



CAN EVERYBODY SEE IT

A response to Arts Council England's request for a consultation on their new 10 year strategy.

Pyramid of Arts

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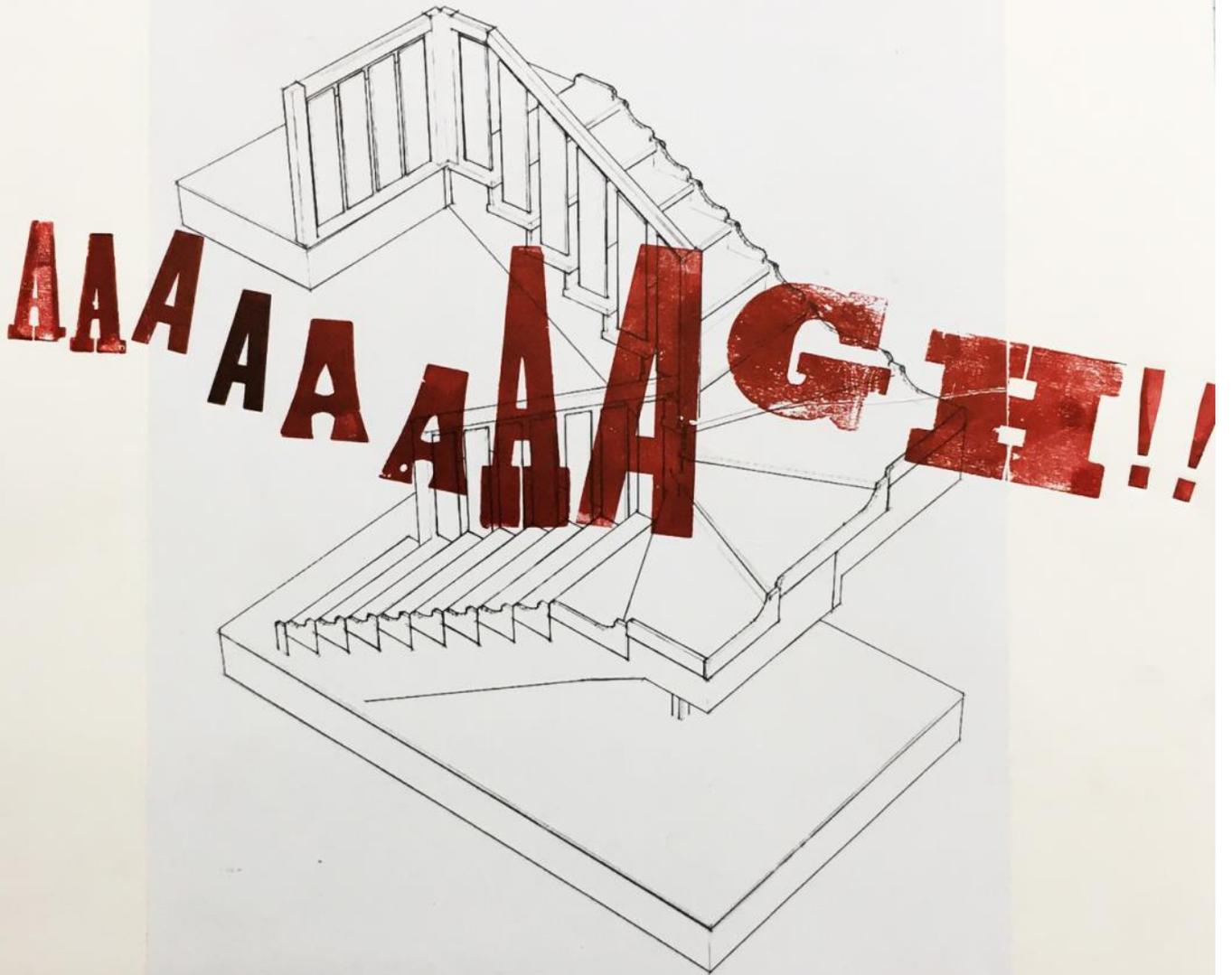
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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**





INTRODUCTION

Is written and spoken communication clear and friendly? Are accessible toilets available? Is level access available? Is the product affordable to people on low or no income? Is enough notice given for staffing and transport to be organized (minimum of 2 months)? Do projects last long enough to meaningfully involve people with learning disabilities (minimum of 12 weeks)?

When the Arts Council announced their consultation 'The next ten years: have your say' we at Pyramid of Arts were frustrated to see that the consultation appeared to be based around an online discussion forum. Pyramid is a collective of 150 artists with and without learning disabilities (LD) who work together to explore and develop their creativity, and to make great art for a wide public. Of those artists, 100 have learning disabilities. Around 25 have profound and multiple learning disabilities. Despite being accomplished, experienced artists with many years of practice under our collective belts, and in some cases in receipt of funding from Grants for the Arts and other funders, the majority of our artists have limited or no literacy and very few are regular users of the internet.

