

The Abbey Theatre
Strategy 2025–2030

A vibrant and vital future





Introduction

120 years ago, a small group of artists set up a theatre company ‘to bring upon the stage the deeper emotions of Ireland’. That spark, the ignition point of their struggle, was the birth of the Abbey Theatre. However, that spark is not an Olympian flame that will burn unaided; it demands constant reignition. The challenge is this; how do we stay true to those founding principles whilst also holding up a mirror to who we are now? This strategy seeks to answer that.

Artists are change makers. The liveness of theatre connects the artist and the audience in the same electrifying moment, and that moment can be transformative individually and societally. Our founders understood the potential of that alchemy, which was political, civic and mythic, and how it would ultimately contribute to the formation of the new state.

However, the nature of that state and indeed, of Ireland itself presents a very different set of challenges today, and the needs of our artists are different; but the primacy of that relationship between the theatre and artist remains unaltered.

As we build a National Theatre for the 21st century we must acknowledge the profound shift in our audience’s expectation and experience, especially our younger audiences and those who are challenged to get access to our Dublin 1 home. To make great theatre is to create electric, galvanising, and live experiences in places where we and our audience breathe the same air. To also meet the requirements of an ever changing audience we must also develop our access points, be that through developing more effective digital platforms or touring.

Our next five years will focus on how we can sustainably and effectively meet our audiences' needs whilst at the same time creating great live art, and deepening our stakeholders' connection with the Abbey Theatre, the National Theatre of Ireland.

Delivering the aims set out in this strategy will require not only our organisation, but all the theatre artists, makers, workers, facilitators, audiences, patrons, donors, supporters and our sectoral partners to collaborate, interrogate and deliver these shared priorities and actions.

This can only happen with the continued support of our funder and partner, the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.



Our Values

Our values speak to who we are
and drive the fundamentals of
what we do —

Bravery and imagination

Honesty and authenticity

Dynamism and warmth

Integrity and transparency

Purpose

Driven by our values, our purpose is built around these four pillars —

A courageous creative platform

A National Theatre is the greatest national art project you can ever have, a safe space for dangerous thinking. We have an opportunity and responsibility to support artists to take risks that no one else can.

Meaningful national discourse

Ireland is always changing but the manifesto of her National Theatre remains, which is to empower artists to tell stories relevant to where we are, where we come from and where we are going.

An electric living experience

We believe theatre is an experience that changes lives, excites passions, thrills the senses and holds extremes of emotions safely.

Purposeful cultural leadership

With a formation that predates that of the State, Ireland's National Theatre holds a unique position in Irish society. The Abbey Theatre has a responsibility and influence beyond theatre into the national identity and the nation's ongoing development.



IMAGE BY: STE MURRAY

Propel the National Theatre of Ireland forward as a vital 21st century institution for all of Ireland.

The Abbey Theatre, since its inception, has held a unique place in our cultural landscape, a landscape which is now changing rapidly.

In this context, we are ambitious for a future where art and theatre are vital parts of Irish life, as entertainment and as something deeper; a way for us as individuals, communities and a nation to better understand who we are, where we are at and where we are going; a way for us to turn our unique lived experience into a shared cultural language, telling the stories that enrich us all.

To achieve this we must take a bold, confident and pro-active approach to propel the National Theatre of Ireland forward as a vital 21st century institution for all of Ireland.

Strategic Priorities – at a glance

To propel the National Theatre of Ireland forward as a vital 21st century institution for all of Ireland. We will focus on four areas –

National Theatre of creativity

Increase quality, ambition and innovation

- Produce and elevate ambitious vital theatre.
- Be a test bed for the future of Irish theatre through sustained investment in the development of a broad range of new work.
- Use our platform and stages to drive important national conversations.
- Build on the power of our programme by making everything we do a creative opportunity.
- Mine our exceptional Irish theatre canon and celebrate the writers who created it.

National Theatre of connection

Expand reach, relevance and engagement

- Leverage our programme to inspire and engage communities across the island of Ireland.
- Ignite audiences of diverse ages, backgrounds, interests and perspectives.
- Evolve touring models to reach audiences in a changing landscape.
- Re-energise our brand and communications for a digital age.

