



Fighting Words

Strategic Plan 2025 – 2029

Mission Statement:

We aim to help children, young people and those who did not have writing opportunities as children, to discover and harness the power of their imagination and creative writing skills. At its core, Fighting Words is also about something much broader and more inclusive: it is about using the creative practice of writing and storytelling to strengthen children and young people from all backgrounds to be resilient and creative shapers of their own lives.

Ethos Statement:

Creativity can be unbound when we provide the space and scope for storytelling, imagination and invention. Our work is always child-centred and participant led, with an emphasis on self-esteem, empowerment, confidence and affirmation. At Fighting Words, we love stories and creative writing, and we aim to provide space for young people to explore their voice. Our workshops are available to all, free of charge at the point of access, with an inclusive and participative approach focused on equity and diversity. It is a community endeavour with volunteer mentors, partners and staff working collaboratively.

The Story So Far:

Fighting Words was founded in 2009 and is credited with playing a persuasive role in deepening policy and practice related to creative writing in our schools and using creative methodologies to amplify the voice of young people. The review of organisational performance over the course of our 2020 – 2024 strategic plan period shows that the organisation performed very well against its goals. Growth has continued during the period and the reputation and profile of the organisation is strong. People want to be involved with the work at all levels, and the promotion of creativity in the education system has been effective.

Growth:

There was an expansion of scale and very positive programme growth during this strategic cycle. There was an increase in the number of regional centres, the range and scope of multi-genre projects, workshop formats, and a strong increase in online offerings during the Covid-19 period. There was a focus on building and strengthening partnerships.

Education:

Our focus on educational disadvantage, the development of the DCU partnership, our positive relationship with the Department of Education and Roinn na Gaeltachta, the mainstreaming of creativity in the national curriculum and our deep engagement with schools and other education providers across the country, are all indications of our strong influence in this area.

People:

We have an excellent and committed team, with positive growth and high retention. Volunteer engagement remains vital with strong recruitment and retention levels.

Provision:

Our governance is robust with an effective board in place. There is a strong focus on quality control and consistency of approach – to training, documentation, reputation, and participation. We have a strong and committed network of ambassadors.

Partnerships:

There is significant growth in partnerships, particularly with regional centres and libraries. Consistently, there is strong interest in Fighting Words from schools and other education and youth organisations. We continue to be responsive and nurture these new partnerships to advance our work.

Publishing:

There has been a significant increase in the number and range of publications, with a substantial expansion of online publications. Research through the DCU partnership has been published in line with targets.

The Current Story:**Strengths**

Fighting Words has a strong track record as a child-centred positive, flexible, fun, and accessible creative writing organisation. We recognise and celebrate imagination, creativity, free expression, and youth voice. Our methodologies are highly regarded as is our focus on partnership, volunteer engagement and experienced staff. We continue to concentrate our programming on educational disadvantage.

Opportunities

Due to its excellence, Fighting Words attracts new partners, funders, educators, schools, artists, and writers nationwide. There has always been a strong, rich tradition of storytelling in Irish society, both oral and written, and we aim to continue to foster expression, writing and storytelling at Fighting Words. Technology offers opportunities, and is increasingly useful for translations, communication, publishing and access. Creative writing is increasingly seen as an important tool when considering the ever-changing dynamic of society.

Challenges

Responding to the increasing requests for creative writing activities in various locations and contexts while managing the quality control, consistency and limited capacity is an ongoing issue. Similarly, balancing growth and consolidation to ensure sustainability and impact is another important consideration. The changing reality and needs of children and young people requires ongoing adaptation and deepening of our methodologies with this age group.

Threats

Funding and sustainable income generation is a long-term concern across the not-for-profit sector.

Fighting Words responds to the complexities that an ever-changing societal dynamic demands including the impact of social media, the barriers to equity and inclusion and the obstacles to accessing education and creativity.

Priorities / Indicators

Priority 1: Creativity

Fighting Words is a catalyst for creative writing, especially for young people. Fighting Words will continue to champion creative education and to provide opportunities at scale and free of charge for children and young people in Ireland.

Creative writing enables free expression, builds resilience and wellbeing, protects truth and identity and provides a voice for all. We promote the power of story making, writing and creating, allowing children to be happier, more imaginative, confident, and capable communicators.

1.1 With our track record and successes to date, we are committed to expand our work with regional partners and to increase the range of workshops, clubs, projects and summer camps across all genres of creative writing.

1.2 Fighting Words will ensure that an increasing amount of our work will be with DEIS schools, youth and community groups working with disadvantaged young people, and engaging groups of marginalized adults.

