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**'How Can Neuro-divergent Artists Gain Equal Access to Arts Funding?'**

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## Statement

This is a brief summary exploring the relationship between my research, professional practice and the major project. The focus of the dissertation has acknowledged the term *neuro-divergence*, contextualised as a *processing and learning difference*. As a recently self-identified neuro-divergent Artist, primarily, affected by Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); I have embraced a new, authentic professional identity.

In October 2019, I embarked upon the major project entitled 'Neuro-Insurgent Horizons', which comprised of two large visual arts pieces; based upon MRI images of my neuro-divergent brain. This culminated in the production of a funding application video and podcast. The term neurodivergence predominantly refers to autism yet includes neurological conditions such as ADHD, dyslexia and other variants. ADHD affects social interactions, learning, attention, emotional regulation, impulse control, attention span and other executive functions (in a non-pathological sense). Short term memory difficulties and processing differences can be problematic when working as an Arts Practitioner. In contrast, neurodivergent people can offer unique perspectives and are often innovative and highly intelligent individuals. Acknowledging a strengths-based perspective helps to address misconceptions but must be balanced, when presenting the case for reasonable adjustments.

The rationale for the dissertation was inspired by my experience of living with ADHD and the implications that this has on accessing arts funding. In addition to ADHD, I was diagnosed with Irlen's Syndrome (visual stress), which presents further challenges. I have analysed the Access to Work (ATW) assessment process and highlighted barriers to access provision and funding, where essential resources were necessary under reasonable adjustments legislation. Having visual stress and binocular instability, whereby seeing words on a white background is debilitating, can be easily resolved by a pale-yellow background or screen masking. Adjustments can be inexpensive and have been transformative for me. Which has prompted me to advocate for reasonable adjustments. I was inspired by the work of Justin Edgar who was commissioned by Unlimited in 2019-2020 to use

art as a vehicle for change. My assistive technology was not provided until February 2020 and the ATW support is now in the implementation stages after being approved in December 2019. Access support was a key focus of my investigations, as I applied to the ATW scheme, developed a Personal Access Statement and appraised current support provisions for neurodivergent Artists.

The main objective of this work was to raise awareness of Neuro-divergence and explore the concept of sensory perception in the form of visual art, which was achieved. The podcast discussed in the Major Project work and promoted discussion about equal access to visual arts events. The visual artwork was exhibited at The Mercury Creative Entrepreneurs Showcase Event, on 5th March 2020 and subsequently on online platforms, due to the pandemic restrictions.

I attended regional events such as Unlimited Connect, and various arts related professional development programmes. Primary insight into the bureaucratic systems was enlightening and allowed me to form recommendations for positive change. Louise Wildish (Mentor), supported me to create an Access Statement document and updated my business plan reflecting upon recent events. I had to cancel several exhibition opportunities this summer, however the contacts that I have made during my season of research have presented various alternative routes for professional development. The impact of the pandemic drastically changed the landscape of funding protocol, creating unprecedented and ground-breaking changes, promoting equity for neurodivergent Artists.

## Introduction

This dissertation consists of three chapters, exploring the complex issues surrounding equal access to arts funding; specifically, for neurodivergent Artists. Chapter one will set the scene for the dissertation by providing historical context to disability rights legislation and the development of Arts Council England (ACE), as the dominant funding body. This will include introductions to relevant terminology such as *neurodivergence*, *Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder (ADHD)*, *disability* and *diagnosis*; concluding with a clear justification for the research question. The main body of the argument and critical analysis will be explored in chapter two. For the purposes of this dissertation, ADHD will be the specific neurological condition referred to in the context of neurodivergence. The rationale for this, relates to the Author's experience of living with ADHD. It is hoped that combining evidence-based research with primary investigations of the funding process, a balanced and informed conclusion can be reached.

Chapter two will explore contemporary ethical and economical debates relating to equity in the Arts Industry. It will present examples of disabled Artists that have been financially supported by ACE, to provide insights into system. Exploration of available support options and providers will highlight the benefits and remaining barriers that neuro-diverse Artists still experience. The purpose of this investigation is to examine contemporary practice in context and highlight areas in need of further improvement. This will include identifying the influences of the current political landscape in relation to the 2020 Let's Create Strategy (ACE, 2020). This will examine opportunities and limitations surrounding the implementation of the new manifesto. Chapter three will reflect upon primary and secondary research undertaken by the Author, evidencing application of theory to Practice. The processes of applying for Access to Work Support, requesting reasonable adjustments and applying for ACE funding will be central to this Chapter. The outcome of this research will conclude with recommendations to be presented to ACE with the objective of bringing about positive change.