National Theatre of cultivation

Evolve our role to cultivate and progress our eco-system

- Expand pathways and opportunities for theatre workers.
- Collaborate and co-operate more widely, meaningfully and openly.
- Activate our spaces to support and champion process and craft.
- Explore opportunities to share insights and expertise on a digital platform.

National Theatre of progression

Support long term strategic impact

- Build a dynamic new home for the National Theatre.
- Foster a culture of inclusion and embed diversity and equality across all our policies and procedures.
- Develop our international connections and partnerships.
- Make environmental sustainability central to everything we do.

National Theatre of creativity



National Theatre of creativity

The creative act drives our vitality. Focusing on quality, ambition and bringing innovation to everything we do will allow us to become a beacon for artists, audiences, and members of the public. This focus will allow us to leverage the unique power of the live theatre experience to ‘bring upon the stage the deeper emotions of Ireland’.

Ambitious vital theatre

We will be a platform and a place of development for the vitality of a modern, forward looking art form; theatre that champions, interrogates and expands the canon, and that creates space to imagine future and alternative forms, responding to a nation constantly in development.

Creative cross-pollination

Our place in society and the cultural landscape gives us a responsibility to be a test bed for new work and ideas. We will expand the possibilities of engagement through cross-pollination across artists, formats, communities and conversations.

Leading the conversation

Our programme aims to be a provocation, to strike up a conversation about what it means to be alive in the world in this time, to remember where we have come from and to imagine what we are capable of becoming in the future. We will find ways to bring that conversation beyond the stage to involve more people in more ways, both in person, and online.

Everything is programme

Our artistic programme is central to how we are understood and create value. We will build on its power and expand its impact by making everything we do in the Abbey Theatre a creative opportunity; embracing innovation and creativity in every part of the organisation.



National Theatre of connection

National Theatre of connection

Theatre offers a unique, visceral sense of connection. By expanding our reach, relevance and engagement we can offer this experience to a much wider set of audiences, providing meaningful connection to unique creative moments, our lived experiences, and the bigger ideas of where we're going.

Spreading inspiration

Leveraging our programmatic themes and conversations as inspiration, information, and participation will help us drive engagement and community building in a range of contexts; allowing us to reach far and wide, and build pathways that lead back to vital theatre.

Igniting new audiences

Culture is shifting constantly and thriving audiences are our lifeblood. We will work to understand and ignite passion for the art and future artists, making a wider range of people feel invited and welcomed.

Evolving touring models

Touring is a fundamental driver of connection for a National Theatre. We will work with national and international partners to explore new, sustainable ways to collaborate and reach audiences with unique, high quality, live theatre.

Invigorating the brand

While the live experience is central to our brand, we will re-invigorate and re-energise our brand for the digital age by expanding the understanding of what the National Theatre of Ireland means, what it does, how that feels and who it's for; helping us inspire and engage with every interaction, inside, outside and online.

National Theatre of cultivation



IMAGE BY: RICH GILLIGAN

National Theatre of cultivation

In a changing theatre ecosystem we must evolve our role as a commissioner, developer and partner to artists and producers. We will expand the ways we collaborate, and share insight, knowledge and resources - helping to increase the skills and career impact of artists and companies we work with, and play a role in the progression of a healthy, thriving industry.

Expanding paths to work

We will review and build on expanding our pathways for theatre artists. We will strive to strike a healthy balance that maximises the number of opportunities while ensuring consistency of quality. We commit to being fair, transparent and responsive with our policies and processes.

Collaborate and co-operate

We will be a cultural mothership for the wider industry, with a commitment to hosting, convening and co-producing with a wide range of cultural and national partners. We will build strong bonds, and share knowledge, thinking and resources that benefit all involved.

Spaces that elevate

We will activate our spaces throughout the building, with the aim of elevating the process, development, craft, conversations and interactions around the work. We will hold space for artists in residence to focus on their craft.

Amplifying our expertise

We will explore the potential of a digital platform and media to share the insights, skills and expertise of the Abbey Theatre team with a wider audience than we can support in a person to person capacity.



National Theatre of progression

National Theatre of progression

To deliver on our strategic aims, and ensure we all thrive now and for the future, we must build a strong, resilient home and organisational agenda that reflects who we are, where we are going and what we need to sustain long term impact.

