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# The Economic and Social Impact of Ireland's Collecting Institutions: Beginning a New Conversation

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**mus  
eum** Ard-Mhúsaem  
na hÉireann  
National Museum  
of Ireland

**nli** *Leabharlann  
Náisiúnta  
na hÉireann*  
National Library  
of Ireland

**NATIONAL  
GALLERY** of  
IRELAND

**IMMA** **ÁRAS NUA-EALAÍNE  
NA hÉIREANN**  
IRISH MUSEUM OF  
MODERN ART

Gailearaí Ealaíne  
**Crawford**  
Art Gallery



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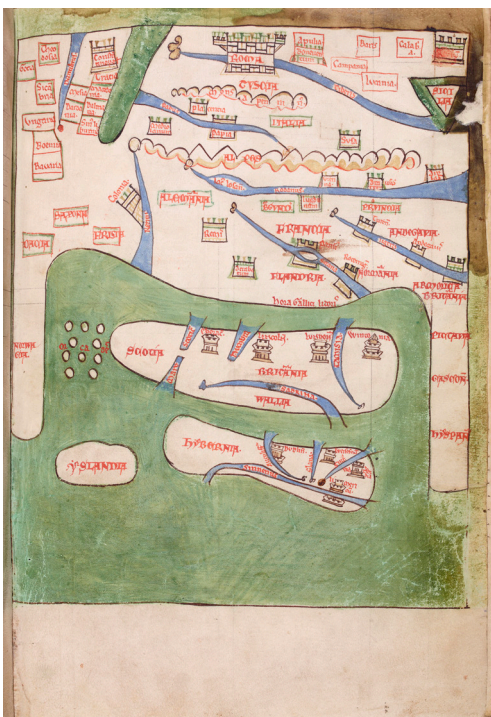
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Jack B. Yeats, *The Liffey Swim*. Photo, National Gallery of Ireland

Illustrations from the  
*'Topographica Hibernica'*  
by Geraldus Cambrensis,  
National Library of Ireland



Jean O Donovan,  
Registrar at Crawford  
Art Gallery caring for  
the collection. Photo,  
Clare Keogh

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# Executive Summary

## Purpose

This report has been commissioned from Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants for five of Ireland’s National Cultural Institutions (NCIs) — the National Museum of Ireland, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Crawford Art Gallery, the National Library of Ireland, and the National Gallery of Ireland. Its purpose is to provide an initial independent evidence-based assessment of the economic and social contribution that the five institutions, as Ireland’s main collecting cultural institutions, collectively make in Ireland.

Ireland’s NCIs have a unique place in State-supported cultural celebration and promotion, and in public policy more generally. Among these, the collecting institutions have a remit which is distinct from other NCIs, which revolves around the care, conservation, accessibility to, and exhibition of physical artefacts, artistic works, exhibits, manuscripts, records and other materials of national cultural significance. The protection, care and conservation of these collections a critical role therefore and a unique one conferred on the institutions.

Each is free to visit, although there are sometimes charges to visit special exhibitions. Collectively, they typically attract 3-4 million visitors each year, employ over 600 hundred people directly, support and encourage wide-ranging creative talent and expression, and help to sustain businesses in a wide range of supply chain businesses.

However, the full scale of their contribution has to date lacked a comprehensive and independent assessment, including the wider contribution of economic returns from tourism, from employment, from the “multiplier” effects of the institutions’ spending on goods and services, and from the targeted outreach and participatory work they undertake with specific groups and individuals. This report seeks to begin to address this gap, but also to point towards further research and analysis needed to determine, demonstrate and understand such impacts going forward, for the benefit of organisational programming and policy more generally.

## Context

Together, the five NCIs that are the focus of this report form part of the backbone of Ireland's publicly funded cultural infrastructure. All offer free to enter public sites, and together they represent one of the most significant concentrations of free, high-quality public cultural provision anywhere in Europe. Spanning six main public sites in Dublin, one in Cork, and one in Mayo, the five institutions collectively attract well over three million visitors a year, high numbers of whom are international visitors and tourists in Ireland. Each institution has a distinct remit and collection focus, yet all five share a common public mission: to preserve and make accessible the documentary, artistic, and material record of Ireland's culture and shared history.

Surveys indicate that visitors indicate high levels of satisfaction with their experiences when visiting each of the institutions. In general, they report feeling stimulated, informed and inspired, and point to the quality of exhibits and the interior layout of attractions as primary drivers of satisfaction.

## Key Findings

The analysis undertaken as part of this research suggests that in 2024, the five institutions together:

- generated total economic output of approximately €209m;
- contributed approximately €135m to national Gross Value Added (GVA)<sup>2</sup>;
- supported approximately 2,300 full-time equivalent jobs across the economy.

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<sup>2</sup> Gross value added is a measure of the true value added by economic actors, and is net of the inputs they purchase from other businesses and service providers. In this sense it is related to Gross Domestic Product and Gross National Product measures of economic activity and growth.

The research also indicates

- that the value of the institutions to their Irish-based users and visitors, in terms of personal subjective wellbeing gained by such visitation, may be in a range between €45m and €68m per annum; and
- that additional value attributed to the work and existence of the institutions by citizens who do not engage or visit them, may be in the order of €55m per annum.

Both of these latter measures are however based on research into such benefits and opinions in the UK, and not on research in Ireland.

The report also describes wide-ranging work undertaken by the institutions in conservation, inclusivity, engagement, education, research and outreach, and points to the growing national and international research evidence of the positive personal, social and economic impacts of such cultural engagement in areas such as physical and mental health and wellbeing, quality of life, education, social inclusion, productivity, migration and integration, justice and crime prevention, and placemaking and identity.

While they have a very substantial ongoing economic impact and support high numbers of jobs, the primary mission of the institutions relate more to preserving and celebrating the cultural and artistic heritage of Ireland, and enabling citizens and visitors to experience and gain from them.

Their impact reaches far beyond the direct visitors they receive each year, as community outreach and education programmes engage students and young people, disadvantaged groups, people experiencing dementia, survivors of domestic violence, disabled and neurodiverse artists, and diaspora communities across 230 countries, among others, while digital collections are accessed from every corner of the world. And beyond all of these active engagements, there is the value that people place simply on the importance of keeping Ireland's cultural heritage preserved and accessible, a potentially significant and largely invisible source of public benefit and value.

## Implications and Next Steps

The evidence implies that the institutions provide a very strong return on the public funding and investment made in them, and do so across many policy domains and in many dimensions of public and civic life. Such returns take different forms, with some quite directly supporting jobs, businesses and incomes. The deeper return, however, lies in the social value generated by cultural engagement, beyond the benefits of simply visiting institutions. These include measurable improvements in mental and physical health, reductions in depression and dementia risk, gains in self-esteem and resilience, improved educational outcomes in children and young people, and productivity benefits that flow from a healthier and more engaged population. Each of these translates, in turn, to a better quality of life for people and communities, and into avoided costs for health services, reduced demand on social care, and higher economic output per person. The quantitative evidence on the social value of cultural institutions is drawn from UK-based studies rather than primary Irish data. However, this UK evidence provides the methodological groundwork, it has produced detailed guidance on user well-being surveys, non-use value willingness-to-pay studies and the measurement of social impact, and its guidance is publicly available and directly applicable to an Irish context.

Relevant comparable research in Ireland would provide the data needed to maximise the evidence base for the benefit of the institutions, and construct a full social return on investment analysis, grounded in Irish evidence and defensible in a public appraisal context. The evidence from international comparators also suggests that such an analysis would demonstrate returns on public investment that are compelling in an Irish context.

As well as demonstrating the degrees to which the collecting institutions generate economic and societal benefits and value, the report, and the international research evidence which it draws from, increasingly demonstrate the wide spectrum of such positive effects – in health, education, wellbeing, identity, inclusion, and many other domains.

This wide spectrum of policy efficacy is a particular feature of the institutions and their work. It also relates very directly to the growing appreciation and acknowledgement in official policy of quality-of-life dimensions of national well-being and prosperity rather than more narrowly measured material wealth.

The findings also demonstrate the positive role which such institutions can play in addressing national policy challenges and contemporary threats. Cultural institutions have been found to retain very high levels of public trust and respect, and to act as forces which reinforce mutual respect, diversity and also unity. In an international context of increasing polarisation, misinformation and extremism, they may hold a unique position to counter divisive forces and support stronger national cohesion. They also may have valuable and important roles to play in addressing national challenges associated with migration and integration, placemaking and local identity, an ageing population, the promotion of a creative, innovative, risk-taking and entrepreneurial workforce, and digital exclusion, to name a few.

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*This report was prepared by Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants. The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Chairs and Directors of the National Museum of Ireland, National Gallery, Crawford Art Gallery, National Library of Ireland, and Irish Museum of Modern Art for their contributions, information provided, advice and support throughout the process of preparing the report.*

*The report content, analysis and any errors therein are the sole responsibility of the authors. The usual disclaimer applies.*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

This report has been commissioned from Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants for five of Ireland’s National Cultural Institutions — the National Museum of Ireland, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Crawford Art Gallery, the National Library of Ireland, and the National Gallery of Ireland. Its purpose is to provide an initial independent evidence-based assessment of the economic and social contribution that the five institutions, as Ireland’s main collecting cultural institutions<sup>2</sup>, collectively make in Ireland.

Ireland’s National Cultural Institutions have a unique place in State-supported cultural celebration and promotion, and in public policy more generally. Each is free to visit, although there are sometimes charges to visit special exhibitions. Collectively, they typically attract 3-4 million visitors each year, employ over 600 hundred people directly, support and encourage wide-ranging creative talent and expression, and help to sustain businesses in a wide range of supply chain businesses. However, the full scale of their contribution has to date lacked a comprehensive and independent assessment, including the wider contribution of economic returns from tourism, from employment, and from the “multiplier” effects of the institutions’ spending on goods and services. This report seeks to begin to address this gap, but to fully investigate and consider the comprehensive impact of Ireland’s cultural institutions as builders of civil society is outside its scope.

The National Cultural Institutions are not simply economic actors, they are places where people encounter Irish history, develop a sense of national identity, encounter ideas that challenge and inspire them, and access forms of learning and well-being that are difficult to capture in purely quantitative terms. The report therefore also draws on the established literature on the wider economic and social value of cultural institutions, including the evidence base for quality of life benefits such as well-being, social inclusion and educational outcomes, while it likewise addresses the importance of “non-user” benefits, e.g. the value that people place on simply knowing that

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<sup>2</sup> As collecting institutions, these National Cultural Institutions have explicit responsibilities for the care, conservation, accessibility to, and exhibition of physical artefacts, artistic works, exhibits, manuscripts, records and other materials of national cultural significance.

Irish culture and its institutions are being preserved, even if they choose not to visit them. Most of the comparative research material included in this report has been generated outside Ireland. There is therefore great potential for a full study of the social, cultural, educational and health benefits of generated by Ireland's collecting cultural institutions.

The report draws on national and international evidence and information sources but has not involved primary research. As such it seeks to demonstrate the scale of impacts and potential impacts but without empirically testing and validating those not having been subject to such research specifically in Ireland. As such the report also seeks to point towards information and knowledge gaps which could be the focus of further illuminating research in future – aligned to developments within cultural research internationally. The report also considers some of the implications of the findings, as they affect public policy within the sector and more widely.

## 1.2 Scope

Ireland has a rich and diverse cultural sector, encompassing hundreds of museums, galleries, libraries, theatres and heritage sites, many of which make significant contributions to their local economies and communities. This report focuses exclusively on the five National Cultural Institutions named above, and its scope does not extend to the wider sector. Therefore, the findings and conclusions set out here relate solely to the National Museum of Ireland, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Crawford Art Gallery, the National Library of Ireland, and the National Gallery of Ireland.

The economic assessment is also built on two methodological pillars. The first is input-output modelling, applied to data on institutional expenditure and employment, which allows the direct economic contribution of each institution to be estimated, alongside the indirect effects that flow through

supply chains and the induced effects generated by employee spending in the wider economy. It does not present a cost-benefit analysis, i.e. to weigh the costs of public funding and investment against the benefits in the manner of a formal appraisal. Such an exercise would require a level of primary data collection, stated preference surveying, and methodological development that goes beyond the scope of this report. Where benefit-cost ratios are referenced, these are drawn from the published literature on comparable institutions rather than being derived from original analysis. The second pillar draws on existing research and evidence on the broader economic and social value of cultural institutions, both in Ireland and internationally. This is not presented as a systematic literature review, and the report makes no attempt to catalogue the range of values that different studies have attributed to cultural effects. Rather, published evidence has been used selectively to identify the main categories of economic and social benefit that the institutions generate, to illustrate the kinds of return that comparable institutions have demonstrated, and to frame the areas where the Irish evidence base remains limited.

Also, the report does not seek to assess the cultural or artistic quality of the institutions' programmes, nor does it make recommendations about the allocation of public funding between institutions. Its purpose is thus demonstrative and analytical rather than evaluative: to set out, as clearly and rigorously as available evidence permits, the scale and nature of the economic and social contribution that the five institutions currently make, and to identify the areas where further research would most usefully strengthen the evidence base for future policy and planning.

### 1.3 Report Structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 provides some context to the report, including an overview of the five institutions, their activities and their visitors, and Ireland's engagement with culture more generally;
- Chapter 3 sets out the economic footprint of the five institutions, covering direct revenues and expenditure, gross value added (GVA), employment, wider multiplier effects and tourism impacts;
- Chapter 4 considers the institutions' conservation, inclusivity and outreach programmes;
- Chapter 5 examines institutions' impacts on quality of life and well-being, including the value of cultural capital; and
- Chapter 6 summarises key findings and considers some implications.

## 2. Context

### Key Findings

- Combined, the National Museum of Ireland, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Crawford Art Gallery, the National Library of Ireland and the National Gallery of Ireland attracted more than 3.5 million visits in 2023, with international visitors accounting for the largest share of visits
- Visitor satisfaction across the five institutions is consistently high, with between 60% and 88% of visitors expressing satisfaction with the institution they visited
- Ireland also invests 0.9% of gross domestic product (GDP) in culture, which is marginally below the EU-27 average of 1.0%

### 2.1 Overview

Together, the five National Cultural Institutions that are the focus of this report form part of the backbone of Ireland’s publicly funded cultural infrastructure. All offer free to enter public sites, and together they represent one of the most significant concentrations of free, high-quality public cultural provision anywhere in Europe. Spanning six main public sites in Dublin, one in Cork, and one in Mayo, the five institutions collectively attract well over three million visitors a year, with evidence suggesting a majority of whom are international tourists visiting Ireland (see Figure 1)<sup>3</sup>.

**Figure 1: Participating Institutions**

Institution	Location(s)	Annual Visitors (2023)
National Museum of Ireland	Dublin (3 Sites) and Mayo	1,487,956
Irish Museum of Modern Art	Kilmainham, Dublin 8	626,629
Crawford Art Gallery	Emmet Place, Cork City	236,693
National Library of Ireland	Kildare Street, Dublin 2	213,574
National Gallery of Ireland	Merrion Square West, Dublin 2	1,014,976

<sup>3</sup> Given the closures of the Crawford Art Gallery and the National Museum of Ireland – Natural History from September 2024 (to facilitate redevelopment works), analysis of visitor attendances in this report uses a baseline year of 2023.

Each institution has a distinct remit and collection focus, yet all five share a common public mission: to preserve and make accessible the documentary, artistic, and material record of Ireland’s culture and shared history.

## 2.2 The Institutions

### 2.2.1 National Museum of Ireland

The National Museum of Ireland is the country’s principal institution for the collection, preservation, and exhibition of Irish archaeological, natural history and decorative arts heritage. Established under the Dublin Science and Art Museum Act 1877, the museum operates across four sites: the Archaeology and Natural History buildings on Kildare St and Merrion St in Dublin; the Decorative Arts and History collection at Collins Barracks, on the north quays of the city; and the Museum of Country Life at Turlough Park, Castlebar, Co. Mayo.

The museum attracted nearly 1.5 million visitors across its four sites in 2023, and the breadth of its geographic and thematic reach is unique among Ireland’s National Cultural Institutions. Its collections span over 4,000 years of Irish and world history, from prehistoric gold torcs and bog bodies, to the silver and furniture collections at Collins Barracks, to the exploration of Irish rural and domestic life at Turlough Park, and headline objects such as the Ardagh Chalice, the Tara Brooch and the Derrynaflan Hoard are among the most important works of early medieval metalwork in existence. The museum also operates an extensive schools and community programme, and has in recent years developed strong digital resources to extend access to its collections beyond its physical sites.

### 2.2.2 Irish Museum of Modern Art

The Irish Museum of Modern Art is Ireland’s National Cultural Institution for modern and contemporary art. Sited at the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Royal Hospital in Kilmainham — founded in 1684 as a home for retired soldiers — it provides a dramatic backdrop to a collection of over 4,700 works by Irish and international artists, including Lucian Freud, Marina Abramović, Louise Bourgeois and Louis le Brocqy. The museum welcomed 626,629 visitors in 2023.

The museum’s exhibition and commissioning programme is ambitious in scope, regularly producing major survey exhibitions and new commissions that attract national and international critical attention. In addition, the museum’s 48-acre campus also encompasses formal gardens, meadows and historic outbuildings, and it has become a cultural destination in its own right that regularly plays host to wider music and artistic events.

### 2.2.3 Crawford Art Gallery

The Crawford Art Gallery holds a distinctive place in the landscape of Ireland’s National Cultural Institutions, as the only institution located exclusively outside Dublin, and it occupies a central role in the cultural and civic life of Cork. Established in its current building in 1884 — originally the Cork Customs House — the gallery has been a public institution for over a century, and thus forms part of the historic fabric of Cork’s city centre.

Its collection spans Irish and international art from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the present, with particular strengths in Cork-associated artists and a celebrated cast collection of classical sculptures, gifted from the Vatican in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Attracting 236,693 visitors in 2023, it is currently undergoing a significant redevelopment and expansion of its site, which will materially increase its capacity, accessibility and exhibition footprint when complete.

#### 2.2.4 National Library of Ireland

The National Library of Ireland is both a working research library and a National Cultural Institution. Established under the same 1877 Act as the National Museum of Ireland, and housed in a matching building (which it faces across the forecourt of Leinster House on Kildare St), the library holds over 12 million items — including books, manuscripts, maps, photographs, prints, drawings, ephemera, newspapers, musical scores and digital collections — and provides free access to the bulk of its collections for researchers and the public alike.

