

Culture

'It's a game-changer for us': Artists welcome guaranteed basic income plan

Pilot scheme could see 2,000 creative workers get €325 a week from March 2022

✕ Expand



Cathy McGuinness, Rachel Lyons, Sarah Corcoran and Pamela Connolly of Pillow Queens: 'It's difficult to maintain an identity as an artist when your day-to-day reality doesn't match up.' Photograph: Rich Gilligan

Deirdre Falvey

Wed Oct 13 2021 - 20:49



“This is a complete game-changer for us, working in music,” said Caroline O’Donoghue, lead singer and guitarist with Irish indie rock band Pillow Queens. “Having a stable arts income would mean we could continue to work in music while not worrying about making rent month-to-month, and without fear of burning out completely.”

The pilot for a new basic income guarantee scheme for artists and arts workers could see “around 2,000” creative workers drawing income from March 2022, or “the beginning of April, and no later than that”, said Minister for the Arts Catherine Martin.

She gave details of the pilot project, which will be backed by €25 million funding in 2022, at Wednesday’s Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media budget briefing.

A basic income guarantee was the top recommendation of the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce’s Life Worth Living report in November 2020, and the Minister said she intends to follow it “as closely as possible and to deliver a scheme that benefits artists and creative arts workers”. The three-year pilot will involve a weekly payment of €325 a week. The department later confirmed there will be no means test to take part in the scheme.

READ MORE

Caroline O’Donoghue



Basic income scheme for



THE IRISH TIMES

Subscribe

Sign In

Day as Gaeilge

‘I used to drink a lot’: Succession’s Alan Ruck on Ferris Bueller, booze and bouncing back



Monarchy or republic: Treaty talks revealed a profound clash of ideals



Corcoran says the scheme “sends a message to artists living and working in Ireland that their work is valued, appreciated and necessary”. She explained what the impact could be.

‘Stable income’

“Pillow Queens have had incredible highs over the last five years, but not having a stable income has meant we’ve been in situations where we’re waving at our dole officers from festival mainstages, or we’re heading to our nine-to-five day jobs in Tesco after playing remotely for the James Corden show. It’s difficult to maintain an identity as an artist when your day-to-day reality doesn’t match up.”

The department expects “significant sectoral stakeholder engagement in the coming weeks to inform the pilot scheme, and ensure that it meets the needs”, and the Minister is considering the oversight group’s interim report to decide on a “suitable delivery model” before announcing further details. The scheme is expected to launch in early 2022.

As an indicator of the size of the sector, at the height of the first Covid wave, about 14,200 people in arts, entertainment and recreation were on the pandemic unemployment payment (though additional creative workers may have been categorised differently). The department said the selection method for about 2,000 artists and arts workers for the pilot will be finalised early next month, but the Minister intends a non-competitive process, with participants chosen randomly. Likely “streams” will include professional artists, emerging/developing artists and creative arts workers.

Lobbying

While 2,000 participants is lower than the National Campaign for the Arts (NCFA) hoped for, after five years of research, consultation and lobbying, NCFA is “happy with the proposed payment of €325 per week, once it is not means tested and other benefits including disability payments are not diminished, and that there is a clear process for selection. There’s some detail to be worked out, but this pilot is a significant step in the right direction.”

Corcoran observes in the music industry “there are months at a time of what can be perceived from the outside as periods of downtime, but it’s during this

very downtime that art is made”. The Pillow Queens all work full-time outside the band, so they had to take unpaid leave from day jobs to make their debut album in 2019. “It meant we were three years into being a band before it was possible to record our first album. When I got back to work after recording, everyone was asking how my holiday was but the truth was I was exhausted.”

She adds: “It’s only 2,000 people to begin with, but basic income for artists is an incredible starting point which could create serious change in a country that’s known worldwide for its artists.”



[Deirdre Falvey](#)

Deirdre Falvey is a features and arts writer at The Irish Times



Basic Income for the Arts