1.3 We will manage this growth carefully and ensure our organisation adapts sustainably.

In the 2025 - 2029 Strategic Cycle, we will:

- Provide free creative writing opportunities for schools and groups countrywide, responding to demand and partnership requests.
- Press for the importance of creative education and creative writing for young people.
- Prioritise our work with groups and communities experiencing disadvantage and discrimination.
- Place a specific emphasis on engagement with post-primary school students and other teenagers, contributing to the directions for reform of the Leaving Certificate
- Run programmes in English, Irish and explore ways to incorporate other languages into our workshops and summer camps.
- Monitor our audience composition to ensure that we maintain universality while effectively identifying and reaching disadvantaged groups.
- Innovate with new formats and technologies to stay vital to new generations of writers and creators, while maintaining our core model of writing workshops.
- Collaborate with funders and partners to address how we grow our creative writing offerings in impact and scale, both strategically and sustainably.

Indicators of Success:

- Fighting Words continues to be a relevant and trusted organisation in the areas of education and creativity in Ireland.
- Publications, performances and recordings (audio and video) in English, Irish and other languages remain central to our work.
- Tested, accepted and agreed metrics used to measure impact and robust quantitative data will ensure an evidenced-based approach.
- A revised post-primary approach is in use which considers the required increase in depth of engagement with this age group.
- The workshop formats across all genres are regularly reviewed, adapted and improved to maintain relevance, quality and impact.
- Maintain and increase the allocation of resources to DEIS schools and areas of educational disadvantage.

Priority 2: Free-Spirited Outsiders

Fighting Words is an organisation that questions and innovates. We see things differently and maintain a critical distance allowing us to tackle norms and systems that can hinder the imagination and limit options for children and young people. We encourage children and young people to express themselves freely and vibrantly.

The inventiveness of story making provides space for irreverence, self-expression and curiosity. Creative writing can help young people develop skills and understanding that will enable them to adapt and think critically as they define the future.

2.1 Fighting Words will continue to deliver strong creative writing programmes with schools and to push for a further and fundamental shift towards creative learning methodologies at all levels.

2.2 Fighting Words will continue to challenge society and systems, to ensure that children and young people can share their stories and have agency in making decisions that affect their lives.

2.3 Through creative writing, we will explore how agency, voice and children's rights can be amplified more broadly.

In the 2025 - 2029 Strategic Cycle, we will:

- Remain a key transformer in education, continuing the drive and commitment to creativity and creative writing in schools and extended education by collaborating with education providers and organisations on curriculum development, teacher education and continuing professional development.
- Engage with other state services essential to children's lives to deliver creative writing projects, emphasising the importance of creativity to all aspects of life.
- Challenge the established ways that people learn, write, create and publish by questioning the status quo, changing public dialogue and embedding a culture of creativity in Ireland.

- Through our research, monitoring, and organisational learning, continually develop our methodologies and approaches, to identify and enable pathways for children and young people to realise their own rights through story.

Indicators of Success:

- Creative writing is encouraged and bolstered and is a standard and accepted approach in the classroom in Ireland.
- Fighting Words provides creative writing opportunities to children, young people and adults who are striving for change, enabling them to write creatively, knowing that their voice and story can contribute to society and provide solutions.
- Projects are organised and stories are published that put the spotlight on difficult issues, mobilising people to listen, building understanding and engaging people in solutions, free from judgement and encouraging empathy building.
- Children and young people who have worked with Fighting Words report on having increased confidence, resilience and agency linked to their creative writing experiences. They see themselves as changemakers.

Priority 3: Partnerships:

We see partnerships as two-way relationships in that we both seek to learn and to contribute, using our creative approach. We are always responsive to collaboration, and we take a wide approach to partnerships, relating to all stakeholders with the same cooperative, professional and impactful approach, including regional centres, libraries, schools, education organisations, youth and community groups, government agencies and funders.

Fighting Words has a strong track record as a collaborative partnership organisation. Through strategic partnerships, we multiply our resources and reach and infuse creative writing approaches into the priorities of other organisations.

3.1 Fighting Words will continue to prioritise collaborative partnerships as a fundamental way of working. We will strive to ensure that we are approachable, cooperative and positive in our dealings with other organisations.

3.2 Our network of Fighting Words partners will continue to grow as we reach different regions, audiences, languages, etc. We will continue to deepen the core formal partnerships that are fundamental to our mission, including the Abbey Theatre, The Irish Times, libraries, DCU, the Department of Education and Roinn na Gaeltachta, as well as seeking similarly important additional partners. Specifically, we will increase our work with libraries across Ireland.

3.3 Fighting Words will continue to work with groups and organisations working with marginalised groups including children and young people from diverse backgrounds, in care, early school leavers, children from ethnic minorities including Travellers, LGBTQIA+ young people, children with disabilities, children with additional needs including neurodivergent young people, children with mental health issues, children in the juvenile justice system and with vulnerable adults.

