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Disability and the Arts Council : a discussion document

Item Type	report
Citation	Arts Council of Ireland, 'Disability and the Arts Council : a discussion document', [report], Arts Council of Ireland, 1998-06
Publisher	Arts Council of Ireland
Download date	2026-06-16 09:01:55
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14765/108917

Disability & the Arts Council

1998

**Disability and the Arts Council
A Discussion Document**

June 1998

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Definitions

Definition of disability

The Arts Council understands the terms 'disabled people' and 'people with disabilities' to include children, adults and older people who experience a physical, sensory, learning or mental health disability. While it recognises both terms it also acknowledges the preference of some individuals and organisations for use of one in favour of the other.¹ The Arts Council will endeavour to keep informed of developments in the definition of disability.

Models of disability

There are at least two competing models through which disability is understood, namely the medical and social models. The medical model is informed by the individual perspective of a person's physical/medical condition or impairment. Some people with disabilities, particularly older people identify with this model. The social model on the other hand proposes that it is society which disables people with disabilities by the way in which it responds to those disabilities. For example, many buildings are inaccessible to people with mobility impairments - this is as a result of designing the building in a specific manner and not a result of the impairment. The social model emphasises that barriers exist in society, and it challenges society to address these barriers.

The Arts Council's perspective is informed by the social model of disability, while acknowledging the preference of impairment focus by some people.

¹ In response to the recommendations of the Irish Council of People with Disabilities as the representative organisation of people with disabilities, the Arts Council uses the term 'people with disabilities'.

Arts and disability

'Arts and disability' is an overview phrase which includes a broad range of arts practice. It embraces artwork by people with disabilities and activities involving people with disabilities. It incorporates people with disabilities as artists, participants and audience members. Arts and disability can be used to describe projects involving collaboration between disabled and able-bodied people (either as artists, participants or as audience). Arts and disability projects, when collaborative, must involve people with disabilities at all stages of the project from planning to showcasing. Where people with disabilities are placed on the margins or involved on non-disabled terms, projects cannot be endorsed within the practice of arts and disability.

Disability arts

Disability arts is a specific arts practice which involves artists with disabilities creating work which expresses their identity as disabled people. The work of disability arts practitioners contributes to the expression of a disability culture. It is informed by disabled people's experiences, values, and beliefs as disabled people, and by a sense of their identity as members of a distinct group with a unique culture.

Disability and the Arts

International overview

In recent decades a strong international disability movement has emerged. It developed as a result of people with disabilities making known the inequalities and barriers in society experienced by people with disabilities. This movement challenges previous notions and definitions of disability in favour of definitions based on equality and civil rights with the result that during the past fifteen years disability has come to play a more prominent role in international political and cultural life. Irish counterparts of this movement include The Forum of People with Disabilities, the Centre for Independent Living, and the Advocacy Ireland Movement.

1981 was declared the United Nations International Year of Disabled People, and in 1993 the United Nations' *Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* were adopted. While not legally binding, these reflect current thinking about disability policy and provide the basic international legal standard for programmes, laws, and policy on disability and the framework for equal participation.

Legislation on disability issues in the United States was addressed through the Rehabilitation Act 1973, and the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990. Similarly in the United Kingdom the Disability Discrimination Act has been in effect since 1995.

Developments in Ireland

In 1993 the Department of Equality and Law Reform established the Commission for the Status of People with Disabilities in order to begin similar proactive work within the Irish context. The task of the Commission was to carry out an extensive consultation process with people with disabilities throughout the country - to find out what people with disabilities wanted with a view to developing and implementing a policy on disability. This process also involved the establishment of working groups focusing on specific areas, and the work of the working group on Arts and Culture was particularly significant for arts and disability. The result of this extensive two year consultation process was the publication, in 1996, of the Commission's report *A Strategy for Equality*. Informed by the UN Standard Rules, the recommendations of this report reflect the views of people with disabilities throughout the country and provide a framework for policy development on disability. Arising from the Commission's report, two bills in relation to legislation on disability issues were put forward in 1997, namely the *Employment Equality* bill and the *Equal Status* bills. Neither of these bills was put into legislation and both have been revised for reconsideration in 1988.