## Chapter 1: Contextual and Historical Investigation

The term neurodivergence predominantly refers to people on the autistic spectrum, yet also includes other variants according to the International Classification of Functioning (Schiariti. et al., 2018; World Health Organisation, 2001.) It is described as a variation in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other mental functions in a non-pathological sense (Singer, 2019). This progressive definition implies *variation* rather than the common, possibly derogatory, phrases like *neurological disorder*, *mental illness* and *deficit* (Wheeler, 2010). The terminology used in medical and educational settings can add to the stigma and may be perceived as reductionist and limiting (DuPaul and Weyandt, 2006). Research by Special Educational Needs (SEN) providers (1998) have found that literature tends to focus on behaviour, rather than addressing and supporting problematic social difficulties (Colton and Sherriden, 1998). Many neuro-diverse people struggle to maintain friendships and are at greater risk of isolation and poor mental health (Hughes and Cooper, 2007).

ADHD is formally diagnosed using clinical assessment and use of the International Medical Classification Systems. This is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5™) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD\_10) (ADHD Institute, 2019). The ICD-10 medical classification system describes ADHD as hyperkinetic disorder (HKD):

*A persistent and severe impairment of psychological development, characterised by early onset; a combination of overactive, poorly modulated behaviour with marked inattention and lack of persistent task involvement; and pervasiveness over situations and persistence over time of these behavioural characteristics* (WHO 1993, p.191).

Arcelus *et al.* (2000) also suggested that people with ADHD are 'impulsive and physically overactive' (Arcelus *et al.* 2000). Conversely, many patients do not experience the hyperkinetic aspect of the diagnosis. The complexity and spectrum of symptoms have been extensively researched, consequently resulting in the formulation of sub-categories. For example, *predominantly inattentive presentation* (ICD\_11, 2020). This can be seen in the updated definition (Appendix 1). DuPaul

and Weyandt (2006) describe ADHD as a *chronic disorder* and, according to the NHS, is the most common behavioural disorder in the UK (NHS, 2014).

Kewley and Latham (2008) suggest that 'ADHD is not due to a lack of skill or knowledge, but is a problem of attention, effort and motivation' (Kewley and Latham 2008, p.91). This is very important as many people with ADHD struggle with low self-esteem, lack confidence and may have been made to feel stupid due to their differences. Lack of self-regulation and extreme emotions can affect how others perceive them, impacting upon self-worth (Colton and Sheridan, 1998). Many neuro-divergent people are (often mistakenly) perceived as bossy, intrusive, impulsive, aggressive, and disruptive (DuPaul and Weyandt, 2006). These are often behaviours relating to neurological responses rather than character traits. Therefore, traditional behaviour management strategies will not be effective (Hughes and Cooper, 2007). For example, a person with ADHD cannot simply work harder to retain their ability to focus and cannot always perform on demand. These sorts of misunderstandings can be extremely detrimental for maintaining a career and demonstrating consistency (Cottell, 2019).

The impact upon professional identity in the Arts Industry is no different. There is no cure for ADHD, but the condition can be managed, and society can be educated to be more supportive and understanding of difference as demonstrated by the creative case for diversity (ACE, 2003). Poor working memory and limited executive functioning abilities result in people feeling inadequate, often being labelled as lazy, forgetful, unorganised and unprofessional (Cottell, 2019). Cottell (2019) highlights the potential benefits of embracing neuro-diverse staff members but also reveals disheartening statistics...

*Sadly, just one in 10 Human Resource professionals focus on the concept of "neurodiversity" - the natural range of differences in human brain function - in their staffing efforts, according to a 2018 survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in London, U.K. It released an employer's guide about tapping into the benefits of hiring workers who are neurodivergent, which includes people with autism, ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), dyslexia and dyspraxia.*

(Cottell 2019, p18).

