Built a membership of 40 artists, 30 of whom are actively involved
- Hosted 5 artist's talks in the community
- Launched 3 publications
- Curated 4 exhibitions, two of which toured to Stockholm
- Coordinated 3 concerts of resident musicians in collaboration with Galway Jazz Festival
- Represented artists at 3 international art fairs
- Attended one international Res Artis conference in Tehran
- Hosted 16 Artist Support online sessions with between 15 and 35 participants
- Co-produced, with Alannah Robins, the ambitious Carrying the Songs project

1.3 Mission, Vision and Values.

The mission of Interface is to:

Provide catalysing opportunities for artists in residence to engage with other international artists and local people through a unique platform with outstanding natural beauty that explores the intersections between scientific research and art.

Our vision is that artists will have the space, time and resources to create, inspired by the special synthesis of science and nature which exists at the Inagh Valley Trust Facility.

Core Values

- *Creativity & Innovation: Facilitate the creative engagement of artists in the residence environment.*
- *Diversity: Develop a diverse programme of residency, welcoming artists from a broad range of disciplines, such as writers, musicians, dancers, visual artists and film makers.*
- *Transparency: Maintain transparent and fair operations.*
- *Collaboration: Emphasise opportunities for interactions and collaborations between experts from different disciplines.*
- *Outreach: Encourage interactions with the local community resulting in educational outcomes.*

1.4 Resources, Income and Support.

Interface has secured funding from a range of public bodies, including Leader, Creative Ireland, Creative Europe, Udarás na Gaeltachta and Department of Arts, Heritage and An Gaeltacht. Residencies are supported by Galway County Council and Ealaín na Gaeltachta and the Arts Council. Funding to date is essentially towards buildings upgrade and programme delivery.

In 2021 Interface secured significant funds, under the Arts Council Arts Grant stream for the first time. This will fund 11 projects, including partnership projects with GMIT Galway City and GMIT Letterfrack Campus.

It is possible, as this plan outlines, that Interface could potentially become income generating. However, even if this were achieved it is likely that a reliance on Arts Council funding to a greater or lesser extent will continue. Currently, Interface remains dependent on a high level of unpaid work by the founder and coordinator.

The project is embedding in the local community, including strong relationships with education, community and business sectors.

The project offers artists membership of a practice development forum, charging 30 euro a year and currently has 40 members, 30 of whom are actively involved. This facility has flourished under lock-down.

1.5 Governance & Financial Oversight

Interface is registered as a Not-for-Profit entity, with a Board of Directors. Significant work has been undertaken towards achieving Charitable Status, however, this remains premature for an agency of this size. This can be revised as Interface continues to develop.

Interface accountant is Mannion Lochrin and Co. Ltd.

1.6. Staffing

As a result of Arts Council Arts Grant funding Interface now employs one part-time staff. This is a significant progression for Interface, in becoming an employer. This employment is on the micro-scale, however, it will be important for Interface to ensure all employers responsibilities, and consider any readjustments required if the founder also becomes an employee, as is intended.

1.7 Membership and On-line Presence

Interface has a high level of on-line capacity. A recent upgrading of the website has resulted in a very high-quality presence, with multiple social media platforms integrated and excellent search engine optimisation.

At the onset of Covid restrictions, Interface reached out to its membership community, offering an option to meet up online, as they were no longer able to offer the shared studio space. There was an enthusiastic take-up. Social media options were expanded, complimented by meeting weekly on ZOOM. The aims were twofold: to encourage one another and offer peer-to-peer support in a time of isolation; to stimulate and inspire one another. At any one meeting there was anything between 6 and 16 in attendance, of a group of 18.

Building on the experiences of 2020, the project has decided to develop this networking and community building Forum.

2. Arts Environment 2021

2.1 National and Regional Policy.

National policy for the arts lies with The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, which provides the national policy, legislative framework and the financial resources to support the stimulation and development of the arts in Ireland. Under the auspices of the Department, The Arts Council is the national agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts in Ireland. In September 2015 The Arts Council published their new ten-year strategy, *Making Great Art Work*, with five priority areas: The Artist, Public Engagement, Investment, Strategy, Spatial and Demographic Planning, Developing Capacity.

