

Cork International Film Festival Artistic Policy

August 2025

Introduction: Cinema Matters

Cork International Film Festival (CIFF), the oldest film festival in Ireland (established in 1956), plays a vital and catalytic role in presenting, supporting and celebrating film. Film is an art form that can take many shapes, but, regardless of these variations, the direct way it connects with us is universally recognised, in all parts of the world. At its best, thanks to this extraordinary power of expression, it can cross social, cultural and national boundaries and bring people together in celebration. It can open our eyes to other mindsets and cultures, making things palpable that would be otherwise out of our reach. We can explore beyond our comfort zone, willingly. A film can fill our hearts with the strongest emotions. Its lights shine from various angles, clarifying what we respond to and why, who we are, and how we relate to others and the world at large.

In a context of intense geopolitical tensions and an accelerating environmental crisis, we see cinema as one of the most positive ways to engage both with our community and the wider world, and, on a smaller scale, with our friends, family, community, and with ourselves.

And we see the movie theatre as a sanctuary that was, is and will remain essential to preserve. A specific, safe place that allows for in-person connection and exchange, the most elementary form of it being to emote, laugh or cry together with your fellow citizens. Whether you need relief from a demanding reality or, on the contrary, are curious to explore in depth specific subjects, cinema is likely to have just what you need, and the CIFF team makes sure that the Festival programme reflects the diversity of its spectators and what they strive for.

CIFF is a proud supporter of Irish, European and international film culture, championing it not only at the annual Festival but, in our year-round programmes and through our networks and partnerships. We actively participate in Ireland's Cultural Cinema Partnership¹ to advocate for the importance of film culture among policy-makers and funders. And we take part, whether as individuals or as a team, in the many events (festival juries, funding advisory panels, programmers' circles, industry keynotes and round-tables, YPCE thinktanks and festival networks) that compose an ecosystem whose vitality and interconnectedness we cherish.

¹ The Cultural Cinema Partnership (CCP) is composed of the five Arts Council Strategic Funded film organisations: Irish Film Institute, Galway Film Fleadh, Dublin International Film Festival, Cork International Film Festival and access>CINEMA. The aim of the CCP network is to create better conditions for cultural cinema exhibition in Ireland; research, explore ideas and champion audience development strategies to attract audiences to cinemas; strengthen and promote film culture, together with filmmakers, film audiences and other associations; share learnings.

A 70-Year Relationship

In 2025, CIFF is celebrating 70 years of faithful and tireless love for cinema. We are proud of our past whilst simultaneously looking towards the future; since 1956, our Festival has been a place of discovery and a launchpad for countless careers, supporting our alumni filmmakers from their first shorts through to their first features and beyond.

CIFF takes place annually over eleven days in November. We partner with approximately 15 venues, and our principal venue partner is the Arc Cinema in Cork city centre, with three of six screens hosting the Festival, including the arthouse-reserved 'Gate at the Arc' screen 6. Other key venues include the Everyman (a 650-seat theatre which we convert into a cinema for the Festival), and the Triskel Arts Centre, and we will continue developing partnerships with venues that ensure professional screening spaces for home-grown, European and world cinema in Cork, preserving and strengthening the film distribution chain in Ireland.

Our programme aims to reflect the breadth and diversity of our audience and to continually evolve with the community it serves. To this end, our dedicated programming team searches for the best new films, supported in this endeavour by around 20 previewers, independent programming advisors, and CIFF's vast pool of alumni filmmakers. Our [FilmFreeway platform](#) welcomes 5,000 submissions each year. Our curators also scout the international festival circuit, connecting with curators, distributors, sales agents, production companies and filmmakers, paying attention to all diverse and different voices, and opening the doors for those underrepresented and overlooked by the majority. Female directors still belong to these minorities, and we actively strive to correct this imbalance.

Our programme includes feature fiction films, documentaries, short films, experimental, artist moving image works, as well as all hybrid approaches that blur the lines of simplistic distinctions. We highlight issues that we deem important with our thematic strands dedicated to mental health and climate change-related challenges. Our role in championing Irish storytelling includes Scannáin Gaeilge. Each year, we premiere Irish language features and shorts, and our aim is to grow that offering, investing in filmmaking talent via our all-Ireland talent development programmes.

