

# ARTISTS AT THE INTERSECTION OF WORK AND WELFARE: DISABLED ARTISTS NAVIGATION OF WELFARE

## Short Interim Report

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## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

### ***Background to the research***

This project examines the working lives of artists with disabilities and their interaction with the welfare system, including its impact on the ability of artists with disabilities to earn income and to participate in culture. Rules regarding earning disregards attached to disability supports have been identified as an impediment to the working lives and full flourishing of artists with disabilities. The fear of a potential reduction or loss of income, as well as secondary benefits such as medical cards, inhibits from artists with disabilities accepting funding awards and taking on work (Throsby and Peteskaya 2017; Arts Council of England 2017; British Council 2021). The working lives of artists with disabilities is under-researched but evidence shows that they often earn less than their peers; have less opportunities for employment and career development; and face significant stigma (Arts Council 2010; Bang and Kim 2015; Throsby and Peteskaya 2017; British Council 2021).

The project utilises Qualitative Longitudinal Research consisting of two rounds of semi-structured interviews and one round of participant diary keeping to explore the experiences of artists with disabilities in receipt of disability supports as they navigate welfare interactions and their working lives. To develop a better understanding of different types of supports, the research also includes artists with disabilities in receipt of the Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) pilot scheme payment. This includes artists with disabilities in receipt of the BIA payment only, as well as those in receipt of the BIA and a disability support.

### ***Funding and Role of the Arts Council***

The project runs from August 2022 to August 2024 and is co-funded by the Irish Research Council (IRC) and the Arts Council through the IRC Postdoctoral Enterprise Partnership Scheme which links academic researchers with civil society bodies to produce research relevant to industry or sectoral needs.

The participation of the Arts Council reflects the organisation's priorities regarding the status, working conditions and incomes of artists (Arts Council 2010, 2015, 2020a, 2021b) as well as increasing and enhancing the cultural participation of persons with disabilities as both consumers and creators of culture (Arts Council 2006, 2012, 2019, 2023b). The Arts Council's funding data indicates that artists with disabilities apply for, and receive, lower funding amounts than their peers (Arts Council 2022, 2023a). This mirrors the concerns of Irish artists with disabilities and the limited international evidence. Collaboration on this research project is shaped by a recognition of the inequalities faced by artists with disabilities and aims to provide a robust evidence base to inform policy development. The research is conducted at Maynooth University Assisting Living and Learning Institute and School of Law and Criminology. It is supervised by Mr Toby Dennett (Arts Council) and Prof. Delia Ferri (Maynooth University).

### ***The Purpose and Outline of this Report***

This document is a short interim report providing an overview of the research project up to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023. It provides a summary of the research project, including the policy context relevant to artists with disabilities; existing literatures on their multi-layered experiences; and preliminary findings from the first round of semi-structured interviews. It has been developed for use by the Arts Council and others to inform relevant policy and strategy processes. Notably this short report is not exhaustive and only aims to present key issues.

The early findings are based on the first round of interviews with 35 participants. A second round of interviews with the same participants is currently under way and will be concluded by the end of 2023. The final report will be submitted in August 2024 including a more detailed methodology; in-depth policy context and literature reviews; full conclusive analysis of all rounds of data collection; and evidence based recommendations.

The following section will briefly outline the methodology of the research project. Next, an overview of the policy context is provided before the report turns to a succinct outline of relevant literature including the relationship to employment and social welfare; artists' incomes and working lives; and the cultural barriers to participation for persons with disabilities. A summary of the preliminary findings from the first round of the data collection is then provided. Finally, the report provides some tentative conclusions based on the early findings.

### ***Disability: Models and Terminology***

The project is informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) definition and social-contextual model of disability (Broderick and Ferri, 2019) which recognises that disability stems from the interaction between the individual's impairment and physical, attitudinal and structural barriers in society.

Terminology in relation to disability is constantly evolving. There is a growing preference for the use of inclusive person first terminology such as 'persons with disabilities'. This is the term used by the UNCRPD, as well as in European Union legislation and policy. The terminology 'disabled people' is associated with the social model that highlights that people are disabled *by* society.

