

Irish Architectural Archive

Being Accessible: An Equality, Human Rights and Diversity Policy for the IAA

July 2022

Background

This Equality, Human Rights and Diversity (EHRD) Policy grew out of an Arts Council funded Irish Architectural Archive (IAA) audience development project which began in July 2021 and continued over the following 12 months. This project responded directly to the IAA current strategic plan which informs the organisation's ambitions and objectives for the period 2021 to 2025, counting down to its 50th anniversary in 2026.

The *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* is underpinned by the objective pillars to 'be archival', 'be accessible', 'be relevant' and 'be digital'. To address the ambitions in the 'be accessible' pillar, a critical path of discovery was mapped out with the board and staff, through workshops, desk research, and discussion, leading to an engagement with the IAA's existing network to understand needs and requirements.

This policy describes the IAA's organisation-wide commitment to engaging with people, whether they are currently members, readers, audience, or not, and to developing long-term relationships of mutual respect and benefit. This work will help ensure the continued relevance of the IAA and will also support making the case for resources when activated and leveraged with that intent.

Methodology

From the perspective of audience development, with a particular focus on EDHR, the IAA, supported by external expertise provided by Blue Line Consulting and Tilting the Lens, sought to consider and establish who was currently in its audience, who was missing, and why they were missing. Was it a lack of understanding of what the IAA does, a lack of relevance of the IAA's holdings to those audiences, or perhaps challenges to access in the way the IAA does its work that was preventing successful engagement with broader communities? Or was it an element of all these things?

To answer these questions, the development of this policy included:

- A desk review of IAA policy documents with a focus on inclusion leading to suggested updates to documents including the Company Constitution, Employee Handbook, Board Handbook, Engagement Policy, and Volunteer Policy.

- Cultural awareness workshops with both the executive and board.
- A review of IAA social media activity, with guidance on use, resulting in the development of a new Social Media Policy.
- A site visit and access audit completed with Sinéad Burke of accessibility consultancy Tilting the Lens, leading to a written Access Report with recommendations for immediate, medium term and longer-term projects, fixes or practices to improve accessibility to the IAA building and services.
- Drafting an Audience Survey to benchmark diversity and the access needs of the current audience, members and readers.
- Hosting a Community Workshop with participants representing communities not currently using the IAA, to discuss greater representation within the collection, inclusive archiving and equitable access.
- Development and delivery of a workshop with education and outreach experts in the culture and heritage area, to discuss future engagement with schools and school-goers and to develop ideas for commissioned research which will support the future use and resourcing of IAA archives to activate and support the primary and second level curriculum.

The IAA Vision

The IAA seeks to be an authoritative and comprehensive repository of primary evidence relating to Ireland's architecture and built environment. Through the holdings of the IAA, freely accessible to all, that architecture and built environment can be celebrated, interrogated, understood and reimagined.

In fulfilling this core mission, the IAA will build on its history of openness to nurture a culture of respect, inclusivity and accessibility at all levels of the organisation, across the full range of its activities, and in its engagements with all of the communities it serves.

Context

The development of this policy is underpinned by the values of the Arts Council's *Equality, Human Rights, and Diversity Policy and Strategy* [2019] which stresses the determination to 'respect, support, and ensure inclusion of all voices and cultures that make up Ireland today, from all sections of society, existing and new communities, from all social backgrounds, ethnicities, and traditions'.

It also ensures the implementation of Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 which places a statutory obligation on public bodies (and 'organisations financed wholly or partly out of moneys provided by the Oireachtas') to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect the human rights of staff and those to whom the organisation provides services.

This policy is also developed in the context of the approaching 50th anniversary of the IAA in 2026. In the years since the organisation's founding, Ireland's culture and Irish identities

have evolved and transformed, and the communities that now make up Ireland's population are using buildings in new ways. As the repository of primary evidence relating to Ireland's architecture, the communities that make up Ireland today need to inform what the IAA collects and how that material is interpreted and presented, to ensure the IAA continues to be relevant and accessible as 'the bedrock for celebrating, interrogating, understanding, and re-imagining our built environment'.

Significant progress on implementing this policy and the IAA's *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* will bring new and diverse audiences, increased understanding of the organisation's relevance in society, and of the relevance of its collections and programmes. With careful stewardship and purposeful approaches, an increase in income, from a wider range of sources, can be anticipated. These achievements will occur within the context of broader approaches to programming, collecting, and audience development.

Approach to Audience Development

There are three possible target audience development opportunities:

1. **Established audiences** – deepening the relationship and creating more loyalty and repeat visits with the people already engaged in the IAA, that is the current visitors, researchers and members.
2. **Those not pursued or engaged** to date – these are people who are similar to the established audience but have not yet been reached or converted.
3. **Those excluded** – these are people who experience barriers to participation, whether physical, educational, or economic.