Because looking back is essential to appreciating the present and imagining the future, repertory cinema is an essential part of CIFF's programming. Festival-goers are offered the opportunity to see, possibly for the first time, cinema's great masterpieces on the big screen, as well as rare films worthy of revisiting, and restored classics.

As we carefully plan, curate, and present the diverse selection of films and events in our extensive programme, we are acutely aware of the significant role that a cultural institution like our Festival plays. We understand the responsibility we have to our local and global communities as we engage with filmmakers and artists in a dynamic relationship. At the core of our mission is the defence of artistic expression and the belief that the Festival should serve as a platform for transformative experiences for audiences, fostering connection and dialogue through engagement, welcoming and inclusive of all. We stand against all forms of discrimination.

We do not accept funding from governments under comprehensive EU or UN sanctions or those formally found by the International Court of Justice to violate international humanitarian law. This also applies to governments under ongoing ICJ proceedings with provisional measures, or which have been found by a UN Commission of Inquiry to be plausibly committing genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, or similar humanitarian violations. The policy applies to direct financial contributions from such governments to the Festival, and to films where those governments are named as an official production or distribution funder. Individual filmmakers or artists are not restricted based on nationality or other characteristics. All decisions made under this policy are made by the Executive, in consultation with the Board, with clear documentation and reference to the relevant sanction, proceedings, measures and/or inquiry justifying the decision. Filmmakers may provide clarifying documentation if they believe the policy has been applied in error, and decisions are applied consistently based on verifiable information.

Key criteria that come into consideration in our selection include: authenticity, **sincerity, connection, curiosity, difference, ambition, political and historical relevance, innovation, storytelling power, and technical craft.**

Programme Structure

For each edition, CIFF showcases a bold and exciting programme of 200+ titles across cinemas in Cork and online, composed of 100+ features and 100+ shorts from 50+ countries: the very best of Irish and international cinema that Irish audiences get to see first in Cork at CIFF. Over 90% of the titles are presented in Irish, European, international or world premieres. The CIFF Programme Structure is as follows, designed to maximise clarity and guidance for our audiences to discover:

- Galas & Competitions:
 - Gala screenings: <5 festive premieres of the year's most anticipated films
 - Best New Irish Feature competition: celebrating Ireland's broad creative diversity
 - Spirit of the Festival competition: the best of new European cinema
 - Films in competition for the Best New Documentary, Youth Jury Lookout Award, and Audience Award are transversal*.
- Strands:
 - World Tour: International must-sees with universal appeal
 - Momentum: Wide-ranging cinematic odysseys for curious-minded spectators
 - Irish Voices: showcasing Ireland's broad creative diversity
 - Disruptors: cinema's mavericks, past and present
 - Illuminate: Cinema casts a light on a subject that matters: mental health
 - Green Screen: Discover more about the particular relationship between humans and their living environment. How they affect it. What can be done.
 - Parallax: Striking works by experimenting filmmakers and artists.

- Family: films and activities for children and young people.
- Retrospective: Jewels from film history.
- Culinary: A carefully crafted combination of nourishment for mind and body.
- Schools: A selection of films offered to Cork County's secondary schools.
- Short Film:
 - Competitive and non-competitive programmes presenting the best of Irish and international short film.
 - Stranded shorts: Family, Experimental, Irish & international partner programmes
- Spotlights:
 - Special Presentations: Honorary awards, cine-concerts, film artist exhibitions, restored classics, and readings.
 - Cork Lens: Displaying the creative talent of our local community.
 - In Conversation: Take the time to listen to and exchange with our guests.
 - Online Programme: nationwide access to a snapshot selection from across the programme
- Cork Film Trail: connected themed installations located at five city centre sites.
- Industry Days:
 - Two+ days (plus an online programme) of presentations, case studies and panel discussions for the film sector to connect and learn, together.
 - Ignite-Docs: all-Ireland documentary talent development programme
- Awards: 16 awards celebrating filmmaking talent (full list in [Appendix 1](#))

* Although a transversal selection of **documentary films** is submitted to the appreciation of our Documentary jury, we see fiction and documentary, as well as other hybrid and experimental forms, as being film first and foremost. Thus, documentary and fiction sit together, as equals, in all of our programme strands.