This raises the following questions 'What can the Arts Industry offer neuro-diverse Artists? (A topic to be discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 3.) Equally, 'What can neuro-diverse Artists offer the Arts Industry?' These 'out of the box' thinkers could be encouraged to bring forth fresh expressions and perspectives that the world has yet to experience. ADHD is often linked to risk taking behaviours which people are so often urged to repress due to a perception of deviance or recklessness.

Whereas strength-based perspectives could be combined with mentoring support to bring out the 'zone of genius' in neuro-diverse individuals (Timberlake, 2019; Sinek, 2011). Perhaps it is time to embrace fresh expressions such as the work of disabled Artist, Katherine Araniello, who had successfully demonstrated radical political live art performances, supported by Unlimited (Unlimited, 2019; Disability News Service, 2019).

The primary purpose of this investigation is to examine the possible difficulties that neuro-diverse Artists may face, when applying for arts funding. The lead funding body for the Arts Industry is ACE. The council was established in 1945 following the end of the Second World War. Contextually, this was a time when the country had experienced great trauma yet, was determined to rebuild society based on community values (Turnbull, 2008). It is widely recognised that the arts have therapeutic properties that can unite in a common purpose (ACE, 2020). Artists such as Vera Lynn, are said to be the very 'Spirit of the Blitz' and such icons evidence the positive influence of the arts industry in times of difficulty (Robinson, 2020). This can be likened to the increased value placed upon entertainment industries during the recent pandemic and consequential lockdown. Boris Johnson himself stated that 'We must act as in wartime and do everything it takes to support the economy' (Johnson, 2020). Contritely, Guardian Journalist, Overly, challenges this analogy, claiming 'It is no fit approach for this crisis' (Overly, 2020). The ACE Emergency Response Funding will be explored in Chapter 2 in relation to current affairs.

Great Britain has a long-established history regarding theatre and the arts.

Turnbull, (2008) refers to regional theatres as 'the bedrock of the artform in Britain

and the training ground many of the country's most celebrated practitioners (Turnbull, 2008). The arrival of state funding allowed the creative industry to develop and expand, providing financial safety that encouraged creative arts to flourish (Turnbull, 2008). Initially the Arts Council governed the whole of Great Britain and later evolved into regional smaller funding bodies. In 1994 the four countries of the United Kingdom were separated which was followed by a further restriction in 2001. In 2001 the ACE 'merged the regional arts boards and rebranded itself as Arts Council England' (ACE) (Sidwell 2009, p.6).

These changes are relevant to the original question as they give insight regarding the foundations upon which the system is established. The Author has liaised with the ACE regional officer for diversity and inclusion regarding Access Support and application processing requests. Establishing contacts within the regional office allows professional relationships to develop. This is particularly important if an Artist does not have the backing and support of a strong portfolio. ACE are keen to support emerging Artists and must balance the element of risk when spending money on an unknown or emerging candidate. By demonstrating that advice is followed and communicating with specific regional staff members a level of trust is established, enhancing the likely success of an application.

The level of funding available through ACE has fluctuated depending on the political landscape. For example, between 1979 and 1997 the Conservative government 'produced an era dominated by low levels of funding, bureaucracy and political infighting' (Turnbull 2008, p.9). A significant shift to the funding dynamic arose at the launch of the UK's first National Lottery in 1994. This 'represented the country's most significant change in public funding for the arts since World War II' (Creigh-Tyte and Gallimore 2000, p.19).

Britain originally abolished Lotteries in 1826 due to ethical issues around moral conduct and they remained illegal until 1934 whereby they had a relatively small-scale presence (Creigh-Tyte and Gallimore 2000, p.19). By 1992 The National Lottery became firmly established and a government White Paper entitled *A National Lottery: Raising Money for Good Causes* was published. This was perceived to give justification for the mainstream sales of tickets. Consequently,

The National Lottery Act 1993, later updated in 1996, established a new format (Bailey, 1995). ACE acted as a Non-Departmental Public Body to carry out Arts related funding allocations from 1994. They were responsible for grant-in-aid from Government and National Lottery funding (as one of the *Lottery's Good Causes*) (ACE, 2020). The overarching premise was that the lottery money must provide benefits for the public at large, including aspects funding for heritage conservation and sports provision (ACE, 2020). Public and community engagement remains a priority in the Let's Create Agenda (ACE, 2020).

