

ARTS & DISABILITY FORUM

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

The trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the company's Articles of Association, the Companies Act 2006 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102)" (effective 1 January 2019).

Objectives and activities

The objects for which the charity is established are to:

Provide an organisation led by disabled people to increase opportunities for disabled people to engage with the arts in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, working on a pan-disability basis.

Ancillary to the core object, is to provide opportunities, training and support to:

(i) Enhance both the extent and quality of:

- The experience that disabled people have of the arts;
- The work produced by disabled artists;
- The public's experience of art created or presented by disabled artists;
- Arts organisations' understanding of the needs and desires of disabled people (as arts consumers and practitioners);
- Showcase of excellence in art by disabled people
- Collaborative working in pursuit of these aims.

(ii) Promote use of arts by disabled people in support of initiatives aimed at enhancing the wellbeing of disabled people and as approved by the Board.

The charity works collaboratively with arts funders, disabled, neurodiverse and D/deaf artists, arts companies, community groups, equality organisations, ethnic minority groups, LGBTQ groups and the mainstream arts sector, aiming to increase the quality and quantity of opportunities for D/deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse people to participate in arts and culture on their own terms.

Public benefit

The trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the company should undertake.

Achievements and performance

Significant activities and achievements against objectives

The University of Atypical (UofA), formally known as Arts & Disability Forum (ADF) is a charity led by d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people to empower people of all ages; working collaboratively with artists and arts sector organisations to create positive change. The vision is of a genuinely inclusive artistic environment where d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people can be involved in the arts in any way they choose.

The work of the Charity continues to focus on:

- increased access and representation in arts by d/Deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse people;
- enhanced skills for d/Deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse people;
- increased well being from social connections; and
- greater societal acceptance and celebration of diversity

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Achievements and performance

During the year to March 2024, the University of Atypical has developed and broadened its reach and output, delivering support to d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists and audiences throughout Northern Ireland.

The principal funder is the *Arts Council of Northern Ireland* through funding from the National Lottery, thanks to Lottery players. This year the organisation received a small uplift on the Annually Funded Programme (AFP) of £5k towards the end of the financial year as part of this core funding. A contribution to core funding was achieved through the Cultural Multi-Annual Grant (CMAG) from Belfast City Council at standstill.

The Belfast City Council also continued support for the organisation through the Capacity Grant (we are in year 2 of 3) and the Belfast Communities Festival's Fund (CFF) for Bounce 2024. University of Atypical was awarded a tender to support the Belfast 2024 initiative through support for access and inclusion across the organisations taking part in Belfast 2024; phase 1 completed in Spring 2024 and phase 2 commenced in February 2024.

The *Department for Communities* (DfC) provided essential funding in 2023/24 year, to support a range of sign language training, translation and support to engage and make more accessible the arts for the d/Deaf Community. We engaged with over 30 arts and cultural organisations; supporting them to increase their awareness and break down barriers to d/Deaf people's engagement.

Philanthropic Trusts and Foundations have made a significant contribution to the overall aims and objectives of the organisation through funding for specific programmes and initiatives. The *Santander Foundation* completed year 2 of 3 in 2023/24 year, rolling out 10 digital technology masterclasses and a suite of other support. The Halifax Foundation supported an innovative pilot called the Career Advisor Support Scheme (CASS) that paired artists with mentors towards a short term goal.

A range of support initiatives for individual d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists was delivered including grants, awards, mentoring and training. The Arts Council Lottery funding allowed the continuation of financial support through the d/Deaf and Disabled Artists Support Funds (DDASF). DDASF awarded grants of £1,000 to 20 recipients to support d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists. One award of £3,000 was made to an artist through the Digital Innovation Award, supported by the Santander Foundation.

The UofA Ulster University Graduate Award: Christine Kernohan was awarded a package of finance and practical support to continue arts practice and mentoring supported through our core costs.

Halifax Career Advisor Support Scheme supporting short term mentoring for 12 emerging artists. Advice sessions for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists applying to the Support for Individual Artist Programme (SIAP) through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The annual programme of high quality exhibitions at Atypical Gallery featured work produced by recipients of DDASF awards as well as local and international partners - Urban Survival Kits (Erasmus+); Ciaran McGill, Amy Milnes Graduate award exhibition; Connections Arts Centre - ROI; Una Walker, Joel Simon, Drawing Rooms Exhibition.