Although 'person first' terminology is the preferred choice in Ireland, some disability organisations and persons with disabilities do prefer 'disabled person'. It is with that in mind that the terms 'persons / artists with disabilities' and 'disabled artists / people' are used interchangeably throughout the report.

## **SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY**

This sections briefly outlines the methodology of the project including the research questions; the research approach and method; and participant information. A more detailed elaboration of the research methodology will be provided in the final report.

### ***Central Research Questions and Sub-Questions***

The central research question the project addresses is: How does the welfare system enable or constrain the working lives, social inclusion, and participation of artists with disabilities?

Additional questions answered in the course of the research are:

1. How do artists with disabilities experience social welfare interactions?
2. How does engagement with welfare shape practices, decision-making and motivations regarding work?
3. How do artists with disabilities interpret their identity and how does this impact their artistic development?
4. How does the experience of the Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme differ from welfare disability supports?

### ***The Research Approach and Methods***

The project utilises a Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR) approach with multiple semi-structured interviews carried out with participants to capture ongoing and changing patterns in interactions with welfare and work over a specific duration. The first phase of interviews were conducted with 35 participants between February and June 2023, and a second phase is being carried out with the same participants between October 2023 and January 2024.

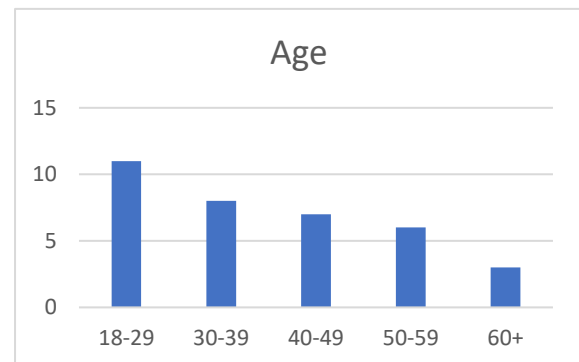
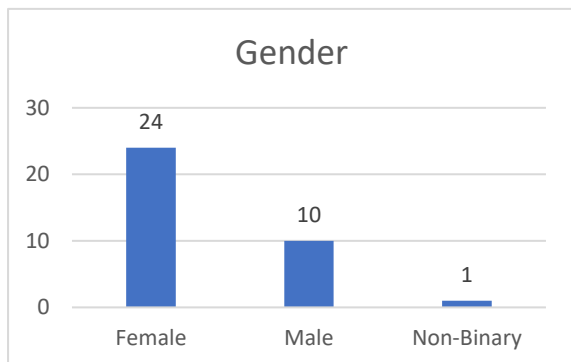
### ***Sampling***

In total, 35 artists with disabilities participated in the research. Participants were purposefully sought on the basis of their ability to help the researcher explore, understand and answer a research question (Rossman and Rallis 2003). In order to participate in the research participants must be:

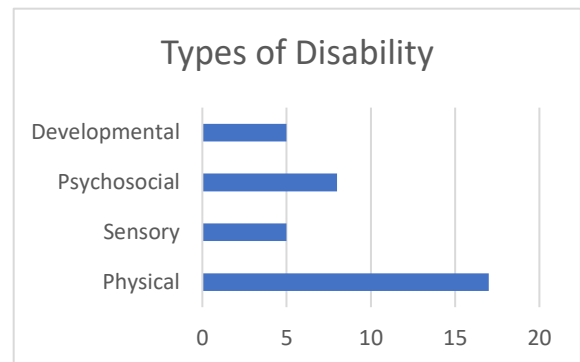
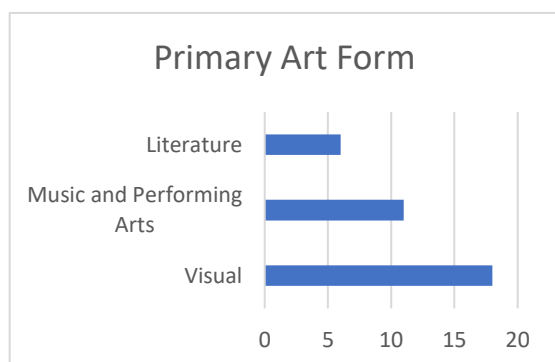
1. 18 years of age or older;
2. Be a working artist with a disability currently or recently in receipt of disability supports (broadly defined to include medical card); or
3. a working artist with a disability in receipt of the Basic Income for the Arts payment.

