



Owning The Space

Introduction

Owning the Space is Blue Teapot's first arts strategy, informed by the findings and recommendations of our social return on investment report *Ability not Disability: Arts Bravery and Changing Views in Ireland*. It is shaped by research reports and approaches that have contributed to the development of disability arts in Ireland over the last 20 years. It aligns with the Government of Ireland Culture 2025 policy and the Arts Council's 10-year strategy *Making Great Art Work*.

Blue Teapot operates within a complex interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral public policy environment where the effective implementation of our three core programmes is influenced by numerous plans, policies and frameworks.

It is a collaborative endeavour that sits at the intersection of arts, disability and education and by its nature can only succeed through successful partnership.

In practice, this means that one of the most important outcomes of this strategy will be to put all the stakeholders active in the development of our company on the same page – to provide a shared framework that supports individual partners; creative, public, community and voluntary to achieve common purpose and direction.

The cross-cutting agenda impacts on the fulfilment and well-being of intellectually disabled (ID) artists.

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Strengthening our Strategic and Operating Framework

This plan provides an overarching framework of values, principles and strategic priorities that will guide our company in its investment over the period 2023–2027.

It will inform how we develop and deliver our core artistic programmes, evolve our business model, and shape our role as an advocate and influencer in the longer-term for disability arts across Ireland.

We will use it as a development tool and a catalyst to maximise opportunities for collaboration, co-production and partnership while supporting innovation and new ways of doing things in the future.

Our ambition is to firmly secure Blue Teapot's position as a leading arts and disability cultural organisation, not only in a local capacity, but also nationally and internationally.

Ultimately, our vision is to change the landscape in theatre arts for people with an intellectual disability in Ireland.

Vision



We are theatre change makers.

Over the next five years we will advocate for inclusive practices to become the norm at national level.

Mission



To empower freedom of artistic expression and unlock diverse creative potential through inclusive theatre practice.

Priorities



PRODUCTION

Making brave, challenging, intrepid theatre

PROGRESSION

Nurturing creativity and talent

PROVISION

Developing infrastructure and quality



STRATEGIC PRIORITY NUMBER ONE

Production

Making brave, challenging and intrepid theatre

The art and craft of theatre making sit at the heart of our identity. Production and performance unite us around a shared project. Our company works hard to produce the best in Irish and international performances for audiences. We aim to be indispensable to all the communities we serve: audiences, artists, employees and stakeholders, while remaining true to our Galway roots.

Our commitment to excellence and experimentation is reinforced through continuing development of artistic practice across the performing arts. Making good theatre takes time and the investment of resources.

We are committed to creating and developing new production models that support performance by ID actors across a range of settings using co-authored, self-produced and co-production models.

Aware that our productions help to create opportunities for the public to engage with art and the ideas that shape it, we will work to ensure all members of our company have regular and ongoing opportunities to create, produce and perform.

We see this as fundamental to achieving our vision and mission.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NUMBER ONE - PRODUCTION

Main Goal

Support ID artists to create new theatre works for the public to experience and enjoy by strengthening opportunities for excellence and diversity in the arts.

Supporting Objective

- We will prioritise the conditions needed to facilitate the making of work from conception to production to public performance.
- We will grow investment in production and performance to ensure that our financial framework aligns with our artistic ambition increasing the annual funding allocated to this aspect of our work.
- We will work with a range of cultural partners to diversify the number and nature of productions and performance opportunities by the company engaging audiences and supporting cross participation.
- We commit to identify and take actions to improve our environmental practices.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Keeping performance and production at the heart of Blue Teapot's operation

The challenge is to ensure adequate investment and staffing resources are available to support the Artistic Director to find space and time needed to reflect, plan and develop an annual programme of diverse performance opportunities and professional productions that meet the creative needs of our artists, fundamental to our work.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NUMBER TWO

Progression

Nurturing creativity and talent

Over the next five years, we will develop this strategy to help shape a progressive and inclusive approach that nurture the creativity and talent of current ID theatre makers and next-generation ID artists.

Our influence in this regard, and the quality of its offering, is dependent on three core aspects of our artistic programming:

1. **Professional Ensemble.** Our ensemble work collectively and individually developing, creating and performing theatre. They work collaboratively with established and emerging writers, directors and theatre practitioners. The ensemble currently has 11 core members. Places are limited and inclusion is by audition.
2. **Performing Arts School (PAS).** Founded in 2010, our PAS is located in a separate building and operates four days a week, supporting 15 students. Programmes delivered lead to certification in QQI awards at Level Two (the achievement of a General Learning Major Award in year one) and Level Three in years two and three (Component Awards). Entry to the programme is by interview and audition for 5 places available each year.
3. **Community Theatre Programme.** The two elements of this programme, Bright Soul & Sparkle, offer adults and youths with an ID who are curious and interested in performance the opportunity to participate in exciting, fun and fearless theatre-making workshops and on occasion work alongside the professional ensemble for specific events.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NUMBER TWO - PROGRESSION

Main Goal

Support the sense of purpose individuals obtain through their engagement with Blue Teapot Theatre Company with the aim of sustaining the positive impact this has on their lives.