Filmmakers Matter

CIFF combines **high-quality standards for its programming and a profound respect for artists**. Our event exists to celebrate filmmakers and their work, fostering a connection with the audience. We showcase the best of contemporary Irish, European and world cinema, bringing to Cork the best new films by established auteurs, including many alumni filmmakers, and at the same time supporting and actively searching for the newest emerging talents, by giving equal attention to short and feature-length films, connecting with film schools and short film events locally and internationally.

The Festival offers the best conditions for a film to come to life: a warm environment where it is discovered by a curious public who is eager to fully receive the work's wonders and to hear filmmakers share the secrets of their drive and their craft. CIFF creates a dynamic space where this exchange becomes possible, and where seeing a film is not only interesting or fun or moving, but is also a social, creative, cultural, and hopefully transformative experience.

CIFF directly supports filmmakers through this engagement with the public, the curation and promotion of their films, alongside meaningful training and career networking opportunities. By platforming films to distributors and generating public and press attention, the festival increases the potential for success and wider dissemination of a single piece of work and can be decisive in taking the artist's profile to another level. Our Artists' Pay and Terms & Conditions Policy adheres to [the Irish Arts Council Policy](#) on fair and equitable remuneration of artists and follows international sector standards on pay and screening fees to rights holders, in cinema and online.

Young People, Children and Education

CIFF has made Young People, Children and Education (YPCE) activities a strategic priority and is committed to expanding young audiences' access to Irish and world film through dedicated Schools, Young People, and Family Strands during the Festival and has made this activity a year-round focus. Since 2018, CIFF has engaged and created access for 21,200+ young people through its Schools Screenings, outreach Intinn Youth Film & Mental Health and Look@Me programmes.

We create opportunities unique in Cork and Ireland for young audiences and filmmakers, providing a high-profile platform to champion their voices, empowering them to unleash their creativity, and to access the industry and influence its future. We value meaningful engagement of young people and ensure their active participation in the development of a YPCE programme designed for and with young people, following the National Child & Youth Participation Framework and Lundy model. In our outreach activities, we focus on providing opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and marginalised communities to participate in the joy of the shared cinematic experience.

This comprehensive programme **nurtures young audiences, filmmakers, and future industry professionals** by providing access, education, and hands-on experience and creative opportunities. Our actions are detailed in [Appendix 2](#).

Community Matters

All of our efforts are directed towards one ideal, which is to **nurture our community with smart entertainment**, help every member of it identify which of the many forms that "film-going" can take might appeal to them, create access to it for them and make the experience special.

- If you want to see the year's best films but you can't make it to the city centre, we have a solution for you, whether with online replays or our Super Cine Saturday Cork County screenings.
- If you teach a class full of young people who are growing up consuming "content" online and can use other models on their way to media literacy, CIFF's extensive engagement with

students and teachers is here to support your endeavour.

- If you are curious about Cork's special bond with cinema, the Cork Film Trail and Walking Tours showcase the city's creative spirit and film heritage.

We work towards a Festival that is inclusive, accessible and welcoming to all. Our Festival doesn't exist on its own; it grew from and belongs to the community. It is important to acknowledge that valued members of this community are CIFF's core staff itself, as well as its seasonal team and volunteers. They have chosen to dedicate their career to their passion for film, and they are the first beneficiaries of our Fair Pay policy.

Welcoming Everyone

We work tirelessly towards a festival that is inclusive, accessible and welcoming to all. CIFF is committed to supporting equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI) in all aspects of our activity, employment, and operations, and to fostering an environment, both internally and externally, that promotes and respects EDI at work and to treating all of our employees, directors, volunteers, stakeholders, artists, and the public equally, regardless of age, civil status, disability, family status, gender and/or gender identity, religious belief, sexual orientation, race and/or ethnicity, membership of the Traveller community, or socio-economic background.

As a sector leader, CIFF promotes EDI in our industry by creating opportunities for meaningful public and sector dialogue as part of the Festival, and by monitoring gender parity across our programme, submissions, viewers, jurors, panellists, programmers, staff, Board and volunteers. CIFF was one of the first Irish signatories to the Cannes 50/50 Charter.