### ***Participants***

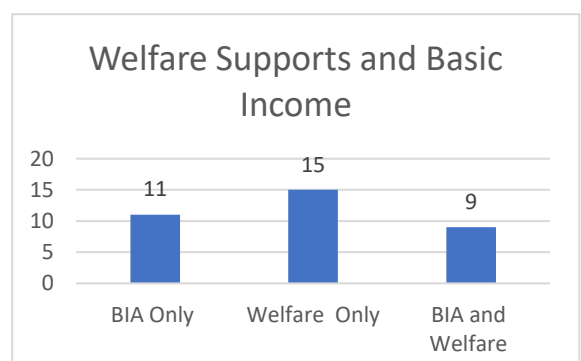
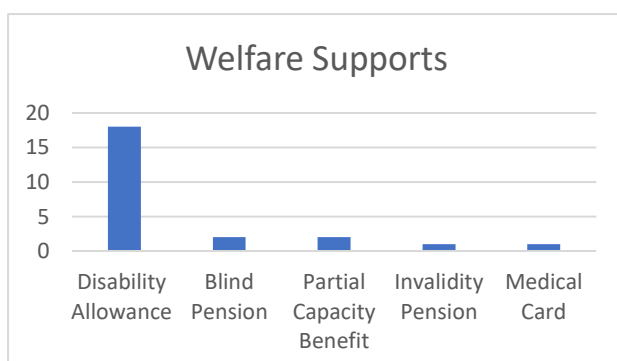
24 participants identified as female and 10 identified as male, while 1 person identified as non-binary. The age range of participants was relatively diverse with 11 between the ages of 18-29; 8 between the ages 30-39; 7 ranged between 40-49; 6 fell between the ages 50-59; and there were 3 participants aged 60 or over.



18 participants can be categorised as visual artists; 11 working in music and the performing arts; and 6 participants work within literature. In terms of disability, 17 participants reported a physical disability; 5 participants reported a sensory disability; 8 reported a psychosocial disability; and 5 reported a developmental disability.



24 participants were in receipt of, or applying for, a disability related support. The majority (18) were receiving, or applying for, Disability Allowance, but other supports included Blind Pension (2); Partial Capacity Benefit (2); Invalidity Pension (1); and a medical card only (1). 11 participants were in receipt of the Basic Income for the Arts payment only. A further 9 participants were in receipt of a welfare support and the Basic Income for the Arts payment.



This section outlines the policy context impacting the lives of artists with a disability. This is intended as a succinct overview identifying relevant treaties, law and policies at international, European and national levels. A more thorough overview will be provided in the final report.

### ***International Treaties***

The UNCRPD is the most significant and comprehensive international treaty regarding the rights of persons with disabilities. Following a socio-contextual model of disability, the UNCRPD outlines and ensures that the full plethora of human rights and fundamental freedoms are enjoyed by all persons with disabilities. Three Articles of the UNCRPD have particular salience for this project: the equal right to work that is freely chosen (Article 27); the right to an adequate standard of living and social protection (Article 28); the equal right to participation in culture (Article 30).

While the Irish Government ratified the UNCRPD in 2018, the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD, which provides a mechanism for considering individual and group complaints regarding violations of rights, has not yet been ratified.

### ***European and National Disability Law***

The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR) bans discrimination on the grounds of disability, while Article 26 recognises the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from policies ensuring independence, integration and participation in the life of the community. The EU has also adopted a range of legislative acts that protect disability rights, including Directive 2000/78 that bans discrimination on several grounds, including disability, in employment and occupation.

