

# Circus

Building Infrastructure

the arts  
council  
as chomhairle  
ealaíon

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Report by Promenade 2022

# Circus Building Infrastructure

Report for The Arts Council / An Chomhairle  
Ealaíon

By Promenade, 2022

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## **Introduction**

In direct reference to the commitments made under the Making Great Art Work: Circus, Street Arts and Spectacle (CSAS) Policy & Strategy 2018, and following the practical limitations of conducting field research during the Covid crisis, in early 2022 the Arts Council commissioned Kath Gorman of Promenade and associate team members Ian Brown and Rachel Clare with support from Ciara O'Mahony to conduct a research initiative focused on mapping the range, quality and needs of building-based infrastructures for circus in Ireland.

This research proposal emerged from a need identified in dialogue with the sector to uncover and collate data on the range of buildings available in Ireland for contemporary and traditional circus practice. This direct engagement with a broad section of circus practitioners had provided anecdotal evidence that the building-based circus infrastructures in Ireland do not provide an adequate level of support for the growing level of both professional and community based activities taking place in the country.

By commissioning a new factual study on circus buildings the Arts Council is keeping sustainable, accessible and safe practice to the fore.

## 1 Executive Summary

### 1.1 Overview

This study is the first of its kind – certainly in Ireland – and has involved thorough consultation with members of Ireland’s circus sector both at home and overseas.

The research involved:

- On-site visits and interviews with seven Arts Council-funded Irish building-based circus organisations
- A sectoral survey, one Zoom and three in-person sectoral focus groups in different locations with over 150 individual circus artists and circus companies

This Executive Summary aims to provide an overview of Ireland’s existing circus building infrastructure, particularly with regard to the challenges, under-resourcing issues and building and wider development supports needed. There was extensive consultation through the sectoral survey and the focus groups regarding the building-related challenges facing circus artists when training or creating work. Given the growth of the Irish circus sector over the past ten years, these challenges cannot be taken lightly.

The Executive Summary also provides a picture of today’s Irish circus sector, the range and level of circus specialisms and a mapping of where artists and others in the sector live across the country. This includes distances travelled for accessing training and rehearsal facilities for circus-related activities and demonstrates the broad range of venues and spaces currently used. The circus sector has been immensely generous in providing time to suggest improvements and priorities for this very specialist industry.

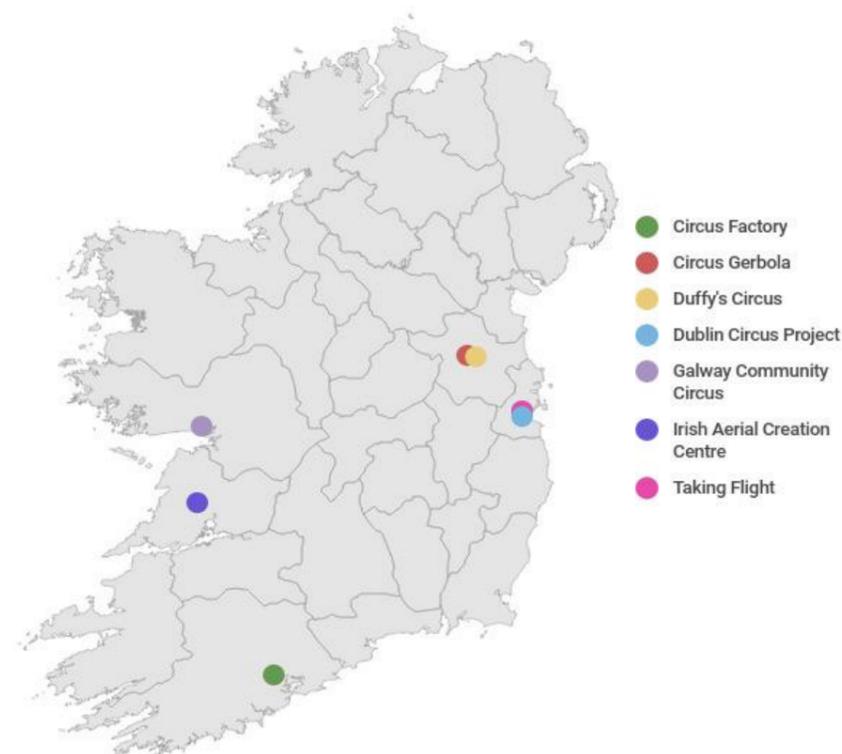
Many of Ireland’s circus sector are well-travelled and have experience of international circus facilities, for example through residencies or training opportunities. This Executive Summary provides a short analysis of six international building-based organisations, some of which have been highlighted by this study’s focus groups and surveys as examples of good practice. There are several examples of French/European circus networks with a focus on national circus centres and/or circus schools and centres. These have an important function in sharing knowledge, advocacy, training and support among its members.

Such examples will be important in establishing future supports for the circus sector and specifically for circus building-based infrastructure. A series of recommendations in the final section of the Executive Summary highlights the importance of a holistic, partnership-focused approach. These are underpinned by the commitment of the Arts Council in the areas of The Artist, Public Engagement, Investment Strategy, Spatial and Demographic planning *and* Building Capacity.

### 1.2 Current position

Ireland has only seven circus building-based organisations that serve the entire country, excluding commercially-based studios. These organisations are all supported by the Arts Council in some capacity, and all participated in this study. They are two traditional circus organisations, Circus Gerbola and Duffy’s Circus, and five contemporary circus organisations, Cork Circus Factory, Dublin Circus Project, Galway Community Circus, Irish Aerial Creation Centre (IACC) and Taking Flight.

Some centres are more specialised such as the Youth and Social Circus focus of Galway Community Circus, or IACC’s specialism in Aerial Arts. Two of the organisations, Circus Gerbola and Duffy’s Circus, have a touring-based model and use their home-based building facilities only partially during the year. The map below shows that four circus organisations are concentrated in the wider Dublin/mid-Eastern region, with the other three concentrated in the South-West, Mid-West and Western regions.



Map of circus building based infrastructure supported by The Arts Council

Led by dynamic and committed individuals, such circus buildings have been developed as a direct response to the country’s lack of purpose-built buildings specifically for circus. All these individuals are consistently finding ways to improve their facilities, even those on shorter-term leases. The Irish Aerial Creation Centre has negotiated the longest lease (21 years), and with a supportive landlord, this has enabled them to develop significant longer-term plans for upgrading their existing space. However, some of these building-based organisations face considerable challenges:

- Six regard a lack of insulation as a major problem when it comes to heating their buildings to adequate temperatures
- Six of the seven surveyed buildings require more space as well as separate spaces for training and creation
- Four out of the seven buildings have a single space for circus work. Of the others, one has a small, low second space; one has two areas but with no partition between them; and one has a shared space that can be used when needed.



Single training and creation space – Circus Factory, Cork. Photo: Claire Keogh.

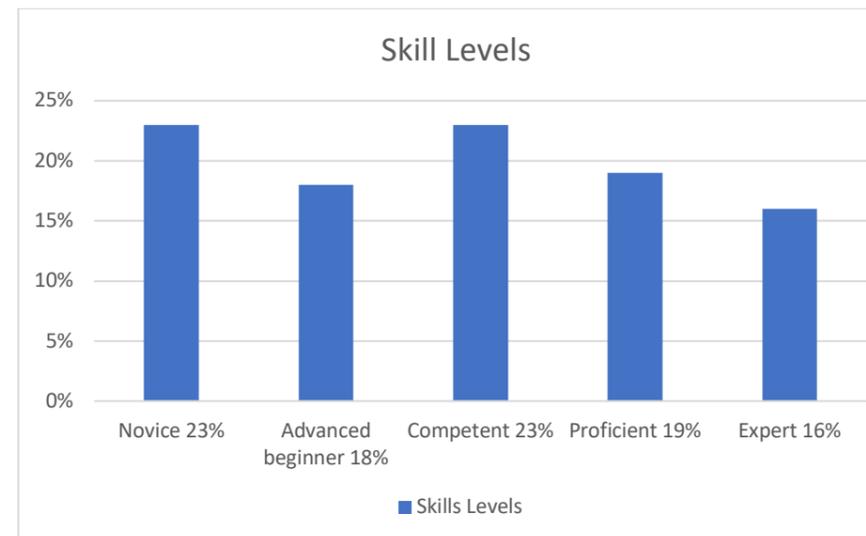
- A lack of affordable accommodation close to the centres was an issue for six of those surveyed
- Five require increased storage
- Three of the buildings presently without a kitchen or canteen space would hugely benefit from having such facilities
- Three that do not have showers at present would like to have such
- Two spaces have to rent additional spaces elsewhere for residencies and masterclasses by visiting artists, particularly for longer periods
- Two of the centres without changing rooms have cited this as an issue

Ultimately, these building-based circus organisations either need upgraded premises and/or new permanent homes with more space to address the key issues highlighted above. These organisations recognise that partnerships with their local authority and other stakeholders are central to making this possible. In addition to capital investment, they also reported the need for wider supports such as:

- Dedicated time and investment for team members to focus on building-related infrastructure
- Investment in technical and building management personnel
- Support for all stages of circus artists' careers and support to encourage the setting-up of additional circus companies

As part of the research for this study, the team created a survey asking those involved in the field of Irish circus to participate and invited sectoral attendance at in-person focus groups on Achill Island, in Cork and Dublin as well as online.

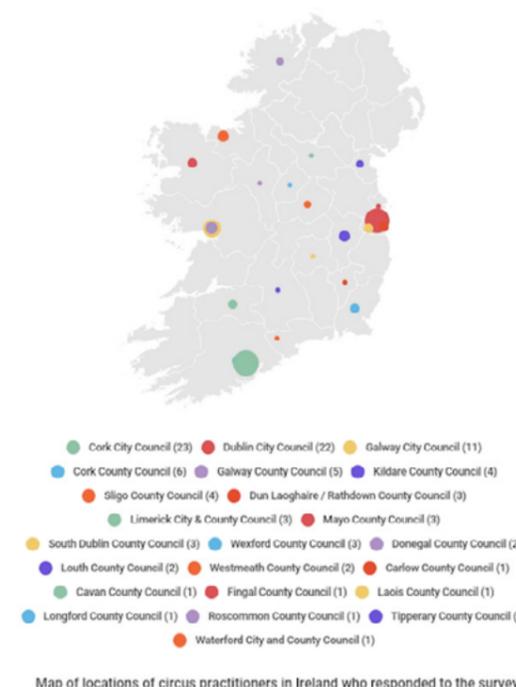
The survey revealed that this is a sector with skill levels spread fairly evenly from novice to expert levels. However, 41% are either novices or advanced beginners, indicating that this is an emerging artform with increasing numbers joining the profession:



Three of the five most-mentioned specialisms were aerial-based, highlighting the impact of the Irish Aerial Creation Centre as the first and only purpose-built aerial dance centre in Ireland. The five least-mentioned circus specialisms were funambulism, Chinese pole, magic, Cyr Wheel and teeterboard.

A lack of sufficient space within circus buildings makes it harder to accommodate some of these lesser-practised specialisms. This opinion was reinforced by some focus group members taking part in this study who highlighted the need for facilities with sufficient space, flooring and apparatus to accommodate artists practising Cyr Wheel, funambulism and teeterboard.

The majority of people base themselves in Ireland full-time; 58% live in urban areas, 25% in rural areas and 17% in towns. Despite higher living costs, city living is still attractive to many, for example because of access to wider work opportunities, arts and social networks, public transport and other amenities.



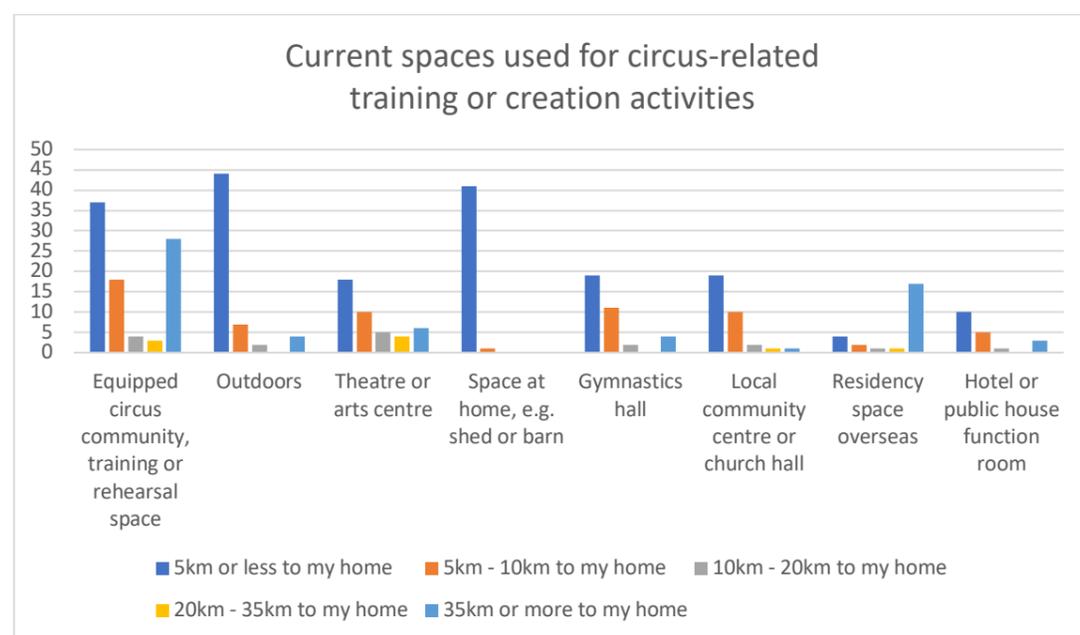
The largest clusters of respondents were found in the South-West (29%), Dublin (29%) and the Western regions (20%), which aligns with where building-based circus organisations Circus Factory, Dublin Circus Project, Taking Flight and Galway Community Circus are based. The Irish Aerial Creation Centre was also cited as a practice space, but on average, people travelled further distances to attend.

This sector has to be very resourceful in finding spaces in which to train and rehearse, particularly those without reasonable access to dedicated circus spaces. For a significant minority of people, travelling distances to circus spaces are considerable, with approximately one third of circus artists reporting that they have to travel 35km or more from their home to use a circus space for training or rehearsals. Travelling longer distances is certainly not sustainable, either in terms of expense or keeping up motivation and energy levels. It is particularly difficult for those who do not have access to a car and who have to rely on public transport.

Only six respondents were based abroad either full-time or most of the time. 29 respondents based themselves partly abroad, varying from year to year. Most importantly, 70% of those either partly or fully based abroad agreed that

*“...[they] would be more likely to base [themselves] in Ireland if suitable circus spaces were available for training and creation.”*

The pandemic has also led some artists to move to more affordable regions, including more rural locations, which means longer travel distances for accessing dedicated circus spaces. The second most popular type of practice space after dedicated circus spaces was the outdoors, such as artists’ own back gardens, which makes sense considering the need of circus artists to train consistently. However, this is certainly not without its challenges as it is subject to weather conditions and understanding neighbours. Furthermore, circus artists use a range of spaces for training or creation activities, particularly within reasonable travelling distances to their homes:



Most crucially, the research found that 75% of respondents said that the existing buildings they use for circus training or creation activities meet their needs only partially or not at all. In particular, these related to:

- **Location issues**, particularly if not easily accessible by public transport or involving long commuting distances.

*“Currently, without being able to drive, accessible and affordable circus spaces are hard to find ... and accommodation is near impossible.”*

- **Suitability of space**, either due to problems with getting available space or space not always meeting creative or technical needs, for example lacking sufficient warmth, suitable height, rigging points or suitable flooring.

*“The main issue is not having a properly-heated training space to develop work from October to April”.*

*“Aerial spaces are always too cold due to the fact that they’re usually just converted warehouses. Also, a lack of pulley systems, counterweights and winches ...”*

These concerns were reinforced by the focus groups, which highlighted some rather fundamental needs of the sector that must be addressed, such as adequately-heated spaces, sufficient height for different circus disciplines and rigging points for different types of apparatus.

### 1.3 Sectoral needs and thematic areas

Based on the consultation in connection with this study, the key themes and needs listed below emerged.

**Fragile and insecure building arrangements.** The tenacity of the circus sector in creating spaces in which to train and develop work is admirable, but there is a need for:

- More affordable, secure and long-term tenancies of suitable buildings that allow for proper building improvements
- Increased assistance and support from local authorities in finding suitable spaces that can properly meet the needs of the circus sector as identified below
- Additional professional development supports in furthering capital development aspirations and plans, e.g. training, skills development, additional staffing, peer-to-peer learning and exchange

**Safer working conditions.** Circus is a strenuous and physically-demanding activity that may involve close contact with others and use of specialist apparatus.

The top four facilities seen as essential among the 88 survey respondents were:

1. Safety features/crash mats – 95% of survey respondents
2. Adequately-heated spaces – 94% of survey respondents
3. Rigging suitable for apparatus/practice – 90% of survey respondents
4. Multiple spaces for different training needs/types of circus skills – 81% of survey respondents

Therefore, there is a need for:

- Better-insulated buildings heated to recommended industry temperatures
- More safe and appropriate spaces in which to work that comply with good safety practices
- More dedicated spaces for particular activities, e.g. uncluttered spaces for rehearsals
- Working environments conducive to psychological as well as physical health, e.g. a welcoming ethos, appropriate policies and an increased number of properly-trained staff

**Higher-quality facilities.** While circus has seen a growth in recent years, the artform has only a limited number of suitable spaces in which to develop. In particular, there is a greater need for:

- Spaces that are suitable for different aspects of circus arts, including some less-developed circus arts, e.g. teeterboard
- Greater ceiling heights for aerial-based work
- Available dedicated rooms for professional development and creation activities, e.g. residencies and production rehearsals

- Multiple spaces for different types of activities conducive to both training and more creative-based circus activities
- Production standard facilities – with sound, lighting etc. – that enable artists to work in high-quality performance facilities that allow for test audiences
- Buildings suitable for cross-disciplinary collaboration
- Facilities with energy-efficient measures to reduce costs and carbon footprint

**Public-friendly facilities.** Circus is characterised by a strong community ethos and those consulted frequently mentioned the importance of a meaningful connection with their local communities. The overall feel and welcome of a space, a strong community ethos and different types of developmental support were highlighted as important by a significant minority. The welcoming nature and accessibility of the building were seen as major factors in thinking about children and young people, including either designated spaces or timetable considerations.

This demonstrates a need for circus buildings that are:

- Designed to create a welcoming and friendly atmosphere
- Able to accommodate audiences for sharing work in progress
- Able to accommodate work with different age groups, particularly children and young people
- Fully accessible and useable by people with disabilities

**Changing socio-economic environment.** The short supply of affordable city housing, which has led some artists to move to more affordable parts of the country including more rural locations, highlights the following needs:

- Accommodation on-site or nearby circus buildings for those travelling from further afield, e.g. for longer residencies
- Circus building-based infrastructure that is easily accessible by public transport
- More accessible, affordable and suitable facilities across the country in which circus artists can train regularly

**Insecure and precarious career paths.** The industry lacks structured and stable career paths for those involved both in the artistic and the management side of circus arts. This has a knock-on effect on developing building-based infrastructure and the ecology of circus development. It leads to a potential drain of talent as people either leave the industry or move overseas. In particular, there is a need for:

- Structured traineeships or other supports to develop more people with dedicated circus venue management skills
- Production supports to encourage circus artists to establish companies, including talent development opportunities for recent graduates

## 1.4 International examples of good practice

The team shortlisted six key international building-based organisations for circus whose facilities and programmes relate closely to needs raised by artists in Ireland in connection with this study. The buildings are all examples of good practice that illustrate how organisations can successfully offer multiple strands of circus activity, such as training and creation in one building. Several of the buildings were also referenced by the artists themselves during the focus group process and survey feedback as examples of good practice.