These Arts Council priorities are met by Interface as follows:

Arts Council Priority	Interface Priority
The Artist	Priority 1: Supporting Artists And Priority 3: Generate Income & Increase Access
Public Engagement	Priority 4: Outreach
Investment	Priority 3: Generate Income & Increase Access and Priority 2: Sustainable Interface
Strategy	Priority 2: Sustainable Interface and Priority 3: Generate Income & Increase Access
Spatial & demographic Planning	Priority 1: Supporting Artists and Priority 3: Generate Income & Increase Access
Developing capacity	Priority 1: Supporting Artists and Priority 2: Sustainable Interface and Priority 3: Generate Income & Increase Access

Current policy is also guided by Culture 2025: A National Cultural Policy Framework (2020) and most recently, *Survive, Adapt, Renew: Arts Council response to the Covid-19 crisis for the Arts in Ireland*.

Regionally, Interface sits within the remit of Galway County Arts Office, which is guided by Galway County Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018 – 2022, Galway County Creative Ireland Programme and the Framework for Collaboration agreement with the Arts Council for the period 2019 – 2026.

3. New Investment and A New Phase

3.1. Arts Council Arts Grant Funding.

As mentioned previously, Interface secured significant Arts Council funding for the first time in 2021. As well as supporting the programming of 11 Projects in 2021, this funding allocation opens up possibilities for securing greater investment from the Arts Council, and, potentially securing a sustainable future through the allocation of Strategic Funding.

As Strategic Funding covers Core costs, in addition to Programme costs, Interface could employ 2 staff posts, at 1.5 fulltime equivalent.

3.2 Looking to the Future & Interface Phase 2

Taking account of achievements and successes to date it is timely for Interface to identify measurable targets for the coming years. This essential in order to stay on track and avoid agencies drift.

This plan identifies 4 Priorities, with Objectives, Actions and Key Milestones for each. 2025 is likely be a year of review and reflection following implementation of this plan

4. Interface Priorities.

Priority 1: Supporting Artists.

Priority 2: Sustainable Interface.

Priority 3: Generate Income and Increase Access.

Priority 4. Outreach into Local Community with educational outcomes.

4.1 Priority 1. Supporting Artists.

[Meeting the Arts Council Priorities: The Artist; Spatial & Demographic Planning; Developing Capacity]

Objectives

- Provide studio spaces and an artist residency programme in the Inagh Valley Trust Facility where artists can work side by side with various and ongoing scientific projects.
- Building and strengthening of networks nationally, in Connemara, and in the European context, with special emphasis on partnerships in Turkey and Sweden, maximising learning from 2020 online engagement.
- The creation of exhibition and performance opportunities linked with the residency and garnered from the partnerships mentioned above
- The organisation of artistic symposia where a group can gather for a period of intense work and exchange.
- Building the capacity of Interface, in terms of facilities and equipment

Activities in 2021, 22, 23

Deliver programme as funded by Arts Council Arts Grant, to the greatest extent possible under Covid constraints. Reallocate unfeasible international project money to local/feasible projects.

Continue building relationship with AC and other funders.

Research other funding streams towards diversification of funding streams.

Compile a Programme for 2022 which seeks to substantially increase AC investment. The programme is funded through the Arts Grant. 2021: 62,000.

Establish networks on a national level.

Engage with Local Authorities towards on-going annual schedule of local authority funded residencies.

Engage with local Enterprise Officer, Skillsnet, and possibly Leap Leadership, to ensure all employment criteria in place.

Harnessing the learning from 2020, continue developing Members Forum networking and community building process, including a new series of meetings, with members of three different artist-led initiatives in attendance: Pasaj (Istanbul), Detroit (Stockholm) and ourselves, Interface (Connemara).

Key Milestones:

- Successful residencies.
- Increased and consistent participation in Membership Forum.
- Residencies funded by local authorities outside of Galway County and City
- Increased network at national level.
- High quality feedback and reporting to Arts Council.
- High Quality Submission for 2022.
- Securing of significantly increased funding for larger programme in 2022 and 2023.
- High quality applications to other funders, seek feedback if not successful.
- Clarity of assessment from LEO that all employment criteria achieved.

