

Cultural Governance Alliance Think-In: 'Place/s at the Table: A review of disability and governance in the Cultural Sector'

Wednesday 30 March 2022

StreamText captions Edited Transcript

HILARY: Good morning everyone. Thank you so much for attending today's seminar. We are really pleased to have you with us. My name is Hilary Carty, the Executive Director of Clore Leadership. I am a black woman, gloriously close to 60! And I am wearing a black blouse. I have black glasses and very short cropped hair.

Today, we are really delighted to welcome you to what we are calling a Think-in. It's really an opportunity for you to respond to the research, and the draft report into disability and governance, which we are really thankful that Tim Wheeler has led.

Today's session is a critical step in the process of moving beyond those somewhat tired conversations and rationalisations of why so few deaf and disabled people and neurodivergent people are trustees on Boards of the cultural sector. We really want to hear what your thoughts are; how you have responded to the first-draft of the report, and what actions we, collectively, as well as individually, as a sector, might need to prioritise.

Clore Leadership firmly believes that a thriving cultural sector embraces diversity of thought and experience, and we aspire to have this belief firmly

reflected across our programming; not least in how that relates to disability and test with live experience. We want to facilitate and encourage reflections, experiences, and perspectives from the broadest range of professionals and opinion formers to foster curiosity and build an appetite for open dialogue and differentiating learning across the sector. This think tank is as much about you and the research that has already happened, a quick reminder how it's going to go this morning.

I am going to shortly introduce three individuals that we have had a real pleasure of working with: Andrew Miller, Sarah Pickthall and Michèle Taylor who helped us to form the original ideas and tease out some of the ideas and the originals ideas. Then we'll hear from Tim Wheeler who has done the research and done the report, and we will have a response from Michaela Butter who is from the Attenboro Arts. Essentially what we are trying do is set out before you all the issues that have been picked up.

We would then like you to come in after a ten minute break by sharing your own thoughts in breakout rooms. We have about 10/15 minutes for that. Then we'll have a broader discussion coming back together to really consider those questions and responses from the discussions that you have had.

We'll try to wrap up very much on time so that we'll be finishing as planned by 11.25/11.30. So, that's the game plan for the day.

Just a few matters of housekeeping, if I may. Before I hand you over to Tim, Andrew and Sarah and Michèle, could I just say that this session is being

British Sign Language interpreted by Russell and Nikki. Live captions from Natalie are available via the link that is appearing in the chat now, and we have a notetaker, Dian, who will be happy to share notes with everyone after the session.

When we go into the breakout rooms later, we will have rooms with specific access provisions and if you have already requested a specific provision you will be assigned, preassigned to that room. If you haven't yet done that, but would like to request a provision, please just get, let Tech Clore Leadership, that is Freya, if you just send her a message in the chat and then she'll make sure you are assigned to the right room.

But, also to say that the first half of the morning is being recorded. So, we've got records. Those are mainly the discussions and presentations, but we do want to have your frank opinion and not everyone is comfortable with being recorded so those breakout sessions there will be no recordings after that.

If you have any questions at all, or any access needs, please put them in the chat to Freya and Freya will pick them up.

So, that's the housekeeping out of the way. Now we can get on with the real business of the morning, and really to just share some perspectives and reflections. I am pleased to welcome Andrew Miller, arts consultant and broadcaster. Then Sarah Pickthall, independent consultant and adviser to Clore Leadership, and Michèle Taylor, who is a Director of Change for Ramps on the

Moon.

Andrew, just some thoughts to set us off this morning.

ANDREW: Thanks, Hilary. Good morning, everyone. Really pleased to be with you this morning. Middle-aged white wheelchair user sitting in my study in front of a bright orange blind, wearing a blue top and glasses. Today's conversation and Tim's report emanated from my speaking at the Cultural Governance Alliance symposium in Leeds just before the pandemic in 2020 and online follow-up in 2021.