The Equality Access Standards Initiative (EASI) was renamed the Arts and Disability Access Awards (AADA) and further developed and delivered across Belfast City Council and Derry and Strabane City Council. The Queen's University Open Learning department partnered with UofA to award accreditation to individuals from participating organisations as part of this scheme.

Training across the organisation was significant this year. Our Volunteer Programme and associated training was delivered to 25 recruits. The Digital Horizon programme facilitated Masterclasses in ten areas of digital knowledge by and for people who are d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent working in the creative sector. A series of Diversity Training was offered with a focus on gender and sexual orientation. A sector-wide training including Deaf awareness and BSL sessions was delivered through the Sign Language Development Fund reaching more than 20 organisations and 60 individual learners.

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FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Bounce Arts Festival in October 2023; programmed events in Belfast, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Downpatrick. The festival launch featured guest speakers from Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) Director of Development and Head of Community Arts and Education and the Belfast City Council's Lord Mayor of Belfast. Highlights of the 2023 programme showcased work created by former recipients of DDASF grants: d/Deaf, Disabled Artists Support Funded by ACNI. Bounce included the Atypical Gallery's signature visual arts exhibition by Una Walker for Bounce 2023.

Digital Horizons funded by the Santander Foundation continued to feature as UofA flagship digitalisation and finance management support initiative. During year 2 of a 3 year rolling programme the Digital Innovation Award went to artist Peter Fleming. A series of masterclasses were programmed including; ten new Masterclass submissions were selected for delivery in the finance period 2023/4.

The UofA Social Narrative Video service continued to support disabled audiences access arts venues: by taking a virtual walk through of the venue, offering advice from buying tickets, to using facilities. Using customised captions, voiceover sign language features (Irish and British) to enhance accessibility for a range of potential patrons. During the year we were commissioned to complete a self-funded service by Belfast City Council for arts venues in Belfast as well as the completion of commission for venues in the north west funded by Derry and Strabane District Council.

From 2023/24 the International Residency for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists, funded through Arts Council of Northern Ireland and British Council, came to fruition. Working with Videolabs in Brighton, UofA defined access requirements for many disabled artists who are often excluded from taking part in international residencies. During the year artists residencies were hosted by partners Coven in Berlin, and Flax art studios in Belfast.

Ledger Studio introduced as a much-needed resource for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent audiences and artists. During the year, studio programming and use as a sectoral resource has proved successful. Two new funders were secured for the Ledger Studio - The Begin Together Fund through Bank of Ireland and through the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Staffing

This year has seen significant growth and change in the staffing and structure within the University of Atypical team. New roles emerging alongside resignations and new appointments have been part of the journey towards the emergence of a new and stronger team.

- The CEO Damien Coyle stepped down in January 2024 and a recruitment process confirmed Edel Murphy, (the then Head of Business Administration) as new CEO taking up the role in February 2024.
- The Access and Inclusion Coordinator Ash Jones, resigned in June 2024; her then job share Jonathan Mitchell took on the full four day role.
- Recruitment for Edel's replacement for the Head of Business Administration was initiated in January 2024 and confirmed in March 2024 as Laura Bradley.
- Cara Frazer, the freelance Volunteer Coordinator, moved on from her role in November 2023; Amy Frazer subsequently took on the completion of the Volunteer Coordinator freelance contract.
- Recruitment for the Community Engagement Manager and the Creative Programmes Officer was completed in Summer 2023, however both these roles had to go out to recruitment again in 2024 as both staff in these roles moved on.

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Financial review

Strengthening the UofA financial position and procedures remains a priority. Results for the year are set out in detail on pages 8 to 25. The charity returned net income for the year of £67,719.

At 31 March 2024, the total funds of the charity amounted to £177,865 comprising restricted funds of £95,432 and unrestricted funds of £82,433.

Trustees rely on the unrestricted fund balance which is considered to be essential to provide sufficient funds to cover unforeseen costs and fulfill legal obligations of the charity if current levels of income are not maintained.