The 1990s were a transitional time for ACE as a Team for Combined Arts was introduced. This allowed Artists to work in multi and inter-disciplinary ways (ACE, 2020). In 1997, Prime Minister Tony Blair publicly 'announced that Britain was experiencing a golden age for the arts' (Turnbull 2008, p.9). Consequently, in 2010 the Conservative Party returned to power in a coalition with the Liberal Democrats and the era of austerity impacted the arts industry considerably (Guardian, 2010). Between 2010 and 2015 the government created a policy document proposing the benefits of art and culture to both the economy and the academic development of young people (Gov.uk, 2010). They began to increase the focus on transcending class barriers with a philanthropic approach but were yet to address disability access overtly (Gov.uk, 2010). While this followed the implementation of The Equality Act (2010), the lack of enforced implementation of access provision was yet to be addressed (National Archives, 2015). Financial limitations in an era of austerity was reflected by the gaps in access provision. The Equality Act, 2010, was later updated with what hoped to be a ground-breaking piece of legislation (National Archives, 2015). Sadly, this was critiqued as being difficult to enforce and implement without additional funding support (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010).

Returning to the topic of disability, the original definition was based upon perceived limitations affecting a persons' ability to function and contribute to society (Oliver, 1983). The concept of the 'Village Idiot' has dated back centuries and often referred to a person with a perceived mental or physical impairment (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Ill-treatment of people perceived as being *different* has a long-standing history of institutionalisation abuse and ridicule (Rushton, 2009).

Traditionally, Neuro-divergent people were often misunderstood and placed in asylums, frequently subjected to inhumane treatment even under the *National Assistance Act 1948* and the *National Health Service Act 1946* (The Health Foundation, 2020). Neuro-diversity was not widely understood at this point in time yet the Act was based upon a philanthropic approach. Legislation has progressed in recent years to be more inclusive and empowering, yet equal access has yet to be fully realised due to financial restrictions and lack of knowledge or reinforcement. For example, the introduction of direct payments under the Community Care Act (1996) presented a model of empowerment and self-efficacy yet it remained entrenched in bureaucracy (The Health Foundation, 2020).

Van Gogh, the Dutch post-impressionist painter, is renowned for painting 'Starry Night' (1889) from his asylum cell (Wolf, 2001). In 1957, The Royal Commission on the Law Relating to Mental Illness and Mental Deficiency delivered its recommendations on mental health; entitled *The Percy Commission* (The Health Foundation, 2020). This recommended that people with mental disorders should be treated in the community and not in large psychiatric institutions. The concept of segregation is still apparent today in the arts arena, despite the introduction of equality and diversity policies (Disabilityarts.online, 2020). Separate funding pools include *Unlimited* and *Shape Arts*; specific commissions for disabled or neurodivergent Artists like Jess Starns (Shape Arts, 2020). While this presents new and exciting opportunities that may not have been apparent prior to the new inclusive mandate, it conversely highlights the sense of 'otherness' and difference. This is a double-edged sword in many ways yet advocates for equity in the industry. The development of specific agencies to support disabled Artists remain a vital source of support and advocacy for professionals perceived as 'other' and have brought about a significant degree of equity provision (Arts Admin, 2020).

The origins of diagnosis adhere to the *Medical Model of Disability (MMD)* which infers neurological disorder or deficit (Campbell, 2009). Disability activists have embraced the *Social Model of Disability (SMD)*, which perceives disability as a social construct and societal failure, rather than individual limitation (Disabilityarts.online, 2020). For example, government failure to provide reasonable adaptations to individual needs (Turner and Robinson, 2011). The

SMD was first cited by Oliver (1983) in *Social Work with Disabled People* and has gained increasing support (Disabilityarts.online 2020). The ACE Disability Good Practice Guide (2003) provided further insight to the two dominant paradigms and has been complimented by the 2019 *Building Access: A good practice guide for arts and cultural organisations* Guidance (Earnscliffe, 2019; ACE, 2003). Dr Syng Tan acknowledges that to totally disregard the medical model would also be counterproductive and reductionist (Syng Tan, 2019). She believes that for activists to be listened to, they must work holistically. (Syng Tan, 2019; Small, 2006).