During the research of overseas circus buildings, no one type was found to replicate, but the best circus buildings all met the expected provision of heating, height, access, health and safety maintenance, and provided circus equipment and apparatus as a minimum requirement. Each building is also dedicated to professionalising the current and future generations of circus makers; and each has a unique structure with provision relevant to its locality and its national needs, and is determined by funding and its particular history. One commonality is how positive reputations and

distinctive achievements are determined by funding, leadership and the creative ethos instilled in the organisation.

The need for inspirational environments in which to create and provide the optimum opportunity to develop talent was frequently mentioned by members of Ireland's circus sector. In this, [La Central Del Circ](#) in Barcelona is a benchmark.

Members of Ireland's circus sector noted the need both for multi-spaces and for sharing and meeting like-minded people. [La Grainerie](#) in Toulouse, France, is a good example of a fully-equipped multi-room building with extensive facilities for both training and production/creative work, leading to professional pathways.



La Grainerie, Toulouse, France

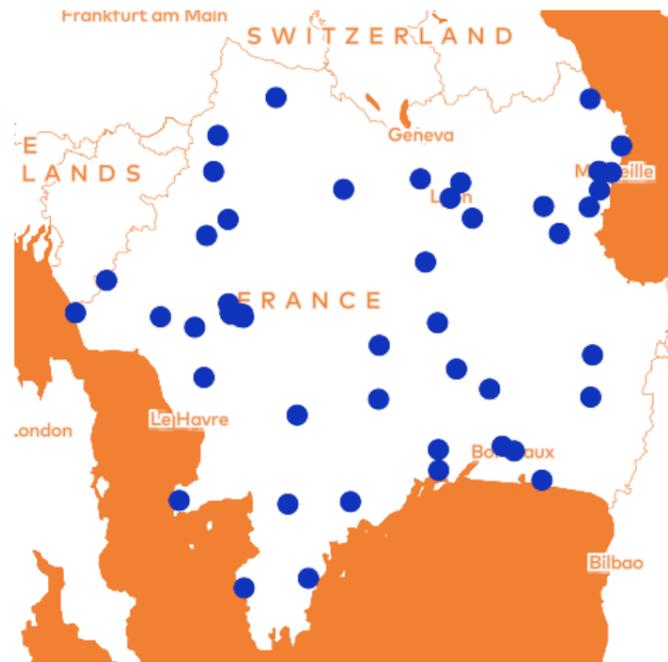
Feedback from the circus sector in Ireland also reinforced the importance of buildings in creating a circus community. [Cirko – Center for New Circus](#) in Helsinki is a good example of having both permanent resident companies and a year-round residency programme.

[La Brèche](#), Cherbourg, France, is an example of a circus building supported by a forward-thinking local authority. At the heart of a regeneration programme on waste land, it brings community values and economic benefits to the town.

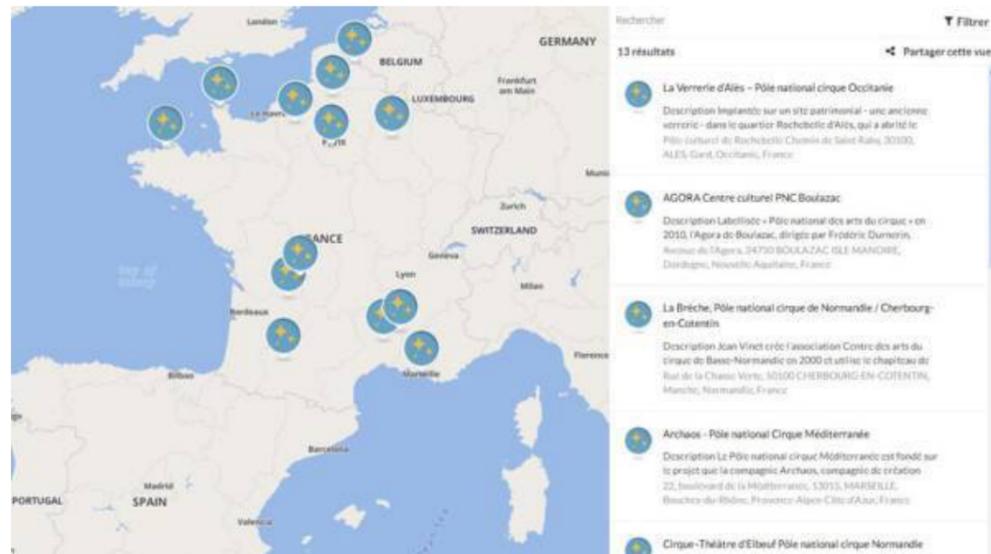
Professional development support for artists within circus spaces was another need raised by artists in Ireland. [Subtopia](#) in Stockholm is an example of how an organisation can give significant development support to its artists. Its success is due to a hands-on team of mentors and advocates that nurtures and follows the artists' journey on their career paths. Subtopia is also home to a variety of creative industries and hires out studios, spaces for filming and performance space.

[101 Outdoor Arts](#) likewise is very good at providing a supportive environment, with staff on hand to advise on artistic, administrative and production matters. They also have a dedicated fabrication space for developing set and street arts/circus apparatus. In 2018 they installed purpose-built cabins – a good example of what can be provided in terms of artist accommodation, something highlighted as a sectoral need in this study.

There are several examples of French/European circus networks with a focus on national circus centres and/or circus schools and centres. These have an important function in sharing knowledge, advocacy, training and support across its members.



The [Territoires de cirque network](#) has nearly 48 structures involved in supporting the emergence, creation and dissemination of circus in France.



The [Pôle National des Arts Du Cirque \(PNC\)](#) is a network of 14 designated national circus centres in France.

[FEDEC \(the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools\)](#) on the other hand, is a European and international network of about 70 members (two thirds secondary, vocational and higher education circus schools and training programmes, and one third organisations involved in information, research and circus arts advocacy), located in more than 20 countries in Europe and beyond.

## 1.5 Recommendations

The Arts Council must prioritise the following actions, aligning with Making Great Art Work and with relevance to the Arts Council's Spatial Policy and, in parts, to the International and Equality Human Rights and Diversity Policies. Project Ireland 2040 also highlights particular professional development needs across a number of sectors, including culture that are highly relevant to the circus sector.

### The Artist

- **Advocate internally and externally for the rights and needs of circus artists** for more accessible, suitable, safe and secure circus building-based infrastructure
- **Communicate the specialist nature and needs of circus arts** to relevant government bodies

### Public Engagement

- **Ensure that circus building-based organisations consider facilities for children and young people** in the adaptation/development of new buildings
- **Ensure that the needs of diverse audiences and communities are carefully considered**, particularly of those less represented in the arts, in the adaptation and development of any circus building infrastructure

### Investment Strategy

- **Work closely with the Department** to develop an optimum circus building-based infrastructure for the future, particularly in the priority areas identified

### Spatial and Demographic Planning

- **Partner with local authorities and the circus sector** to encourage wider regional spread of circus building-based infrastructure
- **Encourage cross-agency partnering** with the circus community to develop more sustainable circus building-based infrastructure
- **Support more regional and rural Arts Centres** to provide suitable facilities for circus artists

### Building Capacity

- **Provide additional sectoral staffing plus training and development supports** to create a strong and resilient circus sector ready for capital development projects
- **Expand** international mobility opportunities for the circus building-based sector and potential partners to enhance circus building knowledge and networks
- **Continue to provide supports for circus artists** at all stages of their careers, enabling them to flourish and build sustainable pathways

## 1.6 Conclusion

Ireland has a small number of circus training and creation spaces, primarily concentrated in the West, South-West and wider Dublin regions. These spaces have been established by pioneering and dedicated members of the circus community as a direct response to the country's lack of purpose-built buildings specifically for circus. Financial investment in capital infrastructure has been modest and ad hoc to date. Together with insecure tenancies for some and the high cost of insurance generally, this has made for an extremely challenging environment in which to operate. All circus building-based organisations are committed to improving their facilities continuously. However, for some, their planned improvements are short-term measures only as the limitations of their spaces make it difficult to realise fully their aspirations to meet all the needs of the circus sector.

The growth in both professional and community-based circus in recent years means that existing circus spaces are not always available nor are there nearly enough for the many circus artists to train

in regularly. Circus is a strenuous and physically-demanding activity that may involve close contact with others as well as the use of specialist apparatus. Therefore, safe working conditions are critical. Some of the needs highlighted in the sectoral survey pertain to rather basic safety requirements, in particular the need for warmer and properly-insulated spaces. This study also identified a whole range of sectoral needs that are crucial to enabling circus to develop properly and flourish as an artform, to support circus artists at all career stages and raise production standards. The needs identified include suitable rigging for apparatus/practice, buildings with multiple spaces for dedicated training or rehearsal/creation activities including production-ready facilities, higher ceilings for aerial-based work and more spaces that could support some of the lesser-developed areas of circus arts, such as teeterboard or Chinese pole. The look and feel of spaces for circus are also important for creating a welcoming environment that is conducive to creativity.

Circus is now at a crossroads in Ireland. Despite the welcome increased investment by the Arts Council in artistic development and public engagement activities in the last two years, the lack of adequate circus building infrastructure will seriously hamper the development of the artform. Ireland is falling considerably behind many European countries in terms of circus building-based infrastructure, with a significant minority of Irish circus artists basing themselves overseas to avail of better facilities.

Undoubtedly, circus has been the poor relation of arts building infrastructure to date, with no major capital funding awards allocated to it. The drain of circus talent will continue if proper support is not provided. However, to support the development of circus building infrastructure properly, a holistic, partnership-focused approach will be required. To this end, the Arts Council will have to play a key role in advocating, communicating, partnering and supporting such plans to create a properly sustainable, accessible, safe and thriving circus sector.

## 2 Brief

For this research study Promenade worked to the following brief:

- Provide an objective overview of the quality and quantity of building-based infrastructures for circus practice in Ireland
- Conduct a survey of the Circus sector's needs in Ireland in relation to building-based infrastructure
- In consultations with the sector, map the infrastructure needs (building based) in circus, with particular focus on the main urban/metropolitan areas and other geographical areas representing significant hubs of activity
- To establish standards of best practice across the art form for circus creation and training spaces

### 2.1 Context

Circus attracts high audience numbers each year including many rural audiences and members of new communities. Circus practice may be regarded as falling into two distinct strands: traditional/classical circus and contemporary circus. Traditional circus has a long working history in Ireland, while contemporary circus practice is relatively new and has seen a real growth in the last ten years.<sup>1</sup> Additional investment from the Arts Council in recent years and sectoral supports through ISACS, the Arts Council funded Irish Street Arts, Circus and Spectacle network have both played a significant role in encouraging this growth.

Following a review of previous surveys aimed at street arts, spectacle and circus artists undertaken across Europe, in July 2010 the Arts Council conducted a mapping of Circus, Street art and Spectacle (CSA&S) aiming to research into the ecology, economy and environment of the circus industry in Ireland. This process involved a questionnaire to gather opinion against a range of topics across these sectors within Ireland including artists, promoters and local authorities. The findings enabled the foundation of a new circus creation centre in Limerick which has become the main national circus resource in Ireland.

The human body is central to circus practise and thus circus artists require as a minimum necessity, clean, safe, warm and secure studio space in order to practice the art form. Physical wear and tear is part of the specific career conditions, it is therefore vital to ensure the provision of well serviced studios and creative spaces in line with best international practice.

There are also unique needs for circus arts practice that include safe rigging of aerial equipment and the use of crash mats and other safety equipment where necessary. Until recently there was no documented universal Irish standard for safe practice requirements for circus arts. However since early 2022 ISACS has been developing a quality assurance framework which may be put towards providing evidence that organisations comply with and conduct best practices around health and safety within the street arts, circus and spectacle sector. It has been proposed to do this via a Self-Audit questionnaire.<sup>2</sup>

In order to promote creativity and diversity in circus, it is also important that good quality spaces are made available and affordable to artists at all stages of their career, from student to professional level and which provide for circus production companies as well as independent artists. Given the growth in the sector this research study is very timely.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Circus/Overview/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://isacs.ie/isacs/self-certification-of-safe-practices-in-circus-street-arts-and-spectacle/>

## 2.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to identify the quality and availability of circus building based infrastructure nationwide as they currently stand and to create a guide for future infrastructural developments in circus.

Additionally, and through this report, the Arts Council is actively seeking to find solutions to improve access to artistic creation and training while ensuring that the highest international standards of facilities, safety and welfare are made available in Ireland for the benefit of both professional and community based circus practice.

This report has conceived as a standalone research and advocacy document. Furthermore, its framework aims to facilitate more specialised and independent infrastructural developments led by the circus community in Ireland.

## 2.3 Methodology and approach

In order to deliver the above the team carried out the following activities:

- Site meetings and some follow up meetings with seven circus building based organisations in Cork, Galway, Dublin, Limerick/Clare and County Meath.
- Three in person focus groups on Achill Island, Dublin and Cork and 1 online focus group.
- Developed and distributed a survey to the circus sector resulting in 132 responses
- Carried out desk research exploring examples of good practice internationally in relation to building based infrastructure for circus

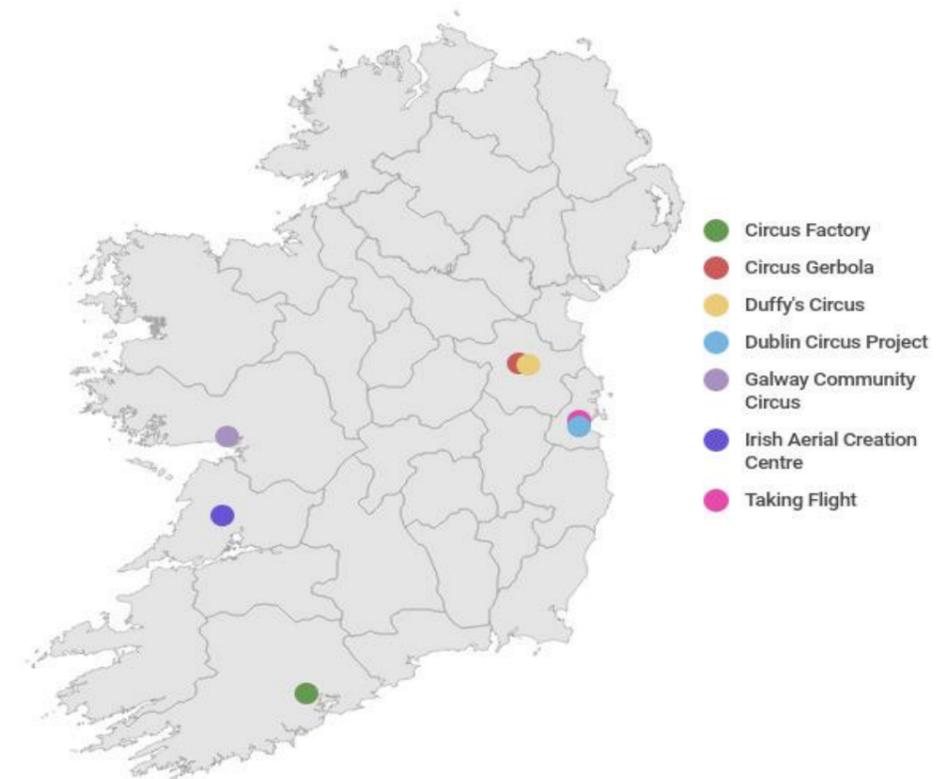
## 3 Review of quantity and quality of building based infrastructures for circus practice in Ireland

This chapter provides a fact based review of the quantity and quality of building based infrastructures for circus practice in Ireland.

### 3.1 Overview

Ireland has just seven circus building based organisations serving the entire country's circus sector (excluding commercial based studios). Such organisations are all supported by the Arts Council in some capacity and all participated in this research study. These consist of two traditional circus organisations Circus Gerbola and Duffy's Circus and five contemporary circus organisations, Cork Circus Factory, Dublin Circus Project, Galway Community Circus, Irish Aerial Creation Centre (IACC) and Taking Flight.

As can be seen from the map below four circus organisations are concentrated in the wider Dublin/mid-East region with the other three concentrated in the South West, Mid-West and West regions.



Map of circus building based infrastructure supported by The Arts Council

Some centres are more specialist such as Galway Community Circus's Youth and Social Circus focus or IACC's specialism on Aerial Arts. Two of the organisations, Circus Gerbola and Duffy's Circus have a touring based model, using their home based building facilities partially during the year.

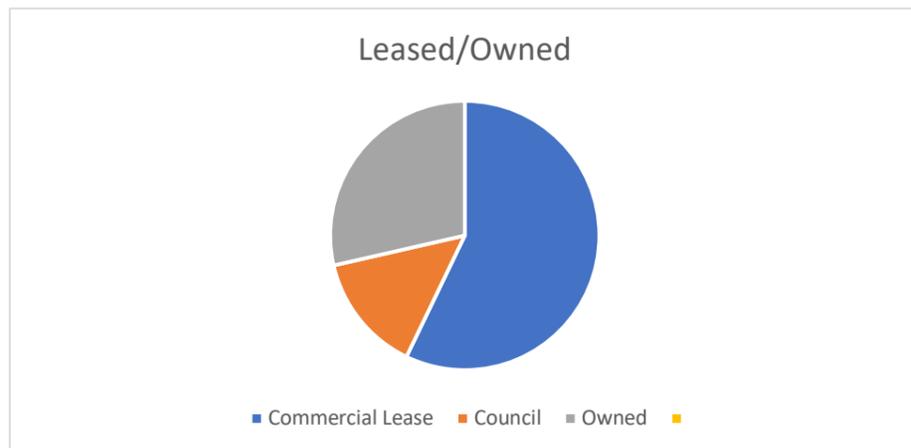
Some of the organisations have plans for upgrades to their buildings in the immediate future, particularly IACC and Taking Flight. More details on this in Appendix section 10.3.

