



## Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

*...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland*



# Including All Improving Arts Accessibility for People With Varying Visual and Hearing Ability

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“The strange power of art  
is sometimes it can show  
that what people have in  
common is more urgent  
than what differentiates  
them”

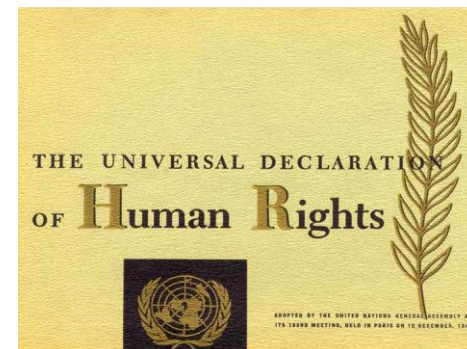
John Berger

- Promoting social inclusion and cohesion through the arts
- Changing perceptions of disability and accessibility
- Inclusive arts, integrated accessibility: embracing diversity, including all.
- Arts access facilities for people with varying visual and hearing abilities and disabilities



- Rapid advancements in arts accessibility due to technological progress
- Urgent need for continual reappraisal and training in arts accessibility
- This call to action responds to:
  - Northern Ireland Disability Strategy 2012-2015
  - EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020
  - UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Impact on wider discussion about disability policy in health, culture and education

# Accessibility as a human right



- Legislation:
  - Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
  - European Audiovisual Media Services Directive, 2010
  - The Northern Ireland Act, Section 75, 1998.
- Society:
  - slow response to accessibility implementation
  - advancements needed to overcome linguistic, sensory, socio-cultural barriers

- Growing number of people with sight and hearing loss
- Ageing population
- **Hearing loss:**
  - over 10 million people in UK
  - by 2031 more than 14.5 million (Action on Hearing Loss 2011)
- **Sight loss:**
  - More than a doubling in numbers of people in UK
  - Nearly 4 million people by 2050 (RNIB, Access Economics 2009)



**ACTION ON  
HEARING  
LOSS**





- 1) How can we review our approach to accessibility to empower people with varying visual and hearing abilities and disabilities so that they can fully enjoy their rights as citizens?
- 2) How do we endorse equitable access and good practice in the implementation of legislation?
- 3) How can we ensure that arts venues are proactively reaching out to include everyone and achieve greater equality of opportunity?

## Arts accessibility facilities for patrons with varying visual and hearing ability

- Raised public expectations for inclusive, interactive, multisensory arts experience due to exposure to multimedia
- Increasing range of access facilities due to pioneering technology
- YET access provisions remain limited