With 213,574 visitors in 2023, the library’s public-facing programme is built around landmark literary exhibitions devoted to W.B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney and the broader history of the Irish people, which have drawn significant audiences and generated strong visitor feedback. The Library also engages extensively with digital users on a global scale – there were almost 2m instances of digital engagement in 2025. Similar to the Crawford Art Gallery, the library is also currently undergoing a major transformation, through its “Reimagining the National Library” redevelopment project, which received planning permission in January 2024 and which will substantially increase the volume of the collection that is available for public display.

#### 2.2.5 National Gallery of Ireland

The National Gallery of Ireland is the guardian of the country’s foremost collection of visual art, housing the national collection of European and Irish paintings, watercolours, drawings, prints and sculptures from approximately 1300 to the present day. Opened in January 1864 and located on Merrion Square West in the heart of Georgian Dublin, the gallery has been a cornerstone of Irish cultural life for over 160 years.

With attendances of more than one million visitors in 2023, its collection numbers approximately 16,000 works, with particular strengths in Dutch and Flemish masters, Italian Baroque painting, and Irish art. Among its most celebrated holdings is the only known Caravaggio in Ireland — “The Taking of Christ”, rediscovered in a Jesuit house in Dublin in 1990 — alongside works by Vermeer, Rembrandt, Degas and Jack B. Yeats.

## 2.3 Visitors

### 2.3.1 Visitor Profile

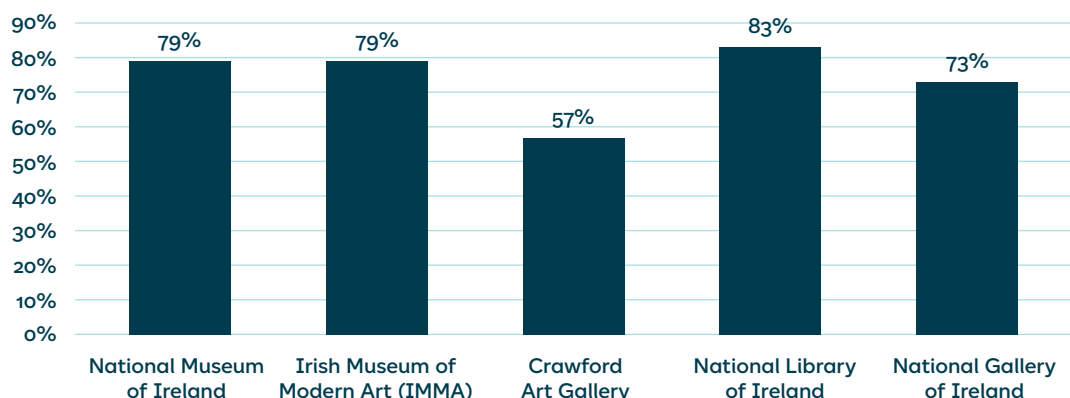
In August and September 2023, Fáilte Ireland commissioned RED C Research to carry out on-site visitor surveys across 12 sites within Ireland's National Cultural Institutions, interviewing visitors as they exited each location<sup>4</sup>. During this research, a total of over 2,500 interviews were conducted across the five institutions covered in this report, and the results of the research provide a comprehensive picture of who visits National Cultural Institutions, why they come, and their experience.

In terms of market origin the research suggests that international visitors account for a substantial share of all visits to National Cultural Institutions (see Figure 2). Such a share is not assumed throughout the year, however the institutions all have a significant number of non-Irish visitors.

In terms of more detailed geographic breakdown, the Fáilte Ireland research found that visitors from Continental Europe account for about 27% of all visitors, visitors from North America account for a further 21%, while visitors from the UK account for about 17%<sup>5</sup>. Also, over half of all international visitors were on their first trip to Ireland at the time of their visit.

Three-quarters of all visitors to the five institutions are in the ABC1 social grade, and 52% are under the age of 45. Visitors also predominantly travel as couples or in adult groups, with families with children accounting for about one-in-five visitors across the Dublin institutions, or somewhat higher than this at the Museum of Country Life site in Castlebar.

Figure 2: International Visitor Numbers (% Of Total Visitors)



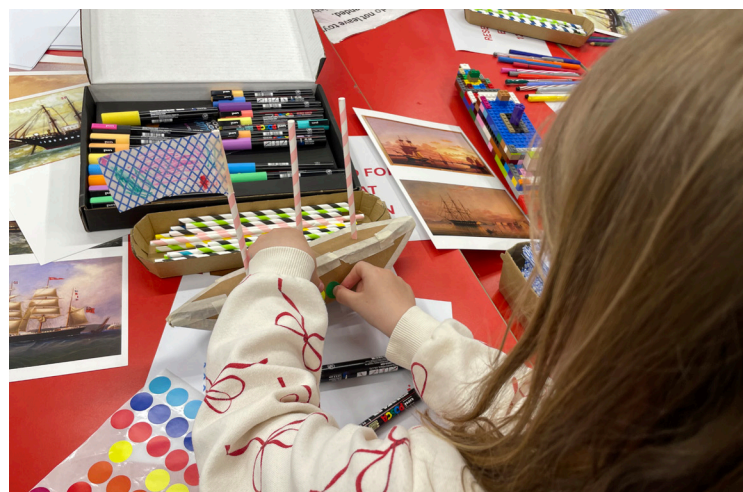
Source: Fáilte Ireland/RED C Research

<sup>4</sup> National Cultural Institutions, RED C Research for Fáilte Ireland, December 2023.

<sup>5</sup> This profile has important implications for economic impact assessment, as visitors from North America and Continental Europe typically stay longer in Ireland and spend more per diem than UK visitors.

### 2.3.2 Visitor Experience and Satisfaction

Overall visitor satisfaction with the experience at National Cultural Institutions is high across the institutions, with visitors consistently describing their experience in terms of feeling stimulated, informed and inspired. The quality of exhibits and the interior layout of attractions are primary drivers of satisfaction, cited across virtually all sites, while average dwell times range from around 45 minutes at the Crawford Art Gallery to over 84 minutes at the Irish Museum of Modern Art.



## 2.4 Ireland's Engagement with Culture

### 2.4.1 Overview

Eurostat collects comparable data across EU member states on three dimensions of cultural activity that are particularly relevant to this report: participation rates, Government expenditure on culture (as a share of GDP), and employment in the cultural sector. Taken together, these indicators allow Ireland's cultural sector to be placed in its European context.

### 2.4.2 Participation and Spend

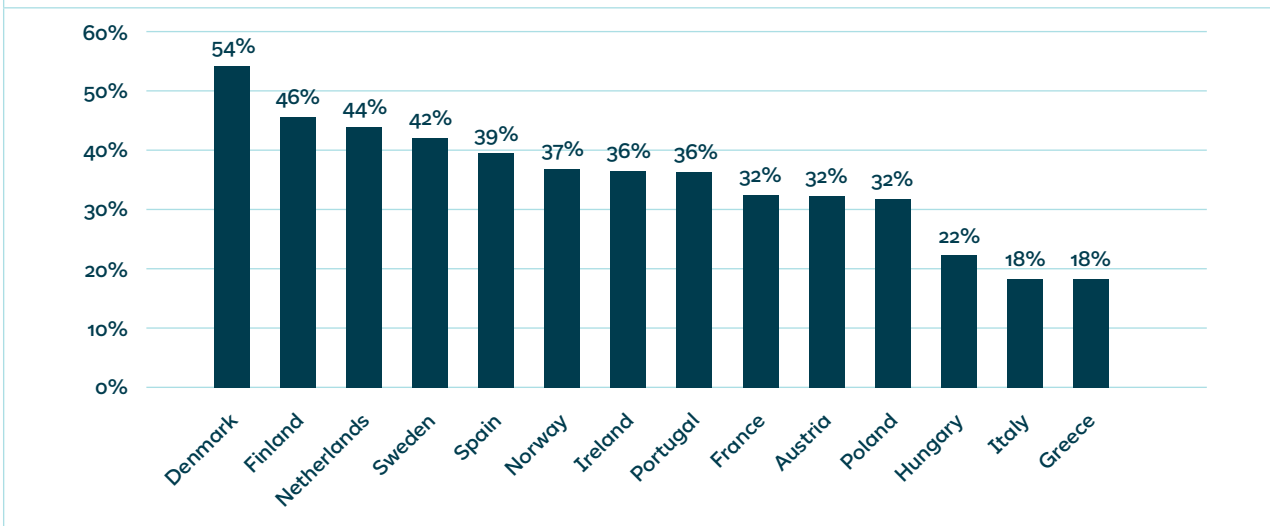
Eurostat's cultural participation survey, most recently collected in 2022, records the share of each country's population that visited a museum, library or zoological garden at least once in the previous 12 months. On this measure, Ireland records a participation rate of 36.3%, placing it 7<sup>th</sup> out of the 14 EU and European Economic Area (EEA) member states for which data is available, and thus broadly in the middle of the European range (see Figure 3).



Visitors taking inspiration from The Collection at Crawford Art Gallery during a Learn and Explore workshop. Photo, Julie Forrester

Daphne Wright, Stallion, 2009, Marble dust and resin, 160 x 140 x 380 cm, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Purchase, 2023

Figure 3: Numbers Engaging in Culture in the Previous 12 Months (%) – 2022



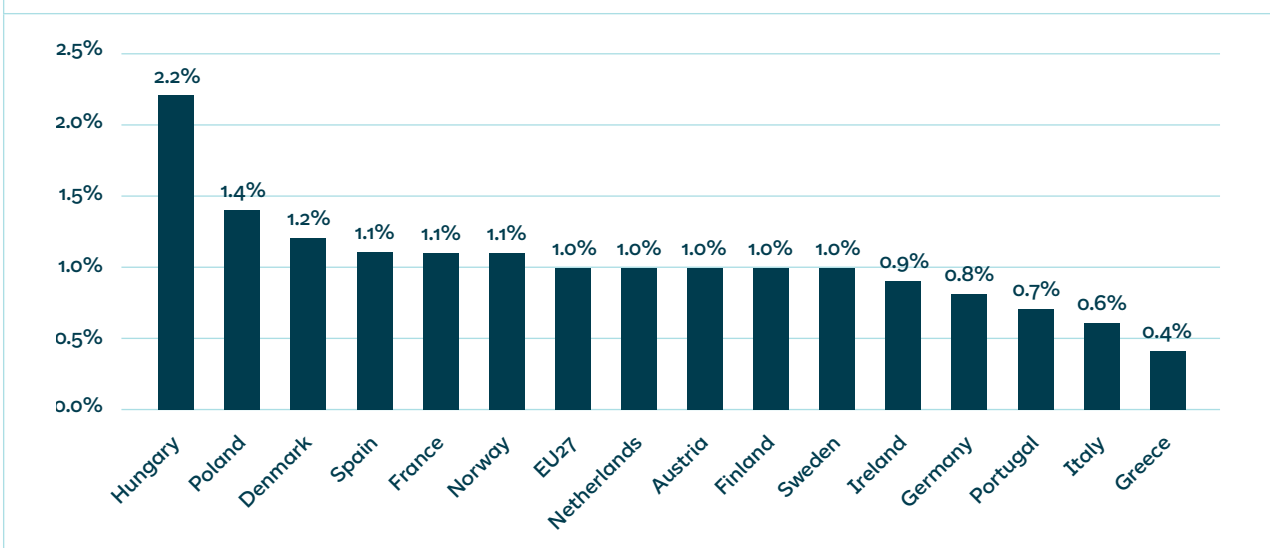
Source: Eurostat

### 2.4.3 Public Investment

Eurostat estimates for Government expenditure on culture (as a percentage of GDP) show that Ireland invested 0.9% of GDP on culture in 2023, marginally below the EU-27 average of 1.0%, but also below several comparable European economies (see Figure 4).

It is worth noting, however, that the Eurostat estimates for Government expenditure cover the broad cultural sector and are not specific to the five National Cultural Institutions that are the focus of this report.

Figure 4: Government Expenditure on Culture (% Of GDP) – 2023

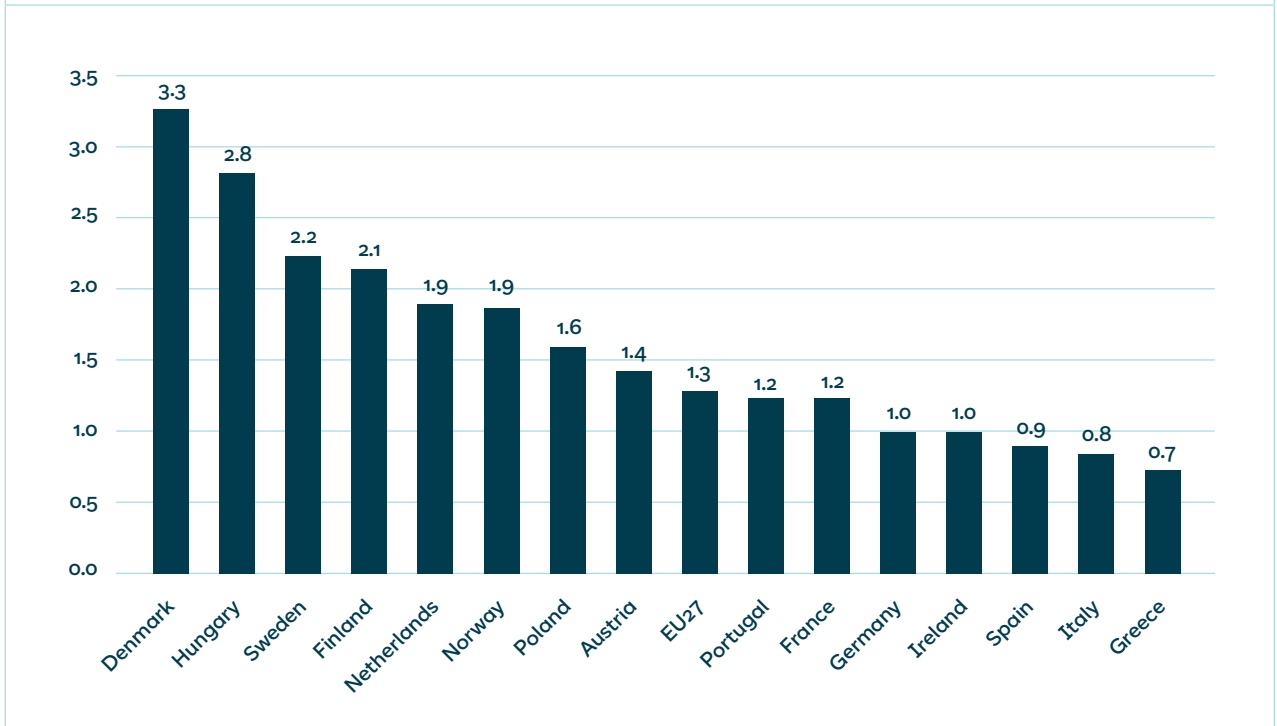


Source: Eurostat

#### 2.4.4 Employment

Finally, Eurostat data on cultural employment shows approximately 5,100 jobs in the cultural sector in Ireland in 2024, equivalent to around 0.95 jobs per 1,000 population. This places Ireland below the EU-27 average and below the majority of comparable European economies (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Employment in Culture (Per 1,000 Population) – 2024



Source: Eurostat

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# 3. Economic Footprint

## Key Findings

- The five institutions spent €54.1 million directly in the Irish economy in 2024, generating a direct gross value added (GVA) contribution of €33 million
- Including indirect and induced effects, however, the institutions' total GVA contribution rises to €54.2 million, supporting 708.5 full-time equivalent jobs
- International visitors that travel to Ireland and are influenced to come here by the attraction of the five institutions, generate approximately €73 million in expenditure in the Irish economy
- Traced through the wider economy, this tourism spend generates €80.5 million in GVA and supports approximately 1,635 full-time equivalent jobs

### 3.1 Overview

This section considers the economic footprint of the institutions. It looks at the economic activity and employment that they generate through their day-to-day activities and operations, including how this spending diffuses through the economy, supporting businesses which supply goods and services to them. In addition, it also looks at their economic footprint in the tourism sector, and the impacts of overseas tourism activity they contribute towards attracting.

### 3.2 Methodology

The analytical framework used throughout is input-output modelling, the standard approach for economic impact assessment in the cultural and public sectors. At its heart, input-output analysis traces what happens to money as it moves through an economy. So, when one of the five institutions pays a supplier, that supplier uses the money to pay its own staff and buy its own inputs, those staff then spend their wages in local shops and restaurants, and so on through successive rounds of activity. Input-output modelling therefore captures all of these flows by mapping the relationships between different sectors of the economy, enabling the full economic impact of an initial injection of spending to be estimated systematically and consistently.

This type of model splits the economic impact into three distinct categories. These are:

- **direct impacts**, i.e. the direct impact of the spending by the institutions in the national economy, which is directly aligned to their total spending (as taken from their annual accounts);
- **indirect impacts**, i.e. all the economic activity created by the supply chain, i.e. through the purchase of goods and services by the institutions which are required for their operation and service delivery; and
- **induced impacts**, i.e. the impacts of individual spending in the national economy, such as the household and personal spending of staff, both directly employed and indirectly employed through the supply chain.

The model then provides figures for three key metrics:

- **output**, i.e. the total value of all goods and services produced as a result of institutions' activities and the spending they generate;
- **GVA**, i.e. the value added at each stage of production, or the difference between the value of what a business produces and the cost of the inputs it purchases from others; and
- **employment**, i.e. full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs rather than headcount employment, whereby (for example) two people both working 20 hours a week would be considered one FTE post.