A dynamic home

The development of a new home for the National Theatre of Ireland is vital to the functioning of the organisation, the artists and theatre sector of Ireland. It will be a huge catalyst to drive much of the progress outlined in this strategy. In its design we can drive equity, sustainability, inclusion, positive impact for the staff, theatre artists, the local community, and the city; and deliver long term value for the nation.

A place to thrive

We will develop a nourishing culture, embedding diversity, equality and inclusion in every layer of what we do. We will ensure robust, transparent procedures and processes, to build the best place for our people to flourish and support the long term prosperity of the organisation.

International infrastructure

We will continue to build connections, relationships and projects with international partners to develop our influence and value as a National Theatre at an international level. We will reach out to Ireland's global diaspora as their National Theatre, while advocating for a unique and ever changing Irish voice and experience on an international stage.

A green transition

Sustainability of the earth's environmental resources will be made central to everything we do. We will accelerate our work to date, communicating our commitments and progress both inside and outside the organisation. Sustainability will drive our decisions across operations in house and on tour and will be at the heart of the development of a new Abbey Theatre infrastructure.



Strategic Roadmap

These are some of the projects, initiatives, and actions that in addition to our core priority areas as outlined, will drive the advancement of this strategy over the next three years. Progress checks will be undertaken annually, and the strategy will be reviewed. Actions for the final two years will be developed and outlined in 2027.

Action area 01:

Expanding programme strands

Action area 02:

Building digital footprint

Action area 03:

Advancing development plan

Action area 04:

Cultivating industry infrastructure

Action area 05:

**Establishing sustainable
custodianship**

Action area 01: Expanding programme strands

To drive aims:

- Produce and elevate ambitious vital theatre.
- Be a test bed for the future of Irish theatre through sustained investment in the development in a broad range of new work.
- Use our platform and stage to drive important national conversations.
- Build on the power of our programme by making everything we do a creative opportunity.
- Leverage our programme to inspire and engage communities across Ireland.
- Ignite audiences of diverse ages, backgrounds, interests and perspectives.

We will:

Our core responsibility is to produce and elevate vital theatre, by presenting new work and by regularly revisiting, mining and sharing our canonical works. In addition we aim to expand our programme strands by:

2025/26

Pollinate

We will formalise and build on our work focused on shifting perceptions and expand engagement through cross-pollination across artists, formats, communities and conversations.

Elevate

Our stages elevate, and from it we address the nation. In issues of national and international relevance what we put on stage will be our statement. We will make space for a strand of work that furthers this, and for the voices that need to speak it.

Experience

We will develop a programme strand rooted in hospitality as a creative and cultural vehicle, designed to expand a visit to the Abbey Theatre as an electric living experience.

2026/27

Ignite

We will establish a strand that helps us expand our understanding of a more diverse range of audiences, and programme work that invites and inspires them.

Inspire

We will develop a strand that allows us to reach outside the organisation to engage, inspire, educate and co-create with a wide range of communities; building on themes, stories and conversations that stem from the core artistic programme.

Futures

We will develop a thought leadership strand to happen once or twice a year that drives cultural leadership, putting theatre at the heart of national conversations, building value with national and international partners.

Ongoing

Audience development

We will use this structure to drive meaningful audience development, ensuring different strands reach different audiences.

Insights database

The insight and feedback from these strands will build a structured framework of data and insights that informs strategic decision making across the organisation.

Sharing insights

We commit to sharing these insights with our partners and the extended community across a series of engagements.

Action area 02: Building digital footprint

To drive aims:

- Use our platform and stage to drive important national conversations.
- Ignite audiences of diverse ages, backgrounds, interests and perspectives.
- Re-energise our brand and communications for a digital age.
- Explore opportunities to share insight and expertise on a digital platform.

We will:

Evolve our digital footprint and strategy to better inform our diverse audiences, to support our work, to provide access to our expertise and experience, and of course to continue to communicate our shows and sell tickets.

2025/26

Dynamic brand

We will activate our brand strategy and assets that allow us to communicate and connect in a dynamic, interactive environment so we can be agile, responsive, and so that work and principles of the National Theatre can resonate with changing audience expectations and inter-connected experiences.