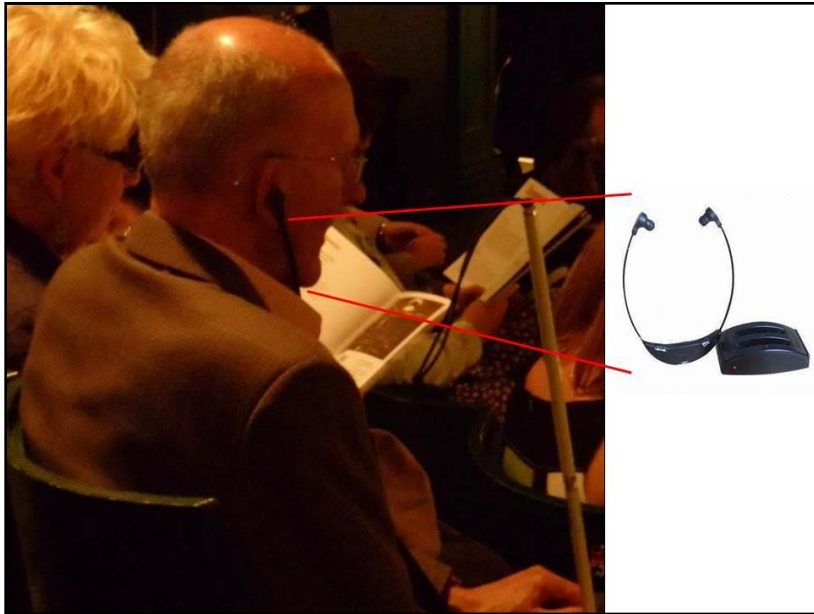




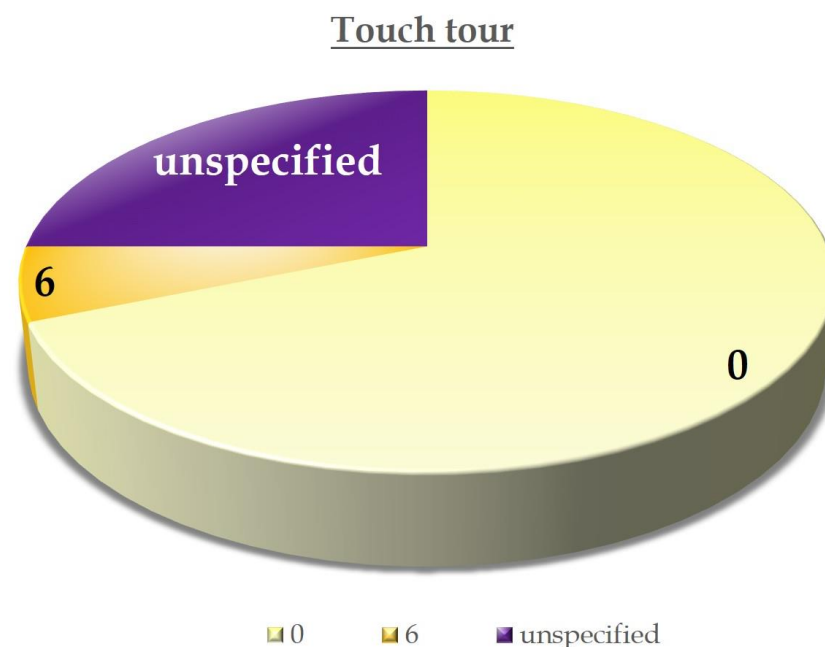
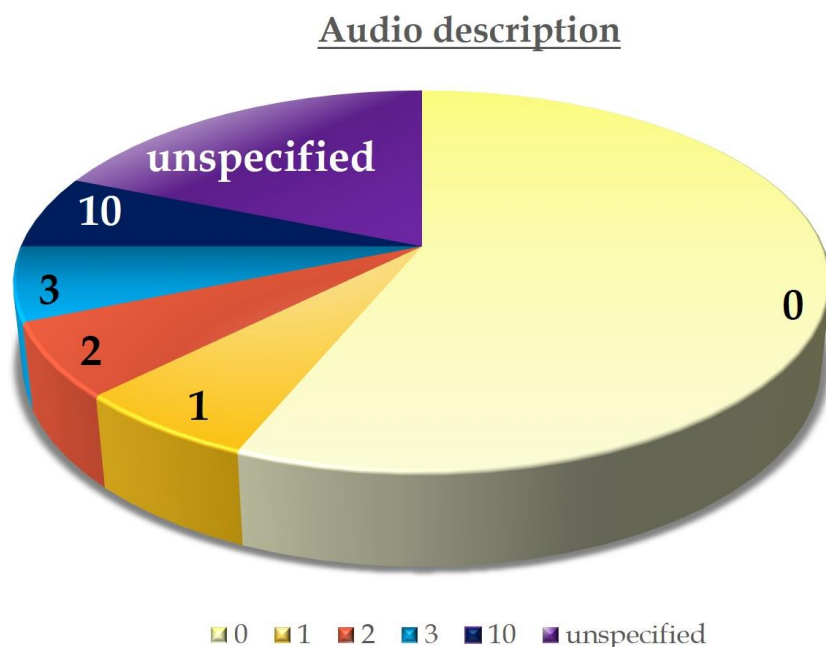
- Audio description
- Touch tour
- Braille provisions
- Audiosubtitling
- Large-print materials
- Provisions for guide dogs
- Thermoforms
- Haptic technology solutions



Picture by Terry Braun  
/Braunarts



Photos courtesy of Opera North



Number of events per year at which audio description and touch tours are available at the venues

- Sign language interpreting
- Subtitles/ surtitles
- Captioning for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing
- Hearing loop
- Provisions for hearing dogs
- Assistive technologies e.g. smart glasses





