



Arts Council of Northern

**ART FORM AND SPECIALIST  
AREA POLICY 2013-2018**

**ARTS & DISABILITY**



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## Preamble

The Arts & Disability Policy has been developed in line with *Ambitions for the Arts*, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's five-year Strategic Plan for the Arts, 2013-18. The overarching priorities of the Plan – champion the arts, promote access, build a sustainable sector – are reflected across the set of the Council's Art Form and Specialist Area policies, 2013-18.

## Introduction to Arts & Disability Policy

Northern Ireland has a higher percentage of disabled people than anywhere else in the United Kingdom and Ireland – more than one in five of the population. Disabled people are amongst the most marginalised in our society and have limited opportunities to be involved in the arts. This marginalisation is recognised in changes such as the introduction of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995); and in the integration of strategic policy, from *Programme for Government* through to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's mission to 'promote social and economic equality, and to tackle poverty and social exclusion'.

Improving access to and participation in the arts for persons with a disability is considered a priority for the Arts Council. Within *Ambitions for the Arts: a Five Year Strategic Plan for the Arts in Northern Ireland 2013-2018*, one of the areas highlighted for priority action is disability. The Arts Council recognises that people with a disability are much less likely to attend arts events than those without; participation levels are also lower.

An action measure identified within the Five Year Strategic Plan is the development of a new Disability Action Plan, aimed at increasing the number of disabled people engaged in the arts. The Disability Action Plan will be a clear statement of the Arts Council's ongoing commitment to fulfilling the statutory obligations in compliance with Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006). The Arts Council will allocate the necessary resources (in terms of people, time and money) in order to implement effectively the new Disability Action Plan and where appropriate, build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans.

Actions taken to deal with or remove the disadvantage experienced by disabled people depend on what is perceived as the cause of the disadvantage. Traditionally, disabled people's inability to join in with others in society has been seen as a direct result of having impairment, rather than as the result of features in our society that can be changed.

The Arts Council works from the perspective of the Social Model of disability. This understands disability as a problem of exclusion from ordinary life, requiring a change in society's values and practices in order to remove the barriers to participation. The Arts Council works in partnership with, and takes advice from, disabled people and relevant sector organisations. We see disability as an equality and inclusion issue. Our aim is to encourage universal accessibility. The Arts Council recognises that changes made to accommodate the needs of disabled people have a positive impact on the population as a whole.

The Arts Council currently provides direct and indirect support to the Arts & Disability sector in a number of ways, through grants and awards to arts organisations and relevant sector organisations, delivery of a Premium Payment scheme supporting additional associated costs, targeted bursaries for artists with disabilities and ongoing support of the Equality Charter, a framework encouraging and rewarding good practice amongst arts venues and increasing access and participation in the arts for disabled people.

## Definitions

The Disability Discrimination Act defines disability as 'a condition caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment, which results in loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the community on an equal level with others, due to physical and social barriers'.

Arts & Disability is a general term relating to a broad range of arts practice, embracing artwork by people with disabilities and activities involving disabled people as artists, participants and audience members. The approach is inclusive and aims to involve all sections of the community.

Disability Arts is a specific arts practice where disabled artists create work that is informed by, or expresses, their identity as disabled people. The work of Disability Arts practitioners contributes to the expression of a disability culture and forms an integral part of disability politics. It is informed by disabled people's experiences, values and beliefs.

A disabled people's organisation is one that is managed by a management or executive committee on which disabled people hold at least 51% of its voting membership.

## Funding Objectives

- Encourage and support disabled people's involvement in the arts on their own terms, including Arts & Disability, Disability Arts and involvement in mainstream practice;
- support the ongoing development and delivery of the Arts & Disability Equality Charter for Northern Ireland;
- promote the concept of universal accessibility in arts venues;
- support best practice amongst organisations funded by the Arts Council;
- increase the level of involvement and quality of experience for disabled people's participation in the arts;
- provide good quality exhibition and performance opportunities for disabled artists;
- encourage the development of events to showcase the best of Disability Arts and encourage Disability Arts practice in Northern Ireland;
- encourage organisations funded by the Arts Council to take part in Disability Equality Training and other training around disability issues;
- encourage the development of mentoring and apprenticeship schemes;
- increase opportunities for artists and arts organisations to work in Arts & Disability practice;
- follow up on recommendations from the Disability Baseline Study (2006) and support and contribute to ongoing research in this area.

- support projects that promote and strengthen partnership working between the arts and disability sectors and the development of shared understandings, resources and responsibilities.
- support best practice through training, support, advice and dissemination of information.

## Additional Information

### **'Ambitions for the Arts' Five Year Arts Strategy, 2013-2018**

[www.artscouncil-ni.org/about-us/strategy](http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/about-us/strategy)

### **Art Form and Specialist Area Policies, 2013-2018**

[www.artscouncil-ni.org/the-arts](http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/the-arts)

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|---------------------------------|--------------------|
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| Community Arts                  | Visual Arts        |
| Crafts & Applied Arts           | Voluntary Arts     |
| Dance                           | Youth Arts         |



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