The research demonstrated that whilst those running circus buildings often face considerable challenges they are all consistently finding ways to improve their facilities, even those on shorter-term leases. Several organisations regularly receive support from the Sports Capital grant scheme to secure smaller items of equipment, such as Circus Factory and Galway Community Circus. In 2017 IACC was also awarded a capital grant of €350,000 from The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

### 3.2 Detailed Building analysis

#### Location, ownership and building type

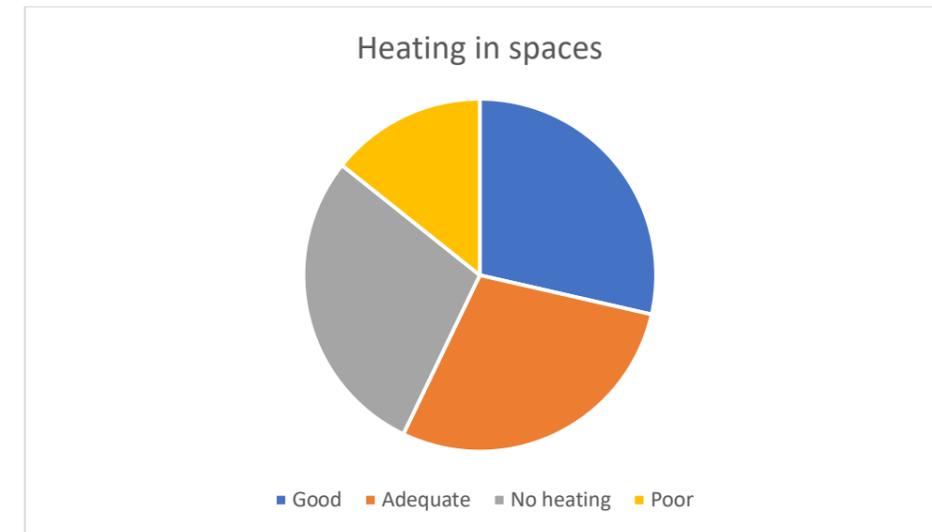
In an analysis across all seven buildings we found the following findings in relation to location, ownership and building type:



- Three of the circus based buildings are commercially leased, one is leased from a church, one is a council lease and two are owned by the circus groups
- Leases range from an annual one year lease to 21 years
- Of those with commercial/church lease, three have a good relationship with their landlord, but all worry about the future if circumstances were to change, e.g. change of landlord
- Two are purpose built sheds, designed specifically for their needs, three are converted industrial buildings and two are in community centres
- The buildings range from three years old to 50 years old.
- Three of the buildings are in a city or close to a city centre, one is in the Dublin suburbs
- Three are in rural settings
- Four have good public transport links
- Three are accessible only by car or bicycle

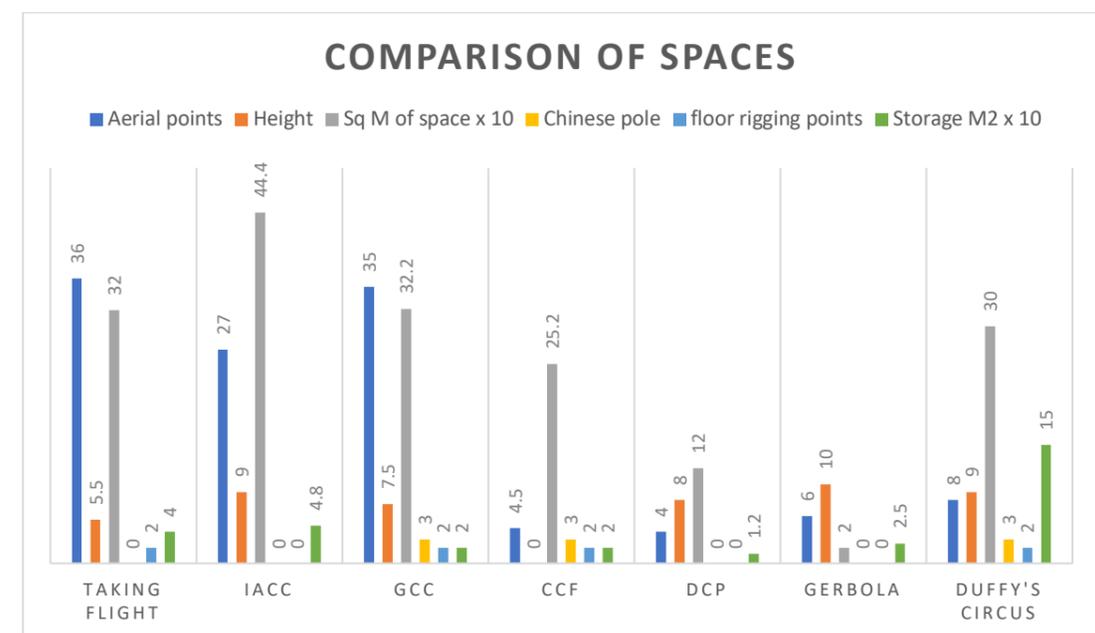
#### Heating and insulation

- Only three buildings have some form of insulation
- Four spaces are heated by diesel or gas blowers either permanently installed or portable, one has gas fired central heating, two have no heating
- Cost for heating ranges from €3,000 - €5000 per annum
- Two reported heating to be good, two adequate, one poor and two non-existent
- Three of the spaces have a 3 phase electrical outlet



#### Space for training and creation

- Four out of seven buildings have a single space for circus work. Of the others, one has a small low second space, one has two areas but with no partition between them and one has a shared space that can be used when needed
- All main spaces are large ranging from 120m2 to 320m2
- They have ceiling heights ranging from 5.5 metres to 9 metres
- The number of aerial rigging points varies from four to 36
- Two centres have rigging for Chinese Pole and three have tight wire rigging points
- Access to rigging is via ladders in three spaces or scissors lift, either hired or owned, in two centres
- Two of the centres have wooden floors, three have concrete, one is gravel and one is compacted silica sand, all but one have mats and or dance floor or a combination of both for floor work
- No spaces have a sprung floor



#### Technical equipment for creation

- All have access to theatrical lighting, some not in situ but available
- All spaces have sufficient access to daylight, whilst two can achieve a blackout
- All but one space has at least a basic sound system, whilst three have access to a professional system
- Two buildings have access to an outside space for training, although for one this is unofficial
- None of the spaces are sound-proofed

#### Opening hours

- Two of the buildings are open 9:00 – 21:00, seven days a week
- One is generally open 14:00 – 21:30, but is flexible
- One is open weekday evenings and Saturday mornings
- One shares the space with other groups and has access on three days a week: 10:00 – 14:00, 10:00 – 17:00 and 13:00 – 17:00

#### Other Facilities

- All spaces have easy access for equipment
- Five of the buildings have at least one accessible office space/meeting rooms
- Five of the spaces have toilets ranging from two unisex to four male and four female
- Five of the centres have WiFi
- Four spaces have no space allocated for members' equipment storage
- All buildings have disabled access although one is only partial as its entrance ramp is too steep
- Three have burglar alarms, emergency lighting and fire alarms, one also has CCTV
- Three of the spaces have accessible toilets
- Three have access to baby changing facilities
- Three have kitchen facilities
- Three have green rooms
- Two of the spaces have showers and three have dedicated changing rooms
- Two have a canteen that members can use
- None of the centres have on site accommodation

#### Membership

- Two of the centres run a membership scheme, one has 65 members, the other 115 including professional, adults and children
- Two use a participant model each with approximately 400 participants
- Members and participants travel on average between 5 – 25km although some are from further afield

### 3.3 Circus building-based organisations infrastructure needs

Circus building-based organisations have identified a number of key issues and needs highlighted below:

- Six of the seven surveyed buildings highlighted the need for more space and separated spaces for training and creation
- Six regarded a lack of insulation as major factor in being unable to heat their buildings to adequate temperatures
- The lack of affordable accommodation close to the centres was an issue for six of those surveyed
- Five require increased storage

- Three of the buildings without a kitchen or canteen space would hugely benefit from having such facilities
- Three that don't have showers at present would like to have them
- Two spaces have to rent spaces elsewhere for residencies and masterclasses from visiting artists, particularly for longer durational periods
- Two of the centres without changing rooms cited this as an issue

Ultimately a significant proportion of the building based circus organisations reported they need a permanent home. They recognise that partnerships with their local authority and other stakeholders are central to enabling this. They understand that engendering and building a collective vision that will champion the benefits and impact such an initiative may bring to a region is critical to making the case for permanent homes.

The Irish Aerial Creation Centre is an excellent example of progress made in this area. They are planning the biggest upgrades out of all the building based organisations to their existing space. Their long lease and excellent relationship with their landlord make this much more viable. They are also in conversation with the University of Limerick regarding their involvement in a major new building development that will enable them to have a second home.

However, this process has been extremely time-consuming and a steep learning curve in navigating stakeholder relationships, particularly at large institutional and local authority levels. The benefits to bringing on board a dedicated person, in the form of a Managing Director role, to concentrate on these building development plans have been significant.

### 3.4 Future supports for building based infrastructure

In addition to the very obvious need for dedicated capital funding for circus building based infrastructure the different organisations highlighted the following supports that would be beneficial:

#### *Dedicated time and investment for team members to focus on building related infrastructure*

Some organisations felt they already had the skills and attributes for tackling large scale capital initiatives, as shown by their track records in securing funding. Instead they needed time away from their normal working jobs, perhaps in the form of a sabbatical to enable them to focus on building development plans.

Others felt they needed dedicated support in this area, including expert help in building complex stakeholder partnerships and specialist knowledge of capital building projects. Sharing of good practice and lessons learnt in this area to date would also be beneficial, for example, the experiences of the Irish Aerial Creation Centre.

#### *Investment in technical and building management personnel*

The technical requirements of circus are onerous and there are not many people in Ireland who have this expertise in a managerial capacity, with several circus organisations bringing in expert riggers from overseas, particularly the UK.

Several organisations felt there was also a shortage of people with the appropriate knowledge of venue and building management specific to circus.

- It was recommended that some sort of international co-operation or partnership was needed to invest in additional training such as rigging
- Supported training programmes or paid apprenticeships in venue/building management and technical aspects of circus.
- Increased investment for circus building based organisations to enable them to appoint dedicated venue/building managers

#### Further supporting Ireland's circus ecology

Several organisations noted that with such a limited number of circus companies in Ireland there is often nowhere to go for people once they have trained

- They felt there needed to be more opportunities and supports for artists to create work at a company level, including supports for artists looking to establish companies
- More tutors for under-developed circus specialisms, such as Chinese Pole

## 4 Mapping of the Circus Sector

### 4.1 Current position/introduction

As part of the research for this study the team created a survey inviting those involved in the Irish circus field to participate. A call went out via ISACS, Arts Council mailing lists, local authority arts offices and the circus sector themselves

132 people completed the survey, the majority of whom were involved in either artistic or training capacity.

- 66% described themselves as Artist/Performers
- 28% described themselves as Facilitator/Trainers
- 22% described themselves as Artistic Directors

### 4.2 Practice and artform specialisms

Respondents were asked, where relevant, to assign their competency across 26 circus specialisms as laid out in the next page:

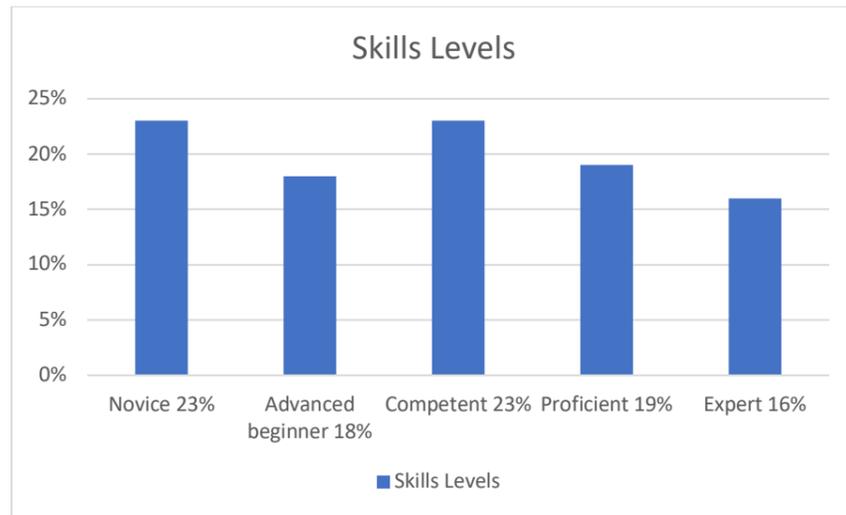


103 people answered this question, rating themselves as either Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competent, Proficient or Expert. The Arts Council in their 2018 Circus, Street Arts and Spectacle Policy report that:

*“Contemporary circus (presented both in theatres and outdoors) has been developing since the late 1990s, flourishing in a large and active sector that has seen a rapid expansion over the last two years.”<sup>3</sup>*

This is reflected in the numbers of those identifying in the survey as novice level. However there are a good proportion of people with more advanced expertise, with 42% of respondents describing themselves as either competent or proficient. In an overall analysis across 26 circus specialisms 103 survey respondents marked their skills level as follows:

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/CSAS\\_Policy\\_2018.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/CSAS_Policy_2018.pdf)



Three out of the five frequently mentioned specialisms were aerial based:

Circus - contemporary	73 people	50 either proficient or expert
Acrobatics	68 people	17 either proficient or expert
Silks/fabrics	65 people	28 either proficient or expert
Aerial hoop	61 people	23 either proficient or expert
Other Aerial	61 people	26 either proficient or expert

The least mentioned 5 circus specialisms were:

Funambulism	31 people	Seven either proficient or expert
Chinese Pole	33 people	Three either proficient or expert
Magic	25 people	Four either proficient or expert
Cyr Wheel	26 people	Two either proficient or expert
Teeterboard	19 people	No one described as proficient or expert

Those who responded as Other included:

Aerial straps	Two people
Contortion	Two people
Hand to hand/double acrobatics	Two people
Unicycle	Two people
Double trapeze/cradle	One Person
Ladder walking	One Person
Ventriloquism	One Person
Sword swallowing	One Person
Object Balance	One Person

6 responses below indicated other performance skills not specialist to circus, but regularly used in the making of circus creations.

Dance/physical theatre	Three people
Director	One Person
Dramaturg	One Person
Acting	One Person

### 4.3 Geographical spread of Circus artists

The survey found that the majority of people, 75 out of 110 survey respondents base themselves in Ireland full-time.

58% live in urban areas, 25% rurally and 17% in a town location. Despite higher living costs city living is attractive to many, e.g. access to wider work opportunities, arts and social networks, public transport and other amenities.

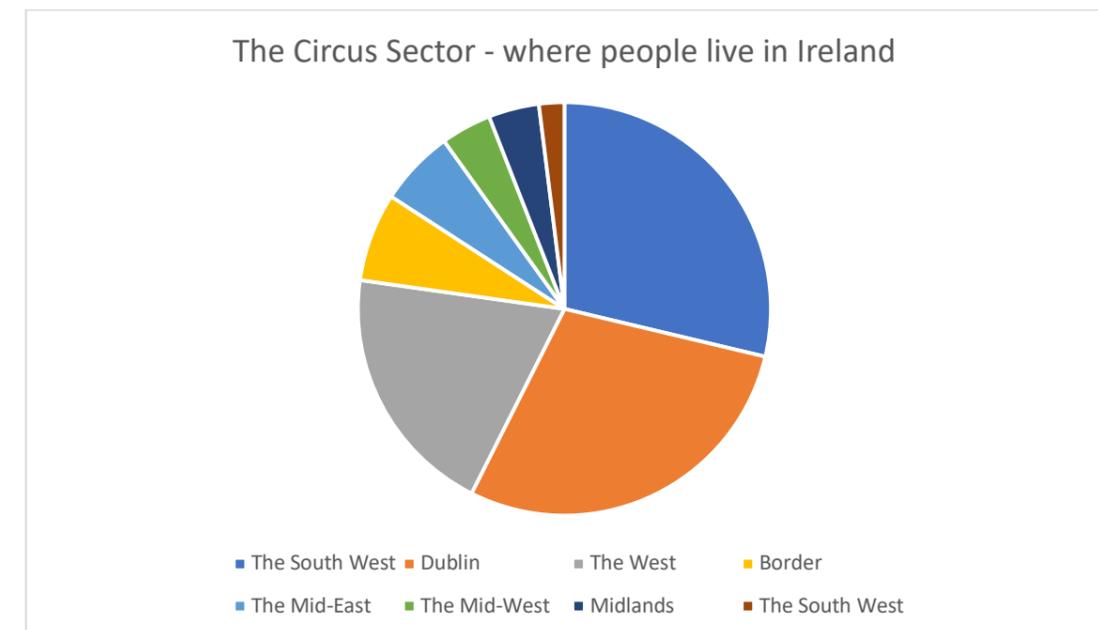
However, for a significant minority of people the distances to Irish cities are considerable, particularly for those who don't have access to a car and have to rely on public transport. Some people report travelling distances of at least 35km or over to train at a circus facility as highlighted below:

Belfast	50km
Cork	45km - 120km
Dublin	50km - 127km
Galway	82km - 90km
Kilkenny	40km
Limerick	70km
Waterford	60km - 62km

*"Currently without being able to drive, accessible and affordable circus spaces are hard to find... and accommodation is near impossible."*

The largest clusters of respondents were found in the following regions, where Circus Factory, Dublin Circus Project, Taking Flight and Galway Community Circus are based:

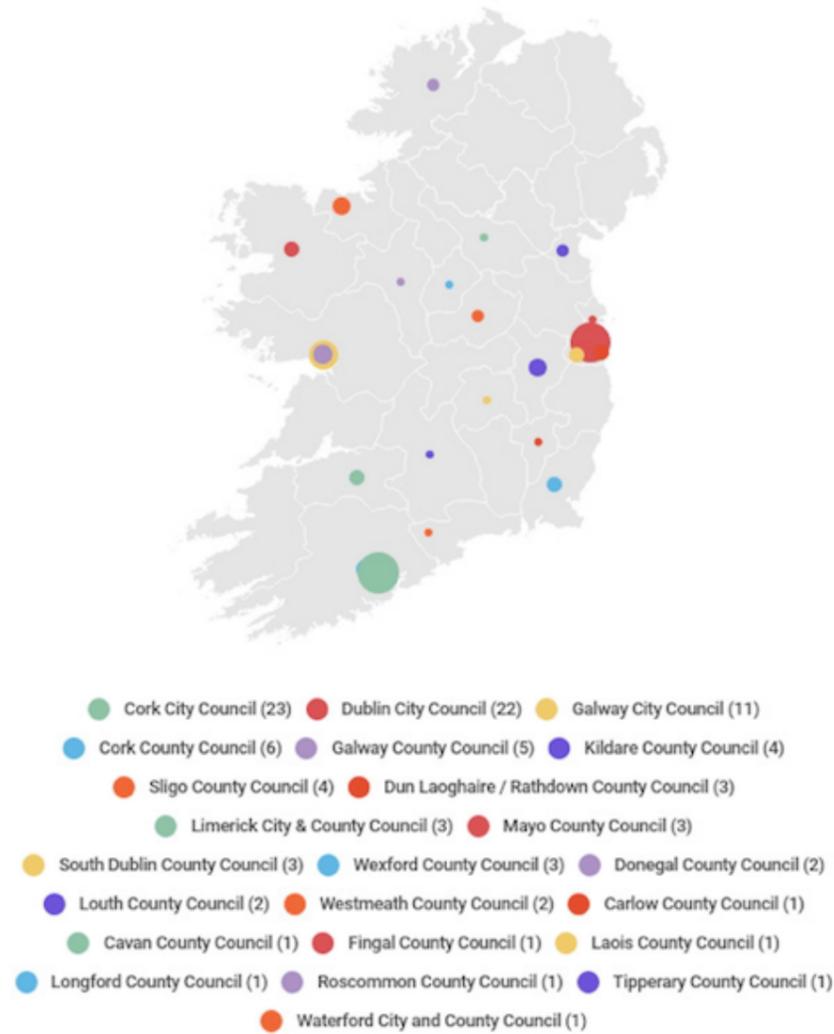
- 29% are in the South West; forming Cork City, Cork County and Kerry<sup>4</sup>
- 29% are in the Dublin region; forming Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin
- 20% are in the West region; forming Galway and Galway City, Mayo and Roscommon



<sup>4</sup> \*0% in Kerry

In addition to the main hubs of Cork, Dublin and Galway there are also small clusters of the circus sector elsewhere, in particular:

County Kildare	Four people
County Sligo	Four people
County Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown County	Three people
City & County Limerick	Three people
County Mayo	Three people
County South Dublin	Three people
County Wexford	Three people



Map of locations of circus practitioners in Ireland who responded to the survey.

Six people reported they use AcroAer in Co Sligo as a training facility. Whilst the number of survey respondents from City & County Limerick (three) and County Clare (none) are low in terms of their proximity to the Irish Aerial Creation Centre(IACC), 20 people listed the IACC as one of the spaces they use. It was also highlighted as a key space in the focus groups, with people willing to travel longer distances to access their facilities:

*“Traditional circuses and the IACC are quite good at being helpful for having a place to train. Places in Dublin are a nightmare for travel & expense unless for people who live already in Dublin. It’s easier to travel to IACC than to Dublin even though it takes longer.”*

It is also noted that a significant minority of the respondents live in Northern Ireland:

Antrim /Co.Antrim	Nine people
Co.Down	Two people
Belfast	One person
Derry	One person

#### 4.4 Circus artists abroad

Only six respondents were based abroad full time or the majority of the time. 29 respondents sometimes base themselves abroad (less than 59% of the time) or state it varies from year to year. Two thirds of such artists are based in Europe, with the remainder either touring or based across multiple countries in Europe, Northern America, Australia and Asia.