Update website

We will update our website to reflect new visual language and messaging. A new website will be designed and developed to better communicate our role, remit and range of offerings for diverse audiences.

2026/27

Digital audit and plan

We will audit all our digital activity and functionality to see how it maps to our stakeholder groups. This will allow us to establish a cohesive plan for the evolution of our digital footprint, and to undertake it in the most feasible and sustainable way.

Content platform

We will establish and grow a digital content platform to support our firm focus on the power and value of theatre as a live art form. This will provide context and access to the thinking and making, glimpses behind the scenes and deeper reflections.

Ongoing

Insightful content

Making the 'why' clear on an ongoing basis will have a major impact on team and audience understanding and bring together many of the strategic strands. The approach will be to start small and simple, building the ambition of the content in parallel with the culture for its planning and production.

Digital masterclass

The development of digital 'masterclass' content that shares the insights of the Abbey Theatre's diverse experts will be piloted and grown once the content platform is established.

Action area 03: Advancing development plan

To drive aims:

- Produce and elevate ambitious vital theatre.
- Use our platform and stage to drive important national conversations.
- Activate our spaces to support and champion process and craft.
- Build a dynamic new home for our National Theatre.
- Foster a culture of inclusion and embed diversity and equality across all our policies and procedures.
- Make environmental sustainability central to everything we do.

We will:

Advance the planning for the development of a new home for the National Theatre of Ireland to allow us to progress many important strands of the strategy and bring concerted focus on the project internally and with important partners.

2025/26

Strategic partners

We will gather and activate a coalition of national and international strategic partners that can support us in navigating all aspects of this process - artistic, architectural, operational, environmental, inclusivity and financial.

Community consultations

We will plan and undertake a programme of consultations and workshops with the different communities and partners that will be impacted by this development. These will include but not be limited to, Abbey Theatre employees, local communities, artists and arts workers, cultural partners and funding bodies.

2026/27

Design brief

These consultations and the insight from strategic partners will resolve into a design brief and development of a design competition framework.

Proactive planning

The development of a new home will mean that for a period of time the organisation will need to orientate and operate differently. We will undertake a programme of proactive planning and professional development to ensure the organisation and our partners are prepared.

Ongoing

Funding, Philanthropy and Corporate Engagement

Building on work already done and existing commitments we will continue to seek and secure funding for the development and delivery of the project.

We will also, through a remodelled Corporate donations and philanthropy department and strategy, develop and enhance pathways for authentic engagement and enhanced income streams.

Action area 04: Cultivating industry infrastructure

To drive aims:

- Evolve touring models to deliver in a changing landscape.
- Expand pathways and opportunities for theatre workers.
- Collaborate and co-operate more widely, often and openly.
- Activate our spaces to support and champion process and craft.
- Explore opportunities to share insight and expertise on a digital platform.
- Foster a culture of inclusion and embed diversity and equality across all our policies and procedures.
- Develop international connections and projects to increase standing.

We will:

Take responsibility for our many roles as destination, beacon, convener, connector and catalyst; building the connections, relationships and infrastructure that is central to supporting the sustainable development of these aims.

2025/26

Cultural motherhood

We will work to make the Abbey Theatre a welcoming host and destination for important cultural and national conversations led by partner organisations, agencies and departments.

Diverse pathways

We will continue to develop, formalise and communicate a diverse range of pathways for artists, arts workers and technical staff at all career stages to be able to work with us.

Responsive communication

We will ensure that all pathways we develop provide clear communication and responses that ensure those interacting with them are informed and empowered.

2026/27

Supporting ambition

Our approach to co-productions, with both national and international companies will be oriented to support greater ambition for quality theatre productions and experiences on all sides.

Valuable space

We will activate all our spaces to support development of projects, ambition and craft of artists and companies we work with; to support artists with the headspace and resources they need to develop career defining work.

International networks

We will continue to build relationships and understanding of the Abbey Theatre with cultural and educational organisations; cultivating partners for future projects and knowledge sharing; and establishing formal partnerships with other National Theatres.

Ongoing

National partnerships

Building relationships and seeking to develop joint opportunities with national institutions and organisations.

