

**Our Ref: COR/57/2014**

**12 March 2014**

Robin Swann MLA  
Chairperson  
Committee for Employment and Learning  
Room 375  
Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast  
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Robin, a chara

**Re: Committee Inquiry into post Special Educational Need Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities**

Your letter of 23 January 2014 refers.

I welcome the Employment and Learning Committee's inquiry into post Special Educational Need (SEN) provision in education, employment and training for those with learning disabilities. I believe it is both timely and necessary that this review is now taking place as evidence from an independent Education and Training Inspectorate report in 2008, *'An Evaluation of the Transition Arrangements from the Special School Sector to Further Education, Adult and Working Life'*, supports the need for a review of this kind.

Whilst this matter is primarily one for DEL and DE to address in the first instance, there is potential for my Department and its ALBs to have an increased part to play in providing placements / work experience to pupils from special schools. For example, the Arts Council, Libraries NI, National Museums and Armagh Planetarium provide opportunities to enhance skills and support those with physical and learning disabilities to fulfil their potential. Further details of the post SEN programmes currently being run/planned/supported by my Department's ALBs are set out in **Annex 1**.

In addition to this, DCAL has recently agreed to participate in the NICS wide initiative which offers short term work placements to people with disabilities. This initiative is included under the DEL Steps to Work Placement Scheme.

I trust you find this helpful.

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**CARÁL NÍ CHUILÍN MLA**  
**Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure**

**Cc CAL Committee**

### **Programmes/projects that relate to post Special Educational Need Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities**

#### **ARTS COUNCIL NI**

The Arts Council has made a substantial investment in Arts and Disability over a number of years, creating new opportunities for disabled people (including children and young people) to be involved in the arts on their own terms. Their approach is based on the social model of disability and they place their emphasis on tackling barriers to equality.

Current initiatives include;

- Funding the core costs for several Arts & Disability organisations including the Arts & Disability Forum, Adapt NI, Drake Music, Open Arts, Streetwise and Kids in Control;
- Funding a wide range of arts & disability projects through Arts Council lottery programmes including annual Lottery programme and Small Grants;
- The Arts Council operate a 'Premium Payments' scheme to encourage enhanced disability access;
- They support the [Arts & Disability Equality Charter](#), a 'kite-marking' project developed by disabled people to encourage and reward good practice amongst arts venues;
- They support the [Arts & Disability Awards Ireland grant scheme](#), for individual disabled artists; and the [Arts & Disability Directory](#);

#### **Youth Arts Strategy - Apprenticeship Programme**

In September 2013, the Arts Council launched a new Youth Arts Strategy which provides strategic direction and vision for the youth arts sector for the period 2013 – 2017 and announces new programming to help meet the development needs of our young people. At its heart, the strategy promotes access to high quality and affordable arts activities for all under 24s regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or disability. It also focuses on the development of young people through a suite of apprenticeships, internships and mentoring opportunities.

The Arts Council is currently working with the Creative and Cultural Skills Sector, the sector skills body for the Performing & Creative Arts, in helping to deliver apprenticeships and internships, as well as mentoring opportunities, for young people who either want to work in the arts or who have historically struggled to find employment. Through offering diversity and enhanced routes for career progression, the arts sector will be more attractive and accessible to young people as a career. Already a key commitment through the

programme for Government, the Arts Council will play a vital role in supporting the initiative.

A current example of post SEN provision within Arts Council funded arts organisations includes;

- **Kids in Control** - Based in Belfast, Kids in Control is a professional theatre company that provides training and support for children and young people of all backgrounds through the use of dramatic arts. Over the past number of years, the organisation has provided apprenticeship opportunities for young adults with disabilities, supporting their access to and participation within the creative industries.

The Arts Council is currently taking forward a number of actions in the area of Arts & Disability including:

- The recent development of an Equality Scheme and Action Plan which includes a number of targets addressing disability issues;
- The current development of a new Disability Action Plan in 2013/2014 period including consultation with key stakeholders within the sector.

## **LIBRARIES NI**

Current initiatives include;

- **Health in Mind activities** including: Music Therapy workshops in Bangor, Chichester and Lurgan; Laughter Yoga workshop in Bangor; Read Aloud taster session in Bangor and Chichester; WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) in Enniskillen.
- **ICT skills/Digital Inclusion** including: GOT IT sessions i.e. basic one to one computer skills; Go On i.e. slightly more advanced ICT skills, related to a particular theme (e.g. Rathcoole: Library in Your Living Room); iPad based Digital Storytelling delivered to Foyle Downs' Syndrome Trust members in Derry Central Library; links with LiveNet which uses Omagh and Lisburn Libraries to deliver IT training to adults with learning disabilities.
- **Six Book Challenge** - to boost the reading confidence of emergent readers.

In addition library services in general are used by people with learning disabilities – groups and individuals.

## **NATIONAL MUSEUM NI (NMNI)**

NMNI seeks to provide opportunities for all to explore, engage and enjoy the national collections through a range of activities, events and exhibitions across all its sites. The approach in line with current thinking in general is to “design in” solutions in a coordinated, integrated way to provide access for all. National Museums complies with and seeks to exceed its legal obligations under the DDA and other equality legislation. We support the principle of access for all and seek to ensure access for people with disabilities is a central component of an overall approach.

Current initiatives include;

- The Ulster American Folk Park in partnership with Leonard Cheshire (who support people with physical and learning disabilities to fulfil their potential and live the lives they choose) brings volunteers with disabilities on site between March and October each year to work in an adapted polytunnel where they raise plants – from vegetables to hedging – for the Folk Park site;
- Work with groups of people with Alzheimer’s has included art workshops in the Ulster Museum, creating textile hangings inspired by the collections of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and a day conference at Ulster Folk & Transport Museum;
- AutismNI is NMNI Charity of the year and NMNI have been working in partnership with them to raise awareness of autism, support the work they undertake and also attract more people with autism to NMNI sites; and
- Ulster Museum, ‘Time Transformed Reflections on the Ulster Museum’ 10:00 - 17:00, Wed 26 Jun 2013 - Fri 30 Aug 2013. Time transformed was a new and innovative creative writing project by Open Arts with Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (NIAMH), Beacon (a part of NIAMH which provides support for people with mental health needs across Northern Ireland) and the Ulster Museum. Ruth Carr, a Belfast based freelance creative writing tutor, editor and published poet, facilitated people with mental health needs to express their creativity in writing.

## **ARMAGH OBSERVATORY**

Armagh Observatory supports two young adults with complex needs for 3-4 hours a week on a programme of Lifetime Opportunities, or therapeutic work experience. This is part of their wider, multifaceted programme of Science in the Community.

In recent years, the individuals supported by this programme have undertaken (1) library and archives duties and work associated with updating the monthly meteorological records, and (2) work associated with recording data on the flora and fauna in the Observatory Grounds and Astropark, especially in

providing images for the Phenology Garden, a list of wild flowers around the Observatory, and a classification of the insects recorded in the Grounds.

Both individuals benefit enormously from these ongoing work-experience programmes, not just socially but also in terms of personal development such as improved communication and computer skills, working as part of a team and working independently.