We were really pleased, then, that the Arts Council listened to the comments that we made online, and offered us support to run some sessions with artists with LD. This short report documents those sessions.

I could probably respond in a very wordy, academic way to this consultation and this report but actually I think what we discovered as we talked is that there are a lot of basic nuts and bolts issues that which are still not right—apparently 'simple' things which can and do still serve as barriers to people with LD creating and experiencing art. They are listed at the top of this page.

When we talk about a strategy for the next 10 years we mustn't fall into the trap of thinking that the basics have been sorted, and now we can move on to the next stage. There are still NPO venues that do not have level access to education spaces, which means that people who use wheelchairs benefit less from that venue's National Portfolio funding than those who don't use wheelchairs. This report is not about finger-pointing. Pyramid itself still makes mistakes and we must be constantly on guard against making them. Often, for instance, funding timescales mean, as with these consultation sessions themselves, that we get money to do projects but are not able to give our members two months notice of them happening.

While it is important about to talk about strategies, and creative cases, and sectors and roles we must always remember that we all still have a lot of work to do to get the basics right.

James Hill, Director, Pyramid of Arts



**CHEAP
AND
CHEERFUL**



NO

TOILETS

NO

ART

WHAT WE THOUGHT ABOUT.

We were thinking about the consultation both as makers and consumers of the arts. When people in the group go to galleries, theatres, museums and other creative venues, these are the things that are important. When Arts Council England give money to venues and projects, these are the things the group would like you to think about.

CAN EVERYONE SEE IT?

Is the whole experience open to everyone? Are wheelchair users plonked behind a pillar in the theatre? Is there a sign that says, “exhibition continues up these steps”?

AAAAAAAAGH!

The feeling people with restricted mobility get when they see a lot of stairs! Is there a lift? Where is it? Is it obvious? Are there signs? Is there someone around to show us?

CHEAP AND CHEERFUL

Are shows and arts experiences reasonably priced? Is the coffee mega-expensive? Are the people friendly and amenable or are they snobby and standoffish?

NO TOILETS NO ART

Get the basics right, or people with disabilities won't bother turning up.

CAN YOU READ THIS?

Are things written too small? What about people who can't read? Or who can't see? Is the experience dependent on reading? If so, is there an alternative ie audio?

USE PICTURES

Be creative in how information is presented. Not everyone reads! And we're supposed to be artistic!

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

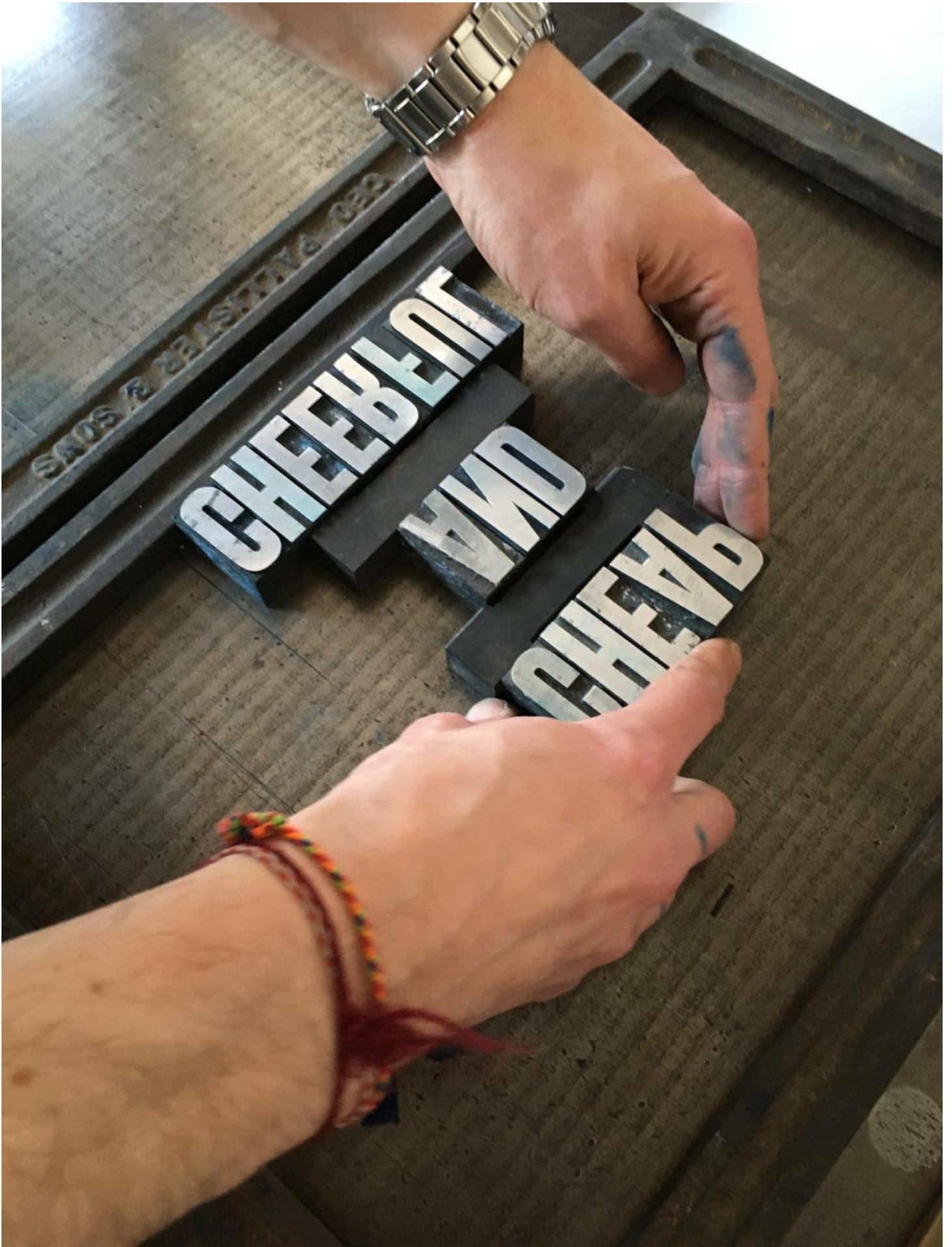
Do you want to know if projects and venues are welcoming to disabled people? Ask disabled people! We'll tell you.

