SCALING THE HEIGHTS
Message from the Chair and Chief Executive

For nearly 50 years now, the Irish Chamber Orchestra has occupied the distinguished position of Ireland’s flagship chamber ensemble. Our ambitious strategy celebrates these past decades; it salutes the musicians who established the ICO and pays tribute to those who played such an active role in establishing it as a national cultural asset.

The ICO has evolved through the years and has honed its unique personality. Its dynamic approach challenges and enthrals, its energy is palpable. It engages with and delights audiences nationally and globally. Our purpose-built studio on the University of Limerick campus is home to the orchestra, and as its orchestra-in-residence, we are proud to play our part in the University’s cultural life.

Despite the economic setbacks of more recent times, the ICO has thrived under the leadership of outstanding artistic partners and has adopted an open and flexible approach. Our positive impacts have been felt far and wide through our local, national and international networks. At the heart of our vision is the belief that music is for everyone. It permeates all our work as we adapt in today’s rapidly changing world and is reflected in the enthusiasm and commitment of our musicians, who push the boundaries of what a chamber orchestra can do. Our Sing Out with Strings programme aims to take music into the local community, inspiring children to try music for themselves, and supporting them on their journey from first lesson to public performance.

Now looking forward, we are delighted to present Scaling the Heights; our strategy for our continued development and sustainability over the next four years. Our core values of excellence, innovation, collaboration, inclusivity and engagement are threaded across our four strategic goals, shaped and underpinned by our exhilarating playing style and our desire for performance excellence. We will continue to inspire people to engage with music in a variety of different contexts. We are committed to nurturing the talent of the many young children we meet. Exploring and consolidating mutually beneficial partnerships to strengthen our offering are core to our mission.

In this first strategy we pay tribute to the work of those visionaries who dared to dream over the years, and who witnessed that dream become a reality. Their legacy lives on. In moving to the next stage of our development, we welcome the support of our main funder, The Arts Council, the expertise of a dedicated Board and a hard-working executive team, as we continue to change lives through music.

Aibhlin Mc Crann
Chair

Gerard Keenan
Chief Executive
Established in 1970, the Irish Chamber Orchestra (ICO), with the support of the Arts Council and Culture Ireland has become one of the leading chamber orchestras in Europe; a national cultural asset and ambassador.

The ICO occupies an important position as the leading chamber orchestra in Ireland. Known for its unique and inclusive approach to the presentation of repertoire from the baroque to the contemporary, the ICO is an outward-looking and dynamic group of musicians, whose warm and infectious ethos shines through in every performance.

It provides work for the very best Irish musicians, and collaborates with leading international guest conductors, artistic partners and soloists across the music spectrum ranging from Jörg Widmann, Gábor Takács-Nagy, Thomas Zehetmair, Genia Kühmeier, Elizabeth Leonskaja and Igor Levit to The Cranberries, The Stunning, Something Happens and DJ Kormac.
ICO musicians recorded with the Cranberries

Irish National Opera/Marriage of Figaro

Barry McGovern, Testimony

Feile Classic Launch

Irish Chamber Orchestra/DJ Kormac
The ICO’s creative and imaginative approach to programming has also seen it embrace cross-artform collaborations with artists such as Irish theatre and opera director Patrick Mason, actors Barry McGovern, Bosco Hogan and Stephen Rea and national companies like Irish National Opera, Fidget Feet and Ballet Ireland.
The ICO maintains a strong commitment to the commissioning and performance of new music and it has given numerous premieres and repeat performances of works by, amongst others, Sam Perkin, Sebastian Adams, Gerald Barry, Raymond Deane, Jennifer Walsh, Elaine Agnew, Deirdre McKay, Linda Buckley, David Fennessy and Ronan Guilfoyle.

Nationally, the ICO has a widespread reach delivering rich musical experiences to broad and diverse audiences in towns and cities across the country. The orchestra also tours extensively internationally, most notably to Europe, the US and South America and in recent years has received invitations to take up a residency at Heidelberg Festival and to perform at MozartFest, Frühling Festival, Berlin Konzerthaus, Vienna Konzerthaus and Reitstidel, Neumarkt.
The ICO records for Out Here Music, the leading European classical label.

Alongside its artistic activities, the ICO has made an investment in the musicians of the future by building an extensive programme of outreach activities. Initiated in 2008, its flagship programme Sing out with Strings uses music as a tool for personal development. Through weekly workshops and regular showcase performances, the Sing out with Strings programme has engaged with hundreds of children living in socio-economically deprived areas of Limerick, through their primary school years and beyond. An exciting development has been the recent establishment of a youth orchestra, which provides a continuum of tuition and performance opportunities for young musicians locally.

