



An Introduction to **The Arts and Disability Access Awards**



Belfast
City Council



Paul Hamlyn
Foundation

About University of Atypical



University of Atypical for Arts and Disability is the lead sectoral organisation in arts and disability in Northern Ireland.

We are disabled-led and take an empowerment-based approach towards d/Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent people's involvement in the arts, as audience members and creative practitioners.



About the Programme



The Arts and Disability Access Awards is an innovative programme of training and support for arts, culture, and heritage organisations who want to make their activities as accessible as possible. It is designed and led by d/Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent people, who bring with them a wealth of experiential knowledge, and the freshest ideas about disability rights and accessibility for the arts.

The programme has 3 elements:

1. Access Audit and Improvement Plan.
2. Making the Arts Accessible Training Course.
3. Accessibility Information Videos.



1 Access Audit and Improvement Programme



Our Audit and Improvement Programme assists organisations to make practical and effective changes to their space, policies, and practices, to remove barriers to d/Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent people. You will be supported by one of our Access Advisors, who were recruited for their disability experience and knowledge, and have been comprehensively trained in disability and accessibility topics.

Your Advisor will get to know you and your organisation, offer constructive feedback on what is working and what can be improved, and provide you with ongoing support to produce and act on a realistic improvement plan. They also provide information and resources that will help you to make informed decisions about improvements and materials.

We have designed this element to be realistic and manageable. We do not measure you against an external standard that may be unworkable for your organisation. We start from where you are right now, and work with you on a timeframe that suits your other commitments.

While we acknowledge what you are already doing well, the main focus is improvement. We work with you to identify goals to work towards, and accredit you when you meet them.

Stage 1: Assessing Where You Are

At the first meeting, your Advisor will help you to assess your current accessibility provisions, and to identify areas for improvement. They will conduct a comprehensive audit of your space and practices. Our audit includes physical access, promotional materials, websites and social media, communication provisions like sign language and captioning, practices and policies, recruitment and working practices, working with disabled artists, and consultation with disabled people. After this meeting, your Advisor will build a tailored picture of effective goals for your organisation.

Stage 2: Planning & Making Improvements

In the second meeting, you will work with your Advisor to create a timeline and set 3 or 4 goals that you commit to work on.

The Advisor will suggest what is realistic, what can be achieved in the short term, and what may require longer-term planning. You can work on goals that are simple or complex. Previous organisations have organised sign language training, added image descriptions to social media and websites, added contrast markers and signage to physical premises, revised policies, created an accessibility web page, and commissioned Access Information Videos.

Your Advisor will support you throughout the programme via email, phone, and video call. They will provide resources, signpost you to organisations, service providers, and funding opportunities, and generally be on hand to offer advice and support.

Stage 3: Measuring and Awarding Your Achievements

The Advisor will conduct a final audit to assess how closely you have met your goals. If you achieve these goals, University of Atypical will present you with an Arts and Disability Access Award for that year. We will give you your certificate at a biannual celebration event, and provide materials for your website. We will also share your achievements across social media to let everyone know what you have been doing.

Organisations who engage with the programme across 3 years, and who make continual improvement, will receive Accessibility Champion status for 3 years. We will present you with a physical award to mark this achievement.

“We have better knowledge of embedding access into every step of what we do, not adding it on at the end of processes and planning”.



2 Making the Arts Accessible Training Course



This is a comprehensive, practical, and relevant training programme that covers a wide range of aspects of disability and accessibility. Units are designed and led by d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people and artists.

The programme runs for 8 weeks. Each Unit lasts 3 hours.

Current topics are:

Unit 1: Understanding Disability: Theories, Attitudes, Language

Unit 2: Disability Rights and Legal Responsibilities

Unit 3: Accessibility in the Built Environment

Unit 4: Making Information Accessible

Unit 5: Disability Arts

Unit 6: Deaf Culture and Sign Language, and Understanding Visual Impairment

Unit 7: Perspectives on Learning Disability and Neurodivergence

Unit 8: Intersectional Approaches to Disability

Units are delivered by Jonathan Mitchell (Access and Inclusion Manager) alongside disabled artists and experts by experience, and access service providers. We offer the course for a cohort of staff from different arts, culture, heritage, and community organisations. This allows for practical discussions focused on live issues from throughout the sector. We can also offer the course for staff within your organisation, or deliver the Units on a one-off basis.

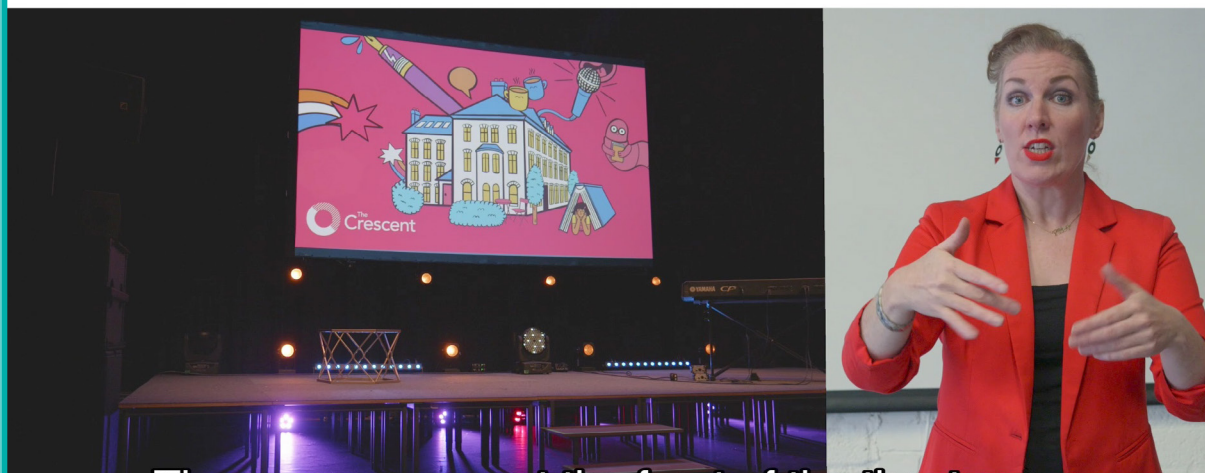
Participants receive a certificate at the end of the course, and are invited to a twice-yearly celebration event.

3 Accessibility Information Videos



These short videos show visitors what to expect at the space, with a particular focus upon accessibility measures. These follow a visitor as they tour your space, and point out physical, information, communication, and sensory accessibility aspects as they go.

We handle all aspects of production, which includes a site visit, script preparation, filming, and editing. Your finished videos will include an audio track, captions, and British and Irish Sign Language interpretation. These videos make your space much more accessible by providing good advance information to d/Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent people, and also show to everyone that you take disability inclusion seriously.



There are spaces at the front of the theater for wheelchair users

“Developing the accessible video has provided a virtual tour of our facility. This is a great benefit to all, but particularly gives confidence to audiences who are disabled and neurodivergent who are thinking of attending our venue”.





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