In Ireland, the 1996 report, *A Strategy for Equality*, by the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities underlined a shift toward a social model of disability by identifying access to education, employment, and cultural participation as key barriers to equality and independence. This led to a range of legislation aimed at preventing discrimination toward persons with disabilities as well as fostering social inclusion and participation. Legislation includes the National Disability Authority Act 1999; the Disability Act 2005; Special Education Needs Act (2004); the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018; Equal Status Acts 2000-2015; and the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015.

### ***European and National Policies***

EU policy also aligns with the UNCRPD's aims to secure and enhance full and effective participation of persons with disabilities. Particularly relevant are the European Commission Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 and the European Social Pillar (2017).

Beyond the EU, the Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023 calls on Member States to implement policies designed to secure and enhance full and effective participation of persons with disabilities across society.

Irish disability policy is outlined in iterations of the National Disability Strategy with a UNCRPD informed emphasis on facilitating persons with disabilities as active members of the community. Participation in employment is viewed as an important mechanism for well-being, social inclusion and moving out of poverty. Key to this approach is the Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2015-2024 (CES) which attempts to address systemic barriers to employment faced by persons with disabilities.

Persons with a disability can currently access a variety of welfare income supports including Disability Allowance; Blind Pension; Invalidity Pension; and Partial Capacity Benefit. The threshold for income disregards of disability welfare payments have been identified as a barrier to employment due to the potential reduction or loss of welfare income or secondary benefits such as the medical card (DFI 2023; Make Work Pay 2017). Welfare policy is increasingly seen as important in facilitating employment with multiple iterations of Pathways to Work (2016, 2021) attempting to widen access to Public Employment Services (PES) activation support services (training, education, job-search assistance) on a voluntary basis.

The *Green Paper on Disability Reform – A Public Consultation to Reform Disability Payments in Ireland (2023)* continues this trajectory by proposing to replace existing disability payments with a single multi-tiered scheme correlating to work capacity. For those in Level 1 (severe incapacity) PES remains voluntary; those in Level 2 (moderate capacity) will be required to engage with the PES and to take up any training programmes offered; those in Level 3 (high capacity) will be required to take up training or employment programmes and to accept reasonable employment opportunities. By linking receipt of disability payments with work-related obligations the proposals would significantly extend the reach of mandatory activation.

### ***Cultural Participation of Persons with Disabilities in European and National Policy***

Culture within in the EU has been regarded as a means for facilitating European identity, social cohesion, and well-being as well as being an important economic asset (Šubic and Ferri 2022) as evidenced by the A New European Agenda for Culture (2018) and the Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026. Recent reports have identified the need for securing and enhancing artists' status and social security; fair working conditions and practices; access to skills and lifelong learning and artistic freedom (OMC 2023).

Access to culture remains a priority through the Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027 and Work Plan 2019-2022, while there have been a number of OMC Working Groups of Experts related to widening access to, and participation in, culture. (OMC 2012; see also OMC 2017; OMC 2019). Europe Beyond Access, co-funded by Creative Europe, seeks to enhance



working lives and career development by internationalising the careers of artists with disabilities.

Irish cultural policy similarly shares an emphasis on creativity, cultural rights and participation in cultural life (McQuaid 2022). The *Culture 2025: A National Cultural Policy Framework* emphasizes cultural participation, but does not specifically address disability. Ireland's National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2022 outlined support for initiatives to increase and enhance the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural activities and programmes. A report from the Joint Committee on Disability Matters (2022) makes specific reference to supporting access to and participation in the cultural life of the community. The Creative Communities strand of the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022 assisted in funding and organising local art projects for disabled people in partnership with local authorities, with a total of 26 projects out of 2,658 being targeted at disabled people.

The Arts Council is the national agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts. The working lives and incomes of artists is of key concern to the Arts Council's policy development, as underpinned by the organisation's Paying the Artist policy (2020a). Enhancing the cultural inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities as audience members and artists features prominently in their policies, plans and programmes (Arts Council 2012, 2019, 2022, 2023a, 2023b). Making Great Art Work 2023-2025 specifically outlines actions to develop more opportunities for disabled artists (Arts Council 2023c).