Transparent thinking

Through our communications and in particular the development of our digital content platform we will make the thinking and decision making of the Abbey Theatre co-directors, and our producers, writers, directors, and creative teams clearer.

Respect

An awareness and acknowledgement that we are standing on the shoulders of literary giants and we must continue to share, celebrate and present these works.

Action area 05: Establishing sustainable custodianship

To drive aims:

- Embed diversity, equality and inclusion and foster a nourishing culture.
- Develop international connections and projects to increase standing.
- Make environmental sustainability central to everything we do.

We will:

Establish an up to date, transparent and resilient organisational structure to support long term health.

2025/26

Culture and people

We will build on work undertaken over the last eighteen months to review processes, structures and culture in all aspects of the organisation to ensure we have fair, resilient and transparent systems and processes that support all our colleagues to ensure they feel safe and supported in their workplace.

Activate sustainability

This is already ongoing but will be formalised, socialised and communicated inside and outside the organisation. We will adopt the green book, developing our own principles, building a community for change and communicating our challenges and progress.

Embed DEI

We have undertaken much work on DEI in every layer of the organisation. We will continue to improve and embed this work at a deeper policy level.

2026/27

Productive pathways

We will develop clear pathways designed for the career needs of Abbey Theatre staff to ensure support and cultivation of talent, skills and excellence.

Supportive cultures

We will work towards developing an internal culture that supports people to participate where they make impact and progress; through their roles and in wider programmes and projects.

Helpful communication

Building more open, useful and collaborative approaches to communication is central to building trust in the organisation, which in turn is a key foundation for the ability to deliver on the strategic objectives.

Ongoing

Custodianship charter

We will further embed our work on building more resilient systems, with the development and establishment of an organisational operating system - a custodianship charter - that will minimise disruption, provide consistency and improve governance for the long term health of the organisation, its reputation, people and assets.



**Abbey
Theatre**

**National
Theatre
of Ireland**

Monitoring Progress

Progress will be monitored and evaluated and reflected in the Abbey Theatre's Annual Reports.

The contribution of each team member and department will be clearly and collaboratively developed in an implementation plan that will expand each of the strategic goals.

Progress against these targets will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

Consultation Process

Strategic goals were developed with the assistance of Scott Burnett at wove.co in consultation with the Abbey Theatre Executive and team, the Board of the Abbey Theatre, the Arts Council, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media and a series of broader stakeholder engagement.

This strategy was approved by the Board of the Abbey Theatre in May 2024.

Image credits in order of appearance

1. From left to right: Elsa Moatti (violin), Constant Madon (oboe, behind the statue), Fergal Curtis, Sarah Van der Vlist (flute), Romain Louveau (piano), Dara Halpin, Michéle Pierre (cello), Fiona Monbet (conductor), Cyprien Noisette (percussion), Joséphine Besançon (bass clarinet), Julia Macarez (viola) in **Elsewhere** by Michael Gallen. Image: Ros Kavanagh.
2. Ciara Ivie in **Her, Sive** by Kat Woods. Image: Ros Kavanagh.
3. From Left to Right: Rebecca O'Mara, Eva-Jane Gaffney, Kate Stanley Brennan, Taylor McClaine, and Ebby O'Toole-Acheampong in **The Square Fellow** by Brendan Behan. Image: Ste Murray.
4. From left to right: Emmanuel Okoye, Pauline Hutton, Naoise Dunbar, Kevin Trainor, Ryan Donaldson, Emma Rose Creaner and Darragh Shannon in a new version of Molière's **Tartuffe** by Frank McGuinness. Image: Ros Kavanagh.
5. Amy Conroy in **Every Brilliant Thing** by Duncan Macmillan with Jonny Donahoe. Image: Fiona Morgan.
6. Damien Dempsey in **Tales from the Holywell** by Damien Dempsey. Image: Rich Gilligan.
7. Audience members at **Distillation** by Luke Casserly. Image: Patricio Cassinoni.
8. Bryan Murray and Matthew Malone in **An Old Song, Half Forgotten** by Deirdre Kinahan (in a co-production with SoFFT productions). Image: Ros Kavanagh
9. Marie Mullen and Anna Healy in **Audrey or Sorrow** by Marina Carr (in a co-production with Landmark Productions). Image: Ros Kavanagh.



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