The 2010-2020 ACE Strategy *Great Art and Culture for Everyone* had a significant emphasis on inclusion and addressing the disparities around equal access (ACE, 2010). According to the ACE commissioned report (2013) and following the initial implementation of the Equality Act 2010, there was a small increase in the proportion of the cultural workforce with disabilities between 2008 and 2012 (ACE, 2014). The report acknowledges that that the National portfolio must become 'more representative of the society that it serves' (ACE, 2014). The report acknowledges that there are 'no quick fixes' and states that an 'additional £6 million of strategic funds would be earmarked to strengthen the diversity of the sector' between 2015-2018 (ACE, 2014, p1.). ACE also supported the Creative Case for diversity which was an arts-driven approach that represented a shift in perspective (ACE, 2014).

While funding bodies in the Arts Industry are becoming progressively more inclusive and neurodiversity is gaining recognition; the topic of equal access to funding in neurodivergent demographics is not widely researched. This provides an excellent rationale for further investigation.

## Chapter 2: Critical and Academic Essay

The primary purpose of this investigation is to examine the possible difficulties that neuro-diverse Artists may face, when applying for arts funding. The aim is, to provide recommendations and solutions to ensure equal access for Neurodivergent Artists which will be presented in Chapter three. The Author has conducted primary research, exploring the application process in addition to library-based research (Barrett and Bolt, 2010). Key lines of enquiry included applying for various arts funding grants and requesting Access to Work (ATW) support (Gov.uk, 2019). External visits to events facilitated by arts funding bodies and various professional development programmes were also undertaken to support the practice-based research (Sullivan 2005; WAU, 2019). South East Creatives provided a programme for 'Creative Entrepreneurs' which included legal and business-based training (Southeastcreatives.co.uk, 2019). The Creative Practitioner Support Programme run by Space Studios, Colchester, and The Mercury Creative Entrepreneurs Programme also aided professional development (Spacestudios.org.uk, 2019; Mercurytheatre.co.uk, 2019). Utilising both primary and secondary research will create a balanced discussion; informed by both qualitative and quantitative data (Dawson, 2009).

Initial investigations began in October 2019 and concluded in a successful grant allocation. This was from the Arts Council England (ACE) Covid19 Emergency Support Fund with further work commissioned by Arts La'Olam (La'Olam.com, 2020). Details of the learning journey will be explored within this essay. The Author has ensured that the research reflects the shifting landscape of arts funding, relating to the pandemic response (ACE, 2020). It is clear that various factors such as sociology, politics, economics and historical context have influenced the system significantly (Artsprofessional.co.uk, 2020). This has been demonstrated by the exciting and radical interventions of ACE in 2020.

After a national consultation period including over 5,000 people, ACE presented 'The Case for Change' (ACE, 2020). Research found...

*That many creative practitioners and leaders of cultural organisations report a retreat from innovation, risk-taking and sustained talent development. (ACE, 2020)*

This is particularly helpful for presenting the case for the inclusion of neuro-divergent Artists. People with ADHD are considered, bold and dynamic thinkers (Wheeler, 2010). Their impulsivity can be a great gift to the cultural sector as it holds qualities of naive freedom of expression. Despite these beneficial qualities, funders must balance the financial risks alongside negative traits of the condition. ADHD is often linked to risk taking behaviours which people are encouraged to repress due to a perception of deviance or recklessness (Schariti *et al.* 2018). Statistically, people with ADHD struggle to manage their finances effectively owing to the impulsive traits which could be present a dilemma for investors (WHO, 2001). The requirement of 10% match funding can be a significant barrier for people with ADHD because no matter how impressive the application is, this could be a serious stumbling block. Equally even if the applicant had the 10% match funding, they may still fail the credit check. This lack of financial competency could be directly linked to the traits of their disability (National Institute of Health, 2001). Alternative provisions such as guarantors or alternative funding account holders would provide solutions while mitigating risk (Rowse, 2019; Turner and Robson, 2011).

*Work in kind* equivalent to 10% match funding can also result in the Artist effectively working for free. This is not encouraged although networking-based support in kind can demonstrate support for the individual and establish trust in the project.