I gave a keynote where I showed my experience as a disabled individual of governance going back around 35 years, but the small group surgeries that took place afterwards were quite hard work and a little unrewarding and they revealed quite a limited understanding of disability beyond engaging disabled people in access and participation terms, what I call the passive model of disability, and certainly miles away from what I was talking about, which was how to empower disabled people in roles of influence.

When it came to governance, the approach of a few seemed to be a rather perfunctory tick box exercise and all in all these surgeries revealed a disappointingly unsophisticated and narrow understanding of disability and I suggested to Clore this was an opportunity to start unpacking the sector's reticence and fears around disability in relation to governance, so here we all are.

I would like to pull out if I may a couple of highlights from Tim's report

that especially resonated with me. Firstly, isolation.

Being the only disabled person on a Board brings huge responsibilities of representation and it makes a huge difference when that burden can be shared as I experienced with John Williams at the Arts Council of Wales Board where we influenced major steps forwards in corporate approach to disability, including the introduction of the first national arts access scheme, Hynt, and I am looking forward to doing the same at BAFTA with Paul Taiano, a fellow wheelchair user.

Tim describes governance as an ableist system with structures that primarily benefit non-disabled people. He is so right and I welcome the recommendation that anti-ableist training that goes beyond the simplicity of disability equality is a recommendation. I have been offering that kind of service for over a year, but actually there is limited demand for it from cultural organisations, and there are very few of us out there delivering it.

And it provides a stark contrast to the current boom in antiracist training. The sector still does not recognise it has a problem around ableism and I hope this report assists in driving this up the agenda.

There is a very interesting statistic in the report that said 28 per cent of people don't know if disabled people should be paid for their work as trustees. It is a really interesting ambivalence because, of course, disabled people are a free resource, hanging off trees waiting to be tapped. 35 years on boards persuades me that we should, of course, be paid as both the Welsh and

Scottish governments have recognised in recent reports to boost representation on their cultural boards.

The primary obstacle preventing that, as Tim recognised, is the Charity's Commission's complex rules about payments to trustees, but if these rules are not changed, our Boards will remain as unrepresentative, as they are now, and that's a really interesting challenge to the Arts Council to unravel.

On average, I get approached 25 times a year to join different Boards. That's a lot of Boards, and it's interesting to compare against the number of executive roles, paid roles, that I am approached for. We all know there are few disabled people in senior positions in the sector, and I think that should perhaps be the Clore's next focus, to really get under the skin of why that is.

But I love Tim's recommendations aren't just for Arts Councils and the sector, they are for disabled people and disabled led cultural organisations too. The report recognises everyone has a stake to bring change here. Congratulations, Tim, and I hope this is a rewarding morning for everyone. Thanks.

SARAH: So it's Sarah. Sarah Pickthall here. I think I am next up. Thanks so much, Andrew, for shaping and focusing us.

For me, this is a passion of mine, governance and the representation of disabled people, and that started in the 1980s for me with the White Paper for people with learning disabilities, and the idea of "nothing about us without us".

So for me, to really go into this conversation and, you know, Tim's work here, this commission work, feels like a real moment in time.

I have been on the Board of Stop Gap Dance for about eight years now, and three years ago I joined as Chair of Access All Areas, theatre company. We were lucky to secure Transforming Leadership money which allowed us to explore the leadership of learning disability, autistic and neurodiverse creatives who were part of the company and exploring their leadership.

That allowed us very much to rewire, rewire our thinking, rewire the Board itself. It gave us extraordinary opportunity and I know that Patrick Collier, Nick Llewellyn are here from Access All Areas and also Michaela as well who sits on the Board.

For me to see in Tim's report that sense of rewiring and rethinking, so how can we demystify Boards? The spaces that we occupy, and interestingly, the pandemic, where we were forced into these virtual spaces, allowed us to really create a different sort of quality to the way we would be together.