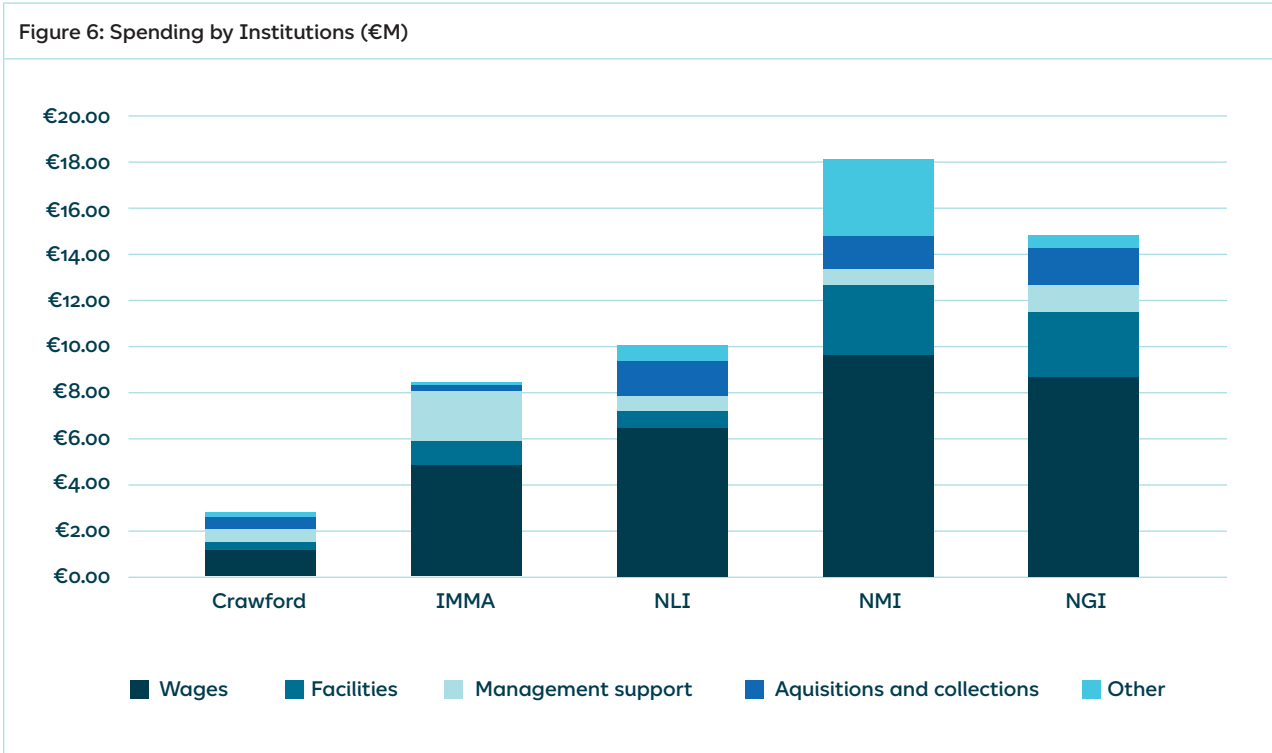
It is important to note the distinction between output and GVA. Output represents the value of sales and as such counts the same economic value multiple times as it passes through successive stages of the supply chain. GVA measures only the value genuinely created at each stage. It is GVA, not output, that feeds directly into GDP, and that represents the truest measure of an activity's net contribution to the national economy.

### 3.3 Direct Impact

In 2024, the five institutions spent a combined total of €54.1 million directly within the Irish economy. As shown in Figure 6, a majority of this spending related to staff costs, which account for 57% of total expenditure. The remainder was spread across facility management, collection care, and the range of goods and services the institutions procure to carry out their public functions.

The €54.1 million of direct expenditure translates to a direct GVA contribution of €33 million, as illustrated in Figure 8. While the National Museum of Ireland and the National Gallery of Ireland are the largest contributors to GVA, reflecting their scale of operation, all five institutions make a meaningful direct contribution.

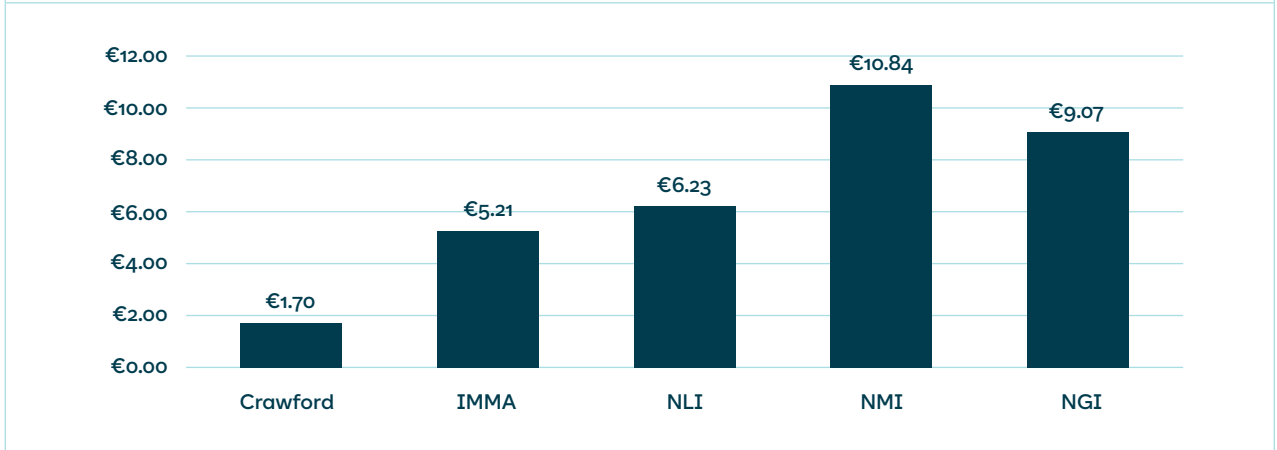
Figure 6: Spending by Institutions (€M)



Source: Institution Data

The €54.1 million of direct expenditure translates to a direct GVA contribution of €33 million, as illustrated in Figure 8. While the National Museum of Ireland and the National Gallery of Ireland are the largest contributors to GVA, reflecting their scale of operation, all five institutions make a meaningful direct contribution.

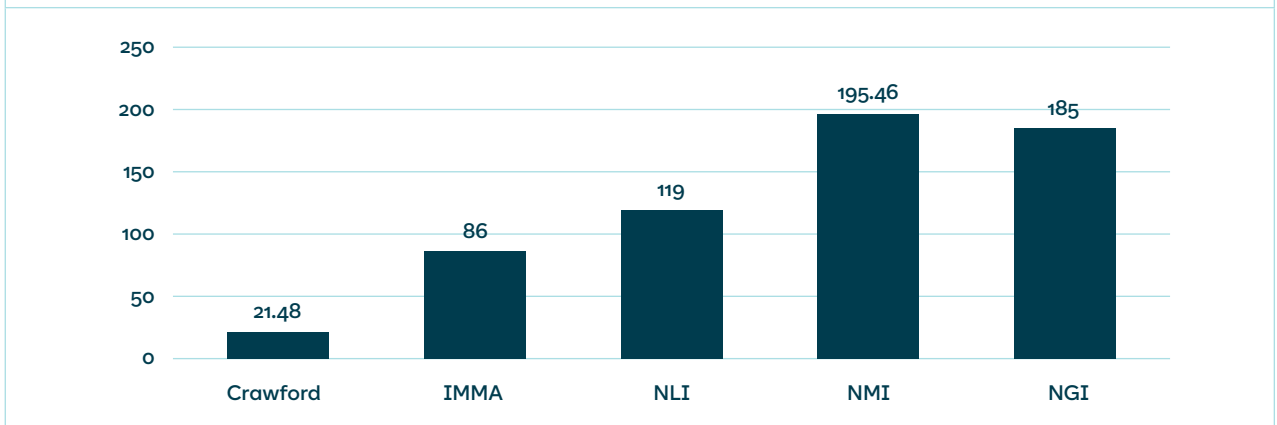
Figure 7: GVA Contribution of Institutions (€M)



Source: Institution Data

In employment terms, the five institutions directly employ 606.9 FTE posts, as set out in Figure 8, with the National Museum of Ireland and the National Gallery of Ireland being the largest direct employers, together accounting for approximately 62% of total FTEs across the five institutions. As with expenditure and GVA, however, these direct employment figures represent only a portion of the institutions' full employment contribution, before their supply chain and induced effects are considered (see Section 3.4).

Figure 8: Employment (FTEs) in Institutions



Source: Institution Data

### 3.4 Wider Impact

The direct figures set out above capture only the first round of economic activity generated by the institutions. Looking at the full chain of indirect and induced effects, i.e. the activity generated across the supply chain and the further spending of employees throughout the wider economy, the institutions generated total economic output of €71.4 million in 2024, contributing €54.2 million in GVA and supporting 708.5 FTE jobs across the economy. The full breakdown of this by institution and by impact category is shown in Table 1.

		Crawford	IMMA	NLI	NMI	NGI	Total
Output (€m)	Direct	€2.80	€8.46	€10.05	€18.06	€14.76	€54.14
	Indirect	€0.28	€0.50	€0.84	€1.46	€1.50	€4.59
	Induced	€0.94	€1.92	€2.20	€3.98	€3.60	€12.63
GVA (€m)	Direct	€1.70	€5.21	€6.23	€10.84	€9.07	€33.05
	Indirect	€0.09	€0.15	€0.26	€0.38	€0.41	€1.28
	Induced	€0.91	€3.15	€4.02	€6.13	€5.68	€19.89
Employment (FTEs)	Direct	21.5	86.0	119.0	195.5	185.0	606.9
	Indirect	1.5	1.5	8.3	5.5	9.4	26.2
	Induced	5.1	7.5	21.1	17.0	24.7	75.4

The pattern of impacts across the three categories reflects the operational characteristics of the institutions. The indirect or supply chain effect is relatively modest, as the institutions' spending activity is concentrated in staff costs and collection expenditure, both of which generate limited onward supply chain linkages. Maintenance and facilities spending, which accounts for approximately 15% of total expenditure, is therefore the principal driver of indirect impact.

Induced impact is, by contrast, a much larger component of the institutions' total economic impact. In this regard, the institutions employ a predominantly skilled, professional workforce. The spending power of these employees — augmented by the wages of those employed indirectly through the supply chain — thus generates substantial further economic activity in additional household expenditure which increases direct GVA of €33 million to total GVA of €54.2 million.

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# International Case Study:

## **The economic footprint of V&A Dundee — the multiplier effect of a distinctive cultural offer**

V&A Dundee, which opened in September 2018, provides one of the most rigorously evidenced assessments of how a single cultural institution generates economic value well beyond its own walls, and well beyond a simple count of its visitor numbers.

An independent study covering its first year of operation found that the museum generated £75 million in GVA across Scotland and supported 2,143 full-time equivalent jobs, against a pre-opening forecast of £23 million in GVA and 604 jobs. Within Dundee itself, the impact was £21 million in GVA, more than double the projection before the museum opened, with multipliers of around 3× at both city and national level illustrating how a museum of this scale does not simply capture existing visitor spending, but actively generates new economic activity throughout the wider economy.

Visitors to V&A Dundee were also found to have spent £32 million with other Dundee businesses in the year, (e.g. hotels, restaurants, retail and transport), of which £16 million was genuinely new spending that would not have occurred without the museum. Critically, 69% of visitors said they would not have visited other city businesses at all without visiting V&A Dundee, and 31% were making overnight stays linked directly to their museum visit. These figures therefore capture the “beyond the door” dynamic that is central to the economic case for investment in such institutions: that a museum can function not just as a destination in itself, but as an anchor that drives spending across a wider local economy.

*Source: V&A Dundee Economic Impact Study, Year 1 (2019), Ekosgen and Reference Economic Consultants, Commissioned by V&A Dundee*

### 3.5 Impact of Displacement

The analysis in Sections 3.3 and 3.4 demonstrates that National Cultural Institutions generate substantial economic activity and employment across both their local areas and the national economy. However, in interpreting these figures, it is important to be clear about what they measure and to consider the extent to which they represent net additions to the Irish economy, rather than activity that would have occurred in some form regardless.

All five institutions that are the focus of this report, for example, are located in Dublin or Cork — Ireland’s two largest cities and its principal economic centres. Both cities have diversified and active labour markets, and both support substantial cultural sectors in their own right, encompassing privately funded galleries, commercial theatres, heritage sites and other attractions. In this context, it is therefore reasonable to assume that a proportion of the economic activity measured here represents displacement rather than genuine additionality, e.g. were the five institutions to close, some of their staff would find employment elsewhere in the economy, and some of their supply chain spend would be redirected to other businesses. Economic impact figures in Sections 3.3 and 3.4 should thus be understood as gross rather than net measures of the institutions’ contribution to the Irish economy.

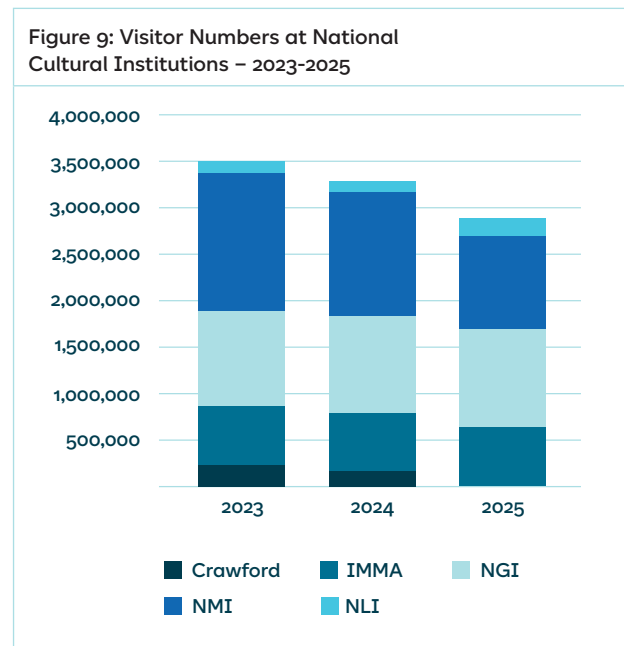
At the same time, this caveat does not diminish the significance of the institutions’ economic contribution. The most clearly additional component of their tangible economic impact is also not found in the recirculation of public expenditure through the domestic economy, rather in their capacity to influence visitors to come to Ireland and attract new spending that these visitors inject into the Irish economy.

### 3.6 Impact on the Tourist Economy

#### 3.6.1 Visitor Numbers and Profiles

Collectively, the five National Cultural Institutions received 3.3 million physical visits in 2024, a reduction of over 200,000 on the previous year (see Figure 9). However, this decline is attributable to two major refurbishment programmes that took effect in Autumn 2024:

- the closure of the Crawford Art Gallery, from September 2024, to facilitate a major expansion and redevelopment of its site; and
- the closure of the Natural History Museum, from September 2024, for refurbishment.

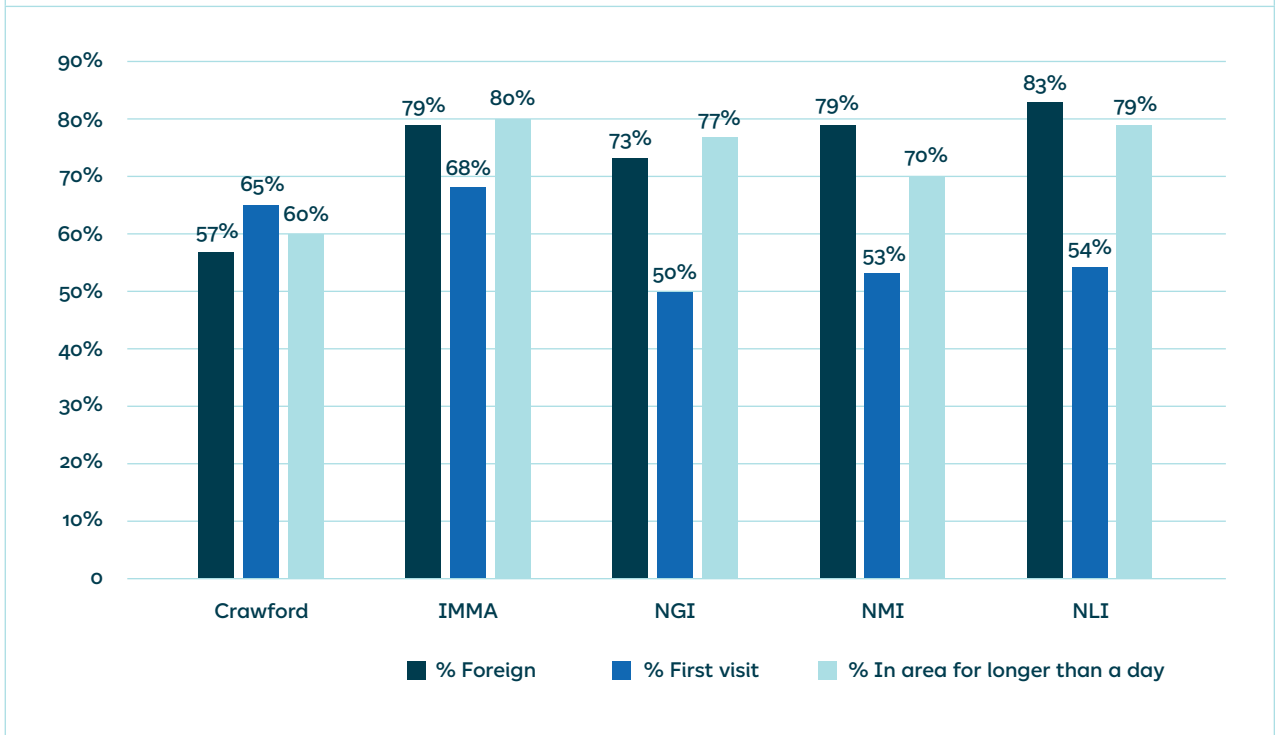


Source: Institution Data

The 2023 visitor research commissioned by Fáilte Ireland suggests that about 72% of visitors to these National Cultural Institutions within their sample are overseas visitors, of whom more than half are on their first trip to Ireland (international visitor shares across the five institutions is shown in Figure 10). The remaining 28% are therefore domestic visitors, though not all of these would be local residents, as a proportion would be Irish nationals on holiday from elsewhere in the country (though it is not possible to determine from the available data what share this represents). Between 60% and 80% of all visitors also stay in the area for more than a day, indicating that the institutions form part of multi-day itineraries rather than isolated day trips<sup>6</sup>.

In our assessment of tourism impacts, we assume a significantly lower proportion of international visitors year-round than captured in the above research (which was conducted in August/September). International tourist visits to Ireland are highest during the peak summer period (although short city-break visiting, including to Dublin, is less seasonal than overall overseas tourism).