Given the recent pandemic, where international travel has been curtailed, this may have had an impact on artists’ ability to make the most of international opportunities for professional development.

Most importantly, 70% of those people - either partially or fully based abroad - agreed that:

*“I would be more likely to base myself in Ireland if suitable circus spaces were available for training and creation.”*

Two survey respondents confirmed this saying:

*“Just need more options and more of a community and training spaces, intensive course etc in South Dublin and also all over Ireland, I would be more inclined to staying put here in Ireland if I had more opportunities.”*

*“Several friends of mine emigrated due to lack of training space in Ireland. I train significantly less without a proper facility, and my progression has stagnated.”*

#### 4.5 Access to types of spaces used for circus related training/rehearsal activities

In the survey, people were asked what different types of spaces they currently use for any circus related training or rehearsal activities. A total of 103 people responded.

90 respondents indicated they use an equipped circus community, training or rehearsal space. The range of sites used also highlighted the circus sector’s resourcefulness in finding multiple venues depending on their needs and availability of suitable space.

*"When I'm in Ireland the Irish Aerial Creation Centre for anything with rigging. The dance house in Dublin for juggling and acrobatics, similarly Shawbrook for dance and juggling. Belfast and Cork for training."*

*"Taking Flight, aerial cirque, Petit Volant (sometimes Circus Factory Cork/IACC Limerick)."*

*"Taking Flight, Phibsboro Outdoor rigging at Kilruddery, Self-rigged gym room at Trojan gymnastics, poles and trapezes at Fierce Maynooth."*

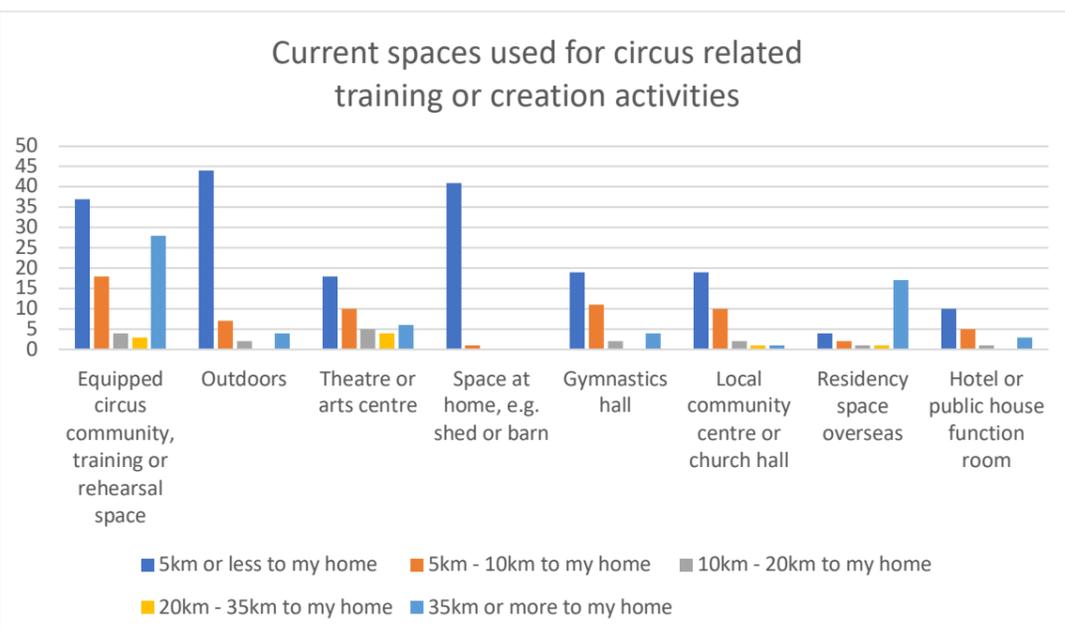
Over one third of respondents had access to such a circus space 5km or less to their home whilst just under one third had to travel 35km or more from their home. One fifth had access to such spaces between 5km - 10km from their home. Some people traveling longer distances reported that this can be tiring, expensive and harder to maintain motivation:

*"I currently travel 127km each way to Dublin on a weekly basis, just to attend one circus class... No closer facilities or access to training is seriously stunting my potential growth in acquiring professional competency in circus skills..."*

*"Taking Flight, Phibsborough (164km from home) Liberty Acrobatics (77km from home) Irish Aerial Creation Centre (187km from home)."*

*"I don't drive so it's difficult to go up and down to Cork every day to train, otherwise I would be there. But the fact that the space is very cold also stops the motivation for me to go there."*

*"There isn't enough open time training available at the spaces to accommodate my schedule as the nearest centre to train aerial is 2 hours away, I rig at home but the self-motivation is difficult."*



Additional spaces used included dance studios, artist spaces and primary schools. Three respondents cited dance spaces such as Dublin's DanceHouse and Tribe Fitness Dance Studio as places they would use which would make sense considering that well-heated spaces are also critical for dance artists.

The second most popular type of space used was the outdoors (57 respondents), dictated by circus artists' need to train consistently, with some people using their back gardens.

*"...Have freestanding rig for conditioning purposes in garden."*

However, this is not ideal, with artists sometimes at the mercy of the weather or understanding neighbours:

*"In a private garden there are neighbours to take into account."*

42 people reported using a space at home such as a shed or barn to train.

*"I use an old hay barn I have at home in the summer. Not possible in winter or very cold/ very windy days. As it is fully open on 1 side."*

43 people named arts centres or theatres as spaces they would use, with 28 having access to a space 10km or less from their homes.

*"Town Hall Theatre Cavan, Central du Circ Barcelona, Spraoi Studios Waterford, Tyrone Guthrie Monaghan, Little Room Waterford, Siamsa Tíre Tralee and West Kerry."*

Some respondents reported that arts centres or theatres can offer dedicated sole use or appropriate facilities, particularly valuable in terms of sole use space and getting work production ready.

*"IACC. Then any venue in Ireland that can offer us their theatre space to do technical rehearsals with lights, or/and the production week & primer of our indoor circus work..."*

*"I train on my own in order to focus solely on my craft. Unless I have a private room, I can't focus. I don't train in circus space as there is very little privacy unless you book the whole space. It is also too cold. They are not suitable for my needs. for the past years, I had been an associate artist with theatre institutions that suit me best."*

Gymnastics spaces and community halls were moderately popular, with approximately 30 people able to access both types of spaces very locally (less than 10km from their homes):

*"Galway Community Circus and The Connaught Hotel gym."*

*"West Wood Gym Leopardstown"*

*"Rossmore Theatre Clonakilty, Community Arts Centre Clonakily Community Hall, Circus Factory."*

*"... Ballydehob Community Hall (haven't used it yet but riggable)."*

Although it is harder for those who need to train in the evenings to access community halls:

*"Circus Training hours in community halls are fantastic, but are normally quite limited due to it being run between the hours of 9 - 5. if working a usual job and training in evening times, this is not ideal."*

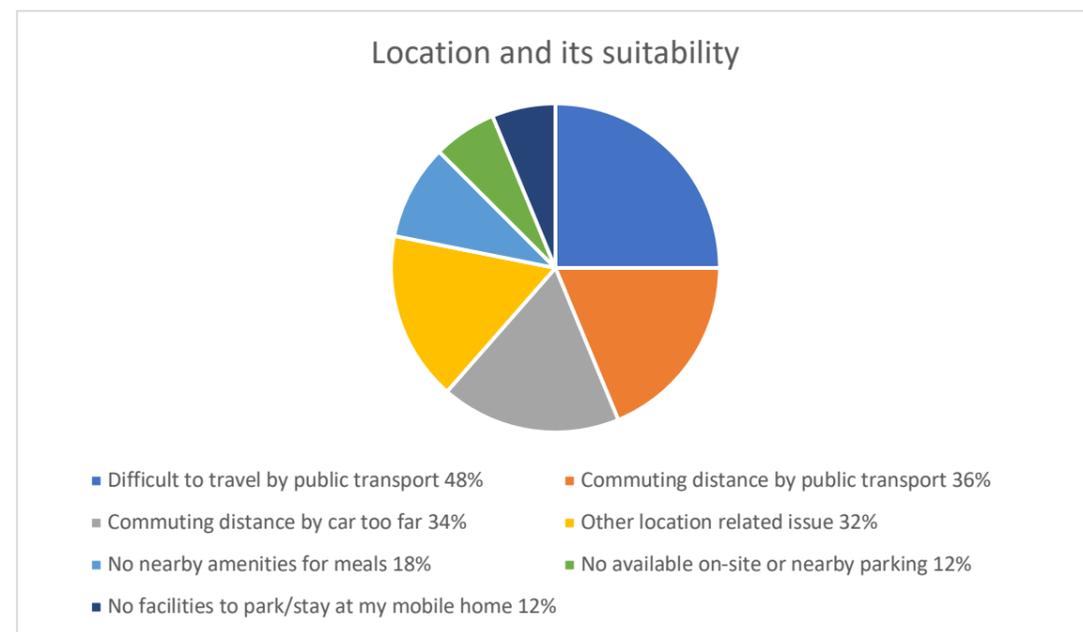
One artist highlighted the differences between their training experiences in Ireland and Norway:

*"In Ireland I rent a practice space less than 5 minutes from my house, a shed transformed into a private yoga loft style. If the weather is nice I train in the garden. In Ireland I would train body and techniques. In Norway I am an artist in residency and have access to a dance room, black box and a theatre 3 times a week. I would train toward production."*

#### 4.6 Suitability of existing spaces used for circus related training/rehearsal activities

Out of 101 survey respondents, 66 said the spaces used partially met their needs, with nine respondents saying the spaces used didn't meet their needs in any way.

50 survey respondents completed a checklist of potential location concerns. 48% reported that the space they used was difficult to travel to by public transport, 36% described commuting distance by public transport as a concern.



Other location issues related to safety:

*"The area is a bit dark at night."*

*"No public transport, unlit roads."*

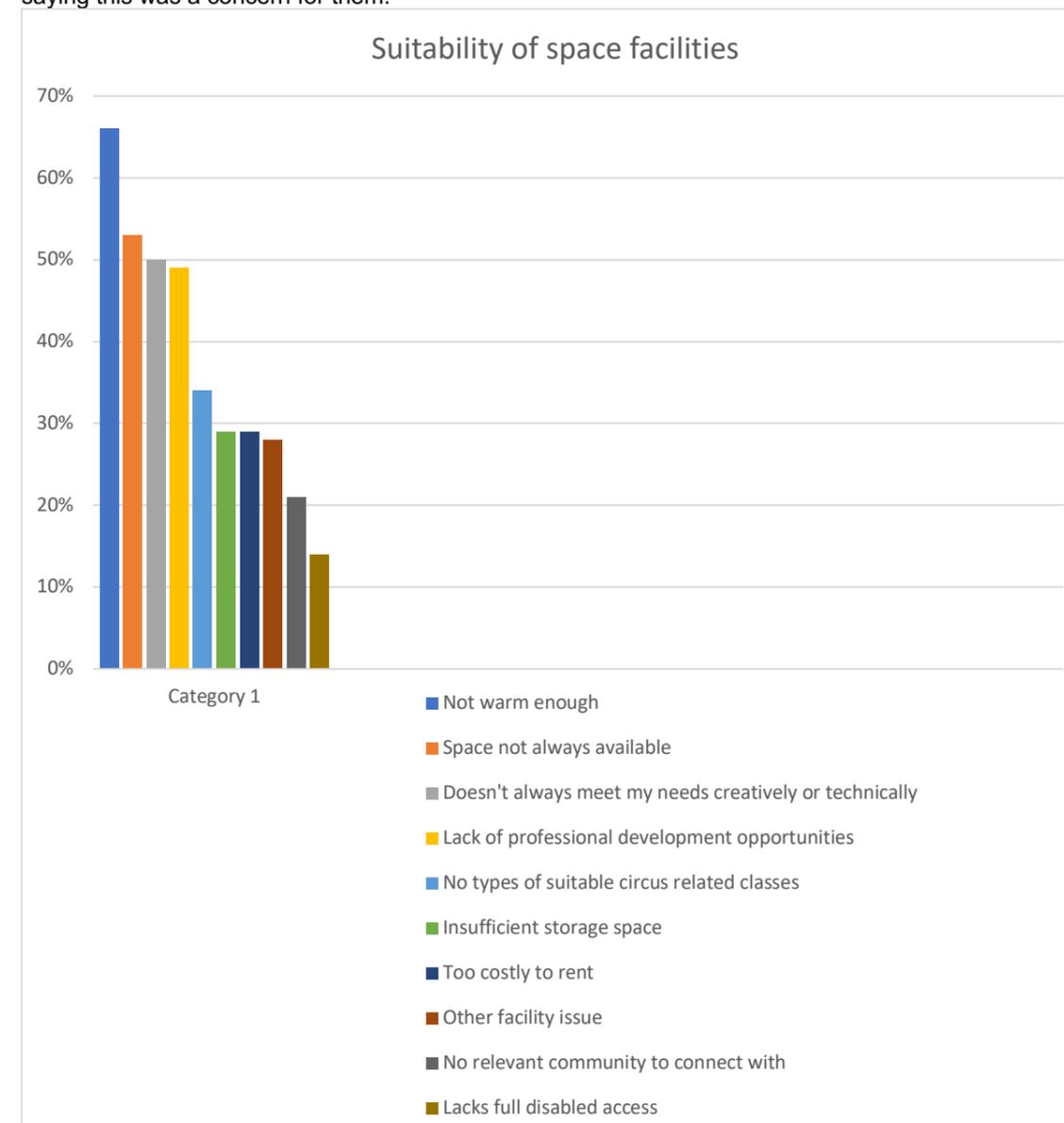
Three people mentioned accommodation issues, either in terms of access to affordable accommodation or no accommodation on site.

When asked regarding the suitability of the spaces' facilities, two thirds of the 76 respondents said the space was not warm enough.

*"The main issue is not having a properly heated training space to develop work from Oct-April".*

*"Aerial spaces are always too cold, due to the fact they're usually just converted warehouses. Also a lack of pulley systems, counterweight and winches..."*

Just over half reported having difficulty accessing a space for training or creation at suitable times for them. Half of those responding said the space didn't always meet their needs creatively or technically, for example, lacking suitable height, rigging points or suitable flooring. Lack of professional development opportunities was also cited as another factor, with just under half of the respondents saying this was a concern for them.



Lack of suitable facilities for other circus activities beyond aerial was also highlighted:

*"I struggle to find space for Cyr wheel."*

*"Flooring is substandard - concrete subfloor with jigsaw mats. Reluctant to train any amount of jumps or successive dynamic landings due to risk of injuries."*

*"Not enough height for Aerial. Not enough space for funambulism."*

21 people cited other facility related issues making some spaces less suitable or not suitable for their needs. Four issues that stood out were:

1. Need for multiple spaces; some circus training and creation spaces had one large room, either causing concentration issues due to noise or issues in availability.

*"Spaces often one open training room, therefore can only facilitate either classes happening OR open training OR residency space. Therefore when each activity happens in general the space then becomes unavailable to others within the community."*

*"Sharing space so get disturbed a lot - always feel like a guest!"*

2. Need for more spaces with enough height for aerial activities

*"I would like 10m+ of height for professional aerial training to allow for the foam pits and use of motors."*

*"Not enough height for rope training."*

3. Need for more suitable production based facilities, e.g. lighting and sound

*"Updated Lighting and performance tech needed"*

*"Lacks performance transition, just for training not production"*

*"No space or soundproofing for musical collaborators."*

4. Need for changing rooms or shower facilities.

*"No shower or proper changing facilities so unlikely to do a morning training as I need to get home to shower before other chores for the day."*

*"No changing rooms, showers."*

## 5 Mapping of the Circus Sector's needs in Ireland in relation to circus building-based infrastructure

The second half of the survey focused on the circus sector's needs in relation to circus building-based infrastructure with regards to location, travel distance, ideal training or creation facilities for circus, including minimum space and height requirements, preferred flooring, general facilities and development opportunities.

### 5.1 Location and travel needs

When asked what were the most important aspects location wise for choosing a space for circus related activities, out of 88 survey respondents:

58% of people said that they preferred to travel shorter distances (20km or less). The most popular distance for traveling to a space on a regular basis was 10km - 20km, with 25% of

respondents indicating this. However a significant minority, 14%, were prepared to travel longer distances, depending on traffic.

*"1 hour travel time to venue."*

*"If just going once a month, it could be up to 100km, but I currently train 3-4 times a week and 1hr each way on public transport is about as long as I can handle!"*

In the comments feedback there were multiple views on where circus spaces should be located. Generally, feedback was that there needed to be **more** suitable spaces and that they should be more **easily accessible**, particularly by **public transport**.

*"Circus is an amazing tool, and the rural communities need access to this as I have seen over the many years living in rural Ireland. Please bring circus access in a regular base closer to rural areas..."*

*"I think it would be a great opportunity to have a space with easy access for individuals like myself who live very far away from the nearest available space."*

One survey respondent recommended a holistic approach to developing a sustainable circus sector that involved both increased community and professional development supports as well as properly resourced circus spaces:

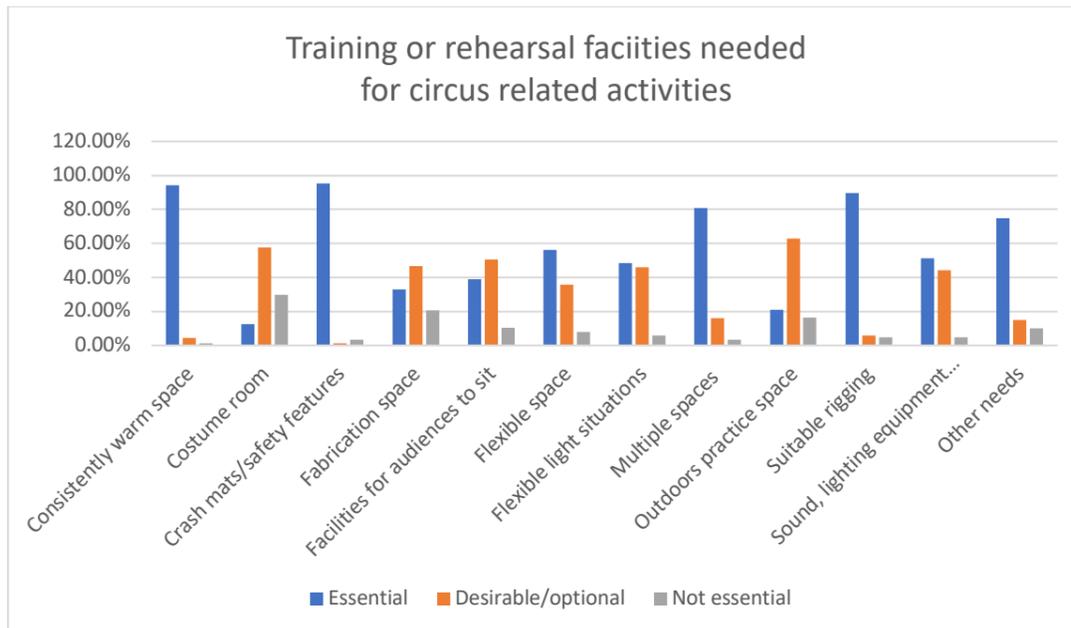
*"...Ireland needs multiple circus venues and none of them need to be "state of the art" but they all need to be accessible and practical. I would look into a model from Finland which is a similar size country to Ireland and has professional level circus spaces in all the 6-7 of the largest cities plus over 100 youth circus spaces and some creation spaces."*

*"...It will take a while for Ireland to get there but is ESSENTIAL is that there is a circus space in all the larger cities (Dublin, Galway, Cork, Limerick plus supported access for rural communities) with a healthy eco-system of artists' supports, community participation, youth circus development (next generation) and professional infrastructures to support this (producers, managers, technicians, makers etc.). Irish circus sector doesn't only need space but it needs employment for current and future artists and circus professionals and, for this, we need this whole ecosystem."*

### 5.2 Types of facilities needed for circus training, rehearsal or creation activities

The top four facilities seen as essential among the 88 people completing this section were:

1. Safety features/crash mats - 95% of survey respondents
2. Adequately heated spaces - 94% of survey respondents
3. Rigging suitable for apparatus/practice - 90% of survey respondents
4. Multiple spaces for different training needs/types of circus skills - 81% of survey respondents



Understandably safety was a running theme in the various comments sections through the survey. Given the nature of the artform, there is an essential need to have adequate safety features, this came out as a top priority for the overwhelming majority of survey respondents:

*“Foam pit for safe training of highly dangerous and technical tricks.”*

*“Safe adequate floor and floor equipment like mats, mirrors would be also a good thing.”*

Lack of adequate heating is another significant safety concern and can contribute to the increased likelihood of performers incurring injury:

*“There are currently very little circus spaces with adequate heat. I would see this as one of the two most important things for an aerial space, the first being height.”*

*“Ceiling height & warmth are by FAR our leading barriers to creation.”*

Suitable and well thought out buildings were needed to allow safe and flexible rigging:

*“A foam pit with rigging points over it would completely change the level of aerial in Ireland.”*

*“Foam pit, 10m + height, many exposed beams or truss that is not flush against the ceiling in order to allow for creation of rig points anywhere you want. Vertical Beams or columns of truss to allow for counterweight systems. A wide, clear flat wall to allow for vertical dance.”*

*“Qualified professionals present to help with rigging, check safety, etc.”*

There is a need for buildings with multiple spaces to allow for different activities, including having a dedicated space for those rehearsing and developing performances and productions:

*“One of the key features of some of the best circus spaces I’ve visited is MULTIPLE SPACES. People train circus in different ways, through different disciplines and have different objectives.... The ideal circus space offers a central training space, and also alternative spaces either for: residencies, a performance space, a rehearsal room (all of which can either be separate, or can be combined).”*

*“The space needs to accommodate all kinds of projects for many disciplines. From learning basics to creating complex projects. It needs to be central, in the city and close to people.”*

*“Having a semi-permanent setup of audio-visual equipment within the space helps a lot when engaging in creative rehearsals. Setup and take down of this equipment can take up a lot of time especially when there is limited time available.”*

The lowest four facilities seen as either desirable/optional or not essential were:

1. Outdoors space for training or rehearsing - 63% saw this as desirable, with 16% saying not essential
2. Costume room - 58% said this was desirable, with 30% saying not essential
3. Seating for audiences - 51% saw this as desirable, with 10% saying not essential
4. Fabrication space for set or circus apparatus construction - 47% of saw this as desirable, with 20% saying not essential

In terms of other facilities recommended in the comments section, many of them came under General Facilities which are highlighted in section 5.5.