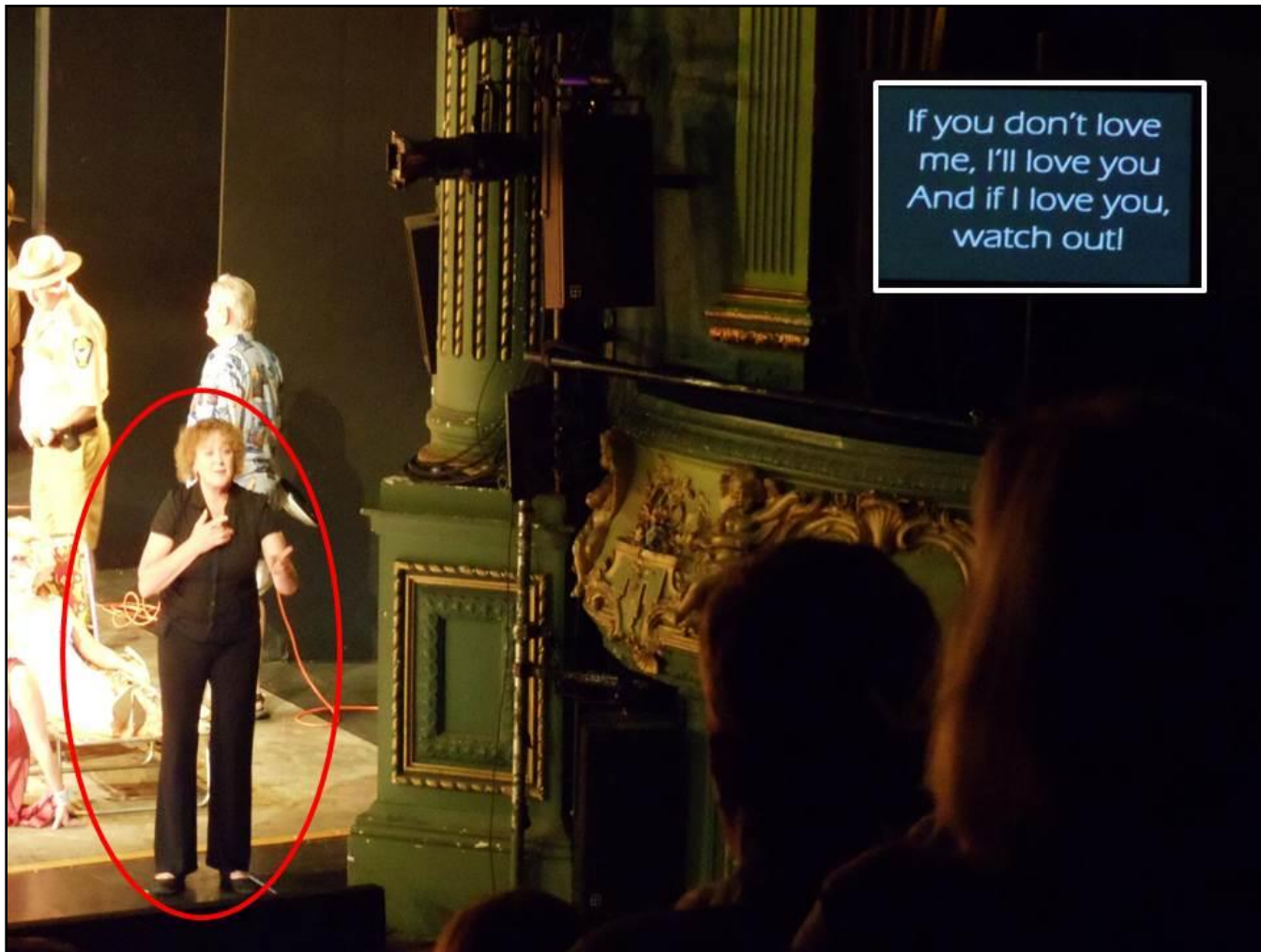
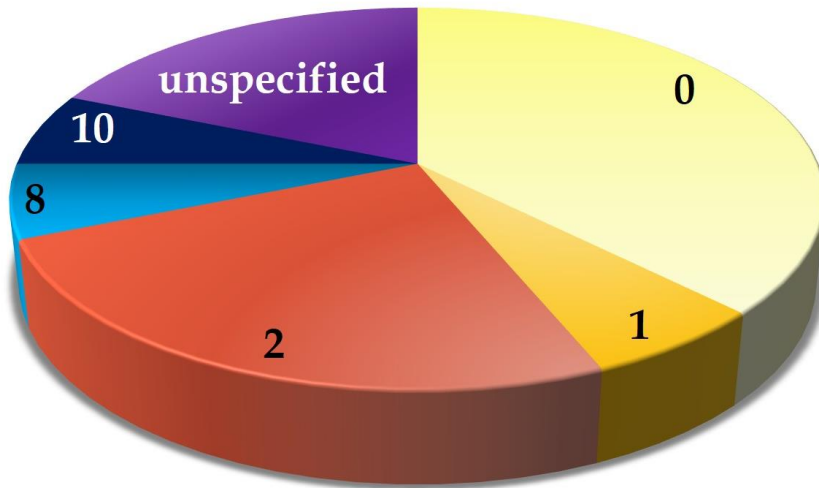


