CFA Strategic Plan 2026—2030

The purpose of this strategy is

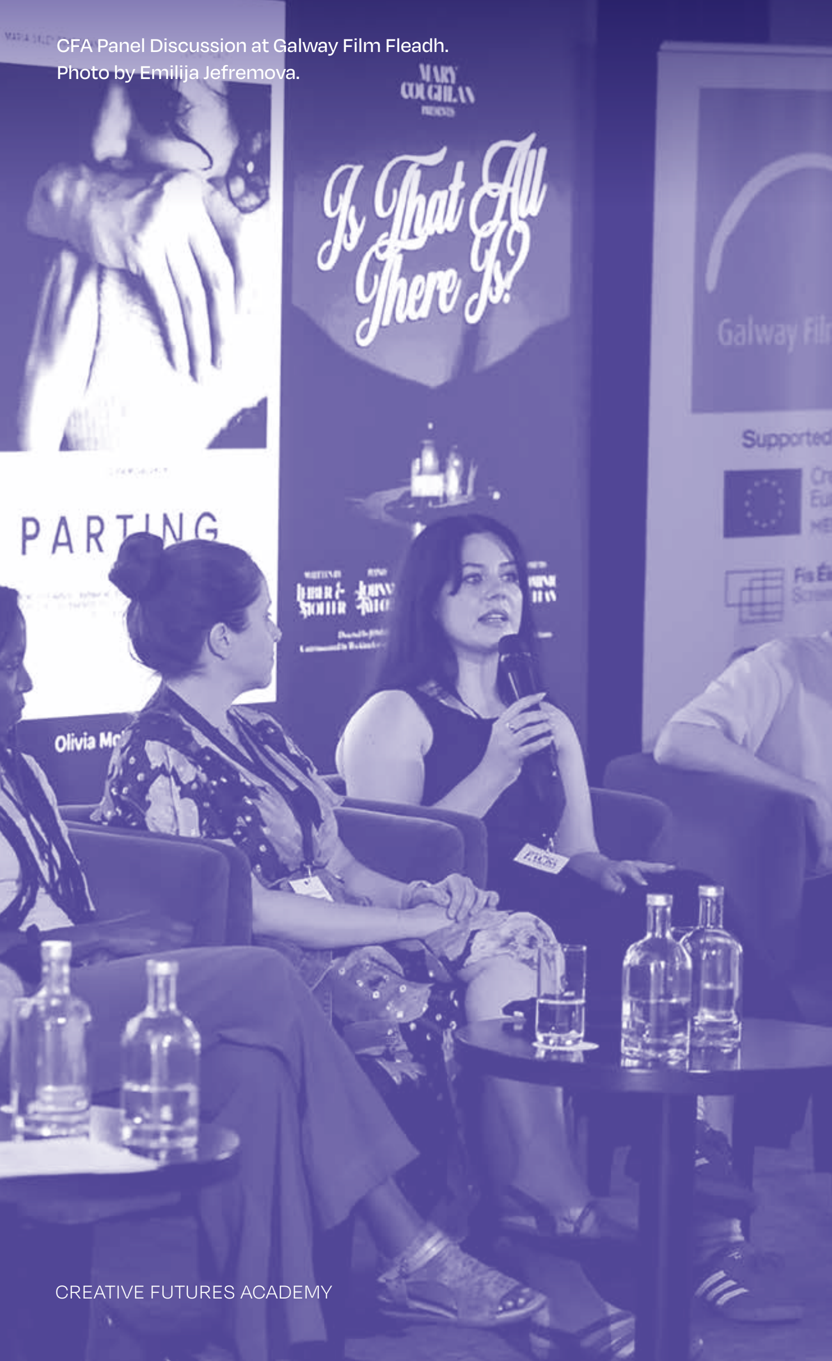
to define CFA's future shared vision,

identify the priority areas of focus,

and outline the key actions required to achieve this vision.

Creative Futures Academy

Immersive Lab at IADT.



CFA Panel Discussion at Galway Film Fleadh.
Photo by Emilija Jefremova.

Creative Futures Academy (CFA) is a dynamic collaboration between its founding partners — the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), University College Dublin (UCD) and the Institute of Art, Design + Technology (IADT) — working in close alliance with industry to meet the evolving and future needs of Ireland's Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI). These industries are a vital contributor to Ireland's social, cultural and economic wellbeing, and central to national ambitions for innovation, sustainability, and inclusion.

Established in 2020 with support from the *Human Capital Initiative (2020–2025)*, CFA has transformed pedagogical infrastructures, strengthened cross-sector partnerships, and pioneered new models for cross-institutional teaching and learning. In alignment with priorities set out in the *National Skills* and *Global Citizens 2030 Strategies* — CFA delivers agile, accredited, and industry-informed courses that build creative capacity across key disciplines: digital technologies (including AR, VR and AI), screen, media and broadcasting, creative writing, music and performing arts, and the visual and applied arts and design.

