

Andrew Miller's speech for Cultural Inclusion Conference 18/10/18

I want to introduce you to my mission as the UK Government's first Disability Champion for Arts & Culture - a role that covers the arts, museums and film sectors.

I'll start with a bold statement. I believe there has never been a better time to be disabled and in the creative industries. The UK's disabled artists lead the world in the quality and invention of their work. Ever improving access and a shift towards inclusive practise in mainstream arts and film, offer better opportunities for disabled artists, employees and audiences alike.

Moreover, we are seeing disabled artists disturbing mainstream culture and influencing artforms in ever more creative ways.

This is a view shared by the Chief Executive of Arts Council England, Darren Henley who stated at the recent Unlimited Symposium, *"The work of disabled and deaf artists is often the boldest, most aesthetically adventurous art out there. As a society we must take steps to include everyone in our cultural conversation. It's a moral, civic and cultural responsibility"*.

Encouraging words of which I'm sure none of us here would disagree, but the creation of my role indicates much more needs to be done. There are 13 million disabled people in the UK, 20% of our national workforce with a combined spending power of £250 Billion - the so called purple pound and that figure is growing 14% annually.

Whilst the business case for inclusion is overwhelming, the arts, museum and film industries have been slow to recognise it, preferring in the past a patricianly approach of beneficent outreach rather than meaningful engagement with disabled people as performers, creatives and audiences.

And that is where I come in.

The Government realises it needs assistance to help tackle the issues disabled people face as consumers across a range of industries from retail to airports. And so they have recruited 11 experienced industry champions, all working in different sectors and undertaking this role voluntarily.

We don't work for, nor represent the government. We are rather, catalysts for change, plugging our sectors further into the mains of good practise.

Utilising my own industry experience, I will also use the role to challenge the sector itself to raise its game on inclusion. I have outlined to Government three areas where I believe change is urgently required to better support disabled people across the cultural industries:

- To address the lack of training opportunities
- To correct underrepresentation in employment and governance structures
- And finally to create equality of experience for audiences

These priorities are shaped by my own personal experience of the arts & broadcasting industries over 30 years which has offered me as a disabled individual few support mechanisms, frequent discrimination and perhaps crucially, no role models to follow. Combined, these factors have made sustaining my career in the creative industries highly challenging and as I've travelled around the country in this role meeting disabled artists and practitioners, it is a depressingly recurrent theme.

I began my career in the late 1980s during the first big moment for equal representation when broadcasters woke up to their lack of on and off-screen diversity. I was Channel 4's first disabled production trainee and was subsequently launched on the Channel as a role model tv presenter.

I found myself fronting a *Blue Peter*-style magazine show called *Boom!* which was produced by Anne Wood, the *Teletubbies* creator, who wanted to make an inclusive programme for children, disabled or otherwise. In that integrated aspect it was ground-breaking and popular too, it ran for two years receiving weekly audiences of 2 million, and established me as one of the very few disabled presenters of mainstream television - the go-to action guy in a wheelchair.

But my presenting career was brought to a premature halt in the '90s after an audition at the BBC, where I was told "*The Blue Peter audience are not yet ready for a disabled presenter*". The zeitgeist had left me behind, the door of opportunity had firmly closed.

In truth the BBC and other broadcasters, thought that they'd done disability, fixed it and moved on. Their complacency meant it would be another 20 years before we began to see disabled people regularly on tv again. I moved into production, focusing on producing and directing arts & music documentaries. But despite being a BAFTA nominated filmmaker, eventually that career path petered out too due to the lack of support mechanisms within the industry to sustain my career as a disabled documentarist.

I was fortunate in that I found a second career in the arts, but I think we need to ensure this kind of basic discriminatory stuff doesn't impact on the next generation of disabled talent.

By 2030 it is inconceivable that our national culture will remain as white, as middle class, as able-bodied as it is now. There is a real energy emerging, as demonstrated at this conference, of people fully committed to democratise the arts in this country. Funders now realise they can't diversify the sector through continuing to fund the existing networks. Because over 20 years, that incremental change-approach simply hasn't worked - the sector remains primarily undiverse.

