

Praxis Statement on the Undelivered Overhaul of the Arts Council IT System 19/3/2025

Praxis: Artists Union of Ireland has been closely following news regarding the Arts Council 2023 Annual Report, the subsequent revelations regarding the failed IT system and the misspend of public funding.

A significant aspect of artistic creation in Ireland is the extensive preparation of Arts Council proposals. Artists and arts workers invest significant amounts of unpaid hours in developing detailed proposals. Even with the recent increases in funding to the Arts Council, the award process is highly competitive.

Praxis members have routinely identified issues with the Arts Council's outdated online application systems. For the past ten years there is a compelling case for modernising these systems. The Arts Council Business Transformation Programme project was intended as a solution to these issues, and we were disillusioned to learn the amount of money spent on what has recently emerged to be a failed IT system.

Led by three main consultants Ergo, Codec and Expleo, the project, costing €6.7 million with an overall loss of value estimated to at least €5.3 million, was never delivered. The project's failure, coupled with the flagrant misuse of public funds hits particularly hard when most artists and arts workers struggle to eke out a basic living, often existing in precarity without stability or security.

We believe that investigating, identifying, and addressing the processes that facilitated the misspend are vital steps in the Arts Council regaining the trust of the arts community, the government and the public. However, we believe it is vital these bad practices and governance failures are not instrumentalised to the detriment of the arts in Ireland.

Praxis seeks assurances from Minister Patrick O'Donovan that any root-and-branch review will have no adverse consequences for the artist and arts worker of Ireland. Punitive or restrictive measures brought against Arts Council should neither affect any funding the Council provides to the arts community, nor should they undermine the arms-length principle that safeguards the art enabled by that funding.

The arts community has clearly demonstrated a significant return on investment from arts funding. Artists, arts workers and arts organisations continue to repay the nation's investment in the sector through discernible positive impacts on individuals and communities in the areas of societal cohesion, inclusion, creativity, critical thinking, innovation, entrepreneurship, global reputation, health, mental wellbeing, education, diversity, and more.

While artists and arts workers are not responsible for the failures surrounding the Arts Council's IT system, many depend on the Arts Council. We will continue to monitor this situation closely and advocate for the artists and arts workers whose livelihoods are most at risk.

Furthermore, Praxis stands ready to offer our expertise and assistance in reforming these systems—ensuring public funds are managed effectively and continue to support Ireland's vibrant arts community.

The Praxis Council
Praxis, the Artists' Union of Ireland
<https://www.praxisunion.ie>