This policy presents a series of recommendations that will begin to address the issues suggested above, including:

- Lack of understanding of what the IAA is and does.
- The need to maintain relevance in its collecting.
- Access challenges in how the IAA works.

Barriers to inclusion and feeling welcome exist everywhere, whether visible or not, in the design of spaces, programmes, or processes, in the language used, or in information that is missing. All individuals are made up of multiple identities, experiences, abilities and communities. They can feel excluded because of any, or many, of them. It is the ambition of the IAA to ensure everyone engaging with it feels welcome and included.

The *IAA Access Audit* [Appendix 1] includes a number of broad recommendations which are being implemented, to create a more open building and to make communications more accessible. This document incorporates a small number of these, where they focus on recommendations relevant to approaches to collecting and commissioning, archival practice, programmes, and engagement with communities of interest.

Echoing the UK Arts Marketing Association's Principles for Audience Development, the IAA will approach this work by:

- thinking long-term
- adopting an organisation-wide commitment
- considering both existing and potential audiences
- designing ongoing processes, not short-term projects
- planning, evaluating, reviewing, and planning (in a continuous cycle).

The recommendations in this document are presented in the context of the relevant objectives within the IAA *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*.

Learnings from the Audience Survey

An online Audience Survey was carried out in January and February 2022, the link to which was distributed to the IAA board and members, via the e-newsletter, and on the IAA social media platforms. Given the wide distribution of the link, the response of just under 120 was disappointing. By way of comparison, the IAA has over 9,750 registered readers. Given the low return, a serious caveat needs to be applied to the results of the survey.

That said, the survey suggests that only 18% of the IAA audience is under age 44; and 40% of the IAA audience is over 65 years of age. This suggests that work should be done in a timely manner to broaden the diversity of age; but it also suggests that a unique opportunity exists to communicate legacy opportunities with an audience who might consider leaving bequests to the IAA. Only 10% of respondents said that they would not consider making a donation to the IAA, which suggests enormous potential in this regard, with careful development and stewardship of this audience.

The survey found that 95% of respondents are white, and only 3% identified as LGBTQI+. This will change over time with the implementation of the audience development ambitions.

All of the accessibility accommodations listed in the survey had some engagement by the audience, despite the fact that only 6.5% currently identify as having a disability. This endorses the theory that access accommodations support lots of different types of people, at different stages of their lives. Some 25% of respondents said that they would like the option of using the reading room on a Saturday.

Growing understanding in what the IAA does

Two of the four pillars within the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* are to 'be accessible' and 'be relevant'; and the core purpose in collecting is 'to reflect contemporary societal, sectoral and educational concerns'. It is vital, therefore, to ensure the widest possible understanding across society of what the IAA does. This will help widen the breadth of engagement. Being relevant is vital to keeping IAA resourced.

This work starts in how the IAA talks about itself, how engaging and accessible it makes its programmes, its physical spaces, its marketing materials, and its online presence (website and social media).

Maintaining Relevance in the Collections

The IAA approached the development of the community workshop with the belief that what is not recorded or archived disappears, and what is not accurately recorded becomes invisible because it is not searchable. The participants, who represented the Traveller, Physically Disabled, Autistic, Blind, Neurodiverse, d/Deaf, Transgender, Black, and Muslim Communities, strengthened the appreciation of the need for the collections to be relevant to the audiences with whom the IAA is seeking to engage.

The IAA also learned about the types of places and spaces that are important to communities not represented in the collections, and, perhaps more crucially, how communities are repurposing existing buildings to new uses. This presents an opportunity to the IAA, as well as a new imperative to revisit and update existing holdings.

Access challenges

Meeting the varying access requirements of people visiting, working or researching in 45 Merrion Square is a priority. The IAA will ensure it can support and welcome a growing diversity in its readers, visitors and participants, its staff, its partners, and its board.

The IAA commits to continually improving user and visitor experiences at 45 Merrion Square, and to resourcing these efforts appropriately, while acknowledging that the building is a protected structure and will always present challenges.

The IAA is ambitious to move as close as possible to best practice accessibility in its work, in its processes and in its spaces; and it commits to being vigilant against accessibility regression in that work.

Objectives of this Policy

The objectives in this policy listed below are structured to respond to the four pillars of the IAA *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*. This provides the rationale for undertaking the work, and can sustain business cases for particular recommendations.

However, to begin with there are three fundamental ambitions that will underpin all IAA audience development work:

1. Establish a Community Advisory Group

Following on from the learnings at the community workshop, the IAA will create a Community Advisory Group (CAG).

The CAG will represent different communities not represented currently on the board, membership, or executive, to support the IAA and provide valued and valuable lived experience. It will be a filter in decision making, ensuring it is strong and inclusive and that diverse voices are heard and considered.

