
Theatre and Dance NI
1st Floor, Crescent Arts Centre
Belfast
BT7 1NH

**E:** director@theatreanddanceni.org

**January 2025**

**Ref: Theatre and Dance NI Member Consultation Feedback**

**CIISA Standards**

**Overview:**

As part of the wider CIISA consultation process to triangulate and validate the existing CIISA Standards (‘the Standards), Theatre and Dance NI (TDNI) prepared a briefing document (Appendix 1), issued to members on the 9th of January 2025, alongside an invitation to attend a consultation session later in the month.

TDNI members, the Chair of the Board, the Executive Director and Project Development Officer participated in the consultation representing a range of roles and perspectives within the Northern Irish theatre and dance community. Representatives from the Irish Theatre Institutes Safe to Create[[1]](#footnote-1) programme (ROI) joined the online consultation session, which was facilitated by Equality, Policy and Strategy Consultant, Olwen Dawe.

**As per CIISA guidance, members were asked to focus their feedback on the following:**

* **Relevance and Relatability**: Feedback on whether the Standards are applicable and relatable to various roles and situations within the creative industries. ​
* **Practicality**: Suggestions on how the Standards can be practically implemented across different sizes and types of organisations, productions, and projects. ​
* **Comprehensiveness**: Input on any areas that may have been overlooked or need further detail to ensure the Standards cover all necessary aspects of professional behaviour and safe working environments.
* **Effectiveness**: Insights on how the Standards can effectively prevent and tackle bullying, harassment, and discrimination, and promote inclusivity and accountability. ​

Members were encouraged to explore the different settings within which work is made, as well as intersectional issues from an identity perspective, and the experiences of young people entering the sector. The insights garnered are outlined below and grouped according to thematic issues arising throughout the consultation session, and in subsequent follow-up feedback.

**Key Themes Emerging:**

**Theme 1: Accountability and Responsibility**

Member feedback highlighted several key points regarding accountability and responsibility within organisations. One of the primary concerns is the need for clear mechanisms to hold individuals and organisations accountable for their actions. There was a recurring theme of questioning whether current practices are genuinely effective in practical terms.

A significant issue raised was the lack of accountability at higher levels of hierarchical structures, such as who holds Artistic Directors (ADs) accountable for example. This concern extends to the Board level, where there is a call for sincerity and commitment to accountability. It was noted that at times, Boards can be complicit in facilitating harmful behaviour at senior level by supporting ADs or other members of leadership over other staff members where complaints are received. Feedback also pointed out the challenge of verifying whether policies and procedures are actually implemented, even if they are officially in place (policies are there for visibility but are often, not in fact followed – a “tick box” exercise).

The agency of freelancers was another critical aspect discussed. Simply having a union is not enough to protect freelancers, especially considering the added vulnerabilities of gender and intersectional[[2]](#footnote-2) identities. There is a need for a safe space where individuals can raise concerns and share their stories without fear of repercussions.

Members also addressed the issue of harassment by members of the public and the need for policies to safeguard staff (workers) in such situations. Additionally, the importance of defining the workplace, particularly in fields like theatre, where the boundaries may not be clear, was highlighted. The necessity for respecting personal time, for instance, avoiding unnecessary contact outside working hours, was raised as another issue requiring clarity and enforcement.

Overall, feedback on accountability and responsibility underscores the necessity for organisations to understand their responsibilities and the impact of their actions on their workforce. There was a call for CIISA to be prepared with the necessary tools and templates to ensure accountability and responsibility.

**Theme 2: Culture Change and Continuous Learning**

Members emphasised the importance of continuous learning and development as essential components for driving culture change within the sector. In particular, highlighting that real change occurs when there is a commitment to fostering a learning culture that encourages the development of new behaviours and attitudes. This involves not only implementing policies but also ensuring that these policies are actively practiced and enforced (as per Theme 1). For instance, learning the tools of speaking assertively rather than aggressively is crucial for changing behaviour and culture.