The overall feel and welcome of a space, a strong community ethos and different types of developmental support were highlighted by a significant minority as an important consideration:

*“Welcoming and safe space for young people, artists and members of the community (safe, inviting atmosphere and professionally run).”*

*“Welcoming and encouraging. A little circus library and training aids/prompts would be nice. Structure in training and showcases to encourage and facilitate a pathway for improvement and progression.”*

*“It need to have an active community at its heart. It is important to include youth activates but the space should be available for appropriate time for artists also.”*

### 5.3 Space, height and flooring requirements for training, rehearsal or creation activities

*Height for aerial or trapeze activities*

27 people indicated between five to six metres as being the ideal minimum height for aerial or trapeze activities.

20 people indicated a minimum height of between nine and fifteen metres.

Survey respondents also highlighted the need to take into account roof trusses or other obstructions:

*“Height minimum of 6m with no overhead obstructions below this height (beams/ventilation systems etc below 6m*

*“10 metres from floor to truss or anchor”*

*Ideal floor size for rehearsal or creation activities*

Ideal floor sizes suggested ranged from a quite modest three square metres to a very large space of 20 square metres.

29 of the 50 people providing details of their space requirements would be happy with spaces of less than ten square metres. Of these, ten people opted for spaces of seven to eight square metres and nine people opted for spaces of five to six square metres.

*“6m x 6m seems to be a good minimum space for rehearsal/creation. Any smaller and the limited space will influence how I am creating which might be an issue when translating the work to bigger spaces.”*

21 people said they really needed larger spaces of ten metres or more. Several people provided a good rationale for their space needs, particularly in being able to prepare work to production standard in spaces comparable sizes to venues they would be performing at.

*“We have created a space the scale of the larger stages in Ireland; 12 metres long & 10 metres wide With 2-3 metres either side four counterweighting & lights etc. With cyc at back space behind space at front for choreography etc to watch.”*

*“For creation, a space clear of any obstacles that matches the size of the average Irish theatre stage would be the minimum requirement...Ideally this space can also be partitioned or entirely closed off from anything else going on in the same building.”*

The need for uncluttered spaces was reported as a key issue in this survey:

*“An empty space/room with wall running rigging point options and enough space to set up a tight wire with pole (e.g. 10m length, 5m width).”*

*“One of the often overlooked requirements for my practice is a clean empty space.”*

*Preferred flooring for circus related activities*

The most popular floor options were either dance floor or a sprung floor, with mats that could be placed as needed. Flexibility is key for supporting different activities in the same space or having separate spaces with specific flooring for different activities.

*“Sprung floor or acro mat covered in marley is the dream, with hardwood areas for handbalance / bounce juggling and anything else that needs a more stable surface.”*

*“Best is soft wood sprung Floor, that a scissor lift can drive on Dancers / aerialists can dance on Cyr wheel can work on. Cover with dance Lino. Add mats when needed.”*

*“Mixed dance floor and gymnastics floor. Preferably roll out floors that can be adapted for different disciplines, like cyr wheel etc that need a flat/solid floor.”*

*“Either separate spaces with installed acrobatic matting in one side/space and sprung wooden dance floor in the other. Or fully sprung wooden dance floor with easily laid acrobatic matting.”*

*“Acro mat with lino on top, to give the spring and support for acrobatics but also a soft ground for dance, hula hoops, movement and juggling.”*

#### 5.4 Circus development opportunities that could be offered in circus based buildings

When asked what were the most important circus development opportunities offered in circus based buildings of 88 survey respondents the majority of people saw the following opportunities as essential:

1. Regular training opportunities - 99%
2. The chance to meet like-minded people, network, share and exchange skills - 91%
3. Once-off training such as intensives or the chance to present work in a space - 76%
4. Residency opportunities - 72%

*“Classes for all ages and to have onus on building the next generation of circus teachers and performers.”*

*“Teacher training, professional skills e.g. rigging courses or business training.”*

*“Sharing of work. Social community activities. A pool of performers to connect with and make work with.”*

*“Work space for professionals. I find having a common space to do production/organisation work can be very beneficial.”*

Mentoring was also mentioned:

*“Mentoring by professionals in the sector.”*

*“Mentorship for professional development skills.”*

#### 5.5 General facility requirements for circus based buildings

The top five general facility requirements, seen as essential by 88 survey respondents were:

1. Ease of booking and hours available for use - 97%
2. Full disabled access - 85%
3. Ease of access for get-in and out of equipment/set - 80%
4. Adequate storage for regular artists attending classes or training - 74%
5. Equipment room - 70%

The five general facilities seen as optional or not essential were:

1. Hot desks – 65% saying optional, 20% saying not essential
2. Mobile homes/caravans welcome - 59% saying optional, 20% saying not essential
3. Green room – 58% saying optional, 21% saying not essential
4. 24 hour access - 56%, saying optional, 17% saying not essential
5. Access to lift - 55% saying optional, 23% saying not essential

The need for quiet, separate spaces was also highlighted by a significant minority:

*“Recovery, rest, relaxation space. Small area. Always quiet.”*

*“Pod/ small office like spaces to brainstorm/ create.”*

## 5.6 Facilities for children and young people in circus based buildings

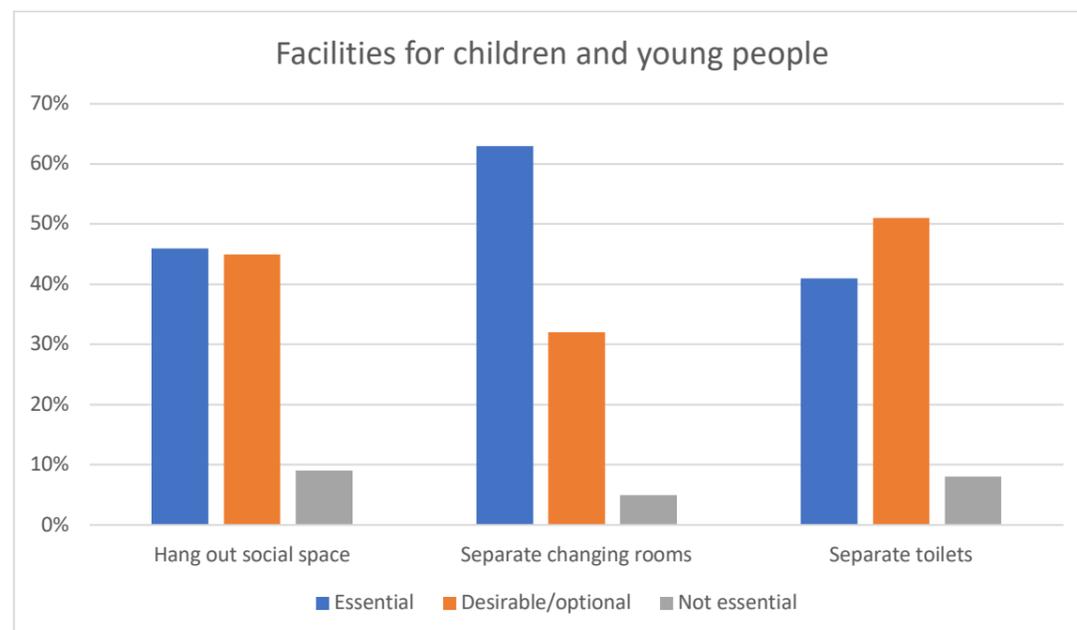
The welcoming nature and accessibility of the building were seen as important factors in thinking about children and young people:

*“That the whole building is safe and welcoming for children and young people.”*

*“Accessible.”*

One survey respondent also suggested specific facilities for children on the Autistic spectrum:

*“It’s good to have a quite/safe space for them to go if they are getting overwhelmed or distressed. These are quiet, low light rooms with comfortable chairs and sometimes with objects to calm or distract them. Such as fidget spinners, stress balls or just a game to play.”*



## 6 Other views from the field regarding the circus sector’s needs

### 6.1 Overview

During March 2022 Promenade ran in-person focus groups for the circus sector on Achill Island (6 March), Dublin (8 March), Cork (11 March) as well as an online workshop (10 March). Some people who were not able to attend these meetings also responded in relation to key questions covering the following broad themes in the focus groups:

*What makes an ideal circus space?*

*How can spaces be more welcoming?*

*What specific training or creation facilities would help lesser developed areas of circus arts?*

*Safety - what physical and emotional supports should be provided?*

*Examples of recommended international spaces*

There was also discussion regarding different types of spaces currently used for circus based activities including arts centres and gymnastics halls. There needs to be a balance between the functionality of a building and a space with character; so to have the proper conditions to accommodate different disciplines but also have the feel of being a creative space with soul. It was also reported that artists in the North can feel isolated, as much of the circus activity mainly happens further south in the country.

### 6.2 Online focus group

21 people attended a sectoral online focus group to discuss their needs regarding circus building based infrastructure. In attendance included an arts centre who provide residency space for circus artists.

Overall, it was felt quite strongly that a lack of dedicated circus spaces is damaging the development of the art form. This included affecting the sectors’ ability to nurture recently graduated circus artists and support their artistic development and training. It was also especially hard for rurally based artists to get sufficient access to appropriate spaces. There was a discussion regarding the different needs between training and creation spaces which needed to be clearly considered in supporting any future development of circus building based infrastructure.

The focus group were asked to take part in a word cloud exercise on what makes an ideal circus space. Adequate heating and height were the number one priority, along with a community to link in and connect with. The building also needed to be safe and spacious.

## What makes an ideal space for circus (training & creation activities)?

Mentimeter



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Other key findings from discussion with the group were:

### Storage

- Having adequately sized storage space that fits all types of equipment; some people found their equipment, such as aerial hoops and Cyr wheel were too large to store in lockers.
- Dedicated storage space needed to be safe and free from damp

### Accommodation

- It was agreed that on site accommodation is vital for dedicated circus spaces for people travelling further within Ireland to train and/or make work, the hosting of masterclasses and international residencies.

### Supports for building based organisations running circus activities

- Need for support, such as a network or advisory support to assist with building concerns and sharing good practice and support with navigating with specific building issues such as rates.

However, those present were pragmatic and aware that the establishment of proper purpose-built circus buildings was going to take time and substantial investment. Some felt that certainly in the interim there needed to be a two-pronged approach to best help the future ecology of circus arts in Ireland.

This involved more support for existing circus-based buildings as well as encouraging more existing arts centres to support circus activities. One festival highlighted the challenges in sourcing appropriate venues for presenting circus. Although it was reinforced that on the whole only really dedicated circus spaces are going to be suitable for training and developing certain circus arts, such as flying trapeze.

Suggestions for the future included:

- Access to details regarding existing arts buildings that are suitable for circus-based activities, particularly for rehearsals and residencies including case studies/models of good practice
- Capturing of gymnastics spaces that offer good facilities for circus
- Building of partnerships with other spaces to encourage their interest and support of circus
- Funding supports and training for rigging at suitable arts centres and theatres

- Establish relationship with local authority arts officers to highlight circus artist needs
- Encourage the above actions at policy level

### 6.3 In person focus group - Achill Island

In this focus group of 18 participants, respondents spoke about the need for openness and safety in terms of ethos, staffing and clear protocols. Furthermore, emphasis was put on community engagement via open days, collaboration with other artistic communities, family classes and work in progress sharings.

The physical environment for circus was important, in its aesthetics, atmosphere, practical functions and being as energy efficient as possible. This included open/communal spaces and facilities for outdoors, such as living options and permanent outdoors infrastructure for funambulism. In addition, respondents placed importance on rest areas such as cafes and kitchen facilities in order for non-formal mixing as well as private training spaces to create safe space.

This focus group put emphasis on cross-disciplinary collaboration through flexible facilities as well as connections with non-circus art forms and groups. It was felt there was a need for buildings for circus all over the country, including the building of greater partnerships with the traditional circus sector.

They also pointed to the huge network of rural theatres and arts centres, as potential spaces for circus-based practice. It was felt there was good potential to cultivate those relationships further including under-utilised buildings that could possibly present circus.



## 6.4 In-person focus group - Dublin

Similarly to the first focus group, this group of twelve people also put emphasis on the importance of welcoming, warm, safe and positive spaces with a strong community ethos. There was an in-depth conversation regarding the need to accommodate cross-disciplinary collaborations including work of an experimental nature. The group wanted to see multi-disciplinary and playful spaces with more separate training and creation spaces to be able to develop work to production standards (supported by lighting, sound etc). They also saw great value in circus buildings that connected closely with their local communities.

More reference was made to safety in a direct sense. They wanted proper induction of use of equipment, crash mats, foam pits, first aid kits and trained staff. Furthermore, importance was placed on ameliorating the environment with better lighting, sound, seating, appropriate heat and heating as well as ease of booking equipment.

It was discussed whether gymnastics spaces were worth exploring as a model; particularly as they are governed by a national body. However, it was pointed out that there are distinct differences to circus in that gymnastics is not a creative practice and is a competitive sport.

In a conversation regarding focus group members' experience of international spaces there was discussion on how a building can influence the type of work being made, for example, work coming out of Barcelona and Montreal. Some spaces members experienced felt overly bureaucratic, lacking soul and were not always conducive to making work. Independent spaces built with artistic involvement from the outset were seen as the most appropriate models.

## 6.5 In-person focus group - Cork

Eleven people attended the focus group in Cork. Similarly to the other in-person two groups, safety was seen as an essential consideration. This included having well-trained staff/facilitators and strong safety protocols and procedures such as regular rigging checks and inspections. They also wanted to see more advanced access measures for people with disabilities such as appropriate lighting, sound, escape access and ramps. Communal areas, seating for audiences and building a relationship with local communities was also seen as important.

Having a warm space, sufficient height for different circus disciplines and rigging points were key requirements; Dancers Equity was highlighted as a good source of information regarding minimum temperature recommendations. The group wanted well-organised spaces, with rooms dedicated to specific circus arts and different flooring for different activities that could support multiple needs including cross-disciplinary work for training, creation and presentation. They wanted adjustable lighting that could be adapted to both light and dark states, including suitable lighting for juggling.

It was also highlighted that most people in the circus world make their living from street arts and was no surprise, given the lack of spaces to perform. It was strongly felt that the need for spaces that could house circus training and creation activities needed to be properly embedded within urban planning.



## 7 International examples of good practice relevant to circus building based infrastructure

### 7.1 Overview

During our research of overseas circus buildings we found that there is not one particular replica type of model. Although the best circus buildings all have the expected provision of heating, height, access, health and safety maintenance, providing circus equipment and apparatus as a minimum requirement. Each building is also dedicated to professionalising the current and the next generation of circus makers.

What was found is that each circus building has an unique structure with provision relevant to its locality, its national needs and is determined by funding and their history of circus. One commonality is how their positive reputations and distinctive achievements are determined by funding, leadership and the creative ethos instilled in the organisation.

The next section highlights the international building examples selected and the rationale for selection, including any relevance to the Irish context and sectoral aspirations. In the final section 6.6.iii we also highlight a bench-marking tool plus a number of circus networks that have brought significant benefits to the circus sector in France and at European level.

### 7.2 International building based organisations for circus

The team selected six key international building-based organisations for circus as their facilities and programmes relate very much to needs raised by artists in Ireland as part of this research study. The buildings are all examples of good practice that illustrate how organisations can successfully offer multiple strands of circus activity such as training and creation in one building. Several of them were also cited by the artists themselves during the focus group process and survey feedback as examples of good practice.

It was frequently mentioned by members of Ireland's circus sector the need for inspirational environments in which to create and to provide the optimum opportunity to develop talent. [La Central Del Circ](#) in Barcelona is a benchmark for this. It was noted by members of Ireland's circus sector the need for multi-spaces and the need to share and meet like-minded people. [La Grainerie](#) in Toulouse, France is a good example of a fully equipped multi-room building with extensive facilities for both training and production/creative work leading to professional pathways. The sectoral feedback from the Irish circus sector also reinforced the importance of buildings in creating a circus community. [Cirko - Center for New Circus](#) in Helsinki is a good example of having both permanent resident companies and an all year round residency programme. [La Brèche](#) Cherbourg, France is an example of a circus building supported by a forward thinking local authority. It is at the heart of a regeneration programme on waste land bringing community value and economic benefits to the town.

Professional development support for artists in circus spaces is a need raised by artists in Ireland as part of this research study. [Subtopia](#) in Stockholm is an example of how an organisation can give significant development support to its artists. The success is its hands-on team who nurture and follow the artist's journey on their career pathways acting as mentors and advocates. It is also home to a variety of creative industries and hires out spaces for filming, studios and as performance space. [101 Outdoor Arts](#) is also very good at providing a supportive environment with staff on hand to advise regarding artistic, administrative and production matters. They also have a dedicated fabrication space for developing set and street arts/circus apparatus. On-site accommodation was highlighted in the sectoral consultation as a need and 101 Outdoor Arts is a good example in that they have installed purpose built ensuite cabins in 2018.