The CAG will include at least two serving members from the board to support the work and ensure it is understood at the highest levels of the organisation.

2. Deliver clearer, compelling, and more accessible communications

The IAA will create a series of 'boilerplate' messages that communicate what it does in an updated, open, inclusive, engaging, and compelling way. These will inform a more conversational house style for the website, social media and marketing materials, and will be used to update standard content disseminated to tourism or other information platforms.

The IAA will maintain a number of communication options to support greater inclusion. These can include email, phone, and contact forms, and social media messaging.

3. Implement the *Access Audit Report*

The Access Audit Report detailed a number of recommendations for the building, the programmes and the collection, which the IAA has begun implementing. These accommodations will make the IAA more accessible to a broader audience, through improving the physical accessibility of its entrances and thoroughfares within the building, its signage outside, and wayfinding and object labelling inside the building, among other things.

Strategic Pillar 1: Be Archival

4. Maintain and preserve the Collection

In planning for objective 1.1 of the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* to provide suitable storage by completing the second phase of the passive archive stores to the rear of 45 Merrion Square, the IAA will ensure planning and design includes the input of Disabled and other marginalised people, to ensure full accessibility, futureproofing for diversity in its workforce.

5. Acquire new (and relevant) material

In its mission to be a comprehensive record of Ireland's architecture and architects and working with the CAG and the Collections Development Committee, the IAA will identify gaps in its collections, supporting objective 1.2 in the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*.

6. Implement best archival practice in the care, maintenance and cataloguing of the holdings

As well as keeping staff up-skilled in the care, maintenance and cataloguing of its holdings, the IAA will also provide regular cultural awareness training supported by the CAG to support sensitive engagement and understanding of visitors' needs and ensure that its use of language in recording and cataloguing remains up to date and appropriate (Objective 1.3 in *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*).

7. Run the organisation in the right way

To ensure stable funding, meeting the objectives of its funders and the Charities Regulatory Authority governance requirements, the IAA will develop the role of a dedicated access co-ordinator who will work specifically to embed access in everything it does, and champion the importance of access across the organisation. (Objective 1.4 in *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*).

Strategic Pillar 2: Be Accessible

8. Make the holdings available through the online catalogue

The IAA strives to catalogue to the highest international standards (objective 2.1 in *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*) and will redesign its website and catalogue interfaces to be more accessible to all types of users. Language will be less formal and images will include Alt Tags. Images and captions will be used to show the diversity within the IAA to ensure as many communities as possible feel represented.

The website will aim for AAA standard (the highest classification) on WCAG 2.0 web accessibility standard. It will include an Accessibility Statement that describes clearly the ways to travel to 45 Merrion Square and the building itself. Access routes and distances between various locations will be detailed. This is so that those with mobility issues can be fully informed, and can assess in advance their degree of independence while at the IAA.

9. Provide direct public access to the collections

To implement objective 2.2 in the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*, as many barriers as possible to the use of the collections will be removed, including the following actions:

Plain-language will be used in all materials, including the written guide to using the Archive and Reading Room. There will be clear and open information on what to expect at the IAA, as well as on how visitors, researchers and readers will be expected to behave.

Any item in the holdings, be it an architectural drawing, a document or a photograph, can be visually described on request for Blind or low vision readers or website visitors. These descriptions will be added to the online catalogue as they are created.

Targeted, downloadable PDFs will be developed which describe possible pathways of engagement for different user categories such as historical societies, architecture students, youth clubs, or third-age learners.

The IAA will maintain connections, and reciprocal flows of relevant information, with peer organisations in the heritage and culture sectors, learning from their successes and building audiences through appropriate partnerships.

10. Promote the collections through the exhibitions programme

Working with the CAG, the IAA will develop themed exhibitions of relevance to broader communities. It will create more accessible materials to interpret them, as it implements objective 2.3 of the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* to make exhibitions more meaningful and enjoyable.

Information (including on exhibitions and reading room guidance) will be available to visitors in large format print and/or sent digitally in advance to support visitors who are Blind or have low vision, are Neurodiverse, or those for whom English is not their first language.

11. Open the building

Objective 2.4 of *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* seeks to make the first-floor spaces in 45 Merrion Square open and more appealing to a wider public. The IAA will resource good design as an ongoing budget line for signage, marketing materials, and the website to ensure its brand identity and essence remains clear, cohesive, engaging, and accessible.

The IAA will develop a media engagement list that it will nurture and keep updated so that key stakeholders understand what it does and can help earn positive editorial at the right times.

The IAA will develop a brief for an artist-, curator-, archivist-, or educator-in-residence to develop a model of practice for the IAA to work with people in the education system, in particular at primary and second levels. Leveraging the assets of the IAA in this way will also support ambitions articulated in the Arts Council's Architecture Policy *Championing Architecture* to engage children and young people with the architecture in their communities, and in the National Architecture Policy *Place for People*.

