Response to ACE funding criteria by members of the team of investigators involved in the InVisible Difference: Dance, Disability and Law project, Arts and Humanities Research Council Funded Research Project 2013-2015

www.invisibledifference.org.uk

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1. The Invisible Difference: Dance, Disability and Law project is an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project that is exploring the issues surrounding professional disabled choreographers and ownership and authorship of their work. The project commenced in January 2013 for a three year period. Members of the team include Professor Sarah Whatley, Coventry University; Professor Charlotte Waelde, University of Exeter; Dr Abbe Brown, University of Aberdeen; Dr Shawn Harmon, University of Edinburgh; Dr Karen Wood and Hannah Donaldson, research assistants; Mathilde Pavis and Kate Marsh, Doctoral candidates. This research carried out for the project includes investigating the cultural value placed on works created and performed by dancers with disabilities, and how audiences’ perceptions affect the works and their position within the mainstream contemporary dance world. What follows is evidenced in the findings we have collated so far.

2. We have spent time over the past year interviewing, working with and observing three artists: Marc Brew, Claire Cunningham and Caroline Bowditch. We also have strong links with Candoco dance company and other independent disabled dancers. From our research to date, it seems that access to funding for this artform and these artists does depend on geographical location. Creative Scotland has a strategy for the support of disability art through which they (the funders and those funded) are able to take risks. By contrast the Arts Council England seems not to have such a clear strategy. Two of the artists we are collaborating with previously lived in England. All three now live in Scotland. .

3. Without knowing the ACE strategy pertaining to their work, the artists have said that it leaves them not knowing whether their work would be acceptable for funding by ACE. The Unlimited programme did help to bring their work into large venues in England (specifically London). But the artists are then unsure as to how to progress those works and in particular whether the Arts Council would fund further productions or touring of existing works. Often the focus, such as it is, seems to be on the production of new works. The second round of Unlimited funding is to be welcomed. There is now a feeling amongst established disabled dancers and choreographers that this second tranche should be directed towards lesser known artists. While Unlimited did a great deal to bring disabled art forms to the gaze of the public, very few disabled artists benefitted (estimates are around 1%). There is a keen sense that the net should now be cast more widely.

4. There are practical difficulties faced by disabled (dance) artists in accessing both funding and venues. We have also been told that there are challenges in the application process, notably the opaqueness of the criteria for obtaining funding and practical difficulties in completing the application forms. There seems little in the way of targeted training and support. Access to venues can sometimes prove almost impossible..

5. There are some excellent examples of disability arts strategies from around the world. Australia is one: <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/about_us/strategies-policies/cultural_engagement_framework/disability>

Closer to home, we would applaud the public funding of Disability Arts Cymru. In England, the response to disability arts seems piecemeal. A joined up approach would enable disability arts in general, and for our project, disability dance, to take their rightful place within our cultural heritage from which they are currently conspicuously absent. It would also contribute to enabling the UK to meet its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 most notably those relating to access to and participation in our cultural life.