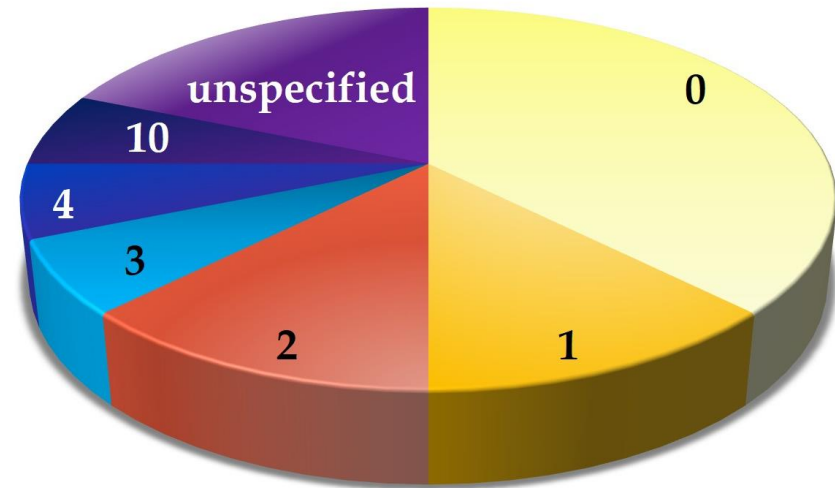
Photo courtesy of Opera North

Sign language interpreting



0 1 2 8 10 Unspecified

Captioning

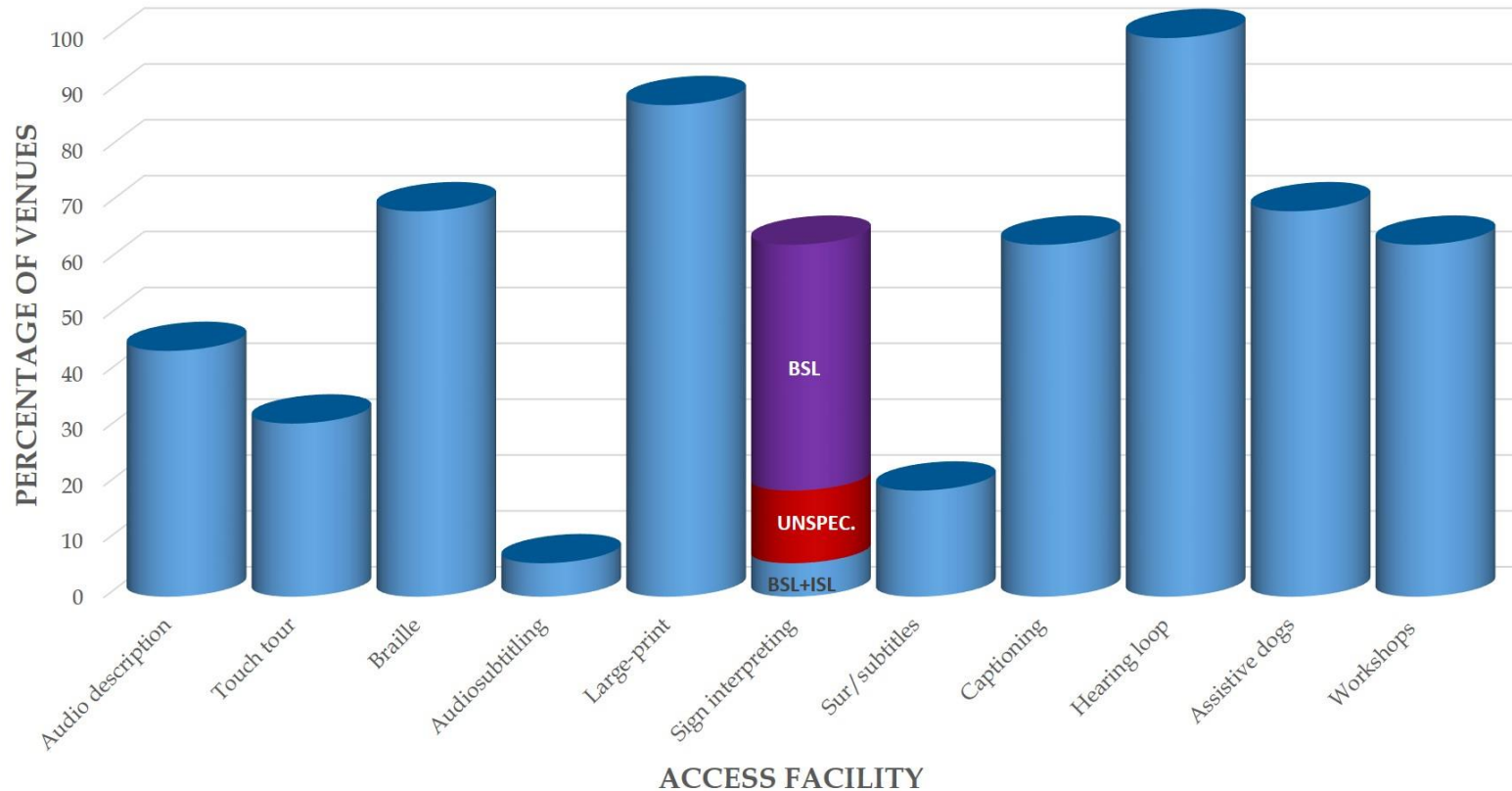


0 1 2 3 4 10 unspecified

Number of events per year at which sign language interpreting and captioning are available at the venues



## Availability of access facilities



Number of events per year at which audio description and touch tours are available at the venues

- Integrated accessibility
- A new approach to arts accessibility which includes all, rather than providing special access to certain patrons with specific requirements
- Incorporation of access concepts from the design stage
- Access methods allowing individual choice



Photo by Masami Ito, The Japan Times

# Key findings



A need to:

- bridge the gap between the limited availability of arts accessibility facilities and the rapidly expanding access options offered by innovative technology
- accelerate the implementation of accessibility legislation
- clarify the practical changes required in the day-to-day operations in the arts.



# Key findings

The project findings highlighted three problem areas requiring action:

- (1) attitudes to disability and accessibility
- (2) financial considerations
- (3) accessibility training.

# Changing mentalities

- Perception of disabled as separate from able-bodied
  - ➡ viewing society as a collective whole with diverse visual and hearing abilities and disabilities
- Segregated access provisions, compartmentalisation of blind and sighted, deaf and hearing
  - ➡ inclusive, integrated access for all
- Accessibility as an afterthought, supplementary
  - ➡ accessibility as integral to the design

# Action points

- Raising awareness
- Public engagement with arts access
- Education: school trips, workshops, talks, further integration of accessibility awareness into the curriculum
- Promotion of dialogue between arts access providers, venues, researchers, users, design team, charities and organisations advocating arts accessibility
- Continued support for arts access advocates





- Audience diversity
- Different types and degrees of visual and hearing abilities and disabilities  
e.g. hearing, profoundly deaf, hard-of-hearing, sighted, totally blind, partially-sighted etc.
- Arts can appeal to multiple senses