### 7.3 Examples of good practice - networks, associations and benchmarking

There are two associations/networks in France, Territoires de Cirque and Pôle National des Arts Du Cirque providing supports, exchange and advocacy for national circus centres (and in the case of Territoires de Cirque theatres and festivals with a focus on circus). Whilst European network FEDEC Whilst FEDEC is a European and international network of about 70 members (two thirds of secondary, vocational and higher education circus schools and training programmes, and one thirds of organisations involved in information, research and circus arts advocacy) located in more than 20 countries in Europe and beyond.

A recently launched Erasmus+ partnership RIGGERS will exchange good practices and work towards a state of the art for safety and rigging in circus schools. They also plan to develop a number of resources that will benefit the wider circus community with regards to safe practice of rigging. The final example is Artsmetric, a benchmarking tool that could be very helpful for building based organisations for circus to assess their organisations against other similar organisations.

#### *Territoires de Cirque - France*

Territoires de Cirque<sup>5</sup> is an association of nearly forty organisations in France that support the emergence, creation, and presentation of circus. Open to all aesthetics of live or specialised performances, these organisations include research laboratories, national or subsidised stage venues, city-run theatres, cultural services and heritage sites, and production establishments.

Their mission is:

- to create a place for dialogue and professional action dedicated to circus,
- to be an active partner and source of proposals for the public, institutional and professional authorities, both nationally and internationally.

#### *National Hubs for Circus (Pôle National des Arts Du Cirque - PNCs) - France*

In 2001 Catherine Trautmann, Minister of Culture, France created "The Arts Circus Year", naming eleven hubs for circus.

Their aims are:

- To support the creation process with artists in residential programmes, co-productions and following-up projects
- To promote circus arts by regularly programming circus shows, especially by collaborating with other cultural entities
- Audience development in circus arts linked with the actions that aim to support circus creation and promotion, via partnerships with schools and other organisations
- To follow-up on the progression of artists and to build the profession

Since then, a network has been created whose members meet regularly (every year during CIRCa Festival) and campaign for a quality-label recognising these undertakings.

The PNCs are expert in all aspects of circus arts.<sup>6</sup> Their focus is on circus production and promotion. The PNCs benefit from dedicated facilities to fulfil their missions: stages (bricks and mortar venues,

<sup>5</sup> <https://territoiresdecirque.com/en/presentation/un-reseau>

<sup>6</sup> <http://circa.auch.fr/en/what-is-a-pnc>

permanent or itinerant big tops, theatre auditoriums), spaces for artists in residential programmes, grounds readily equipped for the installation of big tops, etc.

This project is detailed and its goals are sanctioned in a multi-annual contract, co-signed by the State and local councils. See here the French Ministry of Culture declaration on support for their National Circus Centres (Pôle National des Arts Du Cirque) including an interactive map:

<https://www.culture.gouv.fr/en/Thematiques/Theatre-spectacles/Le-theatre-et-les-spectacles-en-France/Poles-Nationaux-Cirque-PNC>

#### *FEDEC Federation of Professional Circus Schools*

Founded in 1998 at the instigation of the first vocational circus arts schools, FEDEC<sup>7</sup> is committed to supporting the development and evolution of training, teaching and creation in the field of circus arts.

FEDEC is a European and international network of about 70 members (two thirds of secondary, vocational and higher education circus schools and training programmes, and two thirds of organisations involved in information, research and circus arts advocacy) located in more than 20 countries in Europe and beyond.

Since it was founded, it has worked with European support networks for the development and evolution of training, teaching, creation and employment in the field of formal and non-formal education (LLL-Platform), arts education (EYCO, ELIA and AEC) and circus professional sector (CIRCOSTRADA). Its members are key players in their countries, developing training systems and contributing to the structuring of various levels of education.

#### *RIGGERS project*

The recently launched RIGGERS project<sup>8</sup> will run from 2022 until 2024 and is funded by the Erasmus+ programme. It is led in partnership with Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH) with the aim to enhance the quality of safety measures in professional circus schools by:

- sharing best practices
- seeking tailored solutions to common issues
- creating an international rigging community

Beyond the project they are planning to develop a RIGGERS Virtual Platform that will later become an open virtual forum dedicated to the sector of safety and rigging in the field of circus. They also plan to develop a series of video tutorials aimed at sharing schools good practices in safety and rigging with the whole community of circus school riggers in Europe and beyond. The videos, as well as the training materials developed for the tutorials, will remain available after the end of the project.

#### *Artsmetric benchmarking tool*

Artsmetric<sup>9</sup> is a digital platform for European cultural and creative spaces to compare data, share practices and learn from each other. Artsmetric also contains selected resources for arts and cultural managers on themes such as arts business models, urban regenerations, leadership, etc.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.fedec.eu/en/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fedec.eu/en/articles/5416-riggers>

<sup>9</sup> <https://artsmetric.com/about/>

## 8 Recommendations

### 8.1 Key sectoral themes and recommendations

The following key themes emerged across the consultation for this research study:

**Fragile and insecure building arrangements;** the tenacity of the circus sector in creating spaces to train and develop work in is admirable, however there is a need for:

- More affordable, secure and long-term tenancies of suitable buildings that allow for proper building improvements
- Increased assistance and advocacy from local authorities in finding suitable spaces that can properly meet the needs of the circus sector as identified below
- Additional professional development supports in furthering capital development aspirations and plans, e.g. training, skills development, additional staffing, peer to peer learning and exchange

**Safer work conditions;** circus is a strenuous and physically demanding activity that can involve close contact with others and use of specialist apparatus. There is a need for more:

- Better insulated and properly heated buildings at recommended industry temperatures
- Safe and appropriate spaces to work in that adhere to good safety practices
- Dedicated spaces for particular activities, e.g. uncluttered spaces for rehearsals
- Working environments conducive to psychological as well as physical health, e.g. welcoming ethos, appropriate policies and an increased number of properly trained staff

**Higher quality facilities;** whilst circus has seen a growth in recent years the development of the artform it has a limited number of suitable spaces, in particular there is a need for more:

- Spaces that are suitable for different aspects of circus arts, including some less developed circus arts, e.g. teeterboard
- Greater ceiling heights for aerial based work
- Available dedicated rooms for professional development and creation activities, e.g. residencies and production rehearsals
- Multiple spaces for different types of activities conducive to both training and more creative based circus activities
- Production standard facilities - with sound, lighting etc - that enable artists to work in high quality performance facilities that allow for test audiences
- Buildings conducive for cross-disciplinary collaboration
- Facilities with energy efficient measures to reduce costs and carbon footprint

**Public friendly facilities;** circus is characterised by a strong community ethos and those consulted frequently mentioned the importance of meaningful connection with their local communities, demonstrating a need for circus buildings that are:

- Designed to create a welcoming and friendly atmosphere
- Able to accommodate audiences for work in progress sharings
- Considerate of working with different age groups, particularly children and young people
- Fully accessible and can be fully used by people with disabilities

**Changing socio-economic environment;** the short supply of affordable city housing, which in turn has led to some artists moving to more affordable parts of the country, including more rural locations highlights the following needs:

- On-site or nearby accommodation at circus buildings for those traveling further afield, e.g. for longer residencies
- Circus building based infrastructure that is easily accessible by public transport

- More accessible, affordable and suitable facilities across the country that circus artists can regularly train in

**Insecure and precarious career paths;** the industry lacks structured and stable career paths both on the artistic and management side of circus arts, which has a knock on effect for developing building based infrastructure and the ecology of circus development, leading to a potential drain of talent with people either leaving the industry or moving overseas. In particular there is a need for:

- Structured traineeships or other supports to develop more people with dedicated circus venue management skills
- Production supports to encourage circus artists to establish companies, including talent development opportunities for recent graduates

## 8.2 Future Arts Council Circus Policy

It is recommended that the Arts Council consider the following actions to support the themes and needs as identified in section 8.1. These align with the Arts Council's five priority areas outlined in Making Great Art Work:

### *The Artist*

- Advocate for the rights and needs of circus artists for more accessible, suitable, safe and secure Circus building based infrastructure
- Develop and/or enhance funding programmes that address sustainability measures and supports for the career paths of circus artists, including those recently graduated and those underrepresented in circus arts
- Develop and/or enhance funding programmes that provide production supports for circus artists wanting to develop production companies

### *Public Engagement*

- Work in partnership with the circus sector and local authorities to further develop audiences for circus, including those that are less regular attendees of the arts
- Ensure that circus building based organisations consider facilities for children and young people in adaptation/development of new buildings

### *Investment Strategy*

- Work with the Department to develop an optimum circus building based infrastructure for the future, particularly in priority regions identified

### *Spatial and Demographic planning*

- Build on the Arts Council's relationship with local authorities to encourage more accessible and appropriate wider regional spread of circus building based infrastructure, ensuring that the needs of circus artists are central

### *Building Capacity*

- Work with funded circus building organisations to further increase training and development needs to create a strong and resilient sector, e.g. peer to peer networking and structured traineeships for venue personnel
- Expand mobility opportunities for the circus building based sector to visit international circus buildings as examples of good practice

## 8.3 Other policy contexts

### *The Arts Council's Spatial Policy*

The Arts Council's newly launched spatial policy Place Space & People<sup>10</sup> is highly relevant to this piece of research, in particular the identified policy measures.

There is strong potential for the circus community to build complimentary and relevant cross-agency partnerships, with the support of the Arts Council, for example, universities, as highlighted below:

#### Planning and the Arts

- Work with our parent Department to develop an optimum arts infrastructure for the future.
- Work with Planning bodies and authorities to develop knowledge and capacity on the integration of arts and culture into sustainable planning and design.
- In collaboration with the artistic community explore creative ways of informing planning and development processes through cross-agency partnerships and artist citizen engagement.
- Build on our key strategic partnership with local government to work collaboratively exploring the contribution of the arts to other domains.

There is a need to support artists and arts organisations in navigating different funding opportunities for capital infrastructure, to encourage more Arts Centres to provide suitable facilities for circus artists and to use the data from this report regarding reasonable levels of circus arts infrastructure in Ireland's cities. This is relevant to the next section Supporting artists:

#### Supporting artists

- In supporting the Project Ireland 2040 objective, to develop the four other cities outside the capital, the Arts Council will put a specific lens on what reasonable level of arts infrastructure should be available in those cities and make recommendations to the relevant authorities in terms of future planning.
- A key policy objective in the Arts Centre policy is to offer support to artists as creators, participants, collaborators and community members and this is currently being prioritised for support through Arts Centre funding. We will closely monitor and assess the outcomes of this strategic area of focus.
- Finally we will actively support artists and arts organisations in availing of opportunities for capital investment in new work spaces for artists, through relevant schemes such as the Cultural Capital Support Scheme, the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF).

There are considerable youth and social circus programmes being delivered across the circus building based organisations. The following policy measure is important for the development of Circus Building Based Infrastructure.

#### Public engagement

- Ensure the centrality of children and young people's engagement and voice in the arts across all areas of the country.

Environmental measures was also highlighted in this research study as important when thinking about enhancing or developing new circus buildings, which is also reflected in the Spatial Policy.

- Further, we want to see a strategic and sustainable approach to future capital programmes for the arts that is informed by identified needs and reflects the Government's Climate Adaption policy.

<sup>10</sup>[https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts\\_in\\_Ireland/Local\\_arts/AC\\_Spatial\\_Policy\\_English\\_Final\\_Web.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts_in_Ireland/Local_arts/AC_Spatial_Policy_English_Final_Web.pdf)

### *The Arts Council's International Policy*

The Arts Council's recently launched International Policy<sup>11</sup> has two relevant policy actions under The Artist and Developing Capacity.

#### The Artist

- Facilitate access to professional development opportunities abroad and foster the consolidation of international relationships.

#### Developing capacity

- In partnership with others deliver a range of initiatives aimed at the upskilling and professional development of the arts sector.

There are many good examples of international circus buildings, such as La Central Del Circ and La Grainerie. Visits from some of the circus building based organisations and associated local authorities could be beneficial from a professional development and advocacy perspective.

### *The Arts Council's Equality Human Rights and Diversity policy*

The Arts Council's EHRD Policy<sup>12</sup> commits to placing equality, human rights and diversity at the heart of the Arts Council's operational and strategic plans.

The following action is important in ensuring that equality and diversity is embedded in the approach for developing any circus building infrastructure, such as developing access measures to encourage wider audiences and artists from underrepresented backgrounds.

#### Spatial and Demographic Actions

- Make equality and diversity a key focal point of the Arts Council's strategic partnership with Local Government.

### *Project Ireland 2040*

Project Ireland 2040 is the government's long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all of its people.<sup>13</sup>

In their National Development Plan 2021 - 2030 in Chapter 8: Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities under heading Invest in Cultural Regional Infrastructure they make reference to a flexible cultural infrastructure as follows.

- Flexible cultural infrastructure – recent research has highlighted the need for flexible cultural spaces that can meet a broad range of local cultural demands including for presentation, performance or production activities.

Demand for flexible or multiple use spaces for different circus arts was a significant need identified in our research. The specialist nature of circus arts needs to be clearly communicated and advocated for at government level.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/International%20Arts%20Policy%202022.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/EHRD%20Policy%20English%20version%20Final.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/580a9d-project-2040-documents/>

In Project 2040's Capital Project and Programme Delivery Capability Review Report for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Supporting Excellence there is a strong focus on professional development. They make reference that some Delivery Entities in certain sectors, including culture:

*“ have not historically had a large volume of capital Programme delivery responsibility, the level of development of the Programme delivery professionals within these Entities is less mature than those sectors with specialist Delivery Entities who have developed their professionals through sustained investment Programmes (e.g. TII, NTA, IW, OPW). “*

They propose a number of potential solutions to Ireland's capability challenges such as:

- Leadership development programmes
- Industry specific learning and development programme
- Industry specific recruitment programme
- Facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration
- Facilitating a culture of collaboration

These are all highly relevant to needs identified by the circus sector in our research, particularly those running circus building based organisations.

## 9 Conclusion and summary recommendations

### 9.1 Summary recommendations

Considering the key themes and alignment with various policies highlighted in the last section it is recommended that the Arts Council prioritises the following actions under Making Great Art Work areas:

#### *The Artist*

- **Advocate internally and externally for the rights and needs of circus artists** for more accessible, suitable, safe and secure circus building based infrastructure.
- **Communicate the specialist nature and needs of circus arts** to relevant government bodies

#### *Public Engagement*

- **Ensure that circus building based organisations consider facilities for children and young people** in the adaptation/development of new buildings
- **Ensure the needs of diverse audiences and communities**, particularly those less represented in the arts, are carefully considered in the adaptation and development of any circus building infrastructure.

#### *Investment Strategy*

- **Allocation of sufficient Arts Council funds** to sustain a core number of national circus building based infrastructures
- **Work closely with the Department** to develop an optimum circus building based infrastructure for the future, particularly in priority regions identified

#### *Spatial and Demographic planning*

- **Partner with local authorities and the circus sector** to encourage wider regional spread of circus building based infrastructure
- **Encourage cross-agency partnering** with the circus community to develop more sustainable circus building based infrastructure
- **Support more regional and rural Arts Centres** to provide suitable facilities for circus artists

#### *Building Capacity*

- **Provide additional sectoral staffing training and development supports** to improve governance and resilience within the circus sector ready for capital development projects
- **Expand international mobility opportunities** for the circus building based sector and potential partners to enhance circus building knowledge and networks
- **Continue to provide supports for circus artists** of all stages of their careers, enabling them to flourish and build sustainable pathways

### 9.2 Conclusion

Ireland has a small number of circus training and creation spaces, primarily concentrated in the West, Mid-West, South West and wider Dublin regions. These spaces have been established by pioneering and dedicated members of the circus community as a direct response to the country's lack of purpose built buildings specifically for circus. Financial investment in capital infrastructure has been very modest and adhoc to date and this combined with insecure tenancies for some and the high cost of insurance has made for an extremely challenging environment to operate in at times.

All circus building based organisations are committed to continuously improving their facilities. For example, the Irish Aerial Creation Centre are in the process of implementing considerable

improvements to their existing building as well as ambitious longer term plans developed through a partnership based model. However for others their planned improvements are short-term measures as the limitations of their spaces mean it is difficult to fully realise their aspirations to fully meet the needs of the circus sector.

Feedback from the circus sector for this research study found that 75% of survey respondents said that the existing buildings they use for circus training or creation activities either partially or don't meet their needs. Many reported having to use a diverse range of spaces from arts centres to village halls, with significant numbers having to train at home. The growth of both professional and community based circus in recent years means that existing circus spaces are not always available or near enough for many circus artists to regularly train in. Circus is a strenuous and physically demanding activity that can involve close contact with others and use of specialist apparatus. Therefore safe working conditions are critical. Some of the needs highlighted by the survey fall under quite basic safety requirements, in particular the need for warmer and properly insulated spaces.

This research study also identified a whole range of sectoral needs that are crucial for enabling circus to properly develop and flourish as an artform, to support all career stages of circus artists and raise production standards. Such needs identified includes rigging suitable for apparatus/practice, buildings with multiple spaces for dedicated training or rehearsal/creation activities including production ready facilities, higher ceilings for aerial based work and more space that could support some of the lesser developed areas of circus arts, such as teeterboard or Chinese pole. The look and feel of spaces for circus are also important and should be welcoming to all sections of the community and conducive to creativity.

Circus is now at a crossroads in Ireland; whereby despite welcome increased investment from the Arts Council for artistic development and public engagement activities in the last two years, the lack of adequate circus building infrastructure will seriously hamper the development of the artform. Ireland is considerably falling behind many European countries in terms of circus building based infrastructure, with a significant minority of Irish circus artists basing themselves overseas to avail of better facilities. 70% of those survey respondents either partially or fully based abroad, agreed that:

*"I would be more likely to base myself in Ireland if suitable circus spaces were available for training and creation."*

There will continue to be a drain of circus talent, if proper support is not provided. Undoubtedly circus has been the poor relation of arts building infrastructure until now, with no major capital funding awards allocated for circus. However, to properly support the development of circus building infrastructure will take a holistic, partnership focused approach, involving a variety of different supports as highlighted by one survey recipient:

*It will take a while for Ireland to get there but is ESSENTIAL is that there is a circus space in all the larger cities (Dublin, Galway, Cork, Limerick plus supported access for rural communities) with a healthy eco-system of artists' supports, community participation, youth circus development (next generation) and professional infrastructures to support this (producers, managers, technicians, makers etc.). Irish circus sector doesn't only need space but it needs employment for current and future artists and circus professionals and, for this, we need this whole ecosystem."*

The development of a new Arts Council Circus Policy is very timely in ensuring that the Arts Council plays a key role in advocating, communicating, partnering and supporting such plans to make a properly sustainable, accessible, safe and thriving circus sector.

## 10 Appendices

### 10.1 List of appendices

- 10.2 Technical specification for the development of Circus Buildings
- 10.3 Further details on Circus Building Infrastructure in Ireland
- 10.4 Further details on international Circus Building Infrastructure
- 10.6 Acknowledgements

## 10.2 Technical specification for the development of Circus Buildings

### 10.2.i Overview

This information is designed to guide local authorities with regards to circus building infrastructure needs. It is based on extensive consultation with the circus sector in Ireland regarding their needs through this research study and comparison of well-designed examples of circus creation and training spaces in Europe.

There needs to be detailed consideration of physical, health and safety and aesthetic requirements in order to create the best possible functioning space. Atmosphere conducive to creativity is very important and a balance between function and aesthetics are also critical considerations so that spaces are not overly sterile.

This Technical Appendix is not designed as a standalone document and any development of buildings needs to be in careful collaboration with the circus community in the identified local authority region from the beginning and through the development process. Some members of the circus community also emphasised the potential of partnerships in developing new spaces, that might host a number of other related fields such as community social enterprise organisations, street arts/spectacle and/or urban sports groups.