So now co-chairing with people with learning disabilities in the space, co-chairing with Charlene Salter, we allowed to really look at how we can create the spaces to be conducive for everybody. Kate Nuvall I think on Twitter said - asked me as a disabled person, "How are you today?", and this allowed us sort of taking that ethic about it was so difficult through the pandemic it still is, to touch in with all of our Boards, the trustees, to find out how people are.

So, to create that inclusivity, and it made it more conducive so trying to find conducive ways of working and also the power of the pre-meeting, so this was something that is great to see reflected.

So the design of the thing. Pre-meeting. Taking time is absolutely essential to ensure leverage. Equitability. So, people come and they know what is happening. They know what is going on. They feel empowered to take part, so I feel that is a really important part of the work that we all need to do as rethinking, rewiring, how governance looks and feels, so that we come to it in a very active state. We come to it ready to co-create and do the hard work and I think we found, certainly at Access All Areas, is taking time is transforming the experience and making it more possible, and if we are not doing this work, then we are not perhaps living up to our values? You know, we are not sharing what it is that you know that governance is actually the engine and we need to reflect that and have proper representation there.

So, that's all I am going to say. I am going to hand over to Michelle. I'm, you know, so pleased to be in this space and to go on to hear what you have to say, what you can, yeah, share with us from your perspective to really allow Tim and team to finesse the report. Thank you, everybody. Over to Michèle.

MICHÈLE: Thanks so much, Sarah. Morning, everybody. Yes, I want to echo, of course, everything that Andrew and Michèle -- no I'm Michèle -- everything that Andrew and Sarah have said.

So, I'm a white 60 year old woman with short grey hair, wearing a hooded

red jumper and yellow glasses.

For me, involvement in this endeavour has been so crucial and so exciting really, and I want to particularly echo Andrew's congratulations to Tim for the report. Such an important piece of work, um, and it's all about the alignment that Sarah was talking about. Who are we, as organisations, and how are we actually embodying that?

My involvement really is driven by, I have to be honest, frustration. It is driven by the frustration of working in this sector for 30 years, and seeing individuals change, massively, and fundamentally, and just not seeing that go through entire organisations and recognising that it's governance and leadership, that is the stumbling block.

I don't want to say very much really, except some of you may have heard me say this before, some of you that I know, and I have banged on about this before, but I want to reflect on a saying that I have heard a lot that says something like, it goes something like this: "Access is inviting me to the party. Inclusion is asking me to dance."

And, it's always put out there as we are so great because we want to go for inclusion, we want to ask you to dance, we don't just want to invite you to the party, and I have always felt so uncomfortable about that, so angry actually, frankly, about that. Access is inviting me to the party, inclusion is asking me to dance.

Then I formulated what my response actually was and it is so pertinent to the report and to this morning's conversation.

Because what I want my, what I want to say in response is: But what if I don't like your playlist? What if there simply isn't enough Abba for me to want to dance. Why should I feel that I want to dance with you just because you have invited me? Why should I feel grateful actually, and it seems to me that if that's true, if it's true that access is inviting me to the party, if it's true that inclusion is asking me to dance, seems to me that disability equality is organising the party and then paying me a proper fee to review your plans and give you advice on how to tweak them so that they are more appropriate for disabled people.

But as Andrew said, that's okay. That's good. Let's face it, some organisations are not even managing that. Anti-ableism is actually saying: How do we need to set up and co-create an organising committee so that this is a party that we are arranging and organising and planning together? And that, to me, says a lot about governance. Make a space at the board table for me but don't just make a space at the existing Board table because that will simply perpetuate ableism. Be willing to adjust everything about the way that governance actually happens. That's anti-ableism, that's how leadership and governance are going to be impacted by disabled people. That is how we are going to get true diversity and only when we get that kind of true diversity will we get as rich a cultural sector and as just a cultural sector as we can and only then we'll get that alignment.

Thank you.