Arts and Disability Ireland, funded by the Arts Council, is the national development and resource organisation for arts and disability. The organisation advocates for inclusive policy and practices; promotes engagement in the arts; and provides information on available awards, bursaries, and commissions. The organisation manages the Arts and Disability Connect Scheme, which is the only scheme open exclusively to artists with disabilities.

### ***Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme***

The Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme is a payment to artists and arts workers in order to enhance income stability; career viability; and well-being, as well as improving retention within the sector and recognising the contribution of the arts and artists to Irish life. It emerged as a response to the Arts and Recovery Taskforce report *Life Worth Living*. The scheme received over 9,000 applicants, and began in October 2022 with 2,000 randomly selected artists and arts workers. It runs between 2022-2025 with participants receiving a grant worth €325 per week (paid monthly). The payment is taxable and requires recipients to register with Revenue as self-employed, while allowing participants to earn additional income. Participants in receipt of social welfare payments must inform the Department of Social Protection as the payment is regarded as income earned, and thus potentially impacts welfare earnings disregards.

## **SECTION 4: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section briefly outlines some relevant literature across three themes: disability, employment and welfare; artists' incomes and working lives; and the cultural participation of people with disabilities as artists. This is intended as a brief overview identifying key themes informing the research. A more exhaustive discussion of literature will be contained in the final report.

### ***Disability, Employment and Welfare***

Persons with disabilities have a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to those without disabilities (EU SILC 2021). They experience lower rates of employment than non-disabled peers and are often paid at or below minimum wage, in part-time work, on precarious contracts, or in workshops segregated from the open labour market (EDF 2020). Ireland has the joint worst employment rate (32.5%) of persons with disabilities in Europe. The significant risk of poverty and social exclusion is also higher in Ireland (38.1%) (EDF 2023). This is compounded by the cost of disability with disabled people in Ireland facing additional costs of between €8,700-€12,000. Persons with disabilities in Ireland and Europe face significant stigma and discrimination in accessing public services and across society more generally (IHREC 2018; Eurobarometer 2019).

Persons with disabilities report that they are limited in the type and amount of work they can do primarily due to health, illness or impairment (Coleman, Sykes, Groom 2013). Persons with disabilities also face barriers in the recruitment process (McKinney 2013; IHREC 2018; Wegscheider et al. 2021). In work, disabled people often face stigma and mistrust regarding their work quality, productivity and potential development (Prins 2013; Vornholt 2018).

An abundance of welfare studies highlights recipients' expertise, knowledge and management of household finances and debt through in-depth budgeting; strategic decision-making; and strict time intensive routines in order to avoid unnecessary expenditure (Patrick 2014, 2017; Finn 2019; Whelan 2023). Being in receipt of social welfare supports is also strongly associated with stigma (Walker 2014) which occurs in interactions with welfare offices and staff; through wider societal perceptions of welfare; and the internalisation of stigma as shame (Baumberg 2012, 2016). Evidence suggests that attitudes regarding the 'deservingness' of disability supports shifts based on perceptions of work capacity (Baumberg 2017).

The lack of flexibility in disability benefit entitlements has been identified as one of key barriers to employment for disabled people (EDF 2020; OECD 2021; DFI 2023; DSP 2023). The redesign of disability benefits to extend activation support services (job search assistance, training, education) to recipients of disability welfare supports is increasingly positioned as a solution to overcoming poverty and social exclusion (Government of Ireland 2015; OECD 2021). The evidence regarding such measures is mixed. Frederick and VanderWeele (2019) show that policies combining health and employment supports deliver better outcomes in terms of employment, job tenure and higher incomes (see also Rehwald, Rosholm and Rouland 2015; OECD 2021). On the other hand, studies in the UK suggest that mandatory activation did little to facilitate transitions into paid work but exacerbated

existing illnesses and impairments as well as deepening material hardship (Patrick 2017; Roulstone 2015; Welfare Conditionality Project 2018; Grover 2018; Mills and Pring 2023).