As CFA enters a new phase of development, its strategy for 2026–2030 reaffirms the founding partners' commitment to its continuation. This strategy outlines a shared vision for how CFA will continue to deliver responsive learning and research opportunities that support talent development, enhance employability, and strengthen the cultural and creative sector.

Louise Allen
Director, CFA

CFA continues as a partnership, devising and delivering lifelong learning programmes and projects

that contribute to Ireland's economic and social wellbeing.

It is recognised nationally and internationally as a leader in creative and cultural industry research, innovation and impact.

CFA is committed to demonstrating the value of the creative and cultural industries and responding to the emerging needs of the sector.

NCAD DBE, Dennis Lawless.
Photo by Sean Jackson

Partner Institutions

The National College of Art & Design, NCAD

Creative and cultural output underpins and differentiates Ireland's standing globally. It defines our character as a nation, a signifier of our values and a unifier in social contexts. The National College of Art and Design exists to foster, generate and inspire imaginative, ambitious and positive change through art and design for people, communities and society. Creative Futures Academy, over the past five years, has acted as the catalyst for transformational change within and across higher education provision. It has seeded collaboration and remodelled the provision of accredited modular courses, allowing NCAD and our CFA founding partners to be at the forefront of agile and creative education. The launch of CFA's future strategy and vision marks a new phase and underscores the commitment of our founding partners to its ongoing growth and development.

Sarah Glennie
Director, NCAD

Students in Dolby Atmos Studio,
National Film School, IADT.

Partner Institutions

Institute of Art Design + Technology, IADT

Understanding changing patterns of use and consumption across screen and digital media, coupled with rapidly advancing technology and future-skills needs, are a continuous focus for us here in IADT. With a "digital-first" outlook we are always seeking to ensure that our learners are both literate and fluent in the emerging technologies relative to their domain specialisms. As the creative sector – and society as a whole – adjust to the accelerated pace of change, it is clear that a new policy approach to investment is needed to build capacity for the CCI sector. To this point, the initial HCI investment in Creative Futures Academy is an exemplar in many respects. It prioritised industry and HEI collaboration, placed a focus on lifelong learning, and created the necessary conditions for the HEIs to take risks and create innovative programmes. As IADT advances towards becoming Ireland's University for the Creative Industries, we fully support the next phase of CFA and will work with our partners to secure the necessary funding and resources to deliver collaborative, future-facing provision at third-level to meet the needs of industry and the creative sector.

David Smith
President, IADT

CFA Creativity Module in Trapdoor UCD.
Photo by Dunk Murphy.

Partner Institutions

University College Dublin, UCD

University College Dublin is renowned for the quality and calibre of its cultural alumni. It holds the roots of Ireland's cultural heritage through language, literature, drama and music, film and creative writing. The Creative Futures Academy partnership has been instrumental in broadening horizons and, through the realisation of new performance spaces such as Trapdoor, has elevated the importance of engaged and practice-led research. UCD is committed to supporting CFA's ongoing development, recognising the true value of cross-disciplinary and inter-institutional engagement to nurture generations of multi-skilled writers, actors, producers and musicians towards the shared goal of a sustainable and vibrant creative and cultural sector, underpinned by a skilled workforce.

Regina Uí Chollatáin
Dean & College Principal,
UCD College of Arts and Humanities

01 — Additionality

CFA has played a pivotal role in helping attract additional funding for each of the partner institutions. CFA will build on this momentum by fostering partnerships between higher education, industry and the public sector, connecting people, ideas and disciplines to add value to the sector.

Key Steps

Agree to continue with CFA as the three founding partners.

Identify potential revenue-generating and funding opportunities that complement the vision and skills of CFA.

Agree on a process and criteria to respond to opportunities during 2026–2030.

Agree on an indicative programme of activities for CFA for 2026–2030, which complements the existing activities of the founding institutions. This programme will contribute to the missions of each partner, while providing synergistic benefits to further the CCI sector.

CFA is seen as a strong advocate and thought leader for the CCI sector. CFA adds value by bringing cross-sectoral voices together and acts as a strong, informed voice in national and European contexts, meaning that engagement with, and advocacy on behalf of the CCI is one of the strengths of this partnership.