Supporting Objective

- We will put in place new supports to meet the individual needs of our artists at different stages in their creative lives.
- We will develop structured progression pathways within and across Blue Teapot's three programme strands: Professional Ensemble, Performing Arts School and Community Theatre Programme.
- We will harness our experience, best thinking and learning to inform and contribute to future arts and disability policy nationally and at European level.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Highlighting and developing structured progression pathways

We recognise that each artist within our company is different, each takes a different approach to their practice. The challenge is to expand participation opportunities and develop new structured programmes to support members of our company at different stages along their creative journey.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NUMBER THREE

Provision

Developing infrastructure and quality

Over the next five years our aim is to consolidate Blue Teapot's unique identity and cultural presence through the purchase of our theatre base in Galway's Westend.

Owning this space offers us the potential to contribute to the cultural life of Galway and the Western Region through the provision of a new arts and disability centre, which we envision as a hub and centre of excellence for ID theatre arts.

We are convinced that the quality and range of creative opportunities available to ID artists and audiences with a disability will increase if there is a centre to encourage and support better information sharing, peer to peer learning, knowledge transfer, and challenges within the sector.

We are committed to working collaboratively to support networking among ID theatre companies and the wider arts sector, including those that are established in the practice of ID theatre production and performance, nationally and internationally, through to smaller, equally important organisations producing excellent work and supporting development of artists, art forms and audiences.

We recognise the pivotal role that technology plays in supporting creative opportunities and ensuring accessibility to the arts for people with disabilities

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NUMBER THREE - PROVISION

Main Goal

To take an active role in the creation of infrastructure that supports the development of Blue Teapot Theatre Company and ensures continuous quality improvement.

Supporting Objective

- We will prioritise securing a permanent home for our company to ensure its long term contribution to the cultural life of Galway and the Western region. The aim is to develop our space as a regional centre, melting pot and meeting place for disability arts in line with international best practice models.
- We will ensure that Blue Teapot is skilled, resourced and committed to its renewal by developing better business supports that enable us to respond quickly and effectively to a rapidly changing environment.
- We will advocate strongly for inclusive work practices in the theatre sector to create a more equal playing field for ID artists and seek to ensure public investment is shared across the sector.
- We will capitalise on the use of technology to offer new creative possibilities for our artists and establish new platforms for audiences to engage with the work and to ensure greater cultural access for all.
- We will play our part in facilitating better information sharing, peer support and networking among ID theatre companies working nationally and internationally.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Ensuring sustainability

In order to consolidate recent growth and ensure sustainability we need to strengthen our management structure and operating model in a manner that better serves the multisector needs of the company and supports greater cohesion through integration of creative theatre production processes.

The challenge is to build capacity and facilitate a process of change management so the company can achieve its vision and mission.



Michael Hayes & Valerie Egan in *Into the Dark Woods*
by Charlene Kelly, directed by Petal Pilley

PHOTO ANDREW DOWNES

Our Values

A Commitment to Excellence



We promote freedom of thought and expression to develop new ideas and new work and strive to achieve the highest artistic standards in the work we make and produce

A Belief in Equality



We are committed to equality, cultural rights, diversity in all its forms and the advancement of inclusive theatre practices

Dynamic and Sustainable



We are dynamic and adaptable and will evolve our business model to meet the changing needs of our company

Accountable and Transparent



We are open and accountable in our decision making and communicate respectfully with partners and stakeholders

Environmental Awareness



We will identify and take actions to improve our environmental practices



What Success Looks Like

The achievement of our vision and mission will be determined by the progress we make in delivering our three strategic priorities as follows:

- **Production** – achieving a proven increase in the number of ID artists within our company who are supported to create and achieve on their own terms
- **Progression** – ensuring that structured progression pathways and opportunities will be available to support creative skills, social readiness and employability of all the ID artists across our three programmes.
- **Provision** – ensuring evidence of growth in artistic impact, art form development, employment and organisational capacity

We expect that the achievement of goals and objectives detailed in this plan will help to create the conditions where people with an intellectual disability can fully participate, experience and contribute to Ireland's artistic and cultural life and be an integral part of it.



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