The main point we gathered from the sessions was that the group's experience of an arts venue or project starts with **practical** considerations (toilets, accessibility etc). The **people** are incredibly important; how are we treated, is there a friendly “feel”, do we feel that people are open, tolerant and willing to help. Then we thought about **understanding**: is a venue or a project doing enough to help people with learning disabilities understand what's going on?

The prints in this report were created at Leeds Industrial Museum at Armley Mills, using an Albion Press, manufactured by Harrild & Sons (London) in 1850, and letterpress blocks from c1880 - 1960. The Albion Press is an early example of a hand operated iron printing press, originally designed by Richard Whittaker Cope of London in 1820. It would originally have been used for printing posters, newspapers and possibly even books for a short time.

The press is used for work with groups visiting the museum and artists in residence.

Armley Mills is part of Leeds Museums and Galleries and the Arts Council's National Portfolio 2018-2022.



USE PICTURES



TEA



CAKE





WHAT WE DID.

Five sessions of three hours each were planned to make this response happen.

The first session was a meet and greet for all the people involved. We discussed what we were going to do and why, and we talked about how much money the Arts Council has and where it goes.

In the second session we planned how we were going to respond. We role played being artists approaching the Arts Council for money. We realised this was a very difficult thing to do, and were interested in how we disagreed with the decision our Arts Council funder made, even though all the projects were complete fantasy.

We then focused on the venues around Leeds and named as many as we could that we thought had money from the Arts Council. Discussing our personal experiences of these and thinking about how these experiences reflected visiting arts venues in general. This discussion gave us a checklist of things we really needed to know about these places. We decided who was going to which venue.

The third session saw us taking our clipboards and going out into the venues. We took the opportunity to scrutinise things we might not otherwise think about.

At the fourth session we came back together to discuss our experiences and try to plan a way forward. What had we found out? Had we all had similar experiences or were they all very different? We were surprised to find that most of us really focused on the people we had met and this made a huge impact on how we experienced each venue. We came up with a list of slogans for the following week. These were mostly text based which led to another discussion around how confusing this experience was as the biggest criticism about the venues, was that there was no alternative to text.

For this fifth session we visited Leeds Industrial Museum at Armley Mills (part of the NPO-funded Leeds Museums and Galleries) and used letterpress to print the slogans from last week, combining them with images to get the message across.

In this final session we decided to make huge, non-text based statements about the two subjects we felt most strongly about. The works are called *Access* and *Smile*.

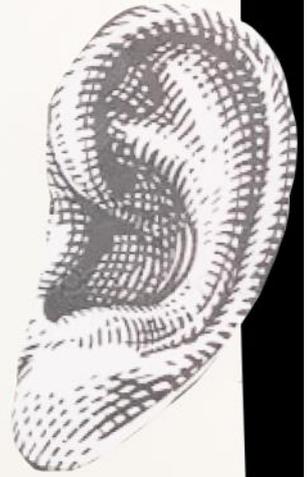
We offer you documentation of this work without further text-based explanation!







**THANK
YOU
FOR**



LISTENING



www.pyramid-of-arts.org.uk