The charity continues to work closely with GMcG staff on payroll admin and the production of financial statements for the 2023-24 financial year.

For 2023-24 the principal funder was the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, with core and programming grants from exchequer and lottery funds, and Belfast City Council, Multi Annual funding and Capacity Programme support. Arts Council of Northern Ireland also sustained funding for the d/Deaf and Disabled artists Support Fund and small equipment grant from the Health and Safety Capital Programme.

There was similar additional support made available to assist cost of living impacts from Santander and Halifax Foundations.

Major risks

Risk management is addressed within the UofA Risk Management Strategy. The organisation has also established systems to mitigate significant risks to potential business and operational risks which the charity may face. Senior staff supported by directors continue to review the major risks which the charity faces and believe that maintaining unrestricted reserves at the required levels to finance working capital and continue the charity's activities on a short-term basis, combined with annual review of the controls over key financial systems, will sustain resources for adverse conditions. In the current period of economic turbulence, the directors remain focused on the need to diversify income streams. Exploring additional funding and business opportunities for unrestricted earned income.

Plans for future periods

Moving forward the priority includes a partnership with *The Paul Hamlyn Foundation* has confirmed a grant to span 3 years towards the Arts and Disability Access Awards Programme (ADAA) and towards the Ledger Studio. This award allows for two core staff roles (Access and Inclusion Manager and Ledger Studio Coordinator) and regional access advisors to be put in place. Bounce Arts festival 2024 will continue to extend a regional rollout across online and offline platforms.

The organisation will continue to focus on generating service revenues to augment income that can sustain core artistic programming to extend reach within the community.

Staffing updates

The core staff team will sustain funding relationships, alongside the priority to diversify income streams across public sector contracts, corporate sponsorship, increased trusts and foundation grants. Plans for 2024 include recruiting new posts supported by funding from Paul Hamlyn Trust; whilst extending freelance contracts for Administration and Marketing roles to support the development of service income generation.

Vice Chair Ciara Smyth met with the Board of Trustees to plan towards succession of the Chairperson; this process is ongoing. The new CEO initiated a recruitment drive for Board of Trustee members in Spring 2024.

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Structure, governance and management

The Arts and Disability Forum / University of Atypical (working name) is a company limited by guarantee and is a registered charity. The Charity is established under a memorandum of association which outlines core objectives and power. The charity is governed by a voluntary board of Directors who operate in accordance with the Articles of Association.

Collectively board members are proficient in core governance skills: HR, accountancy, specialist areas of disability arts, marketing and product development, online education methodologies, access consultancy and disability rights. The Board of Trustees has seen some growth and change in 2023/24 year.

During the year the day to day running of the organisation designated to Chief Executive Damien Coyle was transferred to Edel Murphy appointed as her successor to CEO role in February 2024.

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Mr S Fitzsimons	(Resigned 29 March 2024)
Ms C Smyth	
Ms A E Egner	(Resigned 26 January 2024)
Ms L C McIlvanna	(Resigned 20 November 2023)
Ms I Obrolchain Carmody	
Ms M C Bacon	
Ms T Carlisle	
Mr R D Woodcock	(Resigned 22 July 2024)
Ms H M F Slatne	(Appointed 26 January 2024)
Ms A Doherty	(Appointed 4 June 2024)
Ms N Heptonstall	(Appointed 19 June 2024)
Mr A Bradley	(Appointed 24 June 2024)
Mrs M Dempster O'Neil	(Appointed 25 June 2024)
Mr P Fleming	(Appointed 19 July 2024)
Ms C Herdman	(Appointed 22 July 2024)
Ms A Rashid	(Appointed 23 July 2024)


Recruitment and appointment of trustees

The board consists of between four and fifteen directors. The Board can pass an ordinary resolution to appoint new Trustees. To address any skills gap the organization continue to liaise with external partners such as Arts and Business to attract new Trustees. Formal recruitment to the board is carried out in accordance with the Articles of Association.

Small companies exemption

The report of the directors has been prepared taking advantage of the small companies' exemption of section 415A of the Companies Act 2006.

The trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.



Ms C Smyth
Director

Date: 18th November 2024