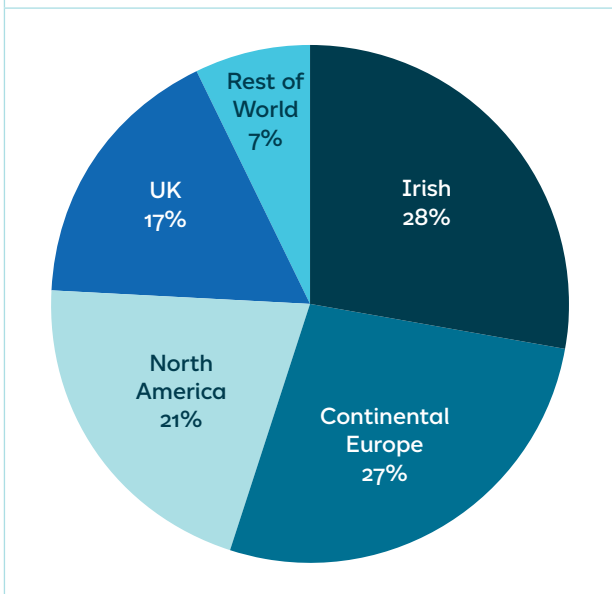
Figure 10: International Visitor Shares at National Cultural Institutions – 2023



Source: Fáilte Ireland/RED C Research

As Figure 11 shows, the international visitor base was also found to be geographically diverse, with the largest shares drawn from Continental Europe and North America. These two source markets together account for approximately two-thirds of all international visitors, and their relevance extends beyond visitor numbers (as noted in Section 2.3) because visitors from North America and Continental Europe typically spend more per night in Ireland (and stay longer) than UK visitors.

Figure 11: International Visitor Shares at National Cultural Institutions – 2023



Source: Fáilte Ireland/RED C Research

About 88% of visitors to the Dublin institutions are also visiting for the first time, a figure that falls to 63% at the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork and the Museum of Country Life site in Mayo. The higher proportion of returning visitors at these two sites reflects their different visitor catchments, as both draw more strongly on regional and domestic audiences, where repeat visiting is more common than among international tourists.

### 3.6.2 Visitor Expenditure

Given the closures of the Crawford Art Gallery and the Natural History Museum from September 2024, the analysis in this section uses 2023 as the baseline year, when all five institutions were fully operational throughout.

As shown in Figure 9 above approximately 3.5 million visits were made to one or more of the five institutions in 2023, with foreign nationals accounting for between 57% and 83% of visitors at each individual institution (see Figure 10).

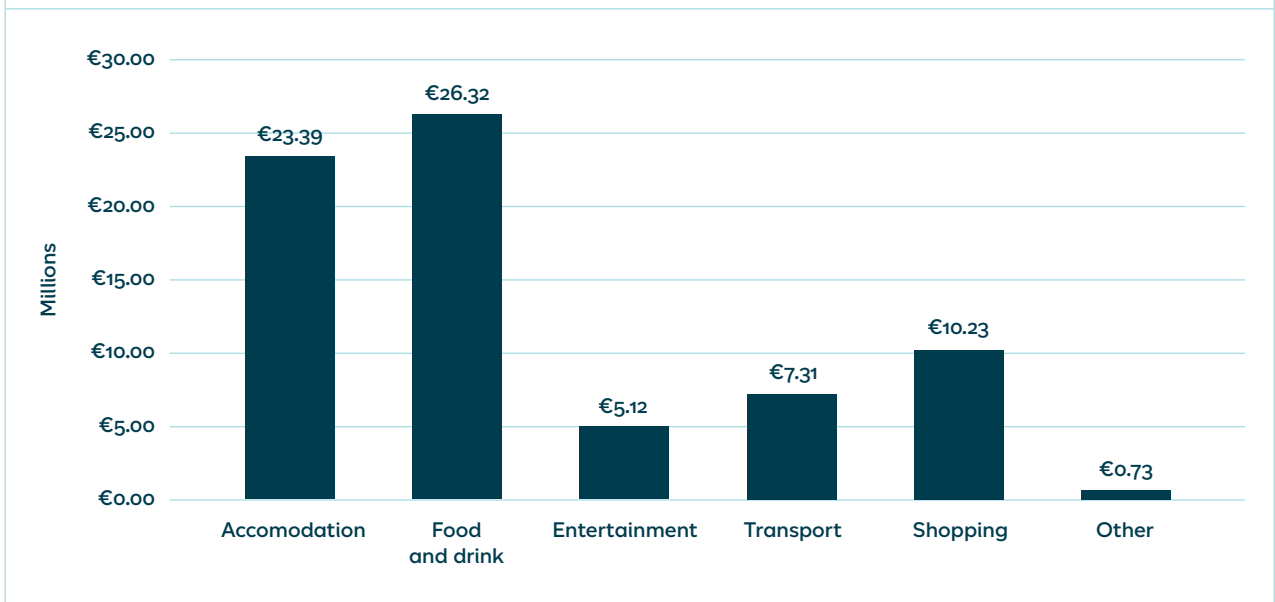
It is important to note that these figures represent visits, not unique visitors, as many international tourists will attend more than one institution during their time in Ireland. For the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that the average Dublin visitor attends two of the four Dublin institutions, while visitors to the Crawford Art Gallery are treated as a separate and distinct group (given that there is no comparable national institution in Cork).

The RED C visitor survey further found that between 5% and 8% of international visitors (depending on the institution) reported that the National Cultural Institutions strongly influenced their decision to visit Ireland. Applying this range to the estimated unique international visitors gives a figure of approximately 64,000 international visitors that are influenced to travel to Ireland by the attraction of the five institutions.

Fáilte Ireland data on visitor expenditure by country of origin, meanwhile, indicates that average spend per visit ranges from approximately €858 for UK visitors to €1,391 for North American visitors, with an overall international average of €1,060<sup>7</sup>. Applying these figures to the visitor origin profiles, therefore, suggests that the 74,000 international visitors whose trips are influenced by the five institutions generated approximately €73 million in expenditure in the Irish economy in 2023. Furthermore, breaking this €73 million down by sector, using average visitor expenditure profiles (see Figure 12), shows that €49.7 million would be attributable to the accommodation and food and drink sectors. Also, based on average productivity in each sector, this direct spend is estimated to support approximately 1,100 FTE jobs.

It is important to emphasise that these figures represent only the international tourist spend in Ireland that is influenced by the five institutions. The total expenditure by all tourists who visit one or more of the institutions during their trip is considerably larger, but the overwhelming majority of those visitors, between 92% and 95%, may have travelled to Ireland regardless of whether the institutions existed (or at least weren't strongly motivated to do so by them). Their wider spending in the tourism economy cannot therefore be attributed to the institutions themselves, whereas the €73 million highlighted in Figure 12 represents a measurable contribution to the Irish economy.

Figure 12: Breakdown of Attributed Direct Spend in the Tourism Economy – 2023



Source: Fitzpatrick Associates Analysis

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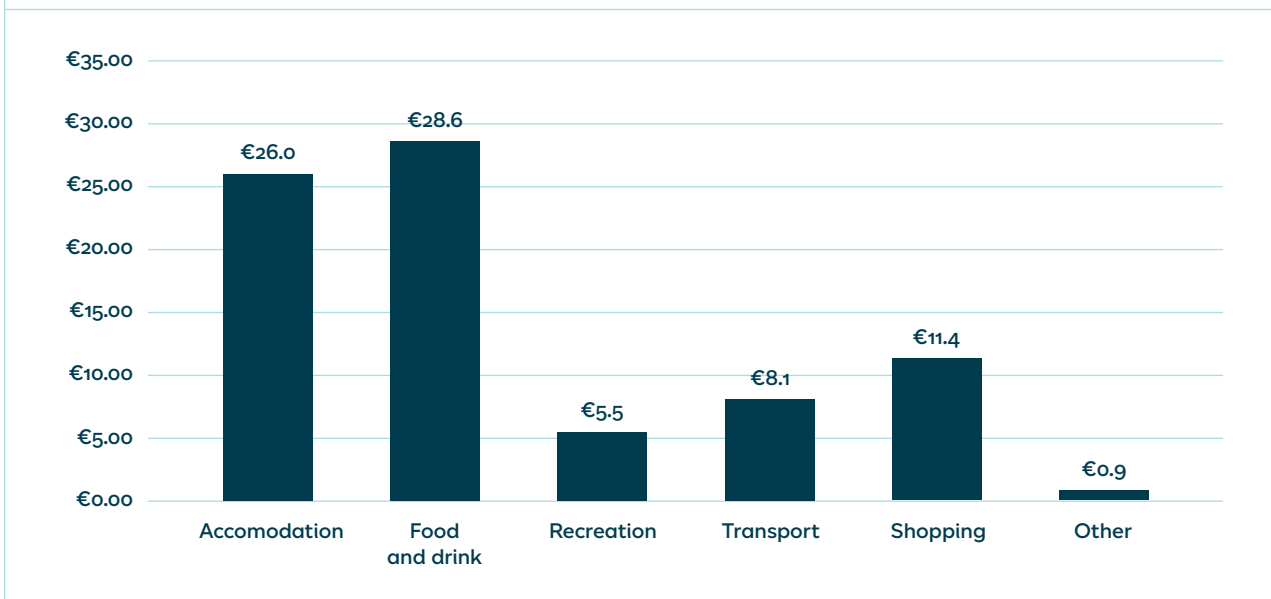
Data derived from *Key Tourism Facts 2023*, Fáilte Ireland, 2023. Available at the following link: [https://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Research/Key%20Tourism%20Facts%20and%20Figures%202023/FI\\_Key-Tourism-Facts-2023\\_National-Summary.pdf](https://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Research/Key%20Tourism%20Facts%20and%20Figures%202023/FI_Key-Tourism-Facts-2023_National-Summary.pdf).

It is also reasonable to assume that among visitors not strongly motivated to travel to Ireland because of the institutions, proportions may have been partly motivated to do so, may visit again having done so, or may recommend visiting Ireland to others based at least in part on their enjoyment of their visits to the cultural institutions. Hence, the estimates of tourism impact based on directly attributable visiting, may be considered conservative.

### 3.6.3 Tourism Impact

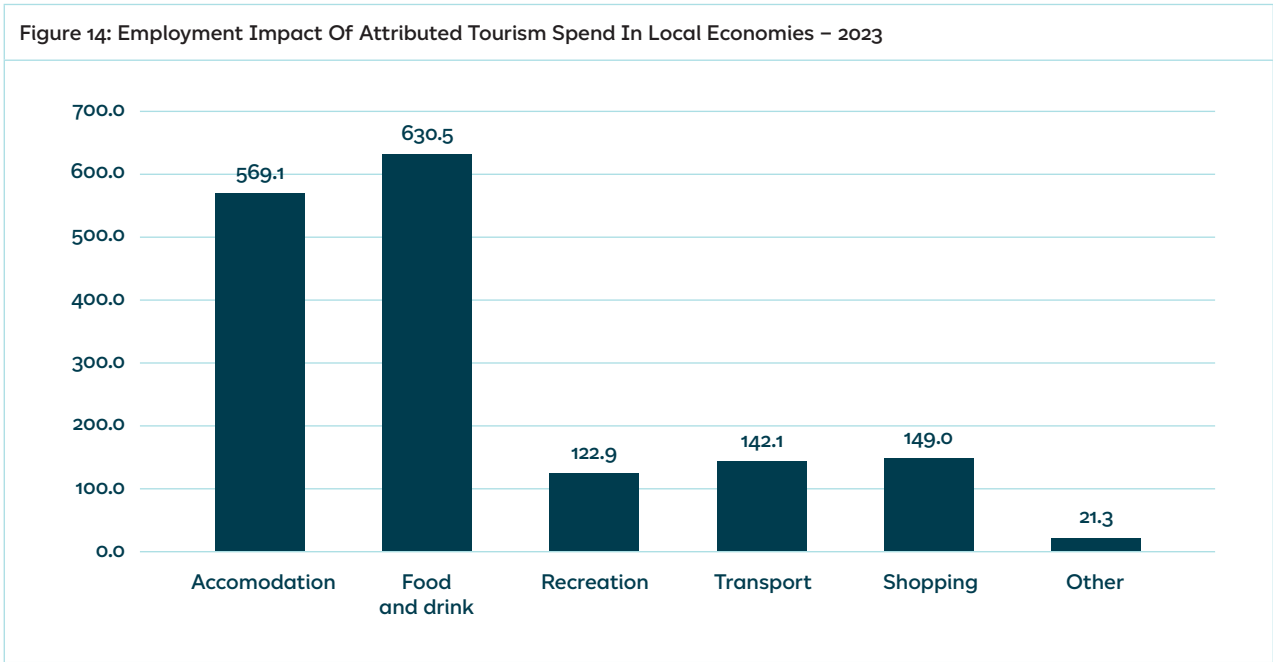
This direct expenditure of international visitors that can be attributed to National Cultural Institutions also generates indirect and induced impacts throughout the economy through multiplier and supply chain effects. Such effects indicate that €73 million in direct visitor expenditure would have generated total economic output of €138 million and would have added €80.5 million to the national economy in GVA terms, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: GVA Impact of Attributed Tourism Spend in Local Economies – 2023



Source: Fitzpatrick Associates Analysis

In employment terms, this economic activity is also estimated to have supported approximately 1,635 FTE jobs (see Figure 14). However, because the tourism and hospitality sectors rely heavily on part-time and seasonal workers, the actual headcount of people employed as a result of this spending is likely to be substantially higher than the FTE figure alone implies.



Source: Fitzpatrick Associates Analysis

Taken together, these figures represent the total additional economic impact of the five institutions on the wider tourism economy.

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# International Case Study:

The Louvre is the world's most visited museum, welcoming approximately 8.7 million visitors in 2024, of whom 77% were international tourists. The Louvre is not merely a cultural institution that generates its own revenues and employment, however, it is one of the primary reasons why millions of people choose to visit Paris each year, and the spending those visitors generate ripples through the entire economy of Paris and France.

The scale of this effect was examined, for example, in a study by economist Xavier Greffe, which assessed the total economic impact of the Louvre on the French economy. The study found a total gross economic impact of €938 million, between 12,738 and 18,090 jobs supported, and a net tax gain to the French state of €39 million. Therefore, while the French government subsidises the Louvre's operations as a matter of cultural policy, the tax revenues generated by the economic activity the museum catalyses substantially offset the cost of its subsidy (through VAT on visitor spending in hotels, restaurants and retail, income and payroll taxes on the employment it supports, and corporation tax on the profits of businesses that depend on its visitor flows). As a result, the Louvre is not simply a call on public funds, but rather a contributor to the public finances in net fiscal terms.

Paris generated €23.4 billion in total tourism revenue in 2024, with international visitors accounting for €14.9 billion of that figure, and the Louvre sits at the centre of this ecosystem. International visitors to the museum typically stay multiple nights in Paris, spending on accommodation, food and drink, transport, retail and other attractions. A meaningful share of them would also not have visited Paris at all, or would have spent fewer nights there, without the Louvre as a reason to travel. The museum thus functions as what economists sometimes call a "catalytic anchor", i.e. an attraction whose gravitational pull draws visitors into an economy and holds them there for longer than they would otherwise stay, generating tax-raising, job-supporting spending that cannot be attributed to the museum alone, but would not occur without it.

*Source: Greffe, X. (2011) "The Economic Impact of the Louvre", The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 121-137, Musée du Louvre (2024), Paris Tourist Office and Île-de-France Tourism (2024)*

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# 4. Conservation, Inclusivity and Outreach Programmes

## Key Findings

- The five institutions collectively engaged hundreds of thousands of people through education and schools programmes in 2024
- Each institution provides distinct targeted services in cultural participation and engagement, all of which are likely to create real value for their participants
- All five institutions extend their reach far beyond their visitor base through outreach, community engagement, digital programmes and international partnerships

### 4.1 Overview

Any measure of the true value of Ireland's National Cultural Institutions extends well beyond what might be considered the conventional and transactional economic footprint, and to their role as cornerstones of Irish cultural identity, custodians of Ireland's national memory, guardians of irreplaceable objects and records, and active agents of education, social inclusion and community life, whose reach extends beyond the people that physically visit the institutions on any given day.

This chapter therefore sets out the evidence for this broader contribution across three dimensions: the conservation and growth of the national collections; the outreach and community engagement programmes through which the institutions serve audiences beyond their visitor base; and the education and schools programmes through which they invest in the next generation of engaged Irish citizens. Taken together, these activities represent a form of public value that is real and significant, but less tangible in conventional measures of economic performance.

1958 Fender Stratocaster  
belonging to Rory Gallagher,  
National Museum of Ireland



## 4.2 Conservation and Acquisition of Cultural Assets

The National Cultural Institutions collectively hold one of the most significant concentrations of cultural, artistic, and scientific assets in Ireland — and arguably among the most important repositories of Irish historical heritage anywhere in the world. Their primary mission is not simply to display these collections, but to grow, conserve, and make them accessible to the widest possible audience, and every year each the institutions (individually or jointly) acquire new material, conserves existing holdings and extends public access through both physical and digital means.

In 2024, for example:

- the National Gallery of Ireland added 1,159 new works to a collection that now numbers over 18,000, including paintings by Katherine MacCausland and Margaret Clarke, alongside a significant conservation project restoring Ludovico Mazzolino’s “The Crossing of the Red Sea” (1521);
- the Irish Museum of Modern Art made 114 new acquisitions (drawn from donations, assisted purchases and direct purchases) and presented 11 major exhibitions and nine artistic performances;
- the National Museum of Ireland acquired six new artworks, including a mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Fenian Sash and a 1958 Fender Stratocaster belonging to Rory Gallagher, alongside 118 folklife acquisitions covering objects from vintage couture to historic craft items;
- the National Library of Ireland added 15,000 items to its collection, including new books, rare and antiquarian volumes, newspapers, and periodicals, and produced 102,000 digital images through its digital studio; and
- the Crawford Art Gallery’s most recent acquisitions data (from 2023) records 77 new artworks, including 68 jointly with the Irish Museum of Modern Art as part of a Government initiative investing in contemporary Irish artists.

The National Museum of Ireland also fulfils a unique statutory role as the repository for Ireland’s archaeological, ethnographical and natural history record, and all material uncovered during excavations on Irish soil becomes part of the national collection by law. In 2024 alone, this yielded 224 archaeological acquisitions, including a Neolithic porcellanite axe head of exceptional quality, alongside approximately 9,000 natural history specimens, some new to science.