*The higher that percentage goes, the more favourable your application looks. This might seem unfair, but it gives donors confidence if you have already got the support of others who might know you or your work already and want to help take it forward. You can add money from your own earnings or from other funds you have applied to or been given*

(Mahfouz, 2019)

The Case for Change also highlights 'Widespread socio-economic and geographic variances in levels of engagement with publicly funded culture' (ACE, 2020). This presents further complexities regarding 'intersectional identities' and overarching barriers to access (WAU, 2018). Commissioners have launched 'working class'

focussed guidance such as 'Smashing It: Working-Class Artists on Life, Art & Making It Happen' (Mahfouz, 2019).

While it is positive that funders are trying to attain the socio-economic demographic of applicants, the questions used to ascertain this information can be limited. For instance, one funding body asked; 'What was the employment status of the main earner in your household at age 14?' (Whatnextculture.co.uk). Answers provide generalised assumptions of the applicant's background that may not be reflective of reality. The Author concedes that it would be difficult to compose non-invasive questions that present an accurate perspective. Equally questions regarding the academic success of parents to give insight to perceived socio-economic status may not be representative of complexities. For example, many people have degrees from other countries and remain limited to low paid jobs in the UK for various reasons. Funders are attempting to establish equal distribution of funds, which is significant progression and demonstrates a desire to bring about positive change (ACE 2020; Mahfuz 2019).

The Case for Change also found that 'the business models of publicly funded cultural organisations are often fragile, and generally lack the flexibility to address emerging challenges and opportunities, especially around the decline of public funding and the growth of new technologies' (ACE, 2020). The WAU Symposium (2018) posed the question 'Does new technology enable or create more barriers'? Industry experts presented, insight from funders and policy makers which was a unique perspective. One speaker stated that 'Technology takes down hierarchy and widens opportunities' (WAU, 2018). This became evident as many Freelancers were forced to embrace the technical world of online platforms due to the Covid-19 Pandemic (ACE, 2020). The created a wider viewing platform that engaged with new audiences (Hannaharia.com, 2020).

The entire industry became reliant on technology as a vehicle for production and distribution which was encouraged by The Let's Create Agenda (ACE, 2020). ACE were forced to radically implement emergency funding strategies to sustain the industry. Prior to this, they had begun investment in providing business support advice and training for people in the cultural sector. This investment in the cultural

economy and provision of support for freelancers has been a welcomed shift in approach, working towards sustainability. Targeted allocation, of funding, produced many essential services and support platforms, that continue to raise the profile of disabled Artists. Examples include WAU, Shape Arts, Disability Arts Online and other pioneering organisations (WAU, 2020). Disabled employees and disabled-led organisations remain under-represented according to the ACE Annual Review statistics (ACE, 2020). The issues surrounding access, equal opportunities and diversity in the arts are a key component in the recent agenda (ACE, 2020). ACE stated that:

*... there remains a persistent and widespread lack of diversity across the creative industries and in publicly funded cultural organisations, although awareness of the issue is greater than it used to be.*

(ACE, 2020)

To tackle the widespread lack of diversity, ACE have provided Access Support which many neuro-divergent Artists remain unaware of. Increased publicity of available support options, including ATW, have been promoted by Disability Arts Online and other industry leaders. The Author was initially unaware that Self Employed Artists were able to apply for ATW or that hidden disabilities were included in the mandate.

ATW presented many barriers, for instance, the Department of Work and Pensions had never disclosed information regarding the provision; despite the Author's frequent requests for additional support. Equally the application guidance implied that a threshold income of £6000 was required in order to access the scheme (Gov.uk, 2019). The Author discussed this with Disability Arts Online and was informed that that was not the case for start-up businesses. Without such information, people may automatically disqualify themselves. The written format of the application was a barrier and the Author had to request a phone interview. Once an assessment had taken place and support was approved in December 2019, there remained consequent challenges with forms that were not fit for purpose in the case of self-employed people. PAYE protocol requires that all assistance is paid upfront, then refunded to the company (Gov.uk, 2019). As a

Freelancer, this was simply not possible. Complicated invoices, and product requests presented extreme challenges for a neurodivergent person. The system is ironically inaccessible, and bureaucracy prevents many individuals benefiting from it. By August 2020, the full support provision had still not been implemented.