Members cited the prevalence of microaggressions as a real and pervasive issue that needs to be addressed. These subtle, discriminatory comments or actions can have a profound impact on individuals, particularly those from marginalised communities, and are often harder to prove in a work context, leading to ‘death by a thousand cuts’. Feedback also underscored the necessity for creating safe environments where *everyone* feels responsible for respect and safety. This multi-layered approach involves many relationships and requires a collective effort from all members of the organisation, and from the top-down. Members pointed out the need for better education and training, particularly for young and emerging artists and arts workers on recognising and addressing inappropriate behaviours, as many individuals feel unempowered to deal with such issues, or worse, expect certain types of behaviours to be ‘the norm’. Specific examples were provided in the context of theatre where actors are expected to perform in ways that they may not be comfortable (or without the involvement of an intimacy coordinator), without consideration or discussion of their agency in the process, breaching consent.

**Theme 3: Unique Challenges for CIISA in Northern Ireland**

Some unique challenges for CIISA from a Northern Irish perspective were noted by members. One significant challenge is ‘post conflict’ Northern Ireland (NI). NI has not only substantially high rates of violence against women, but emerging evidence[[3]](#footnote-3) shows that the majority of women and girls in our society have experienced at least one form of gender-based violence, abuse and harm, ranging from everyday misogyny, sexual harassment in a public place or workspace, to more extreme physical violence. This context creates a unique environment where there are additional needs for training and support that may not be as prevalent in other regions of the UK. It was also pointed out that Northern Ireland does not have a single Equality Act like other parts of the UK (or ROI), but rather a collection of pieces of legislation[[4]](#footnote-4). This fragmented legal framework can make it difficult to implement consistent and effective policies.

Another challenge is the lack of investment in the arts in Northern Ireland, including training and professional development standards, compared to other parts of the UK. Members noted that the arts sector in Northern Ireland has been particularly hit by disinvestment and funding cuts, which impacts the ability to provide long-term consistent training and support for artists and arts workers. Furthermore, funding cuts have led to pressurised work environments, where workers are expected to ‘do more with less’ and tolerate breaches in standards, often afraid to speak up for fear of being difficult and/or consequently blacklisted. This lack of resources can hinder the implementation of safe and inclusive working environments, making it harder for CIISA to achieve the goals of its Standards in the region.

**Theme 4: Limitations / Scope of CIISA**

Members raised some queries regarding both the scope and potential limitations of CIISA. In particular, there was a discussion about the need for CIISA to have a clear line on what they will and won't be able to do with any information they receive. This is important in order to manage expectations and ensure that individuals understand CIISA’s capabilities. Members also highlighted the importance of having services aimed at resolving concerns where possible.

However, CIISA having ‘teeth’ or a clearly defined role in enforcing accountability (an issue which was repeatedly cited in the consultation) will be key, as without enforceable consequences for non-compliance, there is the potential for the Standards to be overlooked or disregarded, ultimately undermining CIISA’s effectiveness in driving meaningful change.

**Summary of Consultation Feedback**

In summary, attendees emphasised the fact that in order for CIISA Standards to be effective, practices and accountability, rather than merely ‘visible compliance’, would be key. Members regularly addressed the challenges posed by hierarchical structures and often the lack of oversight, training and / or knowledge by Boards, which ultimately hinders the effective implementation of policies.

Additionally, members underscored the importance of addressing microaggressions and bullying, and the need for effective reporting mechanisms and training to foster a respectful and supportive workplace culture.

Unique challenges from a Northern Ireland perspective, such as the legacy of conflict and fragmented equality legal framework, were also discussed, highlighting the need for more tailored approaches to address these specific circumstances.

TDNI members noted how substantial the role of CIISA could be as a catalyst for meaningful culture change, once it has the bandwidth to affect this level of impact.

TDNI and those members attending welcomed the opportunity to respond to the consultation and noted the comprehensive work and diligence on the development of the Standards. We look forward to continued engagement with UK colleagues and the CIISA team.

**Theatre & Dance Northern Ireland**

1. The Safe to Create programme is a new initiative funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (ROI), launched in October 2022 by Minister Catherine Martin, following the recommendations outlined in the 'Speak Up: A Call for Change' report. Safe to Create is a comprehensive programme that seeks to create a safer, more respectful, and supportive environment for everyone working in the Irish arts and creative sectors. It aims to achieve this by providing education, resources, and support systems to prevent and address harmful behaviours in the workplace. <https://www.safetocreate.ie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Intersectionality: the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalised individuals or groups <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategic Framework | NICS

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/execoffice/evawg-strategic-framework.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Equality Commission Northern Ireland <https://www.equalityni.org/Legislation> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)