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# Case Study:

## The Genealogical Services of The National Library

In 2024, the National Library of Ireland's genealogy and family history service supported 2,791 visitors, delivered 637 one-to-one in-person consultations, and responded to 2,022 genealogy-related email queries. The service provides free access to historical records and research support, helping people explore their ancestry and cultural heritage. Through digitised parish registers, archival collections, and an advisory service, users can carry out research in an accessible environment. The service connects individuals with Ireland's history, supports learning across generations, and strengthens links between individuals, families, and national heritage.

This service can have a range of positive impacts. Exploring family history can strengthen identity, belonging, and connection to place. It also supports learning and cognitive engagement, especially for older adults, through research and reflection. The service may encourage intergenerational connections, as people share findings with family and communities. In addition, access to inclusive heritage resources can promote cultural participation, improve understanding of history, and support social connection, particularly for those engaging with Irish heritage from abroad.

Research shows that engaging with family history can benefit personal development, identity, and wellbeing. Knowledge of family history helps people develop a stronger sense of identity and belonging by linking their lives to past generations (Fivush, 2024<sup>8</sup>; Hill, 2023<sup>9</sup>). Storytelling and learning about ancestors can also support emotional resilience, especially when people understand how earlier generations faced challenges (Green, 2026<sup>10</sup>). Family storytelling plays an important role in shaping identity, creating meaning, and strengthening relationships across generations (Fivush & Kellas, 2025<sup>11</sup>). Sharing these stories has also been linked to improved mental health and wellbeing by reinforcing social connection and cultural belonging (Elias & Brown, 2022<sup>12</sup>). In addition, taking part in family history research can increase self-esteem and reduce anxiety (Lunt, Summers & Wood, 2022<sup>13</sup>).

- 8 Fivush, R., 2024. Learning family history helps you understand yourself. *Psychology Today*, 8 March.  
9 Hill, B., 2023. Family history knowledge helps American adolescents develop healthy sense of identity. *BYU News*, 22 February.  
10 Green, S., 2026. The significance of studying your family history for self-identity. *Psychreg*, 1 February  
11 Fivush, R. and Kellas, J.K., 2025. Parental and family storytelling across the generations: An interdisciplinary review. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 25(2), pp.103–126.  
12 Elias, A. and Brown, A.D., 2022. The role of intergenerational family stories in mental health and wellbeing. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13  
13 Lunt, B.M., Summers, K.R. and Wood, D.A., 2022. Improving psychological well-being of young adults by conducting family history research. *Journal of Genealogy and Family History*, 6, pp.66–73



Also, across all five institutions, collections are made accessible not only through physical visits but through an expanding digital offer. In this regard, nearly half of all visits to the National Gallery of Ireland's website originate from outside Ireland, underlining the global audience for Irish cultural heritage. Similarly, all five institutions are active participants in national and international loans programmes, ensuring that the impact of the Irish collections extends well beyond their own galleries and reading rooms.



*Chiara Chille, Conservator  
at Crawford Art Gallery  
undertaking conservation  
work on 'The Goose Girl'  
by Edith Somerville. Photo,  
Cyanne Dunn Minihane*

*National Gallery of Ireland,  
The Conservation Studio.  
Photo, Molly Keane*

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# Case Study:

## **The Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN), National Museum of Ireland**

Established by the National Museum of Ireland in 2009, the Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN) is one of the most distinctive and far-reaching community engagement programmes operated by any of Ireland's National Cultural Institutions. Delivered in partnership with the Heritage Council, participating local authority Heritage Officers and Creative Ireland, iCAN works with volunteer-led community groups to create online digital archives that record and share the history, heritage and culture of their locality. The network now spans counties Clare, Cork, Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Tipperary and Wicklow, with further groups in development in Carlow and Limerick, and there is an ambition to support at least 80 digital archives across Ireland by 2028.

The most recent network figures record 46 live digital archives, 1,071 active volunteers, 1,840 attendees at iCAN events, 2.2 million visits to iCAN community archives, and 8.1 million page views. Visitors have come from 230 countries and 16,400 cities across the world, a global reach that reflects the deep connection between Ireland's diaspora and the communities they or their ancestors came from. Also, much of the material held in these archives, including photographs, oral histories, personal letters and records of local customs and traditions, has never previously been published or publicly accessible.

### 4.3 Outreach and Community Engagement

Beyond their collections, National Cultural Institutions invest substantially in programmes that take culture out into communities, reach audiences who might not otherwise visit, and build partnerships with organisations that work with groups that face barriers to cultural engagement. Together, they engage hundreds of thousands of people each year in this way through events, community partnerships, and outreach activities — a scale of engagement that extends far beyond the visitor numbers recorded at the door.



*The Clóliosta Digitisation Project. National Library of Ireland*

*Mark O'Kelly, Empireland, 2016, Oil on oil primed metal plates, 280 x 900 cm, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Donation, 2017*

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# Case Study:

## Crawford Gallery – Beyond the Frame

The Beyond the Frame programme is an outreach initiative by Crawford Art Gallery that worked with people in settings such as Cork Prison. It delivered a series of guided workshops where participants use artworks from the gallery’s collection as a starting point for discussion, reflection, and creative activities. The programme encouraged participants to explore themes like identity, personal experiences, and social issues, helping them connect their own lives to art and history. Rather than simply viewing art, participants actively contributed ideas and perspectives, shaping both the creative work and the learning process.

A key aim of the programme was to make art more accessible to people who may feel excluded from traditional gallery spaces. It also supported wellbeing and personal development by helping participants build confidence, express themselves creatively, and develop new skills in a supportive group environment.

Studies of prison arts programmes report improvements in self-esteem-, emotional regulation, and reduced negative feelings among participants (Littman & Sliva, 2020<sup>14</sup>), while other research highlights how creative activity can foster hope, identity, and better relationships (Atherton et al., 2022<sup>15</sup>). More broadly, socially engaged arts approaches emphasise participation and dialogue, positioning individuals as active contributors and supporting social connection and inclusion (Huhmarniemi & Hiltunen, 2023<sup>16</sup>). In museum contexts, these approaches align with models that prioritise active learning and co-creation of knowledge (Garcia, 2012<sup>17</sup>). Evidence from community programmes further shows that group arts activities can improve psychological wellbeing through shared experiences and supportive environments (Ran & Feng, 2026<sup>18</sup>).

- 14 Littman, D.M. and Sliva, S.M., 2020. Prison Arts Program Outcomes. *Journal of Correctional Education* (1974-), 71(3), pp.54-82.
- 15 Atherton, S., Knight, V. and van Barthold, B.C., 2022. Penal arts interventions and hope: outcomes of arts-based projects in prisons and community settings. *The Prison Journal*, 102(2), pp.217-236.
- 16 Huhmarniemi, M. and Hiltunen, M., 2023. Art education for social inclusion and diverse communities. *Research in Arts and Education*, 2023(3), pp.1-6.
- 17 Garcia, B., 2017. What we do best: Making the case for the museum learning in its own right. In *Professionalizing Practice. A Critical Look at Recent Practice in Museum Education* (pp. 47-54). Routledge.
- 18 Ran, Y. and Feng, Y., 2026. The impact of group-based arts activity participation on community residents' psychological well-being: the roles of emotional intelligence and servant organizers. *BMC psychology*, 14(1), p.504.

Examples of the work of the institutions include the following:

- the National Gallery of Ireland’s year-round public programme reached 344,329 people across 2,113 events and activities in 2024, including a summer programme of free drop-in activities — drawing on the Gallery lawn, open art studios, and guided tours — designed to be welcoming to visitors of all ages and backgrounds;
- the Irish Museum of Modern Art attracted 17,240 attendees to its community programming and hosted 39 family events for 815 participants, with 64% of its visitors attending with children, of whom half were under 18;
- the Crawford Art Gallery’s Supported Studios Programme provides dedicated studio space and support for 16 disabled and neurodiverse artists in partnership with Cork City Council, while its Lonradh Programme offers dementia-friendly visits and person-centred arts engagement for older adults experiencing memory loss;
- the National Museum of Ireland engages thousands of people through partnerships, including collaborative programmes with Fighting Words, Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin, and through a network of community-facing events, which in 2024 included science and biodiversity days, Halloween programming and archaeology outreach with school and university audiences;
- the National Library of Ireland extends its reach through partnerships with cultural festivals and events across Ireland and internationally, collaborating in 2024 with the Dublin Book Festival, the Dublin Festival of History, the Harps Alive Festival and the Milwaukee Irish Festival — reflecting its particular role in connecting diaspora communities to Ireland’s national literary and documentary heritage; and
- the National Gallery of Ireland has used its collections as a platform for broader social purposes, including the Artline project exploring multi-sensory artistic response with primary school children, the Take A Closer Look online courses bringing art education to adult audiences beyond the Gallery building, and the Memory Machines module offering participants a collaborative engagement with archival art practice and historical memory.

This outreach work ensures that thousands of individuals, who would not normally attend museums or libraries, still gain the unique benefits associated with such institutions, and it ensures that a wide range of people maintain a link to Irish national identity and culture, who otherwise would not have done so.

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# Case Study:

## **Cultural Art Therapy in the Community, National Gallery of Ireland**

The Cultural Art Therapy in the Community programme was developed by the National Gallery of Ireland in response to the major 2023 exhibition dedicated to the work of Lavinia Fontana. Art therapy was the conceptual foundation for this programme. As a mode of psychotherapy, it employed creative processes—such as painting, drawing, modelling, and collage—to enable participants to explore and communicate experiences that may be difficult to articulate through language alone.

The programme drew direct inspiration from the life and work of Lavinia Fontana, a pioneering Italian Renaissance artist born in 1552. Fontana’s legacy—defined by innovation, resilience, and professional agency—served as a thematic anchor for the initiative, positioning art as both a vehicle for expression and a catalyst for empowerment. Grounded in this context, the programme was designed to engage women who have experienced domestic violence, alongside the support networks that work with them. The project was delivered in partnership with Saoirse Domestic Violence Service (SDVS), a frontline provider of services in southwest Dublin and west Wicklow, and was facilitated by Andrea Plunkett, an artist and former social care professional.

Two distinct audiences were central to the programme’s design. The primary audience consisted of survivors of domestic violence, and the secondary audience were support staff working within domestic violence refuges. The programme had two phases: a preparatory phase and an engagement phase. The preparatory phase included two CPD sessions delivered to domestic violence support staff, attended by 22 participants, alongside six pilot drop-in art therapy sessions held within refuge settings, with 9 participants. The engagement phase included a combination of drop-in and structured group sessions. Five additional drop-in art therapy sessions were delivered within the refuge, with 11 participants, while a series of ten closed-group sessions took place within the Gallery itself. These sessions included guided “slow-looking” engagement with artworks, individual art-making practices, and facilitated group reflection, thereby integrating cultural engagement with therapeutic processes. Beyond these core activities, the programme also extended into broader community engagement initiatives, including a Summer Family Event with 32 attendees and a closed-group family event involving 13 participants.



*The Grand Gallery, the  
National Gallery of Ireland.  
Photo, Ste Murray*

A growing body of research provides strong evidence that arts and cultural engagement support health and wellbeing across the life course. A major WHO review of over 3,000 studies found that the arts contribute to the prevention, promotion, and treatment of both physical and mental health conditions (Fancourt & Steptoe, 2019<sup>19</sup>). Longitudinal studies further show that sustained engagement with cultural activities is associated with higher wellbeing in older adults (Tymoszuk et al., 2020<sup>20</sup>) and increased flourishing in younger populations (Bone et al., 2023<sup>21</sup>). Evidence also points to causal effects, with cultural participation linked to reduced risk of depression over time (Fancourt & Tymoszuk, 2019<sup>22</sup>) and lower incidence of dementia (Fancourt et al., 2018<sup>23</sup>). At an intervention level, arts programmes have been shown to improve depressive symptoms, cognition, and stress responses (D’Cunha et al., 2019<sup>24</sup>), while broader reviews highlight social connection as a key mechanism underpinning these outcomes (Sonke et al., 2025<sup>25</sup>).

- 19 Fancourt, D. and Steptoe, A., 2019. Cultural engagement and mental health: Does socio-economic status explain the association? *Social Science & Medicine*, 236, p.112425.
- 20 Tymoszuk, U., Perkins, R., Fancourt, D. and Williamon, A., 2020. Cross-sectional and longitudinal associations between receptive arts engagement and loneliness among older adults. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 55(7), pp.891-900.
- 21 Bone, J.K., Bu, F., Sonke, J.K. and Fancourt, D., 2023. Longitudinal associations between arts engagement and flourishing in young adults: A fixed effects analysis of the panel study of income dynamics. *Affective Science*, 4(1), pp.131-142.
- 22 Fancourt, D. and Tymoszuk, U., 2019. Cultural engagement and incident depression in older adults: evidence from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 214(4), pp.225-229.
- 23 Fancourt, D., Steptoe, A. and Cadar, D., 2018. Cultural engagement and cognitive reserve: museum attendance and dementia incidence over a 10-year period. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 213(5), pp.661-663.
- 24 D’Cunha, N.M., McKune, A.J., Isbel, S., Kellett, J., Georgousopoulou, E.N. and Naumovski, N., 2019. Psychophysiological responses in people living with dementia after an art gallery intervention: An exploratory study. *Journal of Alzheimer’s disease*, 72(2), pp.549-562.
- 25 Sonke, J., Pesata, V., Colverson, A., Morgan-Daniel, J., Rodriguez, A.K., Carroll, G.D., Burch, S., Abraham, A., Akram, S., Marjani, S. and Belden, C., 2025. Relationships between arts participation, social cohesion, and well-being: an integrative review of evidence. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 13, p.1589693.



*Pupils from St Audoen's  
NS, at the National  
Gallery of Ireland.  
Photo, Jack Caffrey,  
The Pimlico Project*

#### 4.4 Education Programmes and Schools Engagement

All five institutions that are the subject of this report also run dedicated education and schools' programmes. Collectively, these reach tens of thousands of students, teachers and young people each year, spanning primary, post-primary and third-level engagement, as well as programmes for families and young children visiting outside school time.

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# Case Study:

## National Gallery Apollo Project

In 2024, the Apollo Project reached 79,928 young people, along with their families and communities, through 102 events and online activities, with support from the Apollo Foundation since 2019. The programme brought together a wide range of activities focused on co-creation, participation, and skills development, enabling young people to engage actively with art and contribute to exhibitions and gallery programming. Through workshops and collaborations with partners such as Youthreach and WALK, the programme gave participants practical opportunities to explore different art forms, including visual arts, creative writing, and performance. These activities allow young people to actively take part in creating and interpreting art, rather than just observing it. As a result, participants build confidence, develop creative and communication skills, and gain a better understanding of possible careers or pathways in the arts, helping them to play an active role within the Gallery and the wider cultural sector.

Research shows that taking part in arts programmes like the Apollo Project can have positive effects for young people. Arts activities are linked to higher confidence and self-esteem (Mak & Fancourt, 2019)<sup>26</sup>, as well as better overall health and wellbeing when young people take part in structured activities (Badura et al., 2015<sup>27</sup>). Studies also show that these benefits come from opportunities for self-expression, skill development, and social connection (Acosta et al., 2025<sup>28</sup>). In addition, regular participation in arts and cultural activities has been linked to improved behaviour and social development over time (Hugh-Jones et al., 2025<sup>29</sup>; Fluharty et al. 2023<sup>30</sup>). Overall, this evidence supports the value of programmes like the Apollo Project in helping young people grow, connect, and engage with the arts.

- 26 Mak, H.W. and Fancourt, D., 2019. Arts engagement and self-esteem in children: Results from a propensity score matching analysis. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1449(1), pp.36-45.
- 27 Badura, P., Geckova, A.M., Sigmundova, D., van Dijk, J.P. and Reijneveld, S.A., 2015. When children play, they feel better: organized activity participation and health in adolescents. *BMC Public Health*, 15, p.1090.
- 28 Acosta, J.D., Pak, L., McCarthy, D., Rogers, R.C., Marcellino, W., Rabinowitz, M., González, I., Jacobs, T. and Dion, L., 2025. Stitching together the threads: A cross-disciplinary literature review on youth arts engagement and well-being. RAND Corporation.
- 29 Hugh-Jones, S., Ray, S., Wilding, A., Sutton, M., Humphrey, N. and Munford, L., 2025. Does regular engagement with arts and creative activities improve adolescent mental health and wellbeing? A systematic review and assessment of causality. *SSM – Population Health*, 31, p.101845
- 30 Fluharty, M.E., Bone, J.K., Bu, F., Sonke, J.K., Fancourt, D. and Paul, E., 2023. Associations between extracurricular arts activities, school-based arts engagement, and subsequent externalising behaviours in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. *Scientific Reports*, 13(1), p.13840.

Examples of activities of the institutions in this arena include:

- the National Gallery of Ireland recorded 351,275 education participants in 2024 across a programme that includes the SMBC Aviation Capital Schools Programme, which delivered 10 art-making projects in schools across 15 counties, welcomed DEIS primary schools on-site, and provided Transition Year work experience placements;
- the National Museum of Ireland increased its guided school tours by 20% in 2024, reaching 4,500 students, ran its “We Make Our Own Histories” Programme for over 500 participants, and developed the Reelist digital resource, an online history and folklore tool designed specifically for primary school audiences;
- the Irish Museum of Modern Art hosted 362 learning and participation events, reaching 6,200 participants, and ran 73 engagement events with third-level students, attracting 2,722 participants, which reflects its particular strengths in connecting with university and college audiences;
- the Crawford Art Gallery delivers an extensive school and third-level programme, including Wiggle Room workshops, exhibition-led talks and family events, and it works with the Local Creative Youth Partnership to ensure its educational offer is accessible to young people across the Cork region; and
- the National Library of Ireland contributes a distinct strand of educational engagement through its landmark literary exhibitions and the rich programmes built around them, connecting primary, secondary and university audiences with the documentary record of Irish literary and cultural life.



*Learn and Explore participants enjoying an in-depth tour of the Collection at Crawford Art Gallery. Photo, Jed Niezgod*

*Joan Jonas, Woman in the Well, 1996, Multi-component work including video installation, audio installation, objects, Dimensions variable, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Purchase, 2024*

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# Case Study:

## National Museum Schools Programme

In 2024, the National Museum of Ireland delivered a broad programme of guided tours, workshops, and online sessions for schools. Around 4,500 young people took part in guided tours across the Museum's sites, with almost 2,500 school visits taking place during the year. The Museum also produced and distributed 88 resource packs to support learning in schools. The Museum offered curriculum-linked tours and workshops for both primary and post-primary students, alongside self-guided visits and digital resources that enable flexible engagement with the national collections.