The University of Limerick has been pivotal in the development of the ICO. The orchestra’s continually developing partnership with UL facilitates collaborations on a number of fronts, most notably in the delivery of the MA in Classical Strings Performance and the associated ICO Academy.
Our Vision
WHERE WE SEE OURSELVES

Our vision is two-fold

- To be one of the world’s most inspiring chamber orchestras performing to the highest artistic standards for the widest possible audience.

- To be a catalyst for integration and social change through inclusive engagement with children and local communities.
Our Mission

WHAT WE DO

We engage with and inspire a broad and diverse audience in cities and towns throughout Ireland and internationally. We achieve this through:

- excellence in performance
- innovative collaborations with top international artistic partners and
- music education outreach and community programmes.

Katherine Hunka, Leader

Jörg Widmann, Artistic Partner

Sing Out With Strings
Our Values

EXCELLENCE

We aim for excellence across the organisation from artistic, concert-giving, education and community outreach programmes to management and governance.

INNOVATION

We initiate cutting-edge programmes and projects and commission new works from Irish and international composers, that inspire and engage and are relevant to audiences of today.

COLLABORATION

We collaborate with partners and key local, national and international stakeholders in a spirit of openness and respect.

INCLUSIVITY

We promote inclusivity, equality and diversity across our organisation and with our audiences.

ENGAGEMENT

We maintain strong levels of engagement and participation with musicians and artists across the creative disciplines, audiences of all ages, promoters and the broader music community nationally and internationally.
THEME 1: ARTISTIC

Maintain our distinctive signature sound, excellent artistic standards and innovative programming, with collaboration at the heart of our personality.

Priorities

• Deliver world class performances of a range of repertoire via flexible working formats locally, nationally and internationally.

• Recruit an exceptional Music Director/Artistic Director or a number of Artistic Partners to drive musical direction and open doors to new markets internationally.

• Continue to retain and recruit the very best orchestral musicians in the membership of the orchestra.

• Collaborate with the finest musicians and artists from other creative disciplines to deliver compelling programming for audiences at home and abroad.

• Consolidate recording outputs.
THEME 2: SUSTAINABILITY

Cultivate long-term relationships with key stakeholders, including audiences, funders and sponsors to guarantee the longevity of the ICO thus underpinning the orchestra’s artistic and commercial future.

Priorities

- Grow the ICO’s national and international profile to build support and anchor the orchestra’s exceptional status.
- Expand the Marketing & Communications function to drive increased awareness of the ICO and increase audience attendance in Ireland.
- Increase earned, contributed and public sector revenue.
- Strengthen the ICO’s partnership with the University of Limerick.
- Develop deeper links with the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance through the ICO’s association with the MA in Classical Strings.
THEME 3: EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Continue to develop and deepen engagement with young people and the wider community through a holistic approach to delivering inclusive and innovative educational and community projects.

Priorities

• Continue to enable self-growth and social change through developing a new sustainable phase of our Sing Out with Strings and related achievements in partnership with UL, Limerick local authorities and other stakeholders.

• Continue to advocate for and reinforce the funding framework for Sing Out with Strings.

• Develop an innovative project strand aimed at a diversity of new audiences emphasising education and engagement.
THME 4: ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE

Build an inclusive, transparent and accountable organisation with the resources to deliver on the ICO’s vision and mission, in line with the governance standards set out by the Charities Regulator, the Arts Council and best practice internationally.

Priorities

• Maintain ongoing Board focus on sound governance and leadership continuity.

• Continue to recruit and retain a dynamic, passionate and diverse Board who will ensure that the ICO operates to the very highest standards.

• Expand and develop the executive structure to fully maximise on the ICO’s potential.

• Grow the ICO Board’s high-level advocacy skills.

• As an employer, continue to abide by the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.
THEME 1: ARTISTIC

Maintain our distinctive signature sound, excellent artistic standards and innovative programming with collaboration at the heart of our personality.
**Priorities**

Deliver world class performances of a range of repertoire via flexible working formats locally, nationally and internationally.

Recruit an exceptional Music Director/Artistic Director or a number of Artistic Partners to drive musical direction and open doors to new markets internationally.

Continue to retain and when needed, recruit the very best orchestral musicians in the membership of the orchestra.

Collaborate with the finest musicians and artists to deliver compelling programming for audiences at home and abroad.

Consolidate the ICO’s recording outputs.

**Initiatives**

- Define a clear realisable artistic and programming policy for the ICO which considers the orchestra’s relevance locally, nationally and internationally.

- Define and implement a succession process for the appointment of a Music Director (or Artistic Partners) to be announced in a designate position in 2020.

- Provide the best possible working environment and conditions for members and where possible, training opportunities.

- Continue to develop and strengthen relationships with top artist agencies in the UK, wider European and US jurisdictions in order to secure the very best artists affordably.

- Maintain good relationships and continue to devise engaging programming with top artistic organisations across other creative disciplines in Ireland.