JONATHAN: Thank you so much, Michèle, Andrew and Sarah. I am Jonathan Mayes from Clore Leadership as well. I am a white man in my early 40's with a greying beard, black glasses and a flowery background. This is a quick introduction to Tim. He has been working with us at Clore Leadership for the last 6 months. We invited him to run the work and research into governance and disability when after the conversations that we had had with Andrew, Michaela -- sorry Michèle -- Sarah and also Jo Verrent.

And Tim has been a wonderful, wonderful colleague in this work and really open to having difficult conversations both with us at Clore Leadership, but also with you in the sector, so it is a real pleasure to hand over to Tim to present some of the findings and recommendations from his report. Morning, Tim.

TIM: Good morning. Thank you, Andrew. Sorry. Thank you, Jonathan. First, thank you Andrew, Michèle and Sarah, and I know Jo is in the room as well.

You have been fantastic as a pilot group, as a sounding board throughout the research. The beginning of the research. I want to also thank the 24 people I interviewed and the 72 responses we had to the survey that we put out.

It has been a fascinating piece of work and as everyone has said, it uncovers a deep frustration amongst a number of colleagues here. I will introduce myself as well. I am bald, white, fast-leaving middle age and approaching 60, and as I say, it's been a fascinating piece of work to do. It has

been frustrating just what it uncovers, but it also has been extraordinary what is there and what is out there in the world already.

In terms of people's reflecting on the benefits of Board engagement of disabled people, that's been really helpful in terms of articulating what are the benefits? You know, and really being clear about those, about it being about expressing vision and mission and living vision and mission.

It's also about people making better decisions. Organisations making better decision about reflecting the communities within which they're based. And it's all about the development of skills, knowledge and experience.

And it's also in terms of being able to improve communication with everyone that an organisation serves and it does, and I think the Purple Pound, the work they have been doing, really does show the power of the commercial and the monetary value, that disabled people bring.

So, and I think that's in terms of organisations. In terms of disabled people, I think becoming an active decision maker, networking intelligently in the sector, supporting your own continuing professional development, and really I think one of the things, it's interesting, we all seem to be approaching 60, it's time. We really made sure that we support the next generation of arts leaders, disabled arts leaders, and I think that is incumbent on us in this room to make sure that that is able to happen, and I know that's happening already.

We know the barriers. We uncover the barriers to inclusion and they are

about the cost of providing access, you know it costs, and at the moment disabled people are expected in many cases to provide for that access, and that just can't be. It just can't be right that somebody is giving of their time and that they are also expected to provide their own access.

Absolutely. Ableism is one of those insidious things that exist that is only when we point it out that people go, "Oh yeah, oh I see", and I think that is something that absolutely we need to make sure that we can point these things out, we can hold people to account: in a positive way. In a way that will provoke change and not just make people clam up or say this is not part of us. So, I think it is incumbent on us to find strategies to be able to do that.

So, there's a number of things. I mean it is a wonderful brief to have because I could think about, oh what could the Arts Council do? What could all the independent, the organisations the sector supporters as they used to be known, what could they do? And I think that it is about creating a framework, a roadmap for change in terms of the Arts Council, in terms of, and the sector support organisations. How, and work with the Charity Commission to actually explore ways in which we can overcome ableism within the, within the system. It is also about specialist arts organisations. It has been wonderful to see the work of organisations like Access All Areas, erm, which has done tremendous work in opening up governance and looking at Co-directors, Co-leadership. That model seems to be incredibly effective and it does not have just benefits within a specialist disability sector I don't think. It has a much wider impact, that as organisations provide material in accessible formats, well who's not going to

benefit from that really quite frankly, the demystification of this process.

One of the interviewees I spoke to told me that actually governance and decision making is quite a simple act really, but we mystify it. We create a whole set of language and procedures and processes, which make it baffling for people you know looking at it from the outside. How do we cut through all of that? How do we make our organisations accessible in, right through from Board, through to staff through to volunteers through to participants. So, I think that there is a great deal of learning if we can unlock it from the specialist arts organisations.