12. Maintain and extend the Dictionary of Irish Architects

As the Dictionary of Irish Architects is expanded beyond its current time-frame of 1720 to 1940, every effort will be made to ensure that its contents fully reflect the diversity of the architectural profession in Ireland. The Women in Architecture project will also continue to address gaps in the current contents of the Dictionary of Irish Architects, and to ensure information required for the expansion is captured in time.

Strategic Pillar 3: Be Relevant

13. Develop the collection

Objective 3.1 in the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* articulates the ambition that the IAA collections reflect contemporary society and its concerns. Working with the CAG and Collection Development Committee, the IAA will engage with a broad range of communities to address historically underdeveloped areas of the collections as it becomes aware of them, and keep its use of language in line with contemporary practice.

14. Record buildings

Through its active photographic survey programme (objective 3.2 of the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*) the IAA will develop innovative commissioning projects and seek resources for them from a diversity of sources based on areas of interest. It will work with the CAG to identify buildings in its holdings which have new uses that need to be recorded, or types of spaces not in the collection that are relevant to various communities.

15. Curate exhibitions

Objective 3.3 of the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* stipulates that the exhibition programme, in particular for incoming loan exhibitions in the First-Floor Rooms of 45 Merrion Square, will be open and inclusive. The IAA will work with the CAG to develop ideas for exhibitions, projects, or resources relevant to under-represented identities and communities, supported where possible by material in its own collections, with associated outreach to those communities to engage them in this work.

16. Establish sectoral relevance

The IAA will create and implement a deliverable Communications Calendar and Plan that supports regular media releases and stories. Simple, engaging, and compelling social media campaigns will ensure the IAA gets value from participation in events such as Culture Night, and gets recognition and engagement for its programming.

Through purposeful outreach and engagement, the IAA will develop and maintain a database of diverse communities and individuals who will support its work to expand both its audience and its collections. It will seek their support regularly in formal and informal ways.

The IAA will continue to enlist and recruit more diverse board members, staff, company members, and advocates, who understand what it does and can champion its work in their networks. This is an ongoing practice, with regular and specific guidance on what is needed and what messages are relevant, and when.

These activities will support objective 3.4 of the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*.

Strategic Pillar 4: Be Digital

17. Digitise the Collections

Objective 4.1 in the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* underpins the values of preservation and access in the development of digital surrogates of selected elements of the collection. As more of the collections are digitised and made accessible online, broad search terms will be used to ensure as many relevant associations as possible can be searchable, so that represented communities can find themselves in the holdings.

18. Acquire born digital material

As well as developing workflows and methodologies to acquire born-digital design records, (objective 4.2 of the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025*), the Irish Architectural Archive, with the support and advice of the CAG, will actively seek accession of documentation of places and spaces relevant to communities that do not identify as the majority in Ireland.

19. Implement a digital preservation strategy

Objective 4.3 of the *Strategic Plan 2021-2025* commits to the creation and implementation of a digital preservation strategy. Aware of how inaccessible the online holdings are to many, the IAA will remain engaged with international networks to learn from best practice in archiving and digital repositories, to ensure it can remain at the forefront of accessibility via new technologies as it implements its preservation strategy.

Measure the outcomes

Implementing the breadth of the Equality, Human Rights and Diversity objectives will require the oversight and support of the board, the commitment of the executive and staff, and the support of the company members and audience, including advisory groups. The IAA is cognisant that this will need resources and the accountability of regular reporting. To make the case for resources and account for outcomes, the IAA will measure the outputs and evaluate the outcomes of this work.

Implementing the objectives in this policy will:

- Grow audience numbers – this will be evident via quantitative increases.
- Ensure that this audience is more engaged and connected with the IAA – this will create a qualitative improvement.
- Grow the diversity of the audience – this will quantitatively broaden the IAA's networks.

The IAA will measure and evaluate in the following ways:

- 1 An annual survey of users and social media audience will provide baseline information and allow changes to be tracked.
- 2 The ongoing audit of online and offline media coverage, and interest in its social media channels, will help measure the engagement of the audiences with whom the IAA is most connected.
- 3 Tracking access to digital archives, both in number and range of subject matters, as well as requests for visual descriptions, and wider or more inclusive language.
- 4 Tracking requests for bespoke materials and pathways created from the education sector, community groups and other audiences.
- 5 Recording visitor attendance in the reading room and at exhibition venues.
- 6 Issuing occasional questionnaires which will gather both qualitative and quantitative data. This will facilitate the monitoring of the evolving needs of those accessing and interacting with the IAA. This will be an ongoing and evolving practice.