In addition to an architect and other specialised building personnel, using an established and industry recognised company specialising in circus rigging as a consultant throughout the process would be essential.<sup>14</sup>

### 10.2.ii The site

#### Site area

Site size is an important consideration, to allow for both room sizes of sufficient scale and to factor in where further building development and other facilities may be required.

- Based on La Central del Circ, La Grainerie and 101 Greenham Outdoor Arts an internal building size of between 2000 - 3000 square metres would allow for optimum multiple spaces and facilities as indicated in section 10.5.iv
- La Grainerie has a site area of 11,500sqm including its building of 3200sqm

#### Essential needs

- Sufficient outside space to build further infrastructure, particularly for phased building developments in time, e.g later installation of onsite cabin accommodation or accommodate a temporary tent structure such as a big top
- Sufficient outside space for an outdoors practice/performance area, for example, fire based shows, to include a hard ground area within this

<sup>14</sup> Example specialist rigging company: <http://highperformanceproductions.net/index.html>

- Sufficient outside space for on-site parking for cars and larger vehicles such as trucks
- Artist able to bring caravans/mobile homes to sleep in overnight, where onsite or nearby accommodation not provided
- Accessible to vehicles that need a loading bay, including large trucks
- Secure bicycle parking

### 10.2.iii Location considerations

#### Essential needs

- Good public transport links nearby, ideally with some transport links to other towns/cities
- Good street lighting
- In a safe area for staff, artists and members of the public, particularly when leaving at night time
- At a reasonable distance to domestic properties so they have not impacted by any noise regarding vehicles or outdoors practice

#### Desirable needs

- Near enough to shops/other amenities such as cafes

### 10.2.iv General building considerations

#### Building infrastructure/design

##### Essential needs

- Efficient, quickly responsive and eco-friendly HVAC system that can be controlled locally to maintain a temperature of 21°C and not exceed between 18.3- 24°C is recommended by Equity and One Dance UK<sup>15</sup>
- High levels of thermal insulation and sound insulation both externally, to minimise noise from neighbouring businesses and internally between different spaces
- Rooms need to be acoustically treated to reduce the echo and reverb of large scales
- Ease of access for get-in and get out of equipment
- Adequate storage for regular artists attending classes or training
- Adequate storage for visiting companies/artists
- Lift in buildings more than one storey that is large enough for circus apparatus
- Available Wifi/broadband in all areas
- Security: comprehensive CCTV and an alarm system with panic stations and 24 hour monitoring. CCTV should be high resolution digital recording. All public areas which lead to backstage areas should have high grade keypad locks (or swipe-card entry systems)<sup>16</sup>

##### Desirable needs

- Lockers

#### Systems and facilities

##### Essential needs

- Ease of booking and available hours to use

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.equity.org.uk/media/3067/fit\\_to\\_dance\\_space\\_charter.pdf](https://www.equity.org.uk/media/3067/fit_to_dance_space_charter.pdf)

<sup>16</sup>

[https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts\\_in\\_Ireland/Venues/Building\\_issues/TheatreForum\\_guidelines\\_arts\\_venues.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts_in_Ireland/Venues/Building_issues/TheatreForum_guidelines_arts_venues.pdf)

- Experienced and trained venue staff

#### *Desirable needs*

- 24 hour access for members

### **10.2.v Creation and training facilities**

Circus facilities need to be a specially adapted or purpose built building designed specifically for circus training and creation, bearing in mind the different circus disciplines and types of activities it will need to cater for.

All circus and rigging equipment needs to be in good condition, rigged correctly and easy to access, for example, pulley points. All equipment should be regularly maintained, inspected and annually certified with proper inductions and good safety protocols. For example, Lunge belts and safety lines for when learning or performing dynamic, swinging or flying aerial arts.

#### **Essential facilities for training**

If only one training space is possible then it needs to be flexible with aerial, wall and ground rigging points. Ideally circus buildings need to have multiple rooms for regular training activities and masterclasses, properly separated to allow sound proofing. These would be one for aerial and wall work and another for more floor based activities such as acrobatics, Cyr Wheel and trampoline. The following facilities are recommended:

- The suggested optimum room size would be between 300 – 600 square metres and with unobstructed aerial rigging points at least 10m high
- The floor would ideally be a sprung wooden floor covered with a Marley dance floor
- In addition dedicated acrobatic mats and crash mats should be available for this space
- Plenty of options for different anchor points, for example, flexible ground anchors to support different acro forms and funambulism
- Sufficient space for trampoline (sunk into the floor), Teeterboard and Cyr Wheel
- Foam pits for training dynamics and different circus arts
- Mirrors along one wall with access to changing rooms and showers
- The space should have access to natural light and have the ability to be blacked out
- The design of lighting in these spaces should ensure that users are not affected by glare
- Storage rooms for equipment and other apparatus
- If space allows, enough clear height for swinging trapeze

#### **Essential facilities for creation activities**

This space would primarily be for getting shows production ready and to share with test audiences but would also need to be flexible to allow it to be used for training.

- The room should be 300 – 400 sqm to allow for a stage area of 20m wide and 10m deep with space for a motorized retractable seating rake and a technical control area
- The seating rake should be able to accommodate 100 - 200 people and be retractable to free up more space when not needed
- The space should be at least 10m high
- Separate entrances for an audience to access the seating and performers to access the stage from dressing rooms should be provided. The number of audience entrances will be determined by the capacity of the seating.
- The stage area flooring should be a sprung wooden floor which can continue under the seating system with the appropriate reinforcement under the wheel runs
- In addition dedicated acrobatic mats, crash mats and Marley dance floor for this space should be available
- All floors must be able to take the weight of any access equipment required for work at height
- To allow for full technical rehearsals of a circus work prior to touring to theatres, a minimum of 4 motorized lighting bars would be required over the 'stage' and a further 2 bars would be needed over the 'seating area'

- A stock of both fixed and moving LED theatre lights, a theatre quality sound system and a high quality laser video projector with adequate lumens for the space would need to be supplied
- 2 x Dressing rooms with showers and capacity for large casts, and allowing separation according to age/sex of cast members, should be accessed at the back of the stage area<sup>17</sup>
- The room should be sound proofed, have access to daylight and the ability to be fully blacked out
- The design of the working light in these spaces should ensure that users are not affected by glare
- The acoustics of the space should be designed to offset the effects of the size of the room
- Storage rooms for technical and company set and equipment should be adjacent to this space
- In addition to the permanent electrical supply for the spaces lighting and sound systems, a 125amp 3phase power supply for lighting and a separate 63amp single phase supply for incoming sound equipment should be installed
- Access for large equipment and sets would be required

#### **Essential facilities for rehearsals, residencies and masterclasses**

These would be studio space type rooms that can be used for rehearsals, circus development activities such as smaller residencies and masterclasses. It is recommended that at least one studio space should be included in the plans.

- A space in the region of 70 – 90 square metres with a height of 7.5m
- The floor should be a sprung wooden floor
- In addition dedicated acrobatic mats, crash mats and Marley dance floor for this space should be available
- The space(s) should be equipped with aerial and ground rigging points, mirrored wall and an integrated sound system
- Sound proofing and access to daylight, with the ability to create a blackout should be included
- The acoustic design of the space should offset any effects of the size of the room
- Access to the studios should allow reasonably large equipment to be brought in and storage for crash mats and other equipment should adjoin each studio
- A dedicated technical store room should also be provided for equipment and consumables

#### **Essential storage considerations**

To cater for the wide range of circus based practice a large amount of technical equipment is required, such as crash mats, tight wire apparatus, trampolines and access equipment.

- Adequate storage with good access to the relevant spaces is essential and will need to be designed with consultation with the circus community
- This should factor in potential expansion of numbers of users and breadth of practice
- In addition to a technical storeroom, general storage for individual members equipment and resident and visiting companies will need to be provided
- The size and location of these spaces will be determined by the users' requirements but again expansion of these requirements should be factored into the initial design

#### *Desirable facilities*

##### Workshop/fabrication room:

- A space for the creation and maintenance of sets and equipment
- This should be a minimum of 300sqm floor area with 6m high ceiling

<sup>17</sup>

[https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts\\_in\\_Ireland/Venues/Building\\_issues/TheatreForum\\_guidelines\\_arts\\_venues.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts_in_Ireland/Venues/Building_issues/TheatreForum_guidelines_arts_venues.pdf)

- It should house both wood and metal working equipment, have sufficient power for these tools, good lighting and adequate heating/ventilation
- Large doors to a parking area/loading bay should allow access for raw materials and finished pieces
- It would be beneficial if an outdoor space was adjacent to allow fabrication of larger pieces

#### Outdoor practice area:

- Possibly doubling as additional car parking space this space would ideally accommodate a touring big top and be used for outdoors specific performance based work, for example, using fire
- To install sunken rigging points in multiple areas for flexible rigging of equipment/smaller circus tents/big tops

#### Costume room:

- A space for washing, drying and storing costumes, the space should have sufficient power, access to daylight and good working light

#### Additional support services

- Small side rooms or booths for physiotherapy, weight training, gym etc

#### Other changing rooms/showers for rehearsal /studio spaces

#### Green Room

- This room is for artists to relax with lounge type facilities, e.g. comfy chairs and a table

### 10.2.vi Front of house, foyer and public spaces

The design of the front of house, foyer and public spaces are crucial to creating a welcoming atmosphere, conducive to people being able to meet others and feel included.

#### Essential facilities

- Male, female and unisex toilets
  - o Should be fully accessible
  - o Should include baby changing facilities
- Community kitchen with microwave and communal dining facilities for large groups
- Changing rooms and showers for others using training and studio facilities

#### Desirable facilities

- Hot desks
- Circus library of resources

Facilities for children and young people. This is especially if Young People, Children and Education activities are a considerable part of a centre's building. If space permits it is recommended there should be:

- Additional dedicated changing rooms for children and young people
- A child friendly hang out space

Otherwise, careful programme scheduling can minimise between adults and children.

### 10.2.vii Access

Any newly developed circus training and creation centre should be fully accessible for people of all abilities.

- Wheelchair users and people with limited mobility should be easily able to access all areas of the centre and enjoy easy access to all services
- This includes any seating areas for audiences, stages, back of house and control rooms
- Hearing loops installed in various locations, including foyer, creation space, training space and studios
- To aid the vision impaired the building should be designed with good colour contrast in choice of materials particularly relating to floors, steps ramps and signage
- Clear signage of sufficient size incorporating Braille should be provided in all areas
- The capability to provide audio description of all performances should be available<sup>18</sup>
- A designated sensory rooms or quiet space where people with autism can use to stim or retreat to when feeling overstimulated
- This can be either in a dedicated room or in a particular corner of a room and should be low light rooms with comfortable chairs and objects for calming, distraction<sup>19</sup>

## 10.3 Further details on Circus Building Infrastructure in Ireland

### 10.3.i Overview

The team made visits and met with seven circus building based organisations. These organisations are all funded by the Arts Council in some capacity; Cork Circus Factory, Circus Gerbola, Dublin Circus Project, Duffy's Circus, Galway Community Circus, Irish Aerial Creation Centre (IACC) and Taking Flight.

### 10.3.ii Circus Factory

Circus Factory is a contemporary circus training and creation space in Cork city and a regional hub for South West Ireland. They provide a regular education and training programme along with professional development opportunities for artists and rehearsal facilities.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/74193/appendix\\_3\\_Threatre-Brief.pdf](https://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/74193/appendix_3_Threatre-Brief.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <https://asiam.ie/about-autism/sensory-space/#:~:text=Sensory%20rooms%20or%20quiet%20spaces,%2Dorganization%20and%20sensory%2Dmanagement>

<sup>20</sup> <https://circusfactorycork.com/>



**Circus Factory training and creation space. Photo: Claire Keogh.**

Circus Factory (CF) have been in their present building, a converted commercial warehouse space since 2017, with a recently renewed four years and nine month lease. They are located in the industrial docklands area of Cork city with no nearby public transport; large parts of which are in the process of being demolished and replaced with substantial office developments.

The building has a total floor space of 252m<sup>2</sup> with 108m<sup>2</sup> covered with matting for training. There are 21 aerial points, three ground based points, a permanently rigged Chinese pole and a portable tight wire. The rigging points are fixed 8 metres at the apex of the building and then lower down at 5.2 metres. There is a basic sound system and a lighting system with a lighting desk, 18 LED fixtures and a Tungsten follow spot. The floor is concrete overlaid with a mix of mats and marley dance floor.

There is one main space for all activities. This severely restricts the centre's ability to run classes and offer a professional training space. Heating is an additional cost and with no insulation in the main part of the building it can be very challenging to keep the building sufficiently warm, particularly in the colder months. The team are mindful that the building will not be their long term home and are considering improvements that can be taken out when the time comes.

### 10.3.iii Circus Gerbola

Circus Gerbola tours traditional circus entertainment with a theatrical and contemporary twist for a nine month season across Ireland. It aims to reach smaller rural communities and cities where larger circuses are unable to go thus have no access to live circus performance.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> <https://circusgerbola.ie/>



**Circus Gerbola rehearsal and practise space. Photo: Nick Bradshaw.**

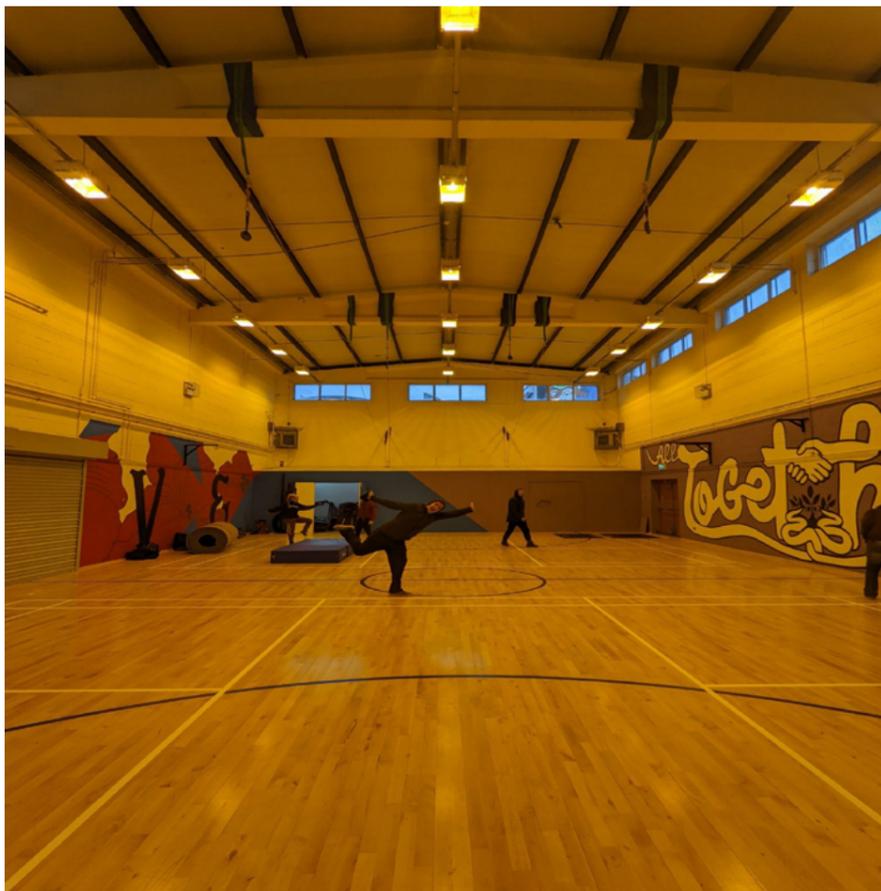
Circus Gerbola own a purpose built shed on their family owned land in Ardracran in Navan, Co. Meath. The space is in a rural area with limited access to public transport; the closest bus stop is a 25 minute walk away. There is ample room for parking. At present there is no heating, insulation or sound proofing although there is access to power and lighting.

The 20m<sup>2</sup> space is all on ground level. The surface is gravel at present with no matting but there are plans to upgrade this to a wooden floor. The building is 10 metres high and aerial rigging is flexible depending on the company's needs. At the moment it is one open space which is used for set building, storage and training. It is hoped that a separate space would be built to accommodate storage, changing rooms, toilets and kitchen facilities. There is no permanent theatrical lighting or sound system installed, although when not touring Circus Gerbola's equipment would be available.

### 10.3.iv Dublin Circus Project

Dublin Circus Project is a non-profit, member-based organisation working to bring the Circus Arts to life in Dublin and beyond by: building awareness, providing a dedicated training centre, offering adult and youth circus education, and hosting circus events and performances in Dublin.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> <https://dublincircusproject.com/>



**Dublin Circus Project training and creation space**

Dublin Circus Project is located in a Dublin City Council owned community building Cherry Orchard Community Centre in the suburbs of Dublin 10, near to the M50. It has excellent public transport links. Whilst they are currently working to a yearly renewable lease they have an excellent relationship with the council and centre staff. Heating, electricity, maintenance and cleaning costs are included in their monthly rent. The space and offices are well heated.

The space is one open 120m<sup>2</sup> space. It has an 8 metre high ceiling with 4 rigging points off 2 beams at 7 metres high. The floor is a new wooden floor and DCP have mats, jigsaw matting and rolls of dance floor.

They are in the process of upgrading their Aerial equipment. At present there are no ground based points, but there are plans to put in 3 points for Chinese pole and tight wire. The 4 aerial points are on pulleys and any other rigging is done with a hired in scissors lift. DCP have no sound system and own 4 theatre lights but there is no means of rigging these in the space at present.

### 10.3.v Duffy's Circus

Duffy's Circus are a family run organisation with a legacy of over 170 years. Every year they develop and present a new production to rural and urban audiences across the island of Ireland. They also encourage artist development and creativity by mentoring, training, exposure to and collaboration with a diverse group of creatives drawn from a global pool of circus professionals.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.duffycircus.com/>



**Duffy's Circus creation and training space. Photo: Stephanie Duffy.**

Duffy's Circus' space is located in Bohermeen, Navan, Co. Meath and was built on the family's land, beginning in 2000. The space is in a rural area of Navan with public transport limited to a weekly Local Link bus service. There is a massive area for parking and the grounds have been designed to accommodate a large group of caravans with 16amp power points and sewerage. There is no heating but there is 3 phase power, lighting and a fully insulated ceiling.

The space available is comprised of three purpose built sheds, one a 300m<sup>2</sup> for training and creation/rehearsals, the others are a 150m<sup>2</sup> space for storage and a 100m<sup>2</sup> stables. The main space has a ring to match the company's big top ring and a height of 9 metres. Aerial rigging is flexible depending on the company's needs. At present there are 8 aerial points. There are 2 ground rigging points for wire work and Chinese pole. The flooring is at present a mixture of concrete and a silica sand filled central ring, originally used for training horses. The company's extensive lighting and sound equipment is available when not on tour.

### 10.3.vi Galway Community Circus

Galway Community Circus (GCC) is Ireland's flagship organisation for youth and social circus, located in Galway City with a local, national and international remit. In addition to their Youth Circus and Social Circus programmes they offer adult circus classes and an artform development programme.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.galwaycommunitycircus.com/>



Galway Community Circus main training and practise space. Photo: Anita Murphy.

GCC have been in their present premises, a 45 year old church owned community centre since 2004. They have worked with the building trustee and have secured multiple funding streams to bring the building back from almost dereliction. Both electricity and heating costs are included in the rent. The Hall space is heated by a newly installed oil fuelled suspended blower acquired by Galway Community Circus to minimise the risk of injury to participants and performers working in a previously bitter cold space. The rest of the building remains uninsulated with inadequate heating. The building is 15 minutes' walk from the centre of Galway and on a bus route.