- Multisensory arts experience facilitated by access provisions  
e.g. touch tour
- Social activity of the arts



# Financial issues

- Widening audience base brings economic benefits
- Imprudent to exclude rising numbers of people with sight and hearing loss in ageing population
- In the UK as a whole in 2001 'it was estimated that the spending power of disabled people (14% of the population) was over £45 billion' (Arts Council for England)



- Considering the advantages of access facilities for sighted and hearing patrons

➡ financial benefits

- Improved inclusive access facilities for all

➡ ‘more customers, more ticket sales and higher profits’

- Pioneering technological access solutions e.g. Google Glass and mobile apps

➡ attract larger audiences to the arts (Arts Council for England)

# Audio introduction for all



- Audio notes to be listened prior to arts event
- Appeal for sighted patrons
- Pre-recorded, available to download for all events
- Audio introductions alone do not offer a complete solution
- Cost-effective option to be complemented by other access facilities

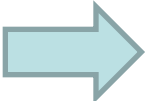


# Training and assessment

- No certified training for arts accessibility at present
- Collaborative EU project ACT (Access to Culture and Training) involving QUB
  - establishing of training course
  - online and face-to-face teaching

# Conclusion

- Advancement of innovative access facilities although limited and often segregated
- Much work needed in developing sustainable, cost-effective access facilities + training and assessment systems ensuring quality is maintained  
→ successful implementation of legislation and NI Disability Strategy
- Raising awareness and moving towards a holistic approach benefitting all

 promotion of social cohesion



- Shift in mentalities within the arts to consider society as a cohesive whole whilst also acknowledging its diversity

➡ impact on policy in other sectors

➡ advocating full integration of inclusive accessibility into the health, cultural and educational agenda

- Respect for the human right of accessibility to all aspects of life

➡ communal responsibility to weave inclusive access into the fabric of our society, to share our rich culture and heritage with all.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly



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