

Watergate Theatre

Paying the Artist Policy

A policy on the fair and equitable remuneration and contracting of artists engaged by the Watergate Theatre

Adopted by the Board: July 2026 |

1. Policy Statement

The Watergate Theatre is committed to the fair and equitable remuneration of every artist we engage, in whatever capacity. This commitment sits at the centre of our mission to pioneer the growth and development of the performing arts in Kilkenny through communication, ambition, inclusivity and collaboration with our community.

We recognise, as the Arts Council does in its own Paying the Artist policy, that an artist's ability to sustain a viable career is essential to a healthy arts ecology, and that where public funding is involved, fair remuneration is a matter of policy and prioritisation – to be built into our budgeting from the outset, not treated as a residual cost.

This policy applies best practice, not minimum standards, as our benchmark for how we pay and contract artists across every strand of our programme.

2. Context

This policy is written to align with, and give local effect to, the Arts Council's Paying the Artist policy and its strategic objective of improving the living and working conditions of artists in Ireland. It also gives practical expression to the commitments set out in our Watergate 2025–2029 Strategic Plan, which names fair artist compensation as a governance commitment underpinning our growth, and which explicitly requires us to adhere to the Arts Council's Paying the Artist policy.

As a recipient of Arts Council Arts Centre Partnership Funding, we are required to set out our approach to ensuring fair pay and conditions for artists as part of our funding application, and to have this policy approved by our board.

3. Scope

This policy applies to every artist engaged by the Watergate Theatre, across all artforms and engagement types, including but not limited to:

- Our three-year Artist in Residence programme
- Our 'Gateways' bursary recipients
- Our residency partnership with KCAT, supporting artists with disabilities
- Professional artists, directors, designers and producers engaged in the Watergate Collective
- Artists engaged in in-house productions, co-productions and commissions
- Freelance and contract artistic staff engaged on a production-by-production basis

We use the term 'artist' in its broadest sense, in line with the Arts Council's own usage, and these principles apply equally to other independent creative workers we engage.

This policy is distinct from, and does not apply to, the voluntary participation of community cast members in initiatives such as the Watergate Collective. Section 7 sets out how we distinguish paid professional engagement from voluntary participation, and how each is governed.

4. Our Commitment: Best-Practice Principles

In engaging artists, the Watergate commits to:

- Setting fair rates of pay by consulting best-practice guidelines from Theatre Forum and other relevant representative and resource organisations, and reviewing these rates at least annually.
- Providing every artist with a clear, timely contract before work begins, setting out the full scope of what is expected of them, deliverables, fees, expenses and payment schedule.
- Ring-fencing artists' fees within project budgets so that they are protected against overruns elsewhere in a production budget.
- Being open and transparent with artists on the nature of their engagement – including whether it is a contract of employment or a contract for services, and any associated tax, PRSI or social insurance implications.
- Ensuring artists and, where applicable, their representatives have a voice in negotiating the terms of their engagement.
- Respecting artists' copyright, in both moral and economic terms, and ensuring any arrangements for future exploitation of their work are proportionate and fairly reflect the value they have created.
- Setting out clear prompt-payment timelines so artists know when and how they will be paid.
- Aiming for continued improvement in rates of pay year on year, rather than treating current norms as an acceptable ceiling.

5. How This Works in Practice at the Watergate

Our commitment to fair pay is not a standalone statement; it is actioned through the structure of our core artistic programmes:

- Artist in Residence programme: our flagship three-year residency provides sustained, fairly-paid support, giving artists the security to develop significant work over a meaningful timeframe rather than project to project.
- Gateways bursary: an open-call process provides seed funding and mentorship to artists annually, ensuring fair access alongside fair payment.
- KCAT residency partnership: our residency partnership with KCAT ensures artists with disabilities are engaged on the same fair, paid basis as any other artist in residence – as demonstrated in practice through Equinox at KCAT's co-production of

The Boy with the Messy Room, which will be performed at the Watergate to a mainstage standard, with full and fair remuneration for the KCAT artists involved.

- Watergate Collective: our professional leadership team – Director, Designer and Producer – are engaged on paid, contracted terms, distinct from the voluntary basis on which community cast members participate (see Section 7).
- PROPEL and SEVN network bursaries: our co-funding of these regional and national schemes extends fair remuneration principles beyond our own building, supporting the wider artistic ecology in the South East.

6. Determining Rates and Terms of Engagement

We determine fair rates of pay by reference to published guidance from Theatre Forum and equivalent representative bodies for other artforms, benchmarked against the scale, duration and demands of the specific engagement. Where no sector guidance exists for a particular artform or role, we will use comparable roles within the theatre and performing-arts sector as our reference point.

All engagements are covered by a written contract prior to commencement of work, agreed directly with the artist or their representative, setting out fees, expenses, deliverables and payment terms.

7. Voluntary and Community Participation

Some of our activity, most notably the community cast of the Watergate Collective, is built on voluntary participation as a deliberate feature of the artistic and community-engagement model, not as a substitute for paid work. In these instances, we commit to:

- Being explicit with participants, at the point of recruitment, that their role is voluntary and unpaid, and setting out clearly the value and experience being offered in place of payment.
- Ensuring the professional creative team leading any such project – Director, Designer, Producer and other core artistic personnel – are paid at fair, professional rates, and that voluntary participation is never used in lieu of a role that should properly be a paid staff or artist position.
- Ensuring volunteers are respected, appropriately supported and not asked to take on responsibilities beyond the scope agreed with them.

8. Governance, Implementation and Review

This policy is approved by the Watergate board and forms part of our conditions of Arts Council funding. Responsibility for its implementation sits with the Executive Director, with oversight from the board.

Review of this policy is embedded within our Strategic Plan's annual reflective-practice cycle (Plan / Execute / Analyse / Course Correct), which includes an externally facilitated evaluation session with the board and team. As part of this annual cycle, we will:

- Review rates of pay against current sector guidance and adjust where required.

- Review artist feedback gathered through direct dialogue, our AAR reporting, and post-engagement conversations.
- Report to the board on the proportion of programme budget allocated to artist fees, and on compliance with this policy across all engagements.

This policy will be published on the Watergate website and made available to all artists we engage or are considering engaging.

9. Related Policies and References

- Arts Council Paying the Artist Policy
- Arts Council Making Great Art Work strategy (2016–2025)
- Watergate 2025–2029 Strategic Plan
- Watergate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Theatre Forum pay and conditions guidance