

RDS Visual Art Awards

College Curator Application Pack 2026

1. Introduction

The RDS Visual Art Awards support graduating visual artists in Ireland as they transition from student to early professional practice. Through a high-profile exhibition, professional development opportunities, and a €40,000 prize fund, the Awards highlight excellence and help emerging artists build sustainable careers.

This pack outlines:

- Background to the Awards
 - Role and responsibilities of College Curators
 - Judging process and conflict-of-interest policy
 - Information on the College Curator Opportunity programme
 - How to apply
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2. Background Information

The RDS Visual Art Awards provide an important platform for artists completing BA and MA visual art programmes in Ireland. Artists longlisted by College Curators are invited to submit an online application, which is reviewed by an expert judging panel. A final shortlist is selected for the RDS Visual Art Award Exhibition, and prizes are awarded at this stage.

2.1 Selection Process Overview



1. College Curators visit degree shows and produce a longlist of promising graduates.
2. Longlisted artists are invited to apply via an online application form.
3. The judging panel reviews applications and selects finalists.
4. Shortlisted artists exhibit in the RDS Visual Art Award Exhibition.
5. Prize winners are selected by the judging panel.

The judging panel includes artists and curators nominated by the RDS, IMMA, RHA and the National Gallery of Ireland.

3. Role of College Curators

College Curators are responsible for identifying the most promising emerging artists graduating in Ireland each year.

3.1 Duties

- Visit assigned colleges to view BA and MA end-of-year shows.
- Review the work of all eligible graduating students.
- Identify and longlist artists based on artistic quality, innovation, and potential.
- Provide written justification for each selection using the RDS provided template (shared only with the judging panel).
- Place an RDS longlist sticker beside each selected artwork.
- Notify the assigned lecturer and RDS Arts team of selections.
- Uphold confidentiality and neutrality throughout the process.

3.2 Longlist Eligibility Criteria

- Students must be graduating in the year of the Awards.
- Selected work must clearly function within a visual art context.
- Work using materials associated with Craft or Applied Art may be considered if presented as visual art.



- Selection must be based on quality, not quantity or previous reputation.

3.3 College Curator Conduct

Curators must:

- Avoid influence or interference from college staff.
 - Maintain objectivity and professional integrity.
 - Report any potential conflicts of interest before adjudication.
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4. Confidentiality & Conflicts of Interest

The RDS requires all judges and curators to maintain strict confidentiality regarding artist selections, notes, and internal discussions.

A conflict of interest arises if a curator:

- Is related to a candidate
- Has a close personal friendship with a candidate
- Has taught, supervised, mentored, or maintained a professional collaboration with a candidate

Even the appearance of a conflict must be declared.

Failure to declare a conflict may disqualify selections or jeopardise participation in future panels.

5. Curator Opportunity (Ireland-based)

This initiative supports early-career curators in Ireland who wish to gain curatorial experience.

5.1 Why This Programme Exists



Curatorial pathways are often opaque, underfunded, or inaccessible. This opportunity seeks to expand who gets to shape the field by offering a curator a pathway into curatorial work.

The programme aims to:

- Support emerging curators within their first ten years of practice
- Broaden representation within the curatorial and visual arts sectors
- Address barriers including lack of networks, financial constraints, and limited access to institutional spaces

5.2 What the Programme Includes

Participants will receive:

- Hands-on curatorial experience
- Skill-building in exhibition planning, installation, and public engagement
- Mentorship and insight into the curatorial process
- Real world work on RDS Visual Art exhibition at the RDS

5.3 Who Should Apply

We want to hear from early-career curators who are:

- Curious about curatorial practice
- Passionate about contemporary art
- Motivated to shape future cultural conversations

5.4 We Particularly Encourage Applications From

- Curators underrepresented in the visual arts
 - Curators based across the island of Ireland
 - Curators working in practices historically excluded from institutional programmes
 - Curators interested in developing skills in adjudicating and evaluating graduate artists' work within a professional framework
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6. How to Apply

Applicants are asked to submit the following:

6.1 Application Materials

1. A two-page written statement, outlining:

- **Your interest in the role** and what you hope to gain from the experience
- **Any previous curatorial projects**, including:
 - A brief description of the project(s)
 - Your role and responsibilities
 - Links to documentation, websites, portfolios, or images where available

This can take the form of a narrative statement, a combined statement/CV, or another format that best represents your experience.

2. A current CV (optional but encouraged)

3. Links to an online portfolio or website (if available)

4. Additional (Desirable) Criteria:

- **Access to a car and ability to drive** (desirable but **not essential**) for travel to degree show sites across Ireland.

6.2 Submission

Applications must be received by **5pm on 23 February 2026**.

Email submissions to: arts@rds.ie

Subject line: RDS College Curator Open Call 2026

7. Conditions



The RDS will pay a **total fee of €2,500**, processed through the RDS payroll (minus any statutory deductions), for the completion of the following:

- Conducting three site visits to BA and MA degree shows in your assigned colleges.
- Producing a longlist of graduating artists, in line with the policies, responsibilities, and criteria outlined in this pack.
- Completing a week-long professional experience with the curator of the RDS Visual Art Awards, offering hands-on insight into curatorial practice, exhibition preparation, research, and project development.
- Contributing to the project led by the RDS Visual Art Award exhibition curator, including any associated tasks relevant to the delivery of the exhibition.