The Arts Council

An Chomhairle Ealaíon /the Arts Council is an independent autonomous body set up in 1951 to stimulate public interest in, and to promote the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts. The Arts Council believes that everyone in Ireland has an entitlement to meaningful access to and participation in the arts.

The Council understands that it has a primary responsibility to encourage and maintain high standards in all art forms, especially in the living contemporary arts. It also understands that it has a clear responsibility to foster those structures which assist and develop dialogue between artists, the arts and the communities from which they emerge.

Operating under the Arts Acts 1951 and 1973, the Council carries out its work through a wide range of policies and programmes designed to provide financial assistance and other support services for individuals and organisations, and generally to create an environment in which the arts can develop and flourish. More recently the Arts Council has adopted the role of a development agency for the arts. This role consists of two elements: advocacy and funding.

Disability and the Arts Council

The Arts Council is committed to addressing the needs of people with disabilities across the range of its activities and within each discipline, and provides support for arts and disabilities through advocacy and funding.

Advocacy

In 1985 *A Code of Good Practice* was published, offering guidelines of good practice to arts organisations. This was followed in 1988 by the publication *To Enable* which focused on issues relating to physical access to arts venues for people with disabilities. A number of actions were taken in subsequent years, most notably the designation of an arts and disability portfolio, responsibility for which was given to an appointed officer, and the introduction of a budget specifically for arts and disability.

In 1991 the introduction of Building Regulations legislation resulted in moderate increases in the provision of wheelchair access to arts centres throughout the country, and in 1996 the Arts Council published *Planning an Arts Building* which offers a comprehensive series of guidelines for individuals and groups involved in the development of arts buildings. The guidelines include recommendations on provision for people with disabilities as staff, audience, and artists, and emphasise the necessity for access to the whole building. The document recommends that the aim should be to provide the best accessibility possible in line with the National Rehabilitation Board's (NRB) recommended standards in *Building for Everyone* (1998).

In 1996, in anticipation of the work of the Commission, the Arts Council, in co-operation with the NRB, convened a working group to advise on how best the Council could address the needs of people with disabilities in terms of its policy and practice. Members of the group were drawn from a number of bodies including the Centre for Independent Living; NRB; Open Arts, Belfast; and the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities. The group was chaired by Séamus Ó Cinnéide. The report from this working group, entitled *Arts, Disability and the Council*² offers a series of recommendations to the Arts Council. These recommendations are based upon consultative research findings, prepared by Mary Duffy, recommendations from *A Strategy for Equality*, and the findings of the Arts and Culture working group of the Commission.

The final report was accepted in principle by the Council in 1997, and an action plan is now in place to ensure that the recommendations are carried out over a phased period of time. The report of the working group offers a three-strand structure which can be named as follows:

1. Recommendations on what the Council itself can do
2. Guidelines on disability for arts and cultural organisations
3. A step by step action plan to enable both of these to occur

Arts and Disability are now part of the brief of the Development Unit of the Arts Council. An executive with responsibility for arts and disability issues has been appointed to ensure that the working group's report is adopted over time, and that ongoing consultation with the wider community of people with disabilities can inform the thinking of the Council.

Disability Equality Training

In order to increase understanding of disability issues and how they relate to policy and practice, the Arts Council commissioned a professional team of trainers to provide a programme of Disability Equality Training for Council members and staff. This

² Copies of the working group's report and research document are available on request

programme is now complete, having included the development of artform action plans to enable each officer to integrate arts and disability issues into the artform areas. Consultation and training will continue in the future to complement policy development in this area, and a sign language trainer has been engaged to provide sign language lessons for the staff of the Arts Council.

Following on from the Disability Equality Training, the Arts Council is commissioning an established Disability Equality Training team from Britain to work with a number of Irish Disability Equality Training teams, led by people with disabilities, to develop a model of Disability Equality Training which specifically addresses the needs of arts organisations. This model will be developed on a pilot basis and will then be made available to arts organisations on an on going basis.