### ***Basic Income***

Basic income's universality and lack of conditionality sets it apart from mandatory activation. Proponents argue that it would alleviate poverty and remove inefficient bureaucracies (Reed and Lansley 2016); create a fairer redistribution (Sage 2019); provide financial and economic security for citizens (Standing 2011; Ginn 2012); enhance well-being (Gibson et.al 2018); provide more free time (Weeks 2011; Van Parijs and Vanderborght 2017); and free individuals from reliance on the market for income (Zwolinski 2015). Critics suggest it would produce an exorbitant economic cost due to its universality allied to its potential for inducing work disincentives which undermine the tax base (De Wispelaere and Morales 2016), while others argue it would shift funding from those most in need while also eroding funding for other social programmes (Lombardozi and Pitts 2019).

Basic income pilot schemes have taken place in Finland, Germany, Canada, Namibia and Kenya. Findings are not extensive but suggest that there is little impact on labour force participation, but some evidence of improved health conditions and greater social cohesiveness (Perikö 2014).

### ***Artist Incomes***

Research illustrates that artists earn less than others with similar education levels and professionals in comparable sectors, and often less than the average worker in the labour force (Alper and Wassall 2006; Arts Council 2010; Throsby and Petetskaya 2017; Wetzel et.al 2018; TBR 2018a). In Australia, Throsby and Petetskaya (2017) show that the total average incomes for professional artists in Australia are 21% below the workforce average, while evidence suggests the average annual income visual artists make from their practice is around £6,000 (TBR 2018a). These experiences are also gendered with research showing that women earn less than men both in terms of total income and income derived from artistic work only (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017; Wetzel et.al 2018; OMC 2021; EENCA 2022; Marchenko and Sonnabend 2022). The Covid 19 pandemic only served to worsen these situations for many artists with widescale lockdowns and other health measures shutting down many revenue streams for often already precarious artists (Arts Council 2020c, 2020d; Spiro et.al 2021; Warran et.al 2022; Dinardi, Wortman and Hernández 2023).

There is a lack of consistency in artists' working lives as they can be casual or part-time employment, self-employed or unemployed all in a short space of time. Studies have consistently shown the necessity for artists to take on second jobs within and outside of their sector in order to survive (Arts Council 2010; Wetzel et.al 2018; Throsby and Petetskaya 2017; Maitland 2023a, 2023b). Studies show that unemployment features as a relatively prominent aspect of artists' working lives (Abbing 2002; Alper and Wassall 2006; Wetzel et.al 2009; Wetzel 2018). There is often a lack of contributory schemes covering self-employed or

freelance workers, while the periodic and sporadic nature of artists' work also presents difficulties in efficiently obtaining benefits (Throsby and Zednik 2010; ILO 2021).

Research from the Irish context finds similarities with international evidence regarding low pay; taking on additional arts and non-arts based work; gendered inequalities; and reliance on welfare supports (Arts Council 2010; VAI 2009, 2016; Maitland 2021, 2023a, 2023b).

### ***Participation of Persons with Disabilities as Creators of Art***

There is little disaggregated data regarding the artistic incomes and working conditions of artists with disabilities, while studies of their experience are also sparse. Throsby and Petetskaya (2017) report that artists with a disability earn 42% less than their non-disabled peers (see also Arts Council 2010). Artists with a disability also report that their disability impacts on their creative practice, and feel constrained by inaccessible work environments and tools (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017; Bang and Kim 2015; Arts Council 2010). Artists with disabilities are likely to be more reliant on welfare but inefficient bureaucratic systems when attempting to access benefit programs undermine disabled artists ability to generate income and survive financially (Gill and Sandahl 2009; Salonlahti 2021).

Statistics from England and Ireland suggest disappointing numbers for persons in receipt of funding awards (Arts Council England 2016, 2020; Arts Council of Ireland 2021; 2022; 2023a). Artists who identify as having a disability are under-represented as both applicants and recipients compared to the wider population, and tend to both apply for and receive lower levels of funding.

Other barriers include inadequate and partial accessibility measures at event, performance and rehearsal spaces (Leahy and Ferri 2023). Attitudinal and stigma barriers include viewing work through a social or therapeutic lens rather than for its artistic merit (Basas 2009; Hee Bang and Mee Kim 2015), and negative perceptions regarding ideal body types (Aujla and Redding 2013). Artists with disabilities also perceive that their work is not properly understood due to a lack of disabled peers throughout the arts and cultural organisations (British Council 2021; Leahy and Ferry 2023), which also means an absence of role models (Arts Council 2017). Recruitment is not seen as flexible enough due to eligibility criteria, application processes and a focus on perceived practical difficulties of employing a person with a disability (Arts Council England 2017).