4.2 Priority 2: Sustainable Interface.

[Meeting the Arts Council Priorities: Strategy; Investment; Developing Capacity]

Objective:

- Eliminate dependency on unpaid work through the employment of two staff at 1.5 full/time level.
- Optimise potential for income through Patrons, Friends, private philanthropy.
- Optimise income through sale of Interface products, including online marketing.

- Ensure Interface structures remain fit for purpose as Interface grows, keeping care of artists at the centre of project.

Actions:

2021 for 2022: seek to double core cost award which is in the form of Visual Artists workspace award. 2020: €8,000 / 2021: €17,000 / 2022: up to €40,000

2021 and 2022 relationship building with AC and start on pathway to secure Strategic Funding.

Achieve full oversight in requirements of A and address as early as possible.

Partner with similar Arts Organisations that have made this journey successfully for information, mentoring and support.

2022: begin preparations for High Quality Submission for Strategic Funding.

2023: Apply for Strategic Funding.

Partner with Arts agencies that can be a model for Objectives 2 and 3.

Seek place on Raise Programme through AC, or secure other Reaching Philanthropic funding training.

Develop business and marketing plan for Objective 2 and 3, through LEO.

Identify artists and agencies successfully making online sales.

Develop an online sales strategy with marketing and PR plan that maximises sale of products.

As Strategic Funding becomes likely, clarify developments required in moving from contracting skills to becoming employer, including at Board level, financial reporting, Revenue, funders Etc. Ensure preparation to upgrade systems and structure, with support from LEO, Skillsnet, SME supports.

Key Milestones:

Achieve full core funding (€40,000) from Arts Council for 2022

Secure Strategic Funding from Arts Council.

Target markets reached via communications and marketing strategy, sales increasing.

Strategy for engaging philanthropic funds completed, potential contributors identified.

Agency structure and systems develop along with Interface and remain fit for purpose.

4.3. Priority 3: Generate Income and Increase Access.

[Meeting the Arts Council Priorities: Investment; The Artist; Strategy; Developing Capacity; Spatial & Demographic Planning]

Currently, accommodation is twenty two kilometres away at Connemara Getaway, a self-contained apartment at High Moyard. It is essential to have a driver's license and the use of a car to access Interface which limits its potential uptake and expansion. An accessible future for Interface requires locating accommodation, likely to be in the form of small size, self-contained, residential units (Pods) onsite.

This is a complex priority to progress and therefore much greater detail is included.

Objective

The eventual creation of more work spaces and some residential units at the facility optimising access and the potential for generating income.

Actions:

Engaging the Hatchery Landlord as an Ally in a Sustainable future for Interface.

This requires expert, external, involvement. A process is required to engage the owner of the Hatchery in providing complete information regarding

- Land zoning
- Planning permissions and any potential issues such as noncompliance
- Council rates liability and any potential issues such as noncompliance

Action: Engage John Raftery, Interface.

Securing Planning Permission for Units.

H91VW58 is located in a Special Conservation Area (SAC). If planning permission for residential units does not currently exist a Preliminary Advice on feasibility of securing Residential Planning Permission will be required, prior to proceeding to an application process.

Action: Contract Engineering Company specialist in Planning Permissions including SACs.

Business and Enterprise Support.

There may be potential to secure funding from the business and enterprise sector, as the project is located in a marginalised/deprived economic area. Locating residential units on site will bring year-round income into the local economy. Business support can be accessed the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) who can also advise on how a 'not for profit', as a contributor to the local economy, can engage business supports.

Action: Engage LEO.

Feasibility Study, Business Plan and Quantity survey.

A number of units will have designated Arts residency usage (DA), provided to artists a zero or very low cost. A number of other units will have an Income generation focus (DI), and will be rented on local rates. Comprehensive and detailed quantity surveying and business planning is necessary which includes calculation of

- Cost per unit
- Income potential for DI Units
- Optimal number of DI to DA units
- Optimal number of DI and DA units to cover annual income target
- Maximum number of units without interference with co-tenants activities.