- Strengthen the relationship with Out Here Music
THEME 2: SUSTAINABILITY

Cultivate long-term relationships with key stakeholders, including audience, funders and sponsors to guarantee the longevity of the ICO thus assuring the orchestra’s artistic and commercial future.
Priorities

Grow the ICO’s national and international profile to build support and anchor the orchestra’s exceptional status.

Expand the Marketing & Communications function to drive increased awareness of the ICO and increase audience attendance in Ireland.

Initiatives

• Find a lasting “home” performance base in Dublin.

• Building on relationships already established, continue to develop a series of residencies/affiliations with Irish/international concert venues and festivals.

• Further develop the ICO’s touring network in Ireland.

• Implement brand awareness campaigns which stress the ICO’s important role in culture, education and community.

• Increase investment in Marketing function - both resources and activity.

• Devise and implement an effective audience development plan for Ireland to achieve audience attendance goals.

• Gather insights on ideal audience profile to improve the ability to reach the audience effectively.
Priorities

Increase earned, contributed and public sector revenue.

Initiatives

- Increase awareness of the positive impact of the ICO’s Community Outreach initiatives across all Marketing & Communications channels.

- Support messaging and storytelling across all ICO activity ensuring a consistent message and strong ICO brand identity.

- Optimise all revenue opportunities; develop strategies to further cultivate and maintain
  - Individual giving
  - Corporate giving
  - Public sector bodies
  - Trusts and Foundations.

- Incorporate fund-raising into the full-range of the ICO’s activities.
Priorities

Strengthen the ICO’s partnership with the University of Limerick.

Develop deeper links with the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance through the ICO’s association with the MA in Classical Strings Performance.

Initiatives

• Develop strands of programme offerings that offer significant fund-raising opportunities.

• Cultivate strong partnerships on the local and national corporate landscape to provide key companies with opportunities to engage.

• Explore new opportunities and points of alignment with UL and put a formal agreement in place regarding the realisation of initiatives focussing on access, marketing, research and teaching.

• Ensure that there is access to scholarships and private tuition for talented local students beyond the reach of our programme.

• Develop and publicise further the third-party research being undertaken on the impacts of our work.

• Continue to provide unique and unparalleled learning opportunities and experiences for MA students/members of the ICO Academy to engage with the ICO in rehearsal, performance and tuition environments.
THEME 3: EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Continue to develop and deepen engagement with young people and the wider community through a holistic approach to delivering inclusive and innovative educational and community projects.
Priorities

Continue to enable self-growth and social change through developing a new sustainable phase of Sing Out with Strings and related achievements in partnership with the University of Limerick, Limerick local authorities and other stakeholders.

Continue to advocate for and reinforce the funding framework for Sing Out with Strings.

Develop an innovative project strand aimed at a diversity of new audiences emphasising education and engagement.

Initiatives

- Sustain our existing longitudinal programme in primary schools.
- Develop our initial launch into secondary schools.
- Further develop the youth orchestra model.
- Pursue stakeholder and funding partnerships to ensure the sustainability of the programme.
- Develop educational initiatives through and based around performances.
THEME 4: ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE

Build an inclusive, transparent and accountable organisation with the resources to deliver on the ICO’s vision and mission, in line with the governance standards set out by the Charities Regulator, the Arts Council and best practice internationally.
Priorities

Maintain ongoing Board focus on sound governance.

Ensure leadership continuity at Board level.

Continue to recruit and retain a dynamic, passionate and diverse Board who will ensure that the ICO operates to the very highest standards from governance and management perspectives.

Expand and develop the executive structure to fully maximise on the ICO’s potential.

Initiatives

• Maintain clear and transparent processes in relation to all Board functions.

• Ensure that governance of the ICO continues to comply with the Charities Governance Code.

• Conduct leadership review and succession planning management in respect of the Board.

• Oversee continuity and timely turnover of Board members.

• Ensure that the Board has the appropriate representation, balance of skills and experience to deliver on its remit.

• Invest in the executive team in order to ensure that all outputs of the ICO are well supported.
Priorities

Grow the ICO Board high level advocacy role/skills.

As an employer, continue to abide by the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Initiatives

• Ensure that the CEO has sufficient support to focus in a balanced way between artistic and financial sustainability objectives.

• Conduct leadership review and succession planning management.

• Provide opportunities for staff training and skills development where possible.

• Communicate the importance of the ICO’s role in Irish society clearly and consistently with key stakeholders; including government and the wider public sector, partners, collaborators and the public.

• Maintain the practice of equality of opportunity in the employment of management, staff and orchestra members.

• Ensure that the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are upheld within the ICO and embodied in the ICO’s employment policies and practices.
ICO Studio, University of Limerick, Castletroy, Limerick.

www.irishchamberorchestra.com