There are also financial barriers to training and education supports; transport; materials; accessing work spaces (Arts Council England 2017; Leahy and Ferri 2023). Difficulties in covering costs of every life as well as basic needs like healthcare can render art and cultural participation 'a luxury' (Leahy and Ferri 2023).

## **SECTION 5: INITIAL INTERIM FINDINGS**

This section outlines the preliminary findings of the research so far. The findings are structured around four themes: 1) Disability and Developing Work Patterns; 2) Struggling to Get By; 3) Welfare Obstacles; 4) Experience of the Basic Income for the Arts Scheme (BIA). It is important to note the preliminary nature of these findings which are derived from the first round of interviews only, and as such are incomplete. With that in mind they are presented without excerpts from participant interviews. The final report will include a comprehensive analysis based on all rounds of data collection, with interview excerpts provided as supporting evidence and illustration.

### ***Theme 1: Disability and Developing Work Patterns***

Many artists with disabilities interviewed spoke about the impact of impairments on their working lives, reflecting research on the working lives of persons with disabilities (Coleman, Sykes and Groom 2013; Arts Council 2010). In discussions regarding what brought them to the art sector participants often reported difficulties in adapting to what they referred to as typical or normal work outside of the arts.

Participants identified the need to learn the rhythms of their body, their physical and/or mental health to understand how much work they might typically be able to do in a day to maximise their working time. For some, this 'everyday creativity' extended to finding ways of working with tools or equipment in their practice that are not designed for their bodies.

Despite this learned knowledge and practice many artists acknowledge moments in which they pushed their physical or mental limits in order to get work done. This has a negative impact on their health, often requiring periods of recuperation where they could perform less or no work. Funding applications were seen by many as being problematic for similar reasons as significant time and energy needs to be diverted into them, depleting an already limited resource.

Although participants were adept at managing their working life there was also a concern among many artists about losing working opportunities due to feeling unable to commit to deadlines or work the same patterns as non-disabled peers. Throughout the interviews participants reaffirmed the importance, and difficulty, in establishing and maintaining one's presence as an artist. This 'brand building' takes on added dimensions for artists with disabilities due to negative perceptions about their working capabilities, which may be reinforced by side-effects associated with their disability.

Artists with disabilities are caught within a double bind, since work is often low paying and sporadic there is a need to find a balance between managing what they can do while also trying to earn income to live, establish their presence and develop professionally.

## ***Theme 2: Struggling to Get By***

Throughout the interviews participants articulated an almost universal struggle to 'get by' with common themes of having little beyond meeting basic needs. In this way the research data reflects studies of artists more generally in that participants universally reported that they struggled to earn a living from their work.

Despite the receipt of welfare payments, it was not uncommon for artists with disabilities to supplement their income by taking on additional work (Arts Council 2010; TRB 2018). This amounted to what some participants described as 'survival jobs' which paid for basic needs. For others, this proved difficult due to the inability to work within what they call typical work conditions. As a result, more pressure is placed on their artistic practice to earn income to get by.

Reflecting the wider research on the lived experience of welfare (Patrick 2017; Whelan 2022) there was a common experience of carefully managing budgets and limiting spending. It was also common for participants to rely on family or friends for accommodation and financial assistance.

The theme of uncertainty permeated the experience of working in the arts, an experience compounded by the further intersections of disability and welfare. Participants described the difficulty in even short-term planning due to the uncertainty of future work, which itself often relied on obtaining funding. The experience of living as an artist and attempting to plan was often described as 'terrifying'.

Although difficult, some participants attempted to save, particularly when in receipt of funding, in case of emergencies or prolonged periods without work. However, this was rare with artists mostly living hand to mouth. There was also considerable fear regarding the longer term future due to reduced capacities to earn, insecure or non-existent pension provisions, as well as the inability to achieve life goals, such as home ownership or starting a family.