The centre has two spaces. The main space is 272m<sup>2</sup> and 7.2m at its highest. The smaller space is 50m<sup>2</sup> and 2.5 metres high. There are 23 aerial rigging points, 2 floor points for tight wire and 3 for Chinese pole in the main space. There are 12 aerial points in the smaller room. In the main space the Circus has reached their full capacity and must leave the remainder of available space for other community usage. The second space is of limited use. This limited and capped usage of available space hinders the growth and development of the organisation. The centre has a sound system and lighting system with a desk, 15 LED lights and 2 trusses for rigging. The floor is timber but not sprung.

There is a council owned outside space available for training through the submission and successful outcomes of permits for each and every action of use for this space. With successful applications the field can be utilised with concrete rigging points and space for the Galway Community Circus' 40 diameter big top to be erected.

### 10.3.vii Irish Aerial Creation Centre

Irish Aerial Creation Centre (IACC) is Ireland's first purpose-fitted space for aerial dance and also home to its founders Fidget Feet Aerial Dance Company. Professional development opportunities are provided through residencies, classes, workshops and performance opportunities. IACC houses the first intensive professional programme for aerialists in the country and is a home for creativity in aerial circus on an international scale.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> <https://irishaerialcreationcentre.com/>



Irish Aerial Creation Centre training space. Photo: Jym Daly.

IACC has been located in a 1970's converted factory in a large industrial estate since 2015. The estate is also home to a climbing centre, The National Kart Centre and a children's soft play space. They have a 21 year commercial lease and a very good relationship with their landlord. They are near to the Limerick/Clare border in County Clare. The centre has no public transport links and the nearest bus route is 20 minutes' walk at University of Limerick (UL) campus. However it is likely that expansion on the UL campus in the land close to IACC will lead to new roads and bus route extension.

Heating charges are additional and are provided by two new gas blowers. There is currently only insulation in the roof of the building. The training space is open plan but divided into two areas. The main training area is 25 metres x 12 metres with thick matting laid on concrete. The professional making space is 12 metres x 15 metres with a layer of jigsaw matting sandwiched between two layers of Marley dance floor.

The space is 8.5 metres high. The centre has 27 aerial rigging points accessed by a scissors lift which all members of staff are trained to use. There are currently 5 wall dancing points. There are no rigging points for Chinese pole. When not being used on tour Fidget Feet's sound system is available to users of the space. There is no theatrical lighting at present.

It is planned that over the course of 2022 and 2023 the centre will go through a major upgrade. The walls and ceiling will be insulated in a major refit/re-design of the space. There will also be new storage, lockers, studio space, a larger kitchen, a concertina wall to separate two spaces, extra office space, a sprung wooden floor for professional creation space plus extra dance wall points.

### 10.3.viii Taking Flight

Taking Flight is dedicated to building communities through the provision of high-quality circus arts education and performance opportunities.<sup>26</sup> They deliver classes, workshops, private lessons and consultancy in floor and aerial acrobatics, act creation and all things circus arts related.<sup>27</sup>



Taking Flight training space

Taking Flight have been in their present premises, a converted carpet warehouse on a former industrial estate since 2017. The space is in a former industrial estate that also houses a Yoga space and a café. Their lease arrangement is on a 4 year, 9 month lease and in 2022 they were renewing the lease on the same basis. They are good terms with their landlord and have recently taken over an adjoining space in addition to their present one (further details below) They are located on the edge of Dublin centre by the Royal Canal. The centre has excellent public transport links and has two dedicated parking spaces.

Heating is an additional cost and they are planning to install a more efficient heating system. The building is heated via a combination of a diesel powered air blower and large ceiling fan that distributes the heat. The roof and walls are uninsulated (the roof is of asbestos construction).

The centre has one 320m<sup>2</sup> space for training. The floor is concrete covered with matting. The pitched roof means that rigging points vary in height from 5.5 metres to 4.2 metres. The centre has 36 aerial points, 32 of which are pulley points. There are two double anchor points for ground rigging. There is a basic theatrical lighting system in place including a lighting desk, projector, cameras and basic in-house sound system. There is no blackout achievable or sound proofing and the lease includes a requirement for noise to stop at 10pm.

<sup>26</sup> <https://culturenight.ie/event/taking-flight-education-performance-aerial-circus-cabaret/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.takingflight.ie/>

In March 2022 Taking Flight acquired an additional space of 80sqm next door to their main premises. They have divided the space into an office, green room and classroom. The remaining space will be used to store all of their equipment and also houses an additional accessible toilet. They have installed a ramp and will be fitting toilet aids i.e. support rails and an emergency pull cord alarm. These two new spaces can be directly accessed from the studio. They have also replaced the studio doors with double glass frameless doors which meet emergency exit regulations. These improvements bring them a step closer to having a dedicated performance space.

### 10.4 Further details on international Circus Building Infrastructure examples

#### 10.4.i La Central Del Circ - Barcelona, Catalonia

With facilities to train in all circus disciplines, La Central Del Circ Creation Centre is sited in a highly accessible location by the sea in Barcelona. It is situated in old converted warehouse in a disused shipyard as part of an urban regeneration project. Established in 2008 its first home was a big top tent. It moved into its current building in 2011.



It uses sustainable light diffusing materials to provide a calm, neutral space to promote concentration and privacy - attributes needed when training for circus. Its floor space covers over 3,500 sqm. There are 6 separate spaces including a shared multiple skilled training space, 650 sqm with a height of 8.7m; a warm-up space 125 sqm; four multiple creative spaces between 66sqm and 170sqm; a soundproofed Scenery Practice Space, 222sqm with 7.2m height with rigging, sound, lighting and movable seating to host a guest audience; a 71sqm sound-proofed music room for music rehearsals and a multi-purpose room with a window through to the training space for skills observation.

All are open 10am to 8pm Monday to Friday. The development programme is a 'laboratory' research process enabling artists to generate new work with financial support and free access to the space.



They connect artists to the wider Catalan and Castilian sector with local and international networking opportunities and offer creative and practical support from the seeding of an idea through to production then onwards to touring on a local, national and international level. They are run by The Association of Circus Professionals of Catalonia funded by the region, the council and the Ministry of Culture, it forms part of the network *Fàbriques de Creació de l'Institut de Cultura de Barcelona*, which generates spaces to develop creative projects for artists, recognising contemporary circus as one of the city's strategic arts.

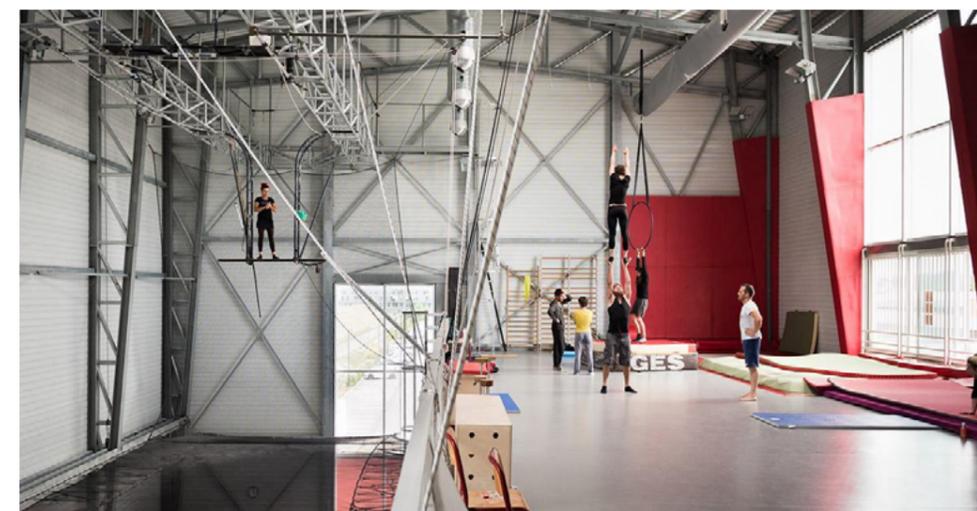


For more details on the facilities and rooms see <https://lacentraldelcirc.cat/la-central-del-circ/lloguer-despais-per-empreses/>

#### 10.4.ii La Grainerie - Toulouse, France



A purpose built training, creation and development centre on the outskirts of Toulouse with 13 spaces, it includes a large fully equipped training space, 275sqm with 3 designated circus discipline areas; a creation studio, 207sqm with 80 seats for work in progress presentations; 4 small dedicated training spaces, fully equipped with a height of 7.5m from 68sqm to 91sqm; a fabrication studio; a presentation auditorium with raked seating (230 seats) for rehearsals, works-in-progress and sharing performances; meeting rooms; a large outdoor space for street circus and hard ground for a circus tent; an indoor area wrapping around the other spaces for exhibitions and informal meeting areas and a cafe.



Professional development and international collaborations are built into strands of activity, closely connected to the Lido Circus School, one of the three professional Circus Schools in France accredited with BA equivalent status.



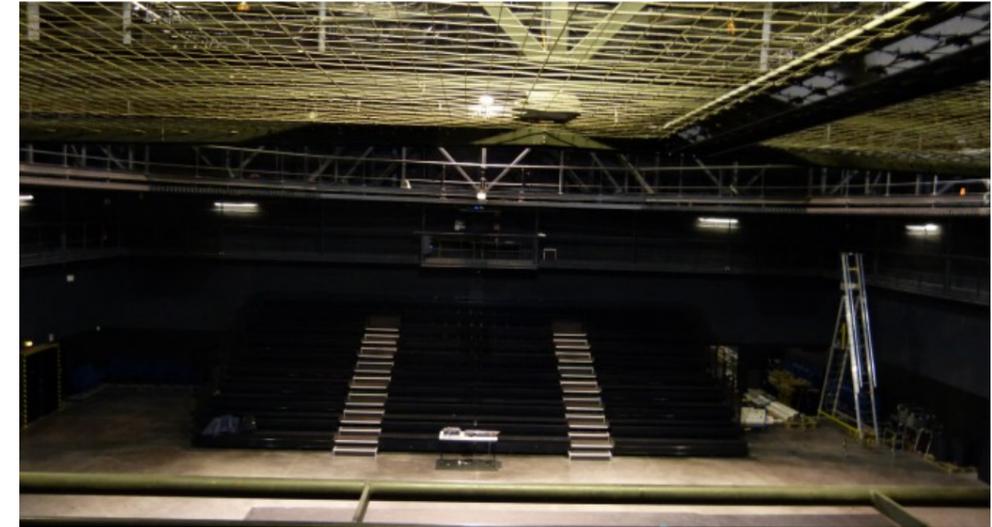
La Grainerie is part of the Territoire du Cirque Network (further details on this network in section 6.6.ii). It is funded by the Regional Council The Mayor's office, Ministry of Culture, Creative Europe and Erasmus funding, rolling trusts and foundations and a private philanthropic donations programme. For more details <https://la-grainerie.net/lieu-de-fabrique/espaces/>

#### 10.4.iii La Brèche - Cherbourg, France



La Brèche is sited on a piece of waste land between a shipping container park, an abattoir and a social housing estate. It was built to regenerate the area in 2006 after the establishment of a Centre for Circus Arts for the Basse-Normandie region in 2000. It is a creation space for residencies and presentations specifically - no training space - in 3 purpose built spaces with accommodation, a kitchen and space for extra caravans.

It has a fully rigged creation space over 900sqm with a 30m x 30m square concrete floor (wooden portable flooring is available for flexible staging), a peripheral 5m high walkway and overhead grill provides optimum rigging opportunities, fixed anchor points are positioned (sunk) every 3 metres in the floor. Fully equipped with lighting and sound enable full technical rehearsals and concertina seating for 250 and there is a rehearsal studio 100m2 with 9m height and fully equipped rigging facilities.



Outside on hard ground is a wooden circular tent shaped structure of 24m diameters, stage area 13m diameter and 9m height, seating for 450. The tent was installed in 2002 at the end of a site-specific production. It is difficult to heat so is not used in the winter.

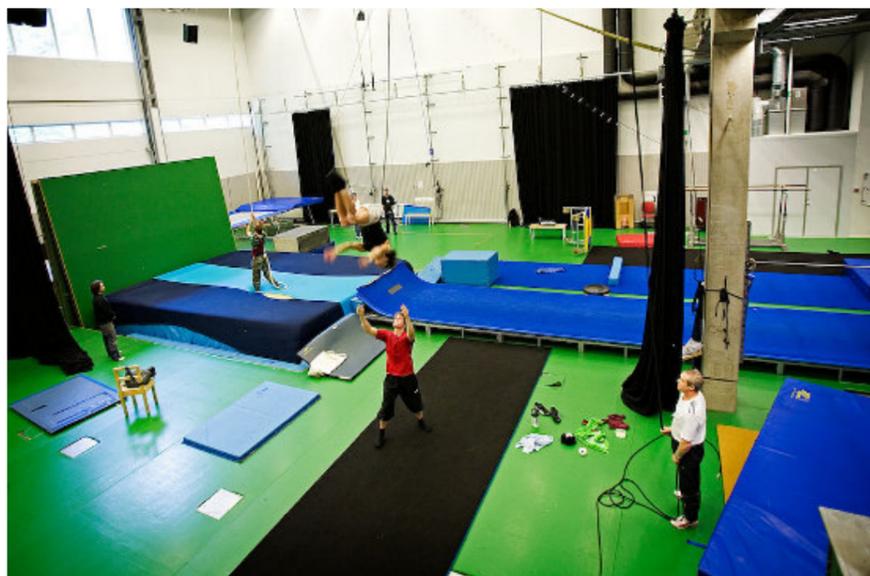
From the beginning local communities have been integrated into the activities, regularly invited to 'work in progress' and feedback sessions plus they make up a large volunteer team for festivals and events. A cook prepares meals for the artists in residence with a small canteen set up.

They are one of the 14 Pôle National des Arts du Cirque and part of the Territoire du Cirque Network. Funded by the City Council, the Regional Department, ONDA and the Ministry of Culture.

For more details on La Brèche see <https://www.labreche.fr/un-lieu-dedie-a-la-creation/espaces-de-travail-et-equipements/>.

#### 10.4.iv Subtopia - Stockholm, Sweden

Subtopia is set in an old lumber yard on the outskirts of Stockholm at the end of a tube line, 45 minutes from the centre of the city. It is a series of converted buildings housing a cluster of organisations that work with arts and creative industries with circus as a focus. The main training centre is housed by Cirk Cirkor, Sweden's best known national circus company, with facilities to train all circus disciplines.



In addition to the training spaces, they have a 388 sqm rehearsal studio, a 54sqm dance studio and a large open space 2,150 sqm hangar/warehouse that can be divided up depending on need. This space hosts creation residencies with the old lumber yard offices converted into 16 single bedrooms (also used as dressing rooms when the space is used as a performance venue), plus a kitchen and 2 bathrooms.



Funded by the City Council and Swedish Arts Council, Subtopia offers support through 'open call' residency programmes, professional development workshops, networking opportunities and funding application support. They also offer opportunities with the international circus festival CirkusMania where artists are paid to work on the day-to-day festival delivery (as ushers, technicians, Front of House etc). They also provide a performance platform and support artists through the Baltic Nordic Circus Network (BNCN). BNCN is a collaborative network of 22 circus arts organisations in the Baltic and Nordic countries. The network works to strengthen the regional collaboration and development of the circus sector.



Closely associated with DOCH, the University of Stockholm's School of Dance & Circus, an academic, pedagogic and practical institution, it connects the undergraduate, Post-graduate and PHD students to the professional world of circus. They are a partner in CircusNext (formerly Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe) an EU circus development programme. For more details see: <https://www.subtopia.se/located-here/circus/>

#### 10.4.v Cirko - Helsinki

Since 2002, Cirko – Center for New Circus has been working to promote and develop contemporary Finnish circus. Cirko is a venue, presenter and artistic development centre. In 2011 they moved into an old converted gas works on the edge of the city, Helsinki's Suvilahti. They have 1,400sqm square metres of office and performance space, custom made for contemporary circus.



There is one empty space 300sqm for general rehearsal, 7 metres height, seating for 300 and fully equipped with lights and sound, blackout facilities and a wooden floor. There is a smaller auditorium with 130 seats, 213sqm, 5.8 metres height, multiple rigging points, dance floor and blackout. Accommodation during residencies is available for 2 people.



Cirko strives to provide circus professionals with a first-class working environment through a year-round residency programme. The residency programme supports around 20 professional contemporary circus artists and groups in their artistic development.



Training facilities from 9am to 3pm weekdays are in the fully equipped Helsinki Circus School in the next building. They also run classes from all ages from babies to adults.

Cirko also houses as social circus organisations Sirkus Magenta and The Finnish Hospital Clowns Association. Besides offices, rehearsal spaces and performance venues, the building houses a restaurant and bar.

They are a member of the Baltic Nordic Circus Network (BNCN) and Circostrada. More details <https://cirko.fi/en/cirko-2/facilities-and-rental/>:

#### 10.4.vi 101 - Newbury Greenham Common UK - The National Centre for Arts in Public Spaces.



101 Outdoor Arts is a creation space and has no training facilities. It is based in a 20,000 square foot warehouse on the former Greenham Common US Airbase. 101 houses one giant and one intimate rehearsal space; 15 purpose built accommodation cabins that can accommodate up to 21 people; a fabrication workshop; large double kitchen and a communal eating and meeting area.



The main space is 12 x 24 metres and the height is 5.5 metres at its apex. It can be blacked out if necessary. They have the ability to rig for aerial work but artists have to bring all their own equipment and provide Health and Safety and insurance documentation. They have a good variety of flooring options with a range of matting solutions.



101 also offers a broad programme of professional development opportunities such as labs, residencies and courses. All residencies are offered free. They offer in the region of 60 two week residencies per year. Additionally, their team are on hand to assist with production advice, administration advice, scratch performances support and more. Run by The Corn Exchange in Newbury, funded by Arts Council England and the local authority.

More details <https://101outdoorarts.com/residencies/facilities-at-101>

## 10.4 Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to all those below for their contribution as well as the anonymous contributors to the sectoral survey.

Emily Aoibheann	Chantal McCormick
Enora Berthou	Susie McDonagh
Dea Birkett	Tara McGowan
Sophia Bikvova	Denise McGrath
Mandy Blinco	Rhona McGrath
Natasha Bourke	Darragh McLoughlin
Jean-Marc Broqua	Elysia McMullen
Freddy Burrows	Lucy Medlycott
Ian Brown	Kate Mitchell
Aoife Carry	Gracie Marshall
Mark Carry	Cormac Mohally
Colm Chan	Ciara Moloughney
Simon Chatterton	John Moran
Rachel Clare	Lisa Moore
Elaine Connolly	Serraut Nelson
Megan Cronin	Lotta Nevalainen
Linda Cullen	Nevi
Izzy Dogliani	Aisling Ní Cheallaigh
David Duffy	Noelle Ni Riagain
Seve Feathers	Ciara O Mahony
Will Flanagan	Siobhan O Malley
Lav Marco Gamundi	Stephaine Pawula
Ines Garcia	Jude Marcus Penders
Henrik Gard	Chloe Pisco
Tara Gerbola	Morag Prunty
Nini Gorzerino	Aoife Raleigh
Flora Herberich	Brian Rafferty
Fiona Hession	Mariana Rampazzo
Michaela Heyer	Édaein Samuels
Mark Hill	Angelica Santander
Ulla Hokkanen	Louisa Sloan
Shane Holohan	Lidija Šola
Katie Joyce Holmes	Dave Spathaky
TV Horan	Stevie Spathaky
Con Horgan	Alexandra Stewart
Laura Ivers	Davide Terlingo
Bruna Jesch	Paul Thompson
Finn Jesch	Jenny Tufts
Helen Keenan	Amanda Usher
Noelle Killius	Jonathan Walsh
Lisette Krol	Archie Williams
Dr Christopher Lester	Jack Wise
Hannah McAdams	Fadi Zmorrod
Tony Mahon	Juliet Zmorrod
Elaine McCague	



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