And then the wider cultural scheme. It is about time, you know, I know that Arts Council is placing a lot of store on the relationship between Chair and CEO, and wanting to have, ensure that there is a gap there that there is a critical relationship that exists. Absolutely applaud that and that absolutely needs to happen. There are organisations that form a kind of cosy cabal between the Chief Executive Officer, and the Chair, and I think we need to make sure that that is the place where our critical, our constructively critical faculties are placed because that's where good decisions are made, and people are held to account. So, I think that, yes, I think that's all I really wanted to say.

Just apart from it is called 'Place/s at the Table' because Darren Henley when he first started at Arts Council gave his first speech in Hull as part of the City of Culture, the capital of culture there, and he was talking about his

relationship with governments and he was saying that he was going to make sure that the arts were at the table, you know, the decision making table because if you are not at the table you are not likely to be on the menu. I said this to a colleague the other day, a disabled colleague, and they said, "Well yeah, I do want a place at the table", but to echo Michèle's sentiment they said "Actually I don't want just a place, I want a knife and a fork and I want to do the carving! That is where I want to be. I want to be active at the table."

JONATHAN: Tim, thank you so much. I love that metaphor. We should all be chefs.

So, Tim has written this report and we gave a slight preview copy to Michaela who is at Attenborough Arts Centre at the moment, but only for another ten days and very kindly in that last ten days of her job has spent some time reflecting on Tim's report and is going to give us an initial response now. Thanks, Michaela.

MICHAELA: Good morning, everyone. I am a white woman in my mid to late 60's with short curly hair and glasses. I am wearing a pale blue floral dress and cardigan with dangling copper and enamel earrings.

So, following on from an Access All Areas event a couple of weeks ago outlining ten steps to inclusive leadership, led by learning disabled cultural leaders, I think this report is very timely.

We have a unique opportunity to make a difference to our sector by ensuring the recommendations within this report are embedded into all applications to Arts Council NPO status over the next month, to deliver the true vision of their new strategy, "Let's Create".

I liked the idea of moving Boards from a passive to an active space in the recruitment of disabled trustees by challenging perceptions about barriers to representation and defining what might be a constructive routes for addressing these a clear framework and ideally timetable for change. I was pleased to see a more inclusive definition of disability within the recommendations that recognises learning disability and neurodiversity, will require new ways of thinking and investment to enable their voices to be properly heard.

Also, that the report recognised that these new ways benefit all Board Members through simplifying language, using more graphic imagery and recognising more time is required before and after Board meetings to check in with trustees.

This is certainly something that has profoundly changed the way Board meetings are held at Access All Areas where I am a trustee and I can honestly say that they are the most joyous and engaged Board meetings that I attend.

I was asked to give my initial response to the paper for we all get a chance to discuss this together. Here is a whistle-stop response. I found the

introduction and context setting very helpful. The shocking revelation that only 11 per cent of disabled people are Chief Execs, 8 per cent artistic directors and 6 per cent Chairs of cultural organisations, despite the fact make up 19 per cent of the working day adults and 40 per cent of pension age adults.

Andrew in his foreword says the most recent ACE figure puts this board membership now at 7 per cent, but that is still far too low and I would suspect would be even less proportionate with learning issues of neurodiversity.

Even amongst those who participated in the survey, nearly a third had no disabled trustees. I think the report is right to review how Board Members are currently recruited since 81 per cent of respondents talked about word of mouth as a primary tool and how this can limit organisations to who they know rather than challenging themselves to think differently outside known contacts.

I was pleased to see a well-argued economic imperative to change contained in the report.

If the spending powers of disabled people and their households is 274 billion then it makes economic sense for cultural businesses to better understand this target market. If only ten per cent of businesses have a targeted strategy, that is far too low. The benefits of ensuring disabled people are better represented on boards is very clearly articulated in the paper. The demonstrating of values, the making better informed decisions, the better representation, better knowledge and skills sharing, improved communication and increased income.

There are important points made about having multiple voices at the table and not expecting one or two disabled Board Members to carry the burden of representation. Andrew described the isolation of the individual disabled Board Member in his introduction, and we need to move away from this.