## ***Theme 3: Welfare Obstacles***

Participants perceived a lack of knowledge and clarity within welfare offices regarding artistic incomes and funding, and how they would impact welfare supports such as Disability Allowance. Participants also perceived a lack of consensus within welfare offices regarding information, with many stating that they received differing responses from staff members, leaving them feeling confused and unclear on how to proceed.

The findings show a clear concern among artists with disabilities about the impact of welfare regulations on their ability to earn an income. For some participants this is a direct result of having had welfare benefits suspended or removed due to their receipt of arts funding or income earnings.

Even among those who had not suffered a reduction or loss of supports it was clearly evident in their thinking and influenced their decision making in relation to taking on work or applying for funding. Disability payments and other supports, including the medical card, offered a security often absent from working lives.

Participants reported negative interactions with social welfare offices and staff. Participants found interactions to be intrusive and stigmatizing. Applications for supports were experienced as necessarily confessional in order to convince staff of their eligibility and deservingness. Many felt that they were navigating stereotypes of what a person with a disability should look and act like during interactions.

#### ***Theme 4: Basic Income***

A number of participants identified a lack of guidance regarding how the scheme would interact with their disability payments, including whether it would be financially beneficial. There was a sense that the development and implementation of the policy excluded artists with disabilities by failing to account for their working lives and experience.

For those in receipt of the payment it was overwhelmingly regarded as having a positive impact. The scheme enhanced self-confidence and feelings of respect which differed from the stigmatizing feelings attached to welfare supports. There was also a sense of recognition and being valued for their work as an artist.

Participants also strongly indicated the financial benefits of the BIA and how it has impacted their working lives. The payment allowed them to purchase materials, access venues, enter competitions, obtain training and mentoring that they otherwise would not have been able to. Importantly, participants reported that the payment allowed them to be selective about work including turning down work which they felt did not adequately value their ability and career stage. As such, it allowed them to focus on the artistic pursuits they valued.

While the financial benefits of the BIA have enhanced the practice of artists, it has also become part of their existing income stream(s) which is stretched to pay for necessities such as rent, food, utility bills etc. In a few cases the payment was almost entirely used for such purposes.

## SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

This short report is based on ongoing research examining the working lives of artists with disabilities, their interaction with the welfare system and its impact on their ability to earn income. It has sketched the research methodology, policy context and literature review, and preliminary findings thus far. It is important to note that full conclusive findings and analysis will only emerge after all rounds of data collection are complete, and these will be contained in the final report submitted in August 2024. Nonetheless, the research to date can identify some tentative conclusions:

1. It is evident that the earnings disregard on disability payments and supports have a significant impact on disabled artists' ability to work. Some artists have suffered penalties due to exceeding earnings thresholds. Beyond this the earnings threshold clearly influences and shapes artists decision-making in terms of funding and earnings.
2. There is a strong perception regarding a lack of knowledge in welfare offices about artists' income, funding and work patterns. This absence of clarity compounds the negative impact of the earnings disregards on disability payments by leaving disabled artists confused about the possibilities for work.
3. Artists with disabilities identify limitations in relation to their capacity for working in both non-art and art based work. In relation to artistic work there was a feeling of lost opportunities. This was not about a lack of capabilities or talent, but rather about working within conditions favouring non-disabled peers and disadvantaging disabled artists.
4. The lives of artists with disabilities are almost universally shaped by welfare, low pay and learning to live on low-incomes. There is an intersection between disability related barriers, low pay and the sporadic nature of work in the arts and welfare regulations which undermine the working ability of artists with disabilities.
5. The experience of the Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) pilot scheme appears overwhelmingly positive thus far. For artists, payments bestow a level of respect absent from stigmatised social welfare payments, which boosts confidence. There is a palatable sense of recognition and validation in their roles as artists.
6. Financially, the BIA is also benefitting the work of artists with disabilities with increased artistic activity and output. It must be noted however that for some it was considered exclusionary policy making that did not properly account for disabled artists' reliance on disability payments and supports.



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