Action: Contract Quantity surveyor and Business Advisor.

Financial Planning relating to Rates Payment.

The footprint of Interface within the Hatchery may not be liable for rates. However, seeking and securing planning permissions may result in the much larger foot print of the Hatchery becoming liable for significant rates noncompliance. Inclusion of these payments in the Annual Budgets of Interface may be a solution to ongoing engagement of Landlord in a sustainable future for Interface. It is not possible at this stage to estimate the additional financial burden to Interface. Engagement of a Rates Advisory Service can assist in achieving the best possible result for both Interface and the Hatchery.

Actions: Contract Rates Advisory Service. Include Interface and Hatchery Rates in Annual Budgets.

Summary Table of Priority 3 Actions and Schedule.

Action:	Delivered by:	Timeline	Associated Costs
1. Engage Landlord	Leap Leadership	Post Lockdown. Funding Required.	€2,000 AC Capacity Grant
2. Assess feasibility of securing Planning Permission	Planning Specialist Engineers, such as Feeney & Associates	Post Action 1.	€1,000 TBC Funding source?
3. Identify Business Supports	Engage with LEO	Post 1 and 2.	n/a
4. Secure Planning Permission	AS above.	Post Actions 1, 2, 3	Seek estimates Business grant funding?
5. Management and Payment plan for Rates Outstanding	Rates Advisory Expert.	??	Seek estimates ? Business grant funding
6. Feasibility/Quantity Survey	Seek advice and assistance from LEO	Post Actions 1, 2, 3 ??	Small Business Support Grants

4.4 Priority 4. Outreach into local community with educational outcomes.

[Meeting the Arts Council Priority: Public Engagement]

Objective

Encourage activities and interactions between visiting professional artists and the local community, sharing expertise in artistic practice, resulting in educational outcomes.

Actions:

- Identify the annual programming of public-facing strand of activities that can be integrated into the programme of residencies.
- Facilitation a minimum of one artist in residence engaging with transition year/primary school students.
- Build on the programme of exhibitions/performances open to the public.

Key Milestones

- One school visit by a visiting professional artist per year minimum, to be revised upwards as feasible
- One public facing event per year minimum, to be revised upwards as feasible.

Appendix 1. SWOT Analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 years dedicated voluntary investment • Location: unique and attractive to artists • Mission, Values & Objectives fit for purpose • Programmes up and running • Successful Residencies to date (how many?), local, national and international • Board in place and clear on purpose • Legal status achieved • Buildings: suitable to artistic endeavour • Website well designed, good platform • Digitally adept; successful in Covid • Multiple funders engaged • Strong Community Development skills • Members Fora very large and active • Exhibitions curated and publication, in addition to Residencies • Embedded in local community • Established International networks • Arts Council <i>Programme Funding</i> secured and Staff hired. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location, Public Transport limited, Car essential • Dependant on on-going voluntary commitment • Subsidised accommodation not sustainable • Level of voluntary input not sustainable • No on site accommodation • Dependent on Statutory Funding • Arts Council <i>Programme level funding</i> insufficient after 2022 • Planning Permission status unclear • ‘Landlord’ cautious in support for seeking planning permission • Area traditionally challenging for securing planning permission • Leases? Large space not secure • Advice and Feasibility Study required regarding potential for and requirements towards securing planning permission, and entire cost of build.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for Advice & Feasibility Study through <i>Capacity Building Funds</i>. • Support available from Local Enterprise Office, business and feasibility supports • Onsite space for 4 Units • Income stream from 2 Units to support 2 Units for residencies. • Diversity of income attractive to funders • Models for mixed income Artists Residencies in rural areas exist, • Gaeltacht area • Multiple Arts Officer Residencies funded annually • Internationally funded residencies • Achieve <i>Strategic Status</i> with Arts Council. 1.5 staff employed on sustainable basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning permission refused/not possible • Cuts to Statutory funding • Lease limited to office and studio, larger space dependant on other tenants expansion • Pathway to <i>Strategic Funding</i> unclear. Interface may not meet criteria. • Limit to voluntary commitment. • On-going absence of sustainable income and on-site accommodation.