Physical Access

Arts Council premises

The Arts Council, in consultation with the NRB, has carried out an access audit to ensure that its premises (70 Men-ion Square, Dublin 2) are as accessible as possible to people with disabilities. The recommendations of this audit - which include front access and an accessible lift - are under consideration by the Arts Council's architects. The Council is committed to addressing its physical access issues on a phased basis.

Guidelines for Arts Organisations

The Arts Council has developed a series of guidelines for arts organisations based on the recommendations of the arts and disability working group. These guidelines will provide information on how arts organisations can become more accessible - in terms of physical access, programming and participation - to people with disabilities. The guidelines aim to provide a framework based on a phased approach, to ensure meaningful and permanent change.

Access to Information

The Arts Council will undertake to provide all its published information in a variety of formats, and will strive to use clear language to ensure accessibility. Some publications are now available in large print, Braille, and on computer disk, and it is hoped to have certain publications available on audio cassette. In 1997 the Council produced a series of three publications in order to ensure easier access to information about its services and policies. These publications provide a comprehensive guide to the workings of the Arts Council, and are available from the Council's administrative offices in a variety of formats, at no charge:

- 1. About the Arts Council** - information on the Arts Council organisation and how it works
- 2. Revenue Funding** - details about grants to organisations
- 3. Awards and Opportunities** - details about financial awards and bursaries to individuals and specific schemes organised by the Arts Council

Resources

Arts and Disability Resource Pack and Database

As part of a joint initiative with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Arts Council is commissioning the production of an arts and disability resource pack for arts organisations and for disability organisations. This resource material will be of practical assistance to arts organisations, helping to increase awareness of disability issues, and enabling organisations to implement ways in which people with disabilities are involved as makers of art, as audiences, as programme participants, as board members, and as organisation employees. Information available to disability organisations will serve to promote the arts and to increase awareness of the benefits of the arts for people with disabilities as audience, artists, participants and employees in the arts industry. The resource pack will include information on disability culture, language and terminology, arts and disability, disability arts, access issues, sign interpreters, disability equality trainers, relevant organisations and other useful contacts.

Funding

While recognising the specific issues relating to disability, Arts Council grant aid for arts and disability and disability arts has generally been incorporated within the various artforms to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are addressed broadly across the range of its activities. Each artform budget allocates funds to people with disabilities in the same way that all other applications are facilitated.

The Arts Council also provides direct support for arts and disability and disability arts through the arts and disability budget which is administered within the Development Unit. This budget is primarily intended to support new initiatives within the area of arts and disability and includes grant-aid for resource organisations, arts and disability and disability arts projects, and disability partnership initiatives. If and when appropriate, successful projects are transferred to the relevant artform budget.

Arts Council funding consists of:

Revenue Funding - annual grant-aid to organisations for programming and running costs, etc.

Capital Funding - grant-aid for building, equipment, and repairs which also enables arts organisations and venues to improve physical access for people with disabilities such as the installation of accessible toilets, lift, ramps, handrails, etc.

Project Funding and Awards - awards, bursaries and schemes to provide opportunities for individuals and groups to carry out specific projects or bodies of work, all of which are available to people with disabilities.

Criteria for funding

- **Revenue Funding - Arts Council grants to organisations**
offers a comprehensive list of criteria applicable to each group and organisation seeking funding from the Arts Council.
- **Awards & Opportunities - Arts Council bursaries, awards and schemes**
states criteria used in determining funding for awards and schemes to individuals and organisations.
Both of these publications are available from the Council's administrative offices in a variety of formats, at no charge.

In general, the Council is concerned to support and recognise artistic excellence and to encourage potential.