Activities were designed by the Museum's Education Team to help students build knowledge, develop skills, and stay curious. Through guided tours, hands-on activities, and teaching resources, students explored objects, took part in discussions, and continued learning both during and after their visit. In this way, the programme supported classroom learning while also encouraging critical thinking, creativity, and engagement with Ireland's cultural heritage.

School-based museum programmes like those offered by the National Museum of Ireland have been shown to support learning and development. Participation in arts and cultural activities is linked to higher confidence and self-esteem, especially in structured settings (Mak & Fancourt, 2019<sup>31</sup>; Badura et al., 2015<sup>32</sup>), and these benefits are supported by opportunities for self-expression, skills development, and social interaction (Acosta et al., 2025<sup>33</sup>). Museum visits can also improve subject knowledge and encourage curiosity and creativity (Hooper-Greenhill et al., 2003<sup>34</sup>), while supporting identity and connection to place (Falk & Dierking, 2013<sup>35</sup>). Overall, such programmes contribute to both educational outcomes and wider personal and social development (Hugh-Jones et al., 2025<sup>36</sup>; Fluharty et al., 2023<sup>37</sup>).

- 31 Mak, H.W. and Fancourt, D., 2019. Arts engagement and self-esteem in children: Results from a propensity score matching analysis. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1449(1), pp.36–45.
- 32 Badura, P., Geckova, A.M., Sigmundova, D., van Dijk, J.P. and Reijneveld, S.A., 2015. When children play, they feel better: Organized activity participation and health in adolescents. *BMC Public Health*, 15, p.1090.
- 33 Acosta, J.D., Pak, L., McCarthy, D., Rogers, R.C., Marcellino, W., Rabinowitz, M., González, I., Jacobs, T. and Dion, L., 2025. Stitching together the threads: A cross-disciplinary literature review on youth arts engagement and wellbeing. RAND Corporation.
- 34 Hooper-Greenhill, E., Dodd, J., Phillips, M., Jones, C., Woodham, A. and O'Riain, H., 2003. *Museums and schools: The impact of school visits on pupils*. Leicester: Research Centre for Museums and Galleries.
- 35 Falk, J.H. and Dierking, L.D., 2013. *The museum experience revisited*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- 36 Hugh-Jones, S., Ray, S., Wilding, A., Sutton, M., Humphrey, N. and Munford, L., 2025. Does regular engagement with arts and creative activities improve adolescent mental health and wellbeing? *SSM – Population Health*, 31, p.101845.
- 37 Fluharty, M., Bu, F., Paul, E. and Fancourt, D., 2023. Associations between arts engagement and health and wellbeing outcomes: A longitudinal analysis. *Scientific Reports*, 13, Article 39925.



*Visitors enjoying the newly acquired painting by Sean Keating, The Window Collection, Crawford Art Gallery. Photo, Clare Keogh*

Across the five institutions, educational engagement also extends into digital formats, online courses, video resources and virtual tours, which allow students and teachers outside the immediate catchment areas of the physical sites to engage with the collections. The benefits of supporting children and young adults in engaging with culture and art, in particular, are increasingly well understood, and have been shown to have lifetime impacts in terms of mental and physical well-being as well as educational attainment and productivity.

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# International Case Study:

## Toronto Public Libraries — Social and Economic Return of Inclusive Cultural Access

In 2013, the Martin Prosperity Institute undertook the first comprehensive economic impact assessment of a major public library system in Canada, examining the Toronto Public Library (TPL), the world's busiest urban public library.

The headline finding from this assessment was that Torontonians received CAD\$5.63 in economic benefit for every dollar invested in the library, with a total annual economic impact of over CAD\$1 billion. Of this benefit, CAD\$680.8 million was associated with use of the collections and databases etc, with the rest split over direct spending (CAD\$177.9 million) and the wider economic impact of the library operations (CAD\$141.9 million).

The return on investment, calculated as total economic benefits against the cost of service provision, was 463%, with a conservative lower bound estimate of 244%. Each open hour across the library's 98 branches generated an average of CAD\$2,515 in direct benefits against an average operating cost of CAD\$653, and the direct benefit to individual library members was estimated at up to CAD\$502 per person per year (with 72% of Toronto's adult population using the library at least once in the year studied).

Figures were based on an assessment across a wide range of services, with collection use accounting for just over half of the total direct tangible benefit, valued at CAD\$512 million. Reference and database services contributed a further CAD\$79 million, technology access CAD\$26 million, and meeting and study space CAD\$38 million. Beyond the quantifiable, however, the MPI study also emphasises the library's role as a literacy and learning resource, with particular importance for children, new immigrants and economically marginalised communities.

*Source: "So Much More: The Economic Impact of the Toronto Public Library on the City of Toronto", Martin Prosperity Institute, December 2013*

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# 5. Social Inclusion, Well-being, and the Evidence Base

## Key Findings

- UK government evidence estimates a well-being benefit of between £70-£1,310 per person per year from cultural institutions, while it also found that non-users also benefit up to a value of £24.62 per person per year
- A significant gap exists in the Irish evidence base for the social value of cultural institutions, however, and the most robust studies available apply UK-derived unit values rather than Irish data

### 5.1 Overview

The institutions covered by this report collectively invest a substantial sum each year in maintaining, conserving and developing their collections. This expenditure is not simply a cost of operation, it is an investment in what economists recognise as a distinct form of social capital.

In 1999, the cultural economist David Throsby proposed the concept of “cultural capital”, defined as an asset embodying cultural significance<sup>38</sup>. This important step placed cultural heritage alongside physical capital, human capital and natural capital as a category of asset that is capable of generating returns, both to those who engage with it directly and to society as a whole.

Further discussion of such benefits is now the subject of this chapter.

### 5.2 The Benefits of Cultural Capital

#### 5.2.1 A Framework for Wider Benefits

Since Throsby’s original contribution, a substantial body of research has developed around the question of how to quantify cultural capital returns. Much of this work has been driven by the practical needs of governments and funding bodies in seeking to make the case for public investment in cultural institutions, and it has often robustly demonstrated that the benefits go far beyond the simple pleasure enjoyed by those who visit institutions like those discussed within this study.

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<sup>38</sup> Throsby, D. (1999), “Cultural Capital”, *Journal of Cultural Economics*, Vol. 23, Nos. 1-2, pp. 3-12.

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# Case Study:

## Crawford Gallery – Crawford Supported Studios

The Crawford Supported Studios (CSS) programme is a long-term initiative that supports neurodivergent and intellectually disabled artists to develop their work in a professional studio setting. It focuses on recognising artists' strengths, valuing different approaches to creativity, and increasing the visibility of disabled artists. The programme offers a shared studio for 16 artists, along with support such as training, advocacy, and opportunities to exhibit, take part in commissions, and develop professionally. Through this, artists can build confidence, grow their practice, and connect with others in the studio and wider community.

The programme also builds strong links beyond the studio, with artists collaborating with organisations, festivals, and galleries, and exhibiting work nationally and internationally. It supports a sense of identity and belonging, while helping participants develop social, communication, and creative skills. Overall, CSS promotes both personal and professional development and contributes to greater inclusion in the arts.

Research shows that arts programmes for people with intellectual disabilities and neurodivergent individuals can improve confidence, self-expression, and communication (MacGlone et al., 2020<sup>39</sup>), while also supporting identity and a sense of belonging (Anderson & Bigby, 2021<sup>40</sup>). They can promote inclusion by reducing stigma and improving access to cultural spaces (UNICEF, 2025<sup>41</sup>; Redmore & O'Dell, 2026<sup>42</sup>), as well as enhancing wellbeing, social connection, and a sense of agency (Zimmermann et al., 2025<sup>43</sup>; Grabowski et al., 2024<sup>44</sup>). Overall, this evidence highlights the wider benefits of programmes like CSS beyond artistic development.

39 MacGlone, U.M., Vamvakaris, J., Wilson, G.B. and MacDonald, R.A.R., 2020. Understanding the wellbeing effects of a community music program for people with disabilities: A mixed methods, person-centered study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, p.588734.

40 Anderson, S. and Bigby, C., 2021. Community participation as identity and belonging: A case study of Arts Project Australia, "I am an artist". *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 8(1), pp.1–14.

41 UNICEF, 2025. Arts and culture for inclusion: A systematic review on children with disabilities. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

42 Redmore, N. and O'Dell, L., 2026. Creating an inclusive arts culture: Exploring the impact of an inclusive arts programme for families with children with learning disabilities and complex needs. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*.

43 Zimmermann, A., Hermsen, M., Visse, M. and Leget, C., 2025. Arts-based communities fostering social justice of persons with intellectual disabilities: A qualitative interpretive synthesis. *Canadian Journal of Art Therapy*.

44 Grabowski, S., Darcy, S., Maxwell, H. and Onyx, J., 2024. Inclusive practice and comparative social impact of disability arts: A qualitative and abductive approach. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23, pp.1–18.

Across decades of research it has become clear that the benefits of culture are significant and provide strong returns on investment across in different policy spheres. This research has followed many different lines of enquiry, and therefore the main benefits of investment in culture that are highlighted in this report are split into six categories, as set out in Figure 15, as follows:

- education and child development, whereby children that visit museums have often been found to score significantly higher in reading, maths and science (even after controlling for income)<sup>45</sup>, and have been shown to have measurable gains in critical thinking<sup>46</sup>;
- social cohesion, whereby cultural heritage enhances social cohesion through shared identity, social bonds and mutual respect<sup>47</sup>, with connection with heritage also being found to be positively associated with personal well-being and community engagement<sup>48</sup>;
- justice and crime prevention, whereby teenagers participating in arts and cultural activities have been found to be less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour<sup>49</sup>, and where preserving cultural identity was also found to help protect against violent offending (through generating a greater sense of belonging)<sup>50</sup>;
- migration and integration, where encounters with artworks and cultural objects in museum spaces fosters cross-community understanding and multicultural awareness, with significant positive effects for school-aged children from different backgrounds<sup>51</sup> (including Europe-wide research across 11 countries that finds that cultural institutions are among the most effective settings for promoting tolerance and acceptance of diversity, while maintaining social cohesion)<sup>52</sup>;

45 Swan, D.W. (2014) 'Children who visit museums have higher achievement in reading, math, and science', Institute of Museum and Library Services Blog, 21 April.

46 Greene, J.P., Kisida, B. and Bowen, D.H. (2014) 'The educational value of field trips', *Education Next*, 14(1).

47 Zabulis, X., Partarakis, N., Zidianakis, E. and Kaplanidi, D. (2025) 'A critical review of the function of intangible cultural heritage as a driver for social resilience and cohesion', *Encyclopedia*, 5(4), Article 189.

48 Richardson, M., Butler, C.W., Alcock, I., Tindley, A., Sheffield, D. and White, P.C.L. (2025) 'Introducing heritage connectedness: connections to people, nature and place across time are associated with wellbeing and environmentalism', *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*, 16(1), pp. 38–58.

49 Bone, J.K., Bu, F., Fluharty, M.E., Paul, E., Sonke, J.K. and Fancourt, D. (2022) 'Arts and cultural engagement, reportedly antisocial or criminalized behaviors, and potential mediators in two longitudinal cohorts of adolescents', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 51(8), pp. 1463–1482.







50 Shepherd, S.M., Delgado, R.H., Sherwood, J. and Paradies, Y. (2017) 'The impact of indigenous cultural identity and cultural engagement on violent offending', *BMC Public Health*, 18, Article 50.

51 Richardson, M., Butler, C.W., Alcock, I., Tindley, A., Sheffield, D. and White, P.C.L. (2024) 'Introducing heritage connectedness: connections to people, nature and place across time are associated with wellbeing and environmentalism', *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*.

52 Honohan, I. and Rougier, N., 2012. Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Ireland, Concepts and Practices. Accept Country Synthesis Report, 22.

- national identity, where cultural heritage can contribute to fostering a shared identity across generations<sup>53</sup>, essential for enabling reconciliation and community integration<sup>54</sup>; and
- health and well-being, where arts therapies significantly reduce psychiatric symptoms and improve social and psychological functioning<sup>55</sup>, while also building empathy, reducing boredom, improving self-esteem and supporting better emotional regulation<sup>56</sup>.

**Figure 15: Wider Benefits Framework**

Education & child development	Social cohesion	Justice & crime prevention
Museum visits boost attainment in reading, maths & Science 	Shared culture builds the social trust communities depend on 	Culture engagement measurably reduces antisocial & offending behavior 
Migration & integration	National identity	Health & wellbeing
Cultural institutions are infrastructure for belonging & inclusion 	Cultural institutions anchor civic identity in a changing society 	Cultural participation supports mental health and life satisfaction 

Source: Fitzpatrick Associates Summary of Available Research

As set out in the scope, this report does not attempt to survey all of the considerable body of literature that supports these benefits. However, the examples above provide a small subset of the wide spectrum of public policy benefits and gains attributed to cultural institutions and the programmes they deliver.

<sup>53</sup> Zabulis, X., Partarakis, N., Zidianakis, E. and Kaplanidi, D., 2025. A Critical Review of the Function of Intangible Cultural Heritage as a Driver for Social Resilience and Cohesion. *Encyclopedia*, 5(4), p.189.

<sup>54</sup> Elkadi, H., 2008. Cultural Built Heritage A Support for a Shared Identity in Northern Ireland. *Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei Corso Magenta*, 63, 20123 Milano..

<sup>55</sup> Abbing, A., Haeyen, S., Nyapati, S., Verboon, P. and Hooren, S.V., 2023. Effectiveness and mechanisms of the arts therapies in forensic care. A systematic review, narrative synthesis, and meta analysis. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 14, p.1128252.

<sup>56</sup> Aktürk, G. and Lerski, M., 2021. Intangible cultural heritage: a benefit to climate-displaced and host communities. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 11(3), pp.305-315.

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# Case Study:

## IMMA Horizons Programme

The Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) Horizons programme is an outreach and engagement programme that positions creative participation as a means of supporting health and wellbeing. It provides free, inclusive opportunities for adults to engage with contemporary art through facilitated, participatory activities that emphasise exploration, discussion, and creative expression within a supportive environment.

A central feature of the programme is its integration with healthcare contexts, including partnerships with institutions such as the Mercer’s Institute for Successful Ageing. A key strand focuses on ageing and dementia-inclusive programs (Azure), offering tailored, sensory-based experiences that prioritise accessibility, emotional engagement, and social connection. Across its broader activity, IMMA Horizons delivers wellbeing-oriented programmes such as mindfulness workshops and guided sessions that encourage reflection and social interaction.

There is evidence in the literature suggesting that participation in arts programmes such as IMMA Horizons can have positive effects on health and wellbeing. Engaging in cultural activities is linked to better mental health across different groups (Fancourt & Steptoe, 2019<sup>57</sup>) and can help reduce loneliness and the risk of depression, especially in older adults (Tymoszuk et al., 2020<sup>58</sup>; Fancourt & Tymoszuk, 2019<sup>59</sup>). In healthcare settings, museum-based programmes have also been shown to improve mood, thinking skills, and stress levels, particularly for people living with dementia (D’Cunha et al., 2019<sup>60</sup>). These benefits are largely due to social interaction and shared creative experiences, which help build connection and support overall wellbeing (Sonke et al., 2025<sup>61</sup>).

- 57 Fancourt, D. and Steptoe, A., 2019. Cultural engagement and mental health: Does socio-economic status explain the association? *Social Science & Medicine*, 236, p.112425.
- 58 Tymoszuk, U., Perkins, R., Fancourt, D. and Williamon, A., 2020. Cross-sectional and longitudinal associations between receptive arts engagement and loneliness among older adults. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 55(7), pp.891-900.
- 59 Fancourt, D. and Tymoszuk, U., 2019. Cultural engagement and incident depression in older adults: evidence from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 214(4), pp.225-229.
- 60 D’Cunha, N.M., McKune, A.J., Isbel, S., Kellett, J., Georgousopoulou, E.N. and Naumovski, N., 2019. Psychophysiological responses in people living with dementia after an art gallery intervention: An exploratory study. *Journal of Alzheimer’s disease*, 72(2), pp.549-562.
- 61 Sonke, J., Pesata, V., Colverson, A., Morgan-Daniel, J., Rodriguez, A.K., Carroll, G.D., Burch, S., Abraham, A., Akram, S., Marjani, S. and Belden, C., 2025. Relationships between arts participation, social cohesion, and well-being: an integrative review of evidence. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 13, p.1589693.

## 5.2.2 Public Policy Benefits

The benefits set out in Figure 15 are widespread and do not just impact on the remit of a central sponsoring department (e.g. the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport). Instead, investment in these cultural institutions benefits a wide range of policy realms the responsibility for which is led by different Departments as set out

in Figure 16. Such benefits are often inadequately evaluated, demonstrated and communicated, but when combined with known impacts and benefits, clearly demonstrate the role of culture as a conduit of positive public policy accomplishment across many spheres.

**Figure 16: Government Policies And Departments – Benefit Alignment**

Government department	Policy alignment note	Education & child development	Social cohesion	Justice & crime prevention	Migration & integration	National identity	Health & wellbeing
Department of Education and Youth	Cultural visits directly support DEIS objectives and build the critical thinking and cultural literacy central to the revised curriculum	✓	✓	-	-	✓	-
Department of Children, Disability and Equality	Cultural institutions deliver on integration, equality and youth development objectives by providing inclusive civic spaces for diverse communities	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration	Cultural engagement reduces antisocial behaviour and acts as a protective factor against offending, supporting community safety objectives	-	✓	✓	-	-	-
Department of Health	Cultural participation supports mental health and social connectedness, central to Sláintecare's prevention-first approach and the Healthy Ireland ambition	-	-	-	-	-	✓
Department of Culture, Communications and Sport	Cultural institutions are the primary delivery mechanism for Culture 2025 and Creative Ireland, directly fulfilling the department's core mandate	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓
Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage	Heritage institutions contribute to Heritage Ireland 2030 goals and support the sense of place that underpins thriving, connected communities	-	✓	-	-	✓	-
Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	Cultural institutions widen access to learning and support disadvantaged groups, reinforcing the goals of the National Access Plan	✓	-	-	-	-	-
Department of Social Protection	Cultural participation reduces social isolation and supports community integration, contributing directly to the Roadmap for Social Inclusion	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓

## 5.3 Quantifying the Benefits

### 5.3.1 Overview

There is a growing research literature that looks to quantify the economic and social value of museums, galleries, libraries and the arts more broadly. The conclusions of individual studies vary in their precise estimates, reflecting differences in methodology, context and the specific activities being assessed.

