[IE] Digital Cinema

IRIS 2010-1:1/42

Marie McGonagle
School of Law, National University of Ireland, Galway

According to the Arts Council, Ireland has the largest per capita cinema-going population in the EU. However, the choice of film in Ireland has been largely confined to mainstream commercial cinema. In 2007 there were only 15 digital screens in Ireland. In April 2008 a report entitled “Digital Cinema in Ireland - A Review of Current Possibilities” was published. It was commissioned by the Cultural Cinema Consortium, which is a joint initiative of the Arts Council of Ireland and the Irish Film Board. Since then, the Consortium has embarked on a project to roll out digital cinema equipment in arthouse cinemas.

The term ‘digital cinema’ in the Report refers to projection systems which can be used to screen new releases and specialised films to public audiences at a standard comparable to or better than that achievable with conventional 35mm film. The Report sets out the technical and financial advantages of digital cinema and considers the options for Ireland. It states that, even if the private company Digital Cinema Ltd (Ireland) achieve their target of equipping 500 screens in Ireland with DCI standard digital projection systems, there will remain a group of cinemas, including cultural cinemas, arts centres and smaller, probably geographically remote venues, which will not suit the DCL business model. The Consortium, therefore, the Report said, might consider developing methods of ensuring that these cinemas are not “digitally abandoned” and potentially denied access to a range of films, especially specialist titles distributed by independent film distributors.

At the time of the publication of the Report it was not clear whether all the cinemas in Ireland were willing or able to participate in the scheme. Additionally, there were concerns from distributors and exhibitors about a single company dominating the entire Irish cinema sector. The Report considered it appropriate therefore to investigate the opportunities for partnerships with other suppliers. The Consortium might consider developing a support programme which would encourage key providers of cultural cinema to keep apace with developments in this area. Also, to assist the digital distribution of Irish films, it might consider requiring producers and distributors who receive public funding to deliver an appropriately formatted digital master as an integral part of the funding contract.

Digital Cinema Ltd (Ireland) aimed to convert most cinemas in Ireland during 2008. In common with its counterparts in the UK, Europe and the USA, it adopted

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

a ‘virtual print fee’ model to fund the digital roll-out. These fees are paid to the equipment suppliers or integrators by film distributors each time a digitally equipped cinema screens a digital film. Over several years, these fees will recoup the capital costs of providing digital projection equipment.

The Film Board’s Strategy Goals for 2008 to 2009 included references to the roll-out of digital cinema and also to exploring with the Irish Film Institute the digitising of the Film Board catalogue in the archive.

The recipients of the Cultural Cinema Consortium’s Cinema Digitisation Scheme grants, which totalled EUR 750,000, were announced in January 2009. The grants were for the purchase and installation of digital projection equipment to cinemas that offer a cultural cinema programme on a year-round basis. Since then a number of cinemas have been refurbished to become digital or all-digital multi-screen and the first custom designed digital cinema in Ireland opened in Dublin in December 2009. The roll-out is not complete yet but it is progressing and an evaluation will be carried out shortly.

Other interesting developments with regard to film include the Virtual Cinema scheme for high-quality short films that are suited to new forms of digital video consumption and the intended launch of an Irish Film Television channel provided for in the Broadcasting Act 2009 (IRIS 2009-10: 13/18).

Report: “Digital Cinema in Ireland - A Review of Current Possibilities”

http://www.irishfilmboard.ie/files/reports/Digital_Cinema_in_Ireland.pdf

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026