Criteria in relation to Arts and Disability

In addition to the general criteria, the Arts Council takes the following factors into consideration when evaluating proposals from organisations, relating to arts and disability:

1. a proven commitment to develop and integrate understanding of disability issues within the organisation;
2. active involvement of people with disabilities in the consultation, decision making, planning, and implementation of a proposal;
3. indication that the proposal has an impact upon the wider sector of people with disabilities and that there is a realistic and substantial representation of the wider group;
4. a commitment to developing new models of practice which can be replicated.

One additional criterion is used to assess disability arts proposals:

5. direct involvement of people with disabilities in the origin of the proposal.

When assessing arts and disability and disability arts proposals, the Arts Council directly involves people with disabilities in its procedures, for example as consultants and panel members.

Costs of disability

People with disabilities often incur additional costs arising from their impairments. The Council is working towards a procedure which may allow a contribution towards these costs which **specifically relate to the making of art work**. Applicants are encouraged to state any costs of disability incurred when making an application. This will help inform the development of an effective response.

Artflight

A person with a disability who is awarded an artflight and requires a personal assistant to travel with them will automatically qualify for a second artflight to accommodate the personal assistant.

The Future

The Arts Council has been working towards establishing strategic partnerships with many non-arts agencies, national and local, governmental and non governmental for the achievement of its objectives in the area of arts and disability. Some of the key relationships which have been identified as necessary to the development of policy in the area of arts and disability are:

- National Rehabilitation Board,
- Irish Council of People with Disabilities,
- Arts Council of Northern Ireland,
- Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands,
- Department of Education and Science,
- Department of Health.

As a first step the Arts Council will explore with various partners the following:

- traineeships to enable people with disabilities to gain experience in the arts as artists and arts workers
- increased accessibility to arts and cultural institutions and organisations
- increased access to arts practice for people with disabilities as practitioners and audience members

In terms of its own practice, the Arts Council will look at the needs of the arts and disability sector under all its areas of work. At present, the Arts Council is undertaking several major pieces of research which span the range of its concerns in the on-going consultation process which will inform the development of the next Arts Plan.

These include:

- Support for the individual artist
- Support for arts festivals
- Arts council collection of fine art
- Audit of arts buildings nationally
- Survey of local authority expenditure on the arts
- Impact of the the artist in the community scheme
- Impact of FAS on the arts
- Economics and Employment
- Public and the arts

Together with the recommendations of the working group, these research initiatives will inform the Council's approach to arts and disability during the planning period.

Code of Practice

Guidelines for Arts Organisations

The Commission's *report A Strategy for Equality* shows that people with disabilities are largely excluded from economic, political, social, and cultural life. Moving from exclusion to inclusion will require change at many different levels: in the understanding and attitudes of the public; in the law; in employment; and in public services. All organisations providing facilities or offering services to the public must recognise the equal rights of people with disabilities and take account of their specific requirements. This means that their activities must be accessible to people with disabilities - and much more than that. Arts and cultural organisations will have to change too, and indeed some have already gone some distance in working for the inclusion of people with disabilities. For example: Garter Lane Arts Centre, Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Firestation Artists Studios, the National Gallery, and the City Arts Centre.

Assisting the roles of arts organisations

Drawing from a variety of documentation, a series of guidelines is offered. This will help arts organisations to increase awareness of disability issues and to increase participation by people with disabilities in arts activities. The guidelines aim to provide a framework to ensure meaningful and permanent change, based on a phased approach. Some represent minimum requirements which organisations should be meeting already or should meet in the short term. Others represent standards that organisations should aim for and strive to attain in the medium term.

Guidelines

1. Participation and planning

Discovering what people with disabilities want from an arts organisation can only be learned through direct consultation with people with disabilities. Entering into discussions with local disability organisations or with individuals is necessary to ascertain particular needs in respect of the arts and to determine how these might be met. The inclusion of people with disabilities in the policy planning and development of an organisation is central to good practice. This may be achieved through encouraging people with disabilities to participate on boards of management and boards of directors of arts organisations. However, responsibility for disability issues should not automatically rest exclusively with people with disabilities, and it should become an integral part of the working ethos at all levels. Developing and implementing a policy and code of practice governing audience, participants, and employment for people with disabilities will clarify issues for organisations. Progress and implementation of policy can be monitored using appropriate performance indicators - for example, levels of attendance.