The recommendations of addressing this deficit through a mix of approaches seems achievable and sensible. Funding bodies such as Arts Council England can ensure organisations are held to account during this current NPO process. But ultimately we need to equip senior staff and Boards to be better trained with the right resources on offer to enable disabled people to participate and to challenge ableist systems.

The barriers to progress are well articulated and should provoke discussion in our breakout groups. I was pleased to note nearly all those interviewed now about access needs when recruiting to their Boards, which is a positive step, but still perhaps lacking some commissioning processes. The attached access rider, produced by Unlimited, was really useful in this regard.

In terms of the specific recommendations, I agree we need a more coordinated approach, commissioning specialist organisations with adequate resources to undertake training and awareness raising. This just can't be done on top of their day jobs. They will need additional staff to do this.

Lobbying for Access to Work funds to be extended to Board roles seems

fair and logical and developing a set of access resources is important, but perhaps needs to be allied with providing proof they are actually being used through clearer target setting for those in receipt of public funding.

And I completely agree with the rewiring and reformatting of Board meetings. So often small organisations have to learn this from scratch, so case studies of best practise, even templates would be a real bonus.

Working with the HE sector I think sufficient commissioning research into ableism in the sector linked to case studies and seminars should be achievable perhaps working with UCAN UK, the University Arts Centre Network, acting as bridges to the academic research colleagues.

And developing skills audits to include questions around lived experience of Board Members is important. And examples of best practice templates and skills auditing might help to increase the current percentage in the report that is a rather low 36 per cent.

There are things that I would welcome further discussion and development. So, I hope Tim won't mind if I just throw them out there.

I really like the idea of a Board Bank, but I would like to see that allied with developmental training programme. A kind of pre-Board apprenticeship or shadowing stage to build confidence to diffuse the imposter syndrome outlined in the report.

I'd like to see particular recommendations and investment into

supporting disabled young people to gain the skills and confidence to become active Board Members, perhaps considering geographic cross-organisational training programmes linked to buddying and mentoring.

And perhaps we could adopt a Japanese system of national treasures in which Disability Champions are selected, paid and trained to support such a Board Bank and new NPOs selected in the funding round. There could be the potential to create Access Support Banks in geographic areas, the sharing of relevant equipment, knowledge of recommended signers, etc.

And I think there are more challenges to current silo definitions of disability and diversity that can celebrate the intersectionality of many potential disabled board members.

Further recommendations on how we can support disabled freelancers to be on Boards without compromising their earning capacity and taxing their available energy levels is more than simply travel or care costs. My own personal preference would be to find a way to pay for specialist advice above and beyond their Board duties, but I appreciate that this is a disputed area. Perhaps more consideration could be given to the role of disability sub-groups or paid disability advisory panels for organisations that feed into Boards through formalised structures.

And stronger recommendations to ACE and other key funders creating more robust methodologies to assist commitment and support to increase representation on Board and staffing structures.

So, I've just got a couple of things I wanted to say in terms of what the Board has, what the report has made me think as a cultural leader. Because although I have only got ten days at the Attenborough Arts Centre, I've become a Chair of another organisation. So, it's made me rethink the style and structure of the Board and creating the rest breaks, timing and lengths that you talked about, and the introduction of easy read and reviewing the procedural access.

I love the idea of introducing those pre and post meeting opportunities. Undertaking specific anti-ableist training now it has been referenced is so obvious to go alongside the work we have been doing on Black Lives Matter.

... Maintaining that mix of hybrid and in person meetings to create the balanced opportunities for access. Reviewing Board recruitment mechanisms beyond the written word and challenging myself, beyond knowing contacts and creating standard item on EDI and adding it within each Board report to ensure we have those right conversations about equality and access issues.

And finally, working towards a case study on that, on the impact diversifying our own board has been to include neurodiverse Board members and how we can build further case studies to share where appropriate. So thank you.