Key Steps

- Recalibrate the membership of the Industry Council and rebrand as a representative CCI Forum.
- Contribute to data collection and evidence gathering concerning the value added by the CCI sector to inform discussions and advocacy.
- Advise on gaps in industry-led course content to collectively increase the relevance of Ireland's CCI pedagogy.
- Act as an influence on policy so that Ireland becomes a global leader in CCI education and research.
- Advocate on behalf of the sector for increased investment. Link this with advocacy for the relevance of CCI subjects. Reference the advocacy programme undertaken for STEM subjects and courses.
- Participate in and / or host a series of thought leadership / research engagement events.
- Participate in public consultations related to the CCI sector.
- Leverage the CCI's storytelling abilities to develop content for media distribution and awareness campaigns.
- Maximise the opportunities which the CFA brand, assets and channels offer to continue to promote the benefits of collaboration between HEI institutions.

CFA provides relevant, flexible CCI teaching and learning content to support a person's career and creative practice. This includes new dynamic provision and new pedagogical models for CCI academic courses from undergraduate to postgraduate, full-time, part-time and micro-credentials. CFA courses offer those working in the CCI sector the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning.

Key Steps

Continue to advance new forms of creative pedagogies and create a high-quality student experience.

Facilitate student mobility across the three partner institutions.

Review and identify key student segments for CCI courses and develop a targeted information campaign for existing and new CFA courses.

Promote the benefits of undertaking CFA-accredited courses for people interested in working in the creative, social, and wider economic sectors.

Course development within CFA allows for prototyping, exploring synergies between creative practices, experimentation with new subjects and new ways of learning all of which offer fresh experiences for learners.

Key Steps

Mainstream successful courses developed under the CFA brand.

Agree on how CFA-designated courses and initiatives should continue to be branded, to provide a consistent approach for the partner institutions' students who signed up for CFA-branded courses and the continuity of visibility in CFA investment.

Partners will consider new courses in response to industry gaps, identified student segments, policy-related demand, funding opportunities, and their respective strengths and facilities.

CFA to consult with Industry partners on potential new courses.

CFA to scope themes for potential courses in alignment with the institutional disciplinary specialisms, having undertaken a skills and student gap analysis, including a review of national future skills policy.

Develop stackable micro-credential courses and pathways between the partner institutions, based on institutional strengths.

Build upon the existing mobility opportunities between the three partner institutions for undergraduate students and consider a comparable process for postgraduate mobility in 2026.

CFA has created a credible platform for visibly promoting the benefits of and potential for collaboration across third-level providers, maximising the differences and synergies in CCI offerings. This is positively recognised by the HEA, creatives, policy makers, and other funders – nationally and internationally.

Key Steps

Explore the potential to collaborate with other HEI and CCI institutions to demonstrate how this form of co-operation can be replicated successfully across different regions, institutions and sectors in Ireland.

Consider extending CFA course offerings and initiatives to include other relevant colleges, departments, schools, centres, and faculties of the partner institutions.

Explore the scope for areas of research alignment and potential collaborations internally within the partner institutions.

Promote the value and relevance of CFA courses to wider enterprise, community groups and the public sector.

CFA will continue to broker new relationships with industry, government and civic society to demonstrate the value the CCI brings to co-creating solutions for some of society's seemingly intractable problems, bringing cross-sectional voices from industry, government and civic society together across different generations, borders and outlooks.

Key Steps

Conduct a mapping exercise to identify opportunities to extend the CFA collaboration with other partners as affiliates, if / when suitable funding opportunities are identified.

Develop a rationale for entering into external partnerships.

Consider partnerships which allow CFA to continue to address societal issues.

Explore funding opportunities for collaborative programmes that could demonstrate the value of the CCI in addressing Ireland's key social and / or economic issues, linking CFA teaching and learning to solving real-world problems.

CFA will continue to offer capacity-building opportunities for each of the three partners that include: extending external stakeholder and peer links; creating staff opportunities and sourcing funding for different kinds of CCI infrastructure within the partner institutions.

Key Steps

Consider what may be needed to support new courses and initiatives developed as part of the 2026-2030 programme of activity.

Seek additional funding to extend capacity building opportunities for students, staff and stakeholders.

Build on peer-to-peer links that help to build capacity within HEIs and across the CCI sector.

CFA has built a credible team and has developed a strong brand equity, which is available to respond to HEI and CCI opportunities that benefit the founding partners and the CCI sector in Ireland.

Key Steps

Identify a baseline budget to which the founding institutions will co-sponsor to support the CFA shared project office for 2027 while external funding sources are identified.

Formulate a business plan to give certainty of direction over the lifetime of this strategy.

Engage with relevant EU and international forums and organisations to promote Ireland's standing in the CCI sector and learn from peer partners.

Screenprinting at NCAD.
Photo by Sean Jackson.

Creative Futures Academy is an initiative of

COLÁISTE NÁISIÚNTA EALAÍNE IS DEARTHA
NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

Institute of Art, Design + Technology Dún Laoghaire

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HEA
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HCI
Human Capital Initiative