2. Staffing

Organisations may find it helpful to designate a member of staff to take overall responsibility for ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities are met. This person could act as a link between the organisation and the disability sector to ensure that disability issues are integrated within the entire organisation.

Obstacles to access for people with disabilities are not confined to physical barriers to venues: the attitudes of staff can be crucial. Working from the social model of disability all organisations are encouraged to:

- organise a programme of Disability Equality Training and Customer Service Training for all staff to increase awareness of disability issues;

- ensure that front of house staff are familiar with arrangements for admitting people with disabilities to their premises;
- ensure that the organisation's employment and equal opportunities policy is inclusive of disability issues, formalising its commitment to equal opportunities through good practice and positive action;
- increase the representation of people with disabilities as employees in the arts through the advertising of vacant positions through the NRB, county networks of the Irish Council of People with Disabilities, disability organisations, and in the disability press;
- consider flexible approaches to working arrangements such as telework, job sharing etc. which are of benefit to employees with disabilities.

3. Programming

Organisations are encouraged to open up their existing programmes of work to people with disabilities. Some sections of the community have specific needs which must be considered if they are to enjoy the same access opportunities to the arts as people without disabilities. Consultation with people with disabilities is encouraged with a view to making arts activities as accessible as possible.

Organisations can also explore new projects and programmes which could increase the participation of people with disabilities in all arts activities. This might involve disability arts events and activities, arts and disability activities, outreach work in schools and in clinical and community settings.

4. Physical access and facilities

Lack of physical access to arts buildings has been identified as a major obstacle for people with disabilities who wish to participate in arts activities both as maker and observer. Many features which make a building accessible for people with disabilities do not require major structural alterations, for example; providing a designated car parking space or large print information and signage. Other features may require investment, however, and assistance is available through the capital budget of the Arts Council.

Again, through consultation with people with disabilities, organisations can learn new ways to address specific needs. For example: many people with disabilities do not have access to credit cards to facilitate performance booking, and queueing for tickets may not be physically possible. New ways of developing and facilitating audiences will need an investment in time and commitment to undergo consultation, planning, and possible modification of existing procedures.

Improvement in physical access can be addressed in a number of ways:

- in consultation with local disability organisations, county networks of the Irish Council of People with Disabilities, and the NRB, arts organisations are encouraged to carry out an access survey of premises for advice on any improvements that could be made;
- by complying with the standards of the Building Regulations and the NRB's guidelines *Buildings for Everyone* for new buildings, and in the renovation of existing buildings;
- by providing access details to visiting companies or artists, as well as notification on all publicity material;
- by being aware of the needs of people with multiple disabilities and offering choices. Locating space for wheelchair users at the back of an auditorium would not, for example, facilitate an accompanying person or wheelchair user who will need to see a sign interpreter;

- touring companies or those with outreach programmes should include a minimum number of accessible venues/centres in each touring programme;
- by providing accessible features such as:
 - concession schemes;
 - induction loop systems;
 - infra-red systems;
 - surtitling in large venues;
 - sign language interpretation for performances, openings, lectures, and tours
 - audio description systems;
 - accessible toilet facilities;
 - ramps;
 - signage;
 - information in alternative formats;
 - priority seating;
 - designated car parking space.

5. Information

Access to information is an essential aspect of increasing participation in the arts for people with disabilities. Organisations are encouraged to review standards and methods of information provision and to consider the needs of people with visual impairments, people with hearing impairments, and people with learning disabilities. Ways in which this can be addressed are:

- providing information in alternative formats, including Braille, large print, computer disk, audio cassette, and video cassette. A proportion of funding for publicity can be set aside to cover the cost of providing information in alternative formats - large print and computer disk are relatively low cost formats;

- publicising activities and events as widely as possible, including targeting disability organisations and the disability press;
- all publicity material must contain information on access features or indeed the lack of same. Pricing policies and special access features should be noted on all material. For example: use of strobe lights or glitter balls can have adverse effects on some people with epilepsy;
- adopting a standardised good practice in addressing the needs of people with disabilities as modelled by the Edinburgh Festival (see appendix).