Rather, there is growing realisation within funders that they have to take responsibility for nurturing the whole arts ecology from education through specialist training and beyond.

That is I believe, our direction of travel and it represents a major shift in approach, but it is one that is gaining traction as the public, artists and the arts workforce demand that our culture represents us all.

To progress the three areas of change I have identified, I am gathering a task force of arts funders including all 4 UK arts Councils, the British Film Institute and Heritage Lottery Fund, under the auspices of both Department of Work & Pensions and Department of Culture, Media & Sport to develop action and investment plans.

I want disabled artists and creatives to have better access to specialist training. Theatres such as Hull Truck have committed themselves to ambitious quotas of diverse staff and performers - proving there is industry demand for disabled talent. They understand the need to reflect their own audiences.

Yet most successful disabled performers have emerged from non- traditional routes. Across UK drama schools in 2016, there was not a single graduate who self declared a disability. So there is clearly an issue with the talent pipeline in the performing arts and I am proposing arts funders work alongside specialist HE & apprenticeship providers to fix it.

They can learn from the leaders of good practise in the field such as University of the Arts London who boast of having 11% disabled staff and an impressive 27% disabled student population.

I'm going to tackle the dismal disability workforce statistics. We have to do better than the current 4% of the English arts workforce declaring a disability, 3% in Wales, 2% in Scotland and Northern Ireland. By contrast the equivalent in the much larger education sector is 12%. So I want to see arts employers promoting a positive culture, embracing the Government's Disability Confident scheme, leading employees to feel more comfortable self-declaring disabilities. I am also providing an opportunity for funders to input into Access to Work - a benefit that isn't well designed to cope with the demands of freelance artists.

Visibility remains a major issue for disabled people in our society with only the superhuman Paralympians given any kind of prominence. So I want to see disabled leaders at the helm of mainstream arts organisations where currently there are none, together with better representation of disabled people on boards. And from my own experience I can tell you, the impact of having disabled people at the decision making end of organisations can be very significant.

Access remains an issue for many arts premises – a third of which I estimate are currently inaccessible to the disabled workforce. So I am encouraging funders to allocate substantial National Lottery capital funds to address these.

I will also offer a voice for disabled audiences, advocating that we get to share cultural experiences in the same way everyone else enjoys. In 2018 it strikes me as astonishing that most UK venues do not offer disabled customers the ability to book tickets online, relying instead on access phone lines.

So building on the pioneering work of Arts Council Wales *Hynt* scheme which has supported 12,000 disabled people in Wales to attend activity across 40 venues, I am proposing a single UK wide access card.

And finally, I am sure many of you were shocked by the experience of Tamsin Parker, a cinema go-er with a Neurological condition at the BFI Southbank in March. Her frightening experience, which could have happened at any entertainment venue, highlighted very publicly that disabled audiences need more clearly defined rights, to assist frontline staff to deal with those that wish to deny such rights. So I will build on Arts Council Northern Ireland's disability arts standard to establish a charter that outlines minimum service expectations for cultural service providers in return for public subsidy, but which also captures best practice across a wide range of our activity from training to employment and from access to governance.

Essentially, this is all about ensuring disabled people are welcomed and valued as artists, creatives and audiences. But it is also about building a better, more inclusive future for the next generation.

I truly believe we are in the midst of an exciting moment of cultural change in wider society. A moment that has been created by disabled people pushing creative boundaries.

For me, there are just three short words that represent the scale of our journey so far: Britain's Got Talent. With audiences of 11 million, that one tv show has done more to alter perceptions of disabled people in this country than anything since the 2012 Paralympics. All due to the success of two exceptionally talented disabled comedians, Lost Voice Guy and Robert White coming first and second on Britain's biggest tv talent show.

Simon Cowell, of all people, has raised the stakes.

And that's precisely what is now required of us all. We have to lead beyond the requirements of The Equality Act, to go beyond reasonable adjustments. I would urge you all to offer leadership in your own organisations, in whatever sector you belong, to support this new and inclusive direction of travel, to do your bit to ensure poor training, rubbish access and enduring discrimination in the arts industry are finally banished to the past.

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