This research, however, has tended to split the benefits into two main categories. The first of these are user benefits, whereby users are considered to be all those who engage with the services provided by an institution, regardless of whether they have actually visited one of the institutions in person. As set out in Chapter 4 all five institutions examined in this report have significant outreach and digital programmes, which bring culture and engagement to many who would not normally visit one of the institutions.

The key user benefits that have been quantified in these studies can be split into three main categories as follows:

- health and well-being, where cultural engagement has been found to improve both mental and physical well-being by (for example) reducing depression, tackling dementia, or improving self-esteem and overall quality of life;
- human capital, where engagement with museums, arts and culture has been shown to improve educational outcomes and thus increase human capital, leading to productivity gains for society (due to a better educated population); and

- savings to Government, where improvements in health and human capital can result in savings to Government, particularly in terms of reduced health-related costs.

Economic benefits are not, however, purely limited to those who visit institutions or engage with their programmes, as research has also found that those who never attend or engage with culture can still value its presence. These are often referred to as non-user benefits, whereby people who do not engage with or visit such institutions are still willing to pay to ensure their work continues.

A substantial 2024 report in the UK drew together much of the relevant research evidence<sup>62</sup>, reviewing over 160 published papers and carrying out a systematic meta-analysis of the quantified benefits associated with engagement with cultural and heritage institutions. This study is one of the most comprehensive contemporary sources for estimating the well-being and social value generated by institutions of the type covered in this report, and its findings therefore provide a credible reference point for considering what comparable Irish institutions are likely to generate.

62 *Culture and Heritage Capital: Monetising the Impact of Culture and Heritage on Health and Well-being*, Report by Frontier Economics for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, November 2024.

### 5.3.2 User Benefits

The primary and most direct beneficiaries of National Cultural Institutions are the people that use them. These users also derive real economic value, in the form of well-being benefits that go well beyond the immediate enjoyment of an experience.

The 2024 study for the UK Government quantified these user benefits using a WELLBY methodology<sup>63</sup>, which measures the impact of activities on subjective well-being and converts those impacts into monetary equivalents, using established values of a life year. This approach captures the direct benefits to the individuals engaged, alongside the savings to the National Health Service in the UK and the social care system (arising from improved health outcomes), and the productivity benefits that follow from a healthier and more mentally resilient population.

The study found that per-person annual benefits from engagement with cultural institutions range from £70 per person per year to £1,310 per person per year, depending on the type of activity and the demographic group involved (see Figure 17). At the society-wide level, meanwhile, the estimated benefits range from £0.17 billion to £8.08 billion per activity category across the UK population (see Figure 18). Taken together, total estimated annual benefit to UK society from engaging with cultural institutions is approximately £22.1 billion, or equivalent to around £325 per capita. Adjusting for exchange rates and inflation to 2025 Irish prices, this would translate to approximately €400 per capita in Irish terms, if research in Ireland had similar results.

Several of the specific benefit categories identified in the UK study are also directly relevant to the activities and programmes of the National Cultural Institutions in Ireland, with two being particularly worth drawing out:

- the first is the benefit generated by engagement with children and young people. All five institutions run education and schools' programmes, with the National Museum of Ireland, the National Gallery of Ireland and the Crawford Art Gallery in particular maintaining substantial and long-standing relationships with primary and post-primary schools. UK evidence shows that such arts and culture-based activities raise self-esteem and improve mental and physical health outcomes in children and young people, with per person values ranging from £68 for music-based self-esteem programmes to £1,240 for daily organised arts activities for young adults aged 18-29. Even at the lower end of this range, the scale of schools engagement across the five institutions would thus imply a significant potential aggregate benefit to Irish children and young people, which does not appear in any conventional measure of institutions' economic footprint;

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63 WELLBY (Well-being Adjusted Life Years) is a metric that measures the impact of policies or projects on societal welfare by combining life length with quality. It is defined as a one-point change in self-reported life satisfaction (on a 0-10 scale) affecting one person for one year.



*From the Exhibition  
'Behind the Scenes'  
Collection works at  
Crawford Art Gallery.  
Photo, Jed Niezgoda*

- the second is the benefit generated by programmes supporting older people, particularly those with dementia and memory loss. For example, the Crawford Art Gallery has developed a dedicated programme that works with older people affected by Alzheimer's disease and related conditions, and this type of activity is increasingly recognised across the cultural sector as a high-value intervention. UK evidence places the benefit of such museum-based engagement for people with dementia at between £148 and £369 per person per year, reflecting both the direct well-being impact on participants and associated savings in health and social care costs, which are significant in the context of an ageing population.

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# Case Study:

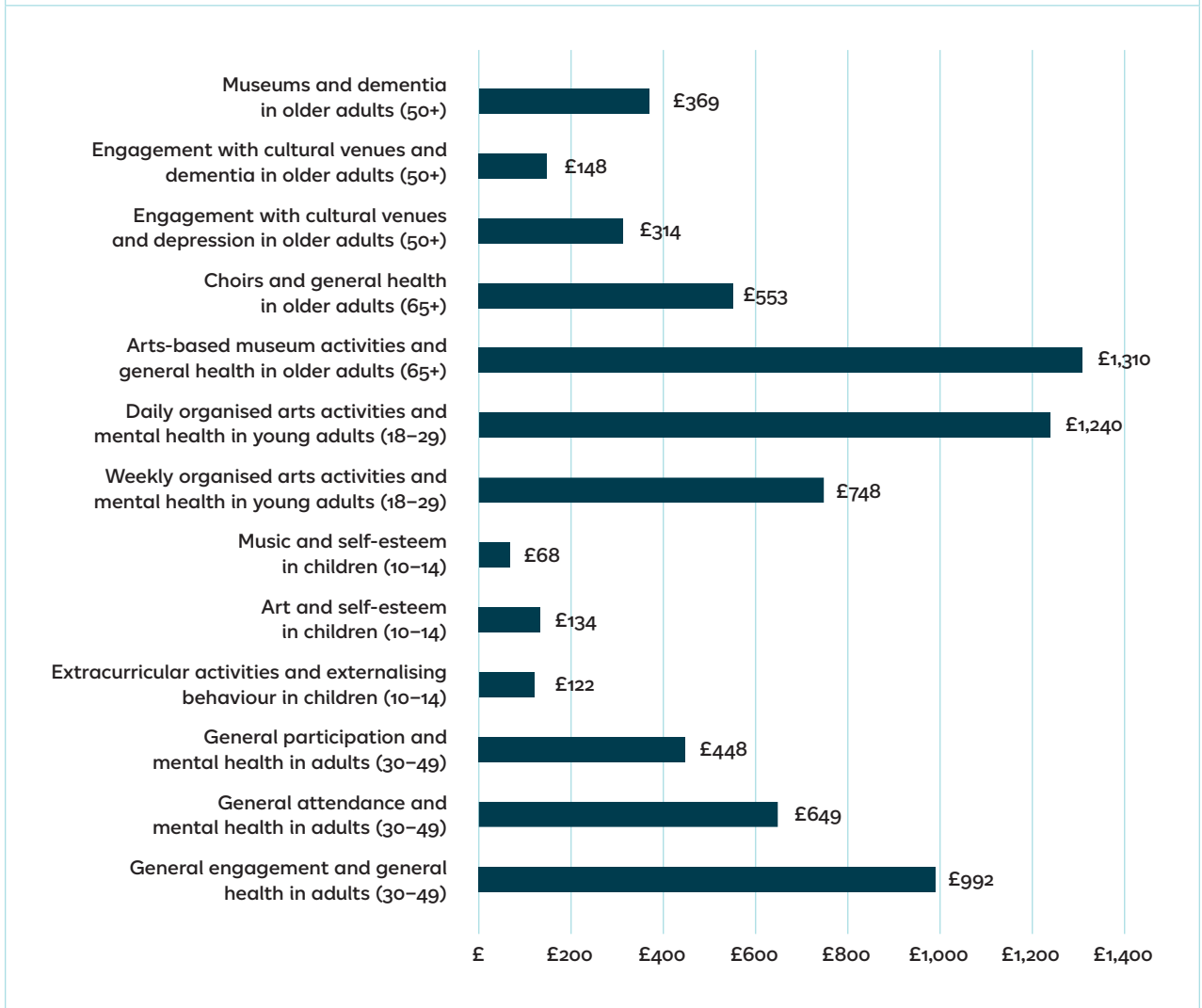
## The “Art of Life” Project

The “Art of Life” project is a cross-border, community-based creative initiative designed to support individuals engaging in conversations about death, dying and advance care planning topics that are often difficult or avoided. It is funded through Creative Ireland and is led by Cavan County Council.

An evaluation of the project was commissioned by the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (RCSI) to assess participant outcomes and the social value of the project. This found that a significant number of participants reported improvements in mental health and confidence, and that they were more willing to discuss end-of-life arrangements with family. The study also found that the project generated €2.43 for every €1 invested, with participants reporting a willingness-to-pay on average of €20.57 per month to avail of the programme.

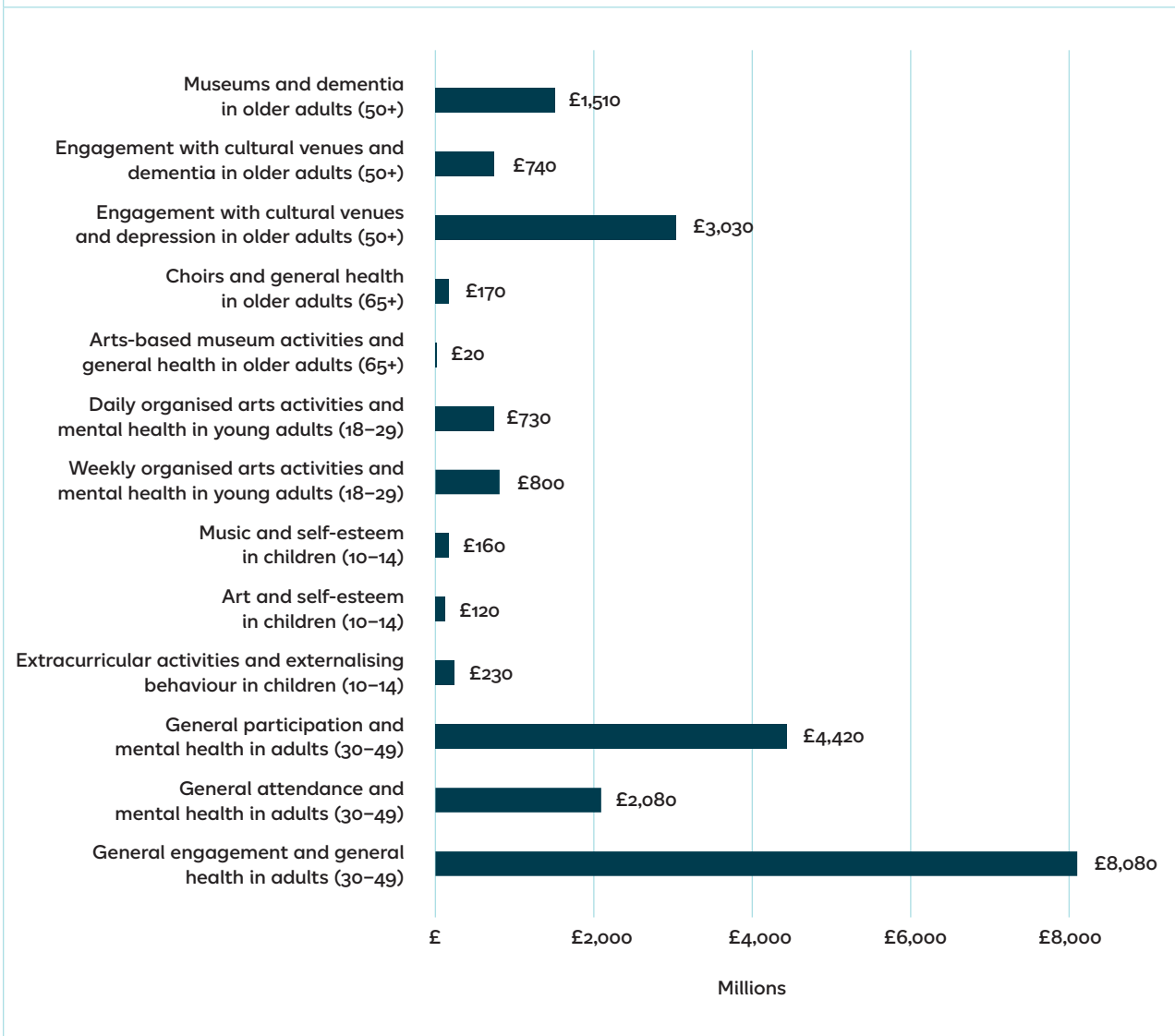
Source: See <https://www.artsandhealth.ie/research-evaluation/the-art-of-life-social-return-on-investment-evaluation-report/>

Figure 17: Estimated Annual Benefits for Users of Cultural Institutions in the UK (£) – 2024



Source: *Culture and Heritage Capital: Monetising the Impact of Culture and Heritage on Health and Well-being*, Frontier Economics, 2024

Figure 18: Estimated Annual Benefits for Society of Cultural Institutions in the UK (£) – 2024

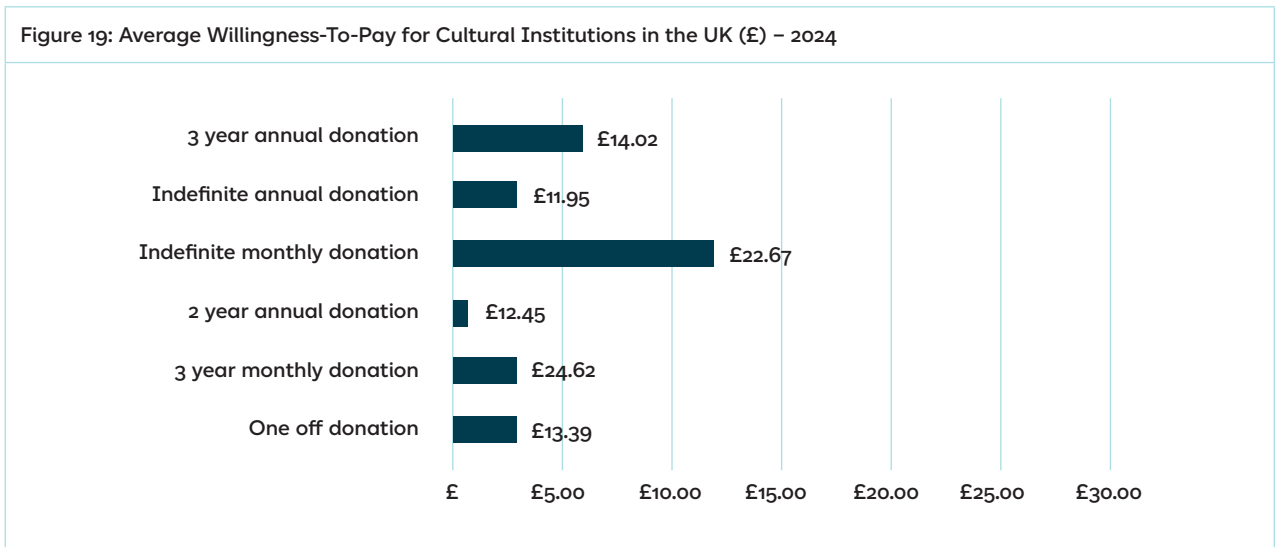


Source: Culture and Heritage Capital: Monetising the Impact of Culture and Heritage on Health and Well-being, Frontier Economics, 2024

### 5.3.3 Non-User Benefits

Recent evidence on the value of non-user benefits is available from the UK Government’s Culture and Heritage Capital Programme, which commissioned Alma Economics to undertake a detailed study into the non-use values of major cultural institutions, published in January 2026<sup>64</sup>. This study, which surveyed over 13,000 UK adults, tested willingness-to-pay, or the annual amount that non-visitors to an institution would be prepared to contribute to ensure its continued existence and accessibility. Using the Natural

History Museum in London, the World Museum in Liverpool and the Museum of Liverpool as sample subjects, the study found that non-visitors were willing to pay between £11.95 and £24.62 per person per year (based on 2024 prices), depending on the framing of the question and the bias-mitigation approach applied, as shown in Figure 20. Converting to Irish prices in 2025, this is equivalent to approximately €16.93 to €34.85 per person per year.



Source: *Applications of Non-Use Values in the Context of Culture and Heritage*, Alma Economics, 2026

64 *Applications of Non-Use Values in the Context of Culture and Heritage*, Report by Alma Economics for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, January 2026. Report available at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-and-heritage-capital-applications-of-non-use-values/applications-of-non-use-values-in-the-context-of-culture-and-heritage-report>.



These are meaningful sums, which indicate that cultural institutions can generate significant economic value through their existence and availability, even among the population that might never visit nor use them.

*From the Exhibition 'Recasting Canova', Collection Crawford Art Gallery. Photo, Jed Niezgoda*

In addition, the study examined how willingness-to-pay varies with geographic distance from an institution, an important question for a country of Ireland's scale. In this regard, the research found that non-use value is not confined to people living close to an institution, as even at a distance of 300 kilometres, willingness-to-pay was still found to be around 80% of the value reported by those living nearby, which may reflect the wider significance that major cultural institutions hold, regardless of proximity.

The relationship between distance and willingness-to-pay was found to be complex and non-linear however, and these figures should be treated as indicative rather than precise. Also, no attempt is made here to directly extrapolate a precise Irish value from the UK data, as the estimates derived from the UK studies relate to specific institutions surveyed under specific conditions, and applying them directly to Irish institutions would require assumptions about cultural equivalence, population preferences and institutional comparability, which this report is not in a position to validate. At the same time, the UK evidence would suggest that the non-use value of Ireland's collecting institutions might be similarly economically significant, be distributed across the full national population rather than concentrated among visitors, and be likely to be substantial in aggregate.