6. Transport

Lack of accessible transport prevents many people with disabilities from participating in arts activities. Organisations may choose to address this by:
liaising with providers of accessible transport to co-ordinate schedules and maximise opportunities for all people to attend events;

- offering the use of transport belonging to the organisation;
- providing a register of local volunteer escorts who would accompany a person with a disability to a performance

Information and Resources:

There are many resource organisations throughout the country and some of the main organisations are listed below. You can contact these organisations for information about resources and activities in your local area.

- **National Disability Resource Centre** - National Rehabilitation Board, 44 North Great Georges Street, Dublin 1. Tel: (01) 874 7503
- **Irish Council of People with Disabilities** - 4th Floor, Park House, North Circular Road, Dublin 7. Tel: (01) 868 3502, Fax: (01) 868 3526, email: icpd@iol.ie
- **Irish Deaf Society** - Carmichael House, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7. Tel: (01) 860 1878, Fax: (01) 860 1960
- **National Association for Deaf People** - NAD House, 35 North Frederick Street, Dublin 1. Tel: (01) 872 3800
- **National Council for the Blind in Ireland** - P.V. Doyle House, 45 Whitworth Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 7. Tel: (01) 830 7033, Fax: (01) 830 7787
- **Irish Wheelchair Association** - Áras Chuchulain, Blackheath Drive, Clontarf, Dublin 3. Tel: (01) 833 8241

Policy Statement

Arts and disability is an emerging area of practice. The Arts Council therefore intends to develop a policy on arts and disability over a period of time, ensuring that it is directly informed by consultation with the sector, and that it addresses the needs and emerging practices of people with disabilities.

The Arts Council is committed to addressing the needs of people with disabilities through its code of practice on arts and disability, and by meaningful ongoing consultation with the sector. It seeks to influence other arts organisations through practical information, incentives, and encouragement.

- The Arts Council understands the terms 'people with disabilities' and 'disabled people' to include children and adults who experience a physical, sensory, learning, or mental health disability, and acknowledges the preference of some individuals and organisations for the use of one term in favour of the other. The Arts Council will endeavour to keep informed of developments in terminology and to respond accordingly.
- The perspective taken by the Council is that of a social model of disability, while acknowledging a preference for impairment focus by some people.
- The Arts Council recognises 'arts and disability' as a broad term encompassing a range of arts activities which involve people with disabilities both as practitioners and as audience members. Arts and disability practice can include both artwork by people with disabilities as well as arts activities involving people with disabilities.

- The Council recognises disability arts as a specific arts activity which involves work done by artists with disabilities as an expression of their identity as disabled people. Artwork created by disability arts practitioners contributes to the expression of a disability culture.
- The Arts Council aims to support and promote both arts and disability and disability arts practice.
- Support for arts and disability and disability arts is addressed across the range of the Arts Council's activities and within each arts discipline. Additional support for the development of new and existing initiatives in arts and disability is through the arts and disability budget. Criteria and procedures for assessment of funding applications have been developed.
- Extra costs of disability specifically related to the making of art work are also considered.
- The Arts Council administers a capital grant scheme which enables arts organisations and venues to improve physical access for people with disabilities.
- The Arts Council is committed to providing all its published information in a variety of formats and will strive to use clear language to ensure accessibility.
- The Arts Council is committed to making its premises and services accessible to people with disabilities
- The Arts Council also addresses the needs of people with disabilities by working to encourage and promote strategic partnerships with other non-arts agencies involved in the disability sector.

- The Arts Council acknowledges the role of the arts therapies and arts practice in health environments. During this period of review and planning the Arts Council will consider the areas of the arts therapies and arts in health.
- The Arts Council is committed to the continued development of a policy on disability and the arts which is informed by the sector and which reflects the needs of people with disabilities.