3.4 We will collaborate, and support our sister organisation, Fighting Words Northern Ireland. We look forward to innovating and exploring new ways to strengthen our work together. Where it is agreed,

we will devise shared initiatives, run joint cross-border projects, and continue to build the strong working bonds at all levels.

3.5 We will respond, where possible, to international partnership requests for support with the establishment and running of creative writing programmes.

In the 2025 - 2029 Strategic Cycle, we will:

- Maintain the consistency and quality of the Fighting Words experience.
- Maintain and manage our key partner relationships to ensure that the shared work is effective and impactful.
- Consult and engage our key stakeholders and partners to share and define plans, adaptations and ways of working.
- Identify new collaborators, building new strong relationships with them and remaining open to approaches.
- Deliver creating writing activities in more spaces by building on the links we already have with libraries and open new connections with others.
- Collaborate and run joint programmes with Fighting Words Northern Ireland.

Indicators of Success:

- Continued strong partnership with stakeholders ensuring that our creative writing programmes continue to grow.
- Fighting Words is acknowledged as a reliable, responsive and effective collaborator.
- Flagship partnerships with core partners, including Fighting Words Northern Ireland, are thriving.
- Quality assurance measures are in place to support our partners in delivering the quality experience offered by Fighting Words.
- Expand partnerships with libraries to ensure Fighting Words has access to workshop spaces across the country.

Priority 4: Organisational Strengths:

Fighting Words is a well-established and high functioning non-government organisation, with strong governance, steady funding and in good organisational health. With an emphasis on strong policies, procedures and compliance, we push ourselves to do things well. Working with children, young people and with vulnerable adults, we will strive to maintain a very high level of rigour in relation to child-protection, safeguarding and welfare.

As a community endeavour that is dependent on staff, volunteers, interns and contractors, we are set up to ensure that everybody is welcomed, respected, supported and included. We engage writers and artists and are committed to fair and equitable pay for contractors.

4.1 Fighting Words is successful because of the dedication, integrity and drive that our staff, volunteers, and board members bring to the organisation. We will continue to invest in recruiting, supporting and retaining the best people.

4.2 We work in ways that reflect our ethos and priorities. We use creative approaches across the organisation. We engage our stakeholders in meaningful ways, especially children and young people. We

reflect and learn as an organisation, with monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment approaches in place.

4.3 The sustainability of our work is dependent on a strong funding base. We will continue to work closely with funders in government, philanthropy, the private sector and individuals to widen our funding base and increase our income, enabling us to broaden the services we provide.

4.4 Child protection and safety is paramount at Fighting Words. We provide a safe, secure and happy environment for children and vulnerable adults, maintaining strict standards and procedures in line with our policies, current legislation and our safeguarding statement.

4.5 Strong financial control, compliance and governance are fundamental to our success. Fighting Words will continue to develop, update and implement internal policies, procedures and ways of working that reflect the highest standards of organisational accountability.

4.6 We organise and deliver our work with a strong internal commitment to environmental action, equity, inclusion, justice and dignity.

In the 2025 - 2029 Strategic Cycle, we will:

- Continue to diversify our funding base, bringing on board new donors while maintaining a close relationship with existing funding partners, maintaining the spread of funding support across sectors and, in particular, focusing on new non-restricted funding relationships and funding for core costs.
- Value and invest in our people – staff, volunteers, interns, contractors, and partners in regional centres – ensuring we maintain and build strong mutual commitments.
- Diversify our staff and volunteer base to better reflect the communities we work with in line with our EDI policy.
- Strengthen our practice through ongoing reflection, monitoring, and evaluation systems.
- Maintain a focus on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, with policies, procedures, training and vigilance, ensuring everyone's safety.
- Strengthen our governance and organisational accountability, matching and surpassing the prevailing standards, and ensuring the organisation is resilient and ready to respond to risks and potential external crises.
- Remain flexible to the developments in an ever-changing creative writing environment while staying true to our core creative writing mission.

Indicators of Success:

- Fighting Words has a healthy portfolio of funders, with sufficient income to run a growing programme, and to provide for contingencies and potential risks.
- Low levels of staff and volunteer turnover, high levels of staff and volunteer satisfaction, retention and increased diversity among staff, volunteers and board.
- Strong fiduciary and organisational systems and ways of working are in place, ensuring Fighting Words is a trusted, respected and well-run organisation.

- Governance and management succession planning and changes are coordinated effectively, ensuring the continuity and strength of organisational leadership.

Policies and procedures are developed, revised and implemented, with appropriate training in place to support staff, volunteers, interns and contractors to deliver our programmes effectively and to the highest standards.