Our programmers are actively advocating for increasing ways to create greater access to films, including, for instance, the creation of closed captioning to be integrated in production and distribution strategies and offers in earlier stages, so that festivals can participate in their generalisation.

CIFF is committed to ensuring equity of access to booking and screenings, venues, and events for all audiences. The Festival has adopted the presentation of all family films as Relaxed Screenings, creating a welcoming environment for young people with sensory sensitivities and their families. We are determined to influence the sector in the generalisation of closed captions design and screenings, as well as audio-described and Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpretation for Q&As, panels, and introductions.

APPENDIX 1: CIFF AWARDS

Features Awards

- Best New Irish Feature
- Gradam Spiorad na Féile (Spirit of the Festival Award): Best Film
- Gradam Spiorad na Féile (Spirit of the Festival Award): Best Screenplay
- Gradam na Féile do Scannáin Faisnéise (Award for Best Documentary)
- Lookout Award
- Features Audience Award
- Eurimages Audentia Award (2025 Only)

Short Awards

- Grand Prix Irish Short (Academy Award®-Qualifying)
- Grand Prix International Short (Academy Award®-Qualifying)
- Grand Prix Documentary Short (Academy Award®-Qualifying)
- Best Director: Irish Short
- Best Cork Short
- Short Film Candidate for the European Film Awards
- Parallax Emerging Film Artist Bursary Award
- Shorts Audience Award
- Redbreast Unhidden Short Award (from 2025)

Honorary Awards

- Honorary Disruptor Award
- CIFF 70th Anniversary Award (2025)

APPENDIX 2: YPCE Activity Overview

Primary Level

- Festival Family Programme: Relaxed screenings of family-friendly films, ensuring accessibility for those with sensory sensitivities.
- Look@Me Filmmaking Project: Annual workshops for primary school pupils (10-12 y.o.) led by a community filmmaker, producing short films showcased at CIFF.
- Cruinniú na nÓg: Free nationwide online screenings of animated and live-action shorts with filmmaker discussions.
- Junior Filmmaking Workshops (8-12 y.o.): Hands-on filmmaking workshops delivered in partnership with First Cut! Youth Film Festival.

Secondary Level

- Schools Screenings: French, German, and Spanish-language features, with accompanying resources, plus films on climate action, sustainability, and EDI, in partnership with IFI Education.
- Intinn Programme: A unique film and mental health early intervention outreach programme, engaging over 8,000 students since 2019, in partnership with UCC School of Nursing and Midwifery.
- Intinn Plus: A tailored version for neurodivergent teenagers, piloted in 2024, with plans to expand in 2025/26.
- [Look@Me Youth Filmmaking Project](#): A new initiative from 2025 with Cork Migrant Centre, empowering disadvantaged teens to create and present films. The finished films are to be celebrated at a Premiere Showcase at the 70th edition of the Festival.
- Schools Career Events: Free events for students (15-19 y.o.) exploring careers in film, in partnership with Atticus Education, IFI Next Generation and Fresh Film Festival.
- Festival Partnerships: Collaborations with First Cut! Youth Film Festival and Fresh Film Festival to screen films made by young people and offer peer-to-peer exchanges.
- Senior Filmmaking Workshops (13-17 y.o.): Hands-on training with industry professionals in partnership with First Cut! Youth Film Festival.
- Aeráid youth film & climate programme: new proposed participatory outreach programme to be delivered for free to Transition Year students (ages 15-16) and their teachers.

Third Level & Graduates

- Lookout Jury & Young Programmers: Expanding young voices in festival programming, with selected students curating and promoting films. We provide young cinephiles with a professional training opportunity to engage with the film festival industry and involve young people in programming and presenting films to their peers.
- Festival Internships: Hands-on experience for university film and arts students in marketing, education, administration, and programming.
- First Take at CIFF's Industry Days: Training for emerging filmmakers on industry insights and career development.
- Puttnam Scholars: University College Cork (UCC) student filmmaking programme under the mentorship of CIFF Patron David Puttnam.
- Parallax Emerging Film Artist Award: A cross-disciplinary bursary for an emerging film artist, including a cash prize, studio space, and exhibition, in partnership with Sample Studios and National Sculpture Factory.