### 5.3.4 Potential User and Non-User Values in Ireland

The evidence presented in the preceding sections is drawn from UK research, and the unit values it contains cannot be applied directly to an Irish context without a degree of caution. Differences in population characteristics, institutional scale, cultural participation patterns, and survey design mean that UK-derived estimates will not translate precisely to Ireland. It is, however, possible to use those values as a broad indicative reference point — not to arrive at a precise figure, but to establish a credible order of magnitude for the benefits that the five institutions may be generating for Irish society. The calculations set out in this section should be understood in that spirit. They are illustrative rather than definitive, and the results should not be treated as robust estimates without further primary research conducted with Irish populations.

To construct an indicative estimate of user benefits, three values have been drawn from Figure 17, selected as the categories most relevant to the visitor profile of the five institutions. These are:

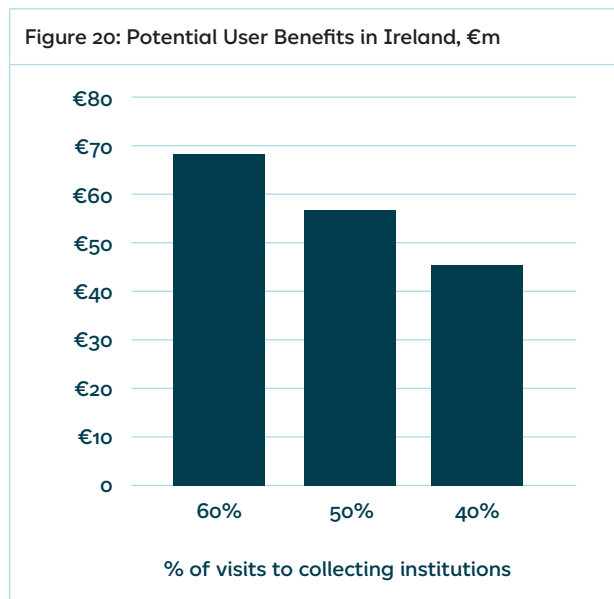
- General engagement and health in adults: £992 per annum
- Art-based museum activities and general health in older adults: £1,310 per annum
- Extra-curricular activities and behaviour outcomes in children: £122 per annum

These three categories are selected as the closest available proxies for the principal audiences of the five institutions: the general adult population who make up the majority of visitors; older adults, for whom museum-based programmes have been shown to generate particularly high wellbeing returns; and children and young people, reached through the extensive education and schools programmes maintained by all five institutions.

In preparing the estimates, the UK sterling values have been converted to euros using the average 2024 GBP/EUR exchange rate and uplifted to 2025 prices using Irish Earnings inflation, so that the resulting figures are expressed in consistent 2025 Euro terms.

Visitor survey data indicates that, on average, approximately 10% of visitors to the five institutions are children, 23% are older adults aged 55 or over, and the remainder are adults under 55. To translate these per-person benefit values into an aggregate annual figure, an assumption is required about the frequency with which individual visitors engage with the institutions across the year. For the purposes of this estimate, it is assumed that each individual attends some form of cultural activity once per month, and that between 40% and 60% of those attendances are at one of the five institutions (i.e. that such users gain some of these benefits from other cultural outlets). These are necessarily broad assumptions, and the resulting figures should be treated as illustrative of the order of magnitude involved rather than as precise estimates.

On this basis, the indicative annual user benefit to Irish society is estimated at between €45m to €68m, as illustrated in Figure 20.



Source: Fitzpatrick Associates Analysis

An indicative estimate of non-user benefits can be derived from the willingness-to-pay evidence presented in Figure 18. Applying the lower-bound annual figure of £11.95 per non-visiting adult, uplifted to 2025 euro prices, and calculated against the relevant non-visitor adult population in Ireland, produces an indicative aggregate value of approximately €55m.

Taken together, these two components suggest that the five institutions may be generating wider societal benefits of between €100m and €123m per annum, in addition to the direct GVA and employment impacts set out earlier. These figures are presented solely as a high-level illustration of the potential quantum of benefit; they are not offered as robust estimates. They should be

read accordingly, as an indication of the scale of benefit that primary Irish research could in time substantiate, not as a measure of value that can be reported with confidence in the absence of that research.

## 5.4 Public Trust

While indirectly related to cultural capital, there is also important international evidence regarding public trust in cultural institutions. Research in both the US and Europe demonstrates that museums and similar cultural institutions are considered among the most trustworthy among public and private institutions in public perception. US survey research from 2021, for example, found that museums were the second most only after friends and family, and significantly higher than news agencies and organisations, corporations, Government or social media. Their factual ethos, authenticity, research orientation and independence were key among contributing factors to such trust<sup>65</sup>. Research undertaken in 2024 in Germany found similar results<sup>66</sup>.

Such a trusted status may underpin both the existing value which citizens place on the institutions, and also their capability to generate greater value by building from such a trusted status in their engagement and outreach programmes and activities.

<sup>65</sup> See Museums and Trust, Wilkening Consulting, on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Available at <https://wilkeningconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Museums-and-Trust-2021.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> See "The hidden capital: Trust in museums in Germany. The German public's view of a cultural institution in transition". Available at <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/institut-fuer-museumsforschung/research/research-projects/hidden-capital/>

## 5.5 The Gaps in the Current Knowledge Base

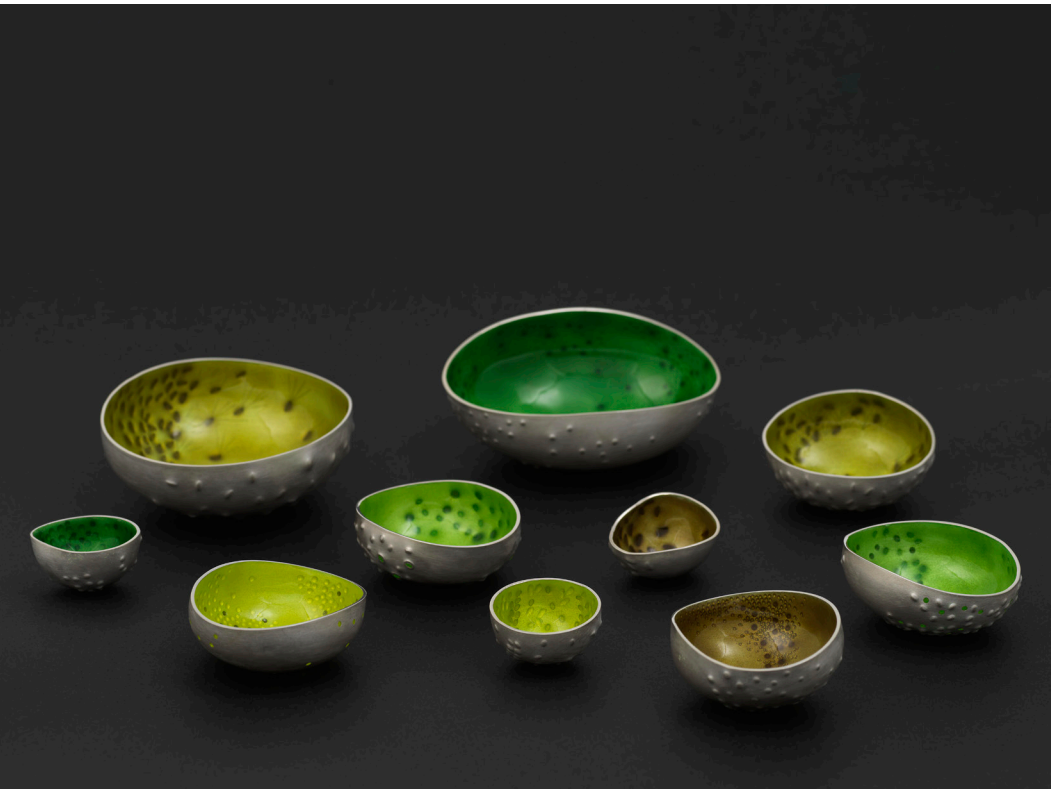
The preceding sections have drawn on available research to examine the economic and social value of Ireland's collecting institutions. However it notes that quantitative evidence on user well-being values, non-use values and social impacts is drawn almost entirely from UK-based studies and evidence, developed using UK populations, UK institutions and UK policy contexts.

While there is no reason to believe that the fundamental dynamics are materially different in Ireland, applying UK-derived values to Irish institutions still involves assumptions that have not been tested with Irish data, and addressing this limitation is a most important step that could be taken to strengthen the evidence base for future investment decisions in Ireland.

The UK studies provide a great deal of the methodological groundwork for developing a more solid Irish evidence base. This includes detailed practical guidance on how to design and implement both user well-being surveys and non-use value, willingness-to-pay studies in a way that is consistent with good practice and rigorous research standards. This guidance is also publicly available and could be adapted for an Irish institutional setting without requiring the development of new methodological frameworks. A programme of survey research conducted with Irish populations, using the five institutions covered in this report as subjects, could therefore generate the type of Irish-specific unit values that would be needed to underpin a more robust quantification of the economic case for investment. In this regard, such a programme might usefully include three types of survey:

- a user well-being survey, which could be administered on-site at each of the five institutions, designed to capture the subjective well-being impact of a visit using a validated WELLBY or equivalent approach. This would allow direct benefit-per-visit estimates to be derived for an Irish context (rather than inferred from UK comparators) and would similarly allow for an understanding of how Irish cultural institutions differ from their UK peers;
- a non-use value survey, which could be administered to a representative sample of the Irish general public rather than visitors, to be designed to elicit willingness-to-pay values for the continued existence and accessibility of Irish cultural institutions (UK guidance on bias mitigation strategies and catchment area definition also provides a strong foundation for designing this kind of study); and
- an awareness and engagement survey of non-visitors, which could go alongside the non-user value survey to help understand how familiar the general public is with the institutions, what barriers prevent engagement, and what factors would encourage wider participation.

Green Fields, ten enamelled silver vessels by Cara Murphy, Acquired in 2024, National Museum of Ireland



These surveys will do more than simply allow for a quantification of the benefits to Irish society. Rather, they can also be used to help to understand how to maximise these benefits and widen the net of individuals that directly benefit from Ireland's national cultural institutions.

Furthermore, the existing research shows that cultural engagement is not evenly distributed across the population, and it suggests that some social groups are substantially under-represented in the visitor base of the institutions. This matters economically as well as socially, given that UK well-being evidence shows that cultural engagement generates measurable improvements in health outcomes, mental well-being, educational attainment and productivity, and that these benefits accumulate over a lifetime. Understanding the specific barriers that prevent engagement from lower social groups (whether those are practical, financial, informational or cultural), and what interventions are most effective in addressing them, is a research priority that institutions and their funders can address directly.

Finally, the evidence on the value generated by engagement with children and young people also deserves particular attention. In this regard, UK evidence has found some of the highest per person benefit values in this demographic, with organised arts activities for young adults generating between £748 and £1,240 per person per year in estimated well-being benefits. These are very large numbers, and they reflect the compounding nature of early cultural engagement, i.e. the benefits of building confidence, creativity and a relationship with culture in childhood and adolescence, which extends through an entire lifetime. In the Irish context, National Cultural Institutions similarly run education and schools' programmes, but there is currently very limited quantitative and systematic evidence on their impact in an Irish context. Developing that evidence, therefore, through longitudinal engagement tracking, well-being measurement and educational outcome data linked to programme participation, would not only strengthen the economic case for institutions but would also provide useful tools to design programmes that maximise the return on the investment that is being made.

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# 6. Summary and Implications

## 6.1 The Aggregate Impact of the Five Institutions

The most readily evident measure of the impact is in the economic footprint of the institutions themselves, i.e. the spending they undertake, the people they employ, and the supply chain and household spending activity that flows from both. Measured in these terms, the five institutions covered in this report generated €54.2 million in total GVA and supported over 700 FTE jobs in 2024.

A second lens captures their role as anchors of the tourism economy. In this regard, an estimated 64,000 visitors are strongly influenced to travel to Ireland by the institutions, injecting €73 million into the Irish economy and generating a further €80.5 million in tourism-related GVA.

Important as these figures are, the primary mission of the institutions relate more to preserving and celebrating the cultural and artistic heritage of Ireland and enabling citizens and visitors to experience and gain from them.

The five institutions reach far beyond the 3.3-3.5 million visits that they receive each year, as community outreach and education programmes engage students and young people, disadvantaged groups, people experiencing dementia, survivors of domestic violence, disabled and neurodiverse artists, and diaspora communities across 230 countries, among others, while digital collections are accessed from every corner of the world. And beyond all of these active engagements, there is the value that people place simply on the importance of keeping Ireland's cultural heritage preserved and accessible, a potentially significant and largely invisible source of public non-use value.

## 6.2 The Potential Return on Public Investment

Public investment in National Cultural Institutions is substantial. The justification for such public support rests, ultimately, on the proposition that the benefits generated for society by the institutions substantially exceed the cost of providing them. In this regard, the evidence assembled in this report supports that proposition, and does so across multiple dimensions.

The return to the institutions' transactional activities alone, while not the primary justification for public funding of national cultural institutions, is likely to be significant, along with the impacts of the tourism expenditure they catalyse, and the employment they support across the economy. All of this, in turn, brings returns that flow back to the Irish exchequer in the form of VAT on visitor spending and income tax on employment.

The deeper return, however, lies in the social value generated by cultural engagement, beyond the benefits of simply visiting institutions. These include measurable improvements in mental and physical health, reductions in depression and dementia risk, gains in self-esteem and resilience, improved educational outcomes in children and young people, and productivity benefits that flow from a healthier and more engaged population. Each of these translates, in turn, to a better quality of life for people and communities, and into avoided costs for health services, reduced demand on social care, and higher economic output per person.

### 6.3 How Ireland Compares to Its Peers

The Eurostat data reviewed in Chapter 2 also places Ireland in a revealing European context. Ireland's cultural participation rate of 36.3% sits in the middle of the European range, while its Government investment of 0.9% of GDP in culture is marginally below the EU-27 average, and cultural sector employment of 0.95 per 1,000 of the population is similarly below most comparable economies. These comparative indicators may reveal the scope for greater investment, engagement, and ultimately benefits arising from, the services provided by the institutions (although the extent to which cultural institutions are free to visit in different countries, as they are in Ireland, may affect these cross-country comparative statistics).

Ireland's participation rate of 36.3% leaves a substantial majority of the population that are not regularly engaging with cultural institutions. Closing that gap would not only widen the social benefit that institutions generate, it would also strengthen the economic case for investment by bringing more of the population within reach of the well-being and productivity returns that cultural engagement generate.

### 6.4 The Case for Further Research

The quantitative evidence on the social value of cultural institutions is drawn from UK-based studies rather than primary Irish data. However, this UK evidence provides the methodological groundwork, it has produced detailed guidance on user well-being surveys, non-use value willingness-to-pay studies and the measurement of social impact, and its guidance is publicly available and directly applicable to an Irish context.

Three research priorities stand out. The first is to establish user well-being values for Ireland and to consider how the benefits of the institutions could be expanded beyond the current user base. The core of this would be a user well-being survey, administered on-site at institutions, to establish Irish-specific estimates of benefit per visit, using a validated WELLBY approach. The second is to establish the non-use values of the Irish general public, using a survey designed to elicit willingness-to-pay values for the continued existence and accessibility of institutions in a way that can be compared with and calibrated against the UK evidence. The third is to understand why certain groups do not engage with the institutions and to consider what more could be done, to understand the barriers that currently prevent wider engagement, and provide the evidence base to design and evaluate interventions aimed at broadening participation across social groups.

Taken together, these three research pieces would provide the data needed to maximise the evidence base for the benefit from institutions, and construct a full social return on investment analysis, grounded in Irish evidence and defensible in a public appraisal context. The evidence from international comparators also suggests that such an analysis would demonstrate returns on public investment that are compelling in an Irish context.

## 6.5 Some Policy Implications

As well as demonstrating the degrees to which the collecting institutions generate economic and societal benefits and value, the report, and the international research evidence which it draws from, increasingly demonstrate the wide spectrum of such positive effects – in health, education, wellbeing, identity, inclusion, and many other domains.

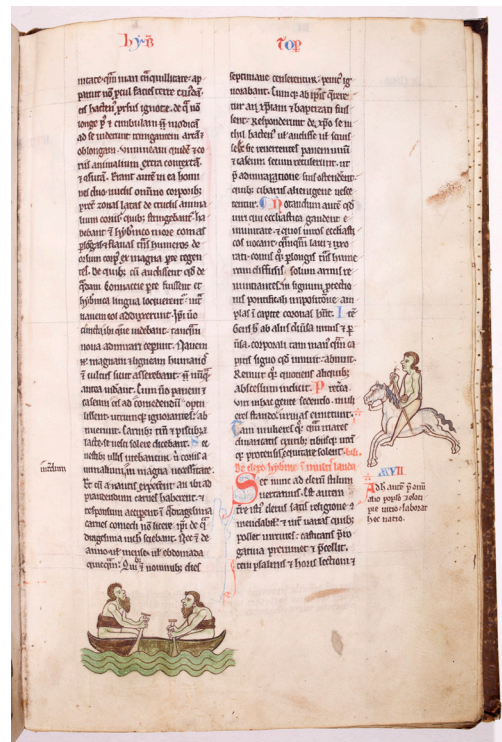
This wide spectrum of policy efficacy is a particular feature of the institutions and their work. It also relates very directly to the growing appreciation and acknowledgement in official policy of quality-of-life dimensions of national well-being and prosperity rather than more narrowly measured material wealth.

The findings also demonstrate the positive role which such institutions can play in addressing national policy challenges and contemporary threats. Cultural institutions have been found to retain very high levels of public trust and respect, and to act as forces which reinforce mutual respect, diversity and also unity. In an international context of increasing polarisation, misinformation and extremism, they may hold a unique position to counter divisive forces and support stronger national cohesion. They also may have valuable and important roles to play in addressing national challenges associated with migration and integration, placemaking and local identity, an ageing population, and the promotion of a creative, innovative, risk-taking and entrepreneurial workforce, and digital exclusion, to name a few.

Bonar Law Collection,  
National Library of Ireland



Red Foxes Taxidermy  
Diorama, Natural  
History Division,  
National Museum  
of Ireland



Illustrations from the  
'Topographica Hibernica'  
by Geraldus Cambrensis,  
National Library of Ireland