The ATW: 'A Guide for the Arts and Cultural Sector: Self-Employed' media resource, was invaluable and consequently enabled the Artist to access support as a self-employed person (Disabilityartsonline, 2019). This film was delivered by a disabled Artist in a friendly, clear and accessible manner. The concept of segregation is still apparent today in the arts arena, despite the introduction of equality and diversity policies although it may present new opportunities and positive discrimination as part of the *Case for Change* (WAU, 2018). For example, many disabled Artists now apply for specific commissions for disabled Artists rather than mainstream applications. Separate funding pools and agencies to support disabled Artists remain a vital source for professionals, perceived as 'other' (Shape Arts, 2020, Arts Admin, 2020).

When seeking case study examples of neurodivergent, ACE supported, Artists; the Author established email contact with Dr Syng Tan. Sadly, she was unable to commit to a formal interview, due to time constraints and consequently provided alternative links to her previous projects and relevant podcasts. Dr Syng Tan is a neuro-divergent Artist working in arts academia (Syng Tan, 2019). She is a contemporary advocate for neurodiversity in the Arts and suggests that neurodiversity should be described as a cognitive style rather than a deficit (Syng Tan, 2019). Syng Tan was commissioned by Unlimited to produce 'The Magic Carpet' tapestry (Syng Tan, 2018).

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October the Author attended the touring regional event *Unlimited Connect*, facilitated by WAU (WAU, 2019). WAU are arguably the leading distributors of ACE funded annual commissions for disabled Artists. Major visual arts organisations from the south east gathered to experience the panel discussion. The Author was able to participate in discussions and describe negative feedback as being positive for enabling further radio interviews and in-depth discussions in the public arena.

Various shortlisted applicants presented their pitches to the audience and gave insight to their research and development process (WUA, 2019). The 'Pitch and Mix' presentation encouraged discussion and interaction with disabled Artists and allies. Justin Edgar produced a particularly interesting fictitious documentary involving a radical armed disabled activist group set in 1980s. The multi-disciplinary exhibition contained burnt wheelchairs and machine guns with braille activist statements on. This was a thought-provoking approach, stating the case for reasonable adjustments (Gov.uk, 2010; Edgar, 2019).

When contemplating reasonable adjustments in the context of application to funds, structured planning is not always an effective tool. Stigma around poor time management, inconsistent production and reliability, has a huge impact upon funding decisions when assessing risk and quality outcomes (ACE, 2016). This highlights the need for strong partnerships and a supportive team to mitigate potential risks (ACE, 2016). The Author reflected upon the strengths of ADHD personality traits that allow for bold networking engagement and often an impulsive inclination to increase opportunities for professional development. People with less impulsive traits, may miss out on such opportunities due to different cognitive processing regarding decision making and fear of rejection.

The Unlimited Connect Event also led to establishing contact with a Producer from Cambridge Junction and Arts Admin, who became a key contact that enabled further networking opportunities. Mahfouz (2019) recommended establishing contact with regional Relationship Managers to gain trust and understanding of the funding process. This contact was also an ACE Relationship Manager for Theatre in the South East. This contact was also the ACE Relationship Manager for Combined Arts in the South East. The Author followed up initial contact with emails and phone calls resulting in an introduction a Business Development & Creative Consultant for ACE specialising in diversity (Also a Relationship Manager). Further correspondence regarding access arrangements and professional development opportunities were a valuable source of information. All advice was directly implemented to both practice and the research process. For example, access guidelines and support options were shared which enabled the next line of enquiry. The Author contacted the regional ACE office and arranged for a Support Worker

to assist in the application process. ACE have strict guidelines regarding what a support worker can do. The Support Worker cannot write the application for the applicant and may only act as an assistant (ACE, 2018).

From February 2020 the Author worked with the Founder of Arts La'Olam in an access support arrangement. Two hours each week were devoted to tackling the Grantium application form. The online form is visually challenging and times out regularly, so all work must be saved frequently. The character limit for answers is difficult to ascertain, so writing directly on to the online form is not advised (ACE, 2020). By using dragon software, read and write text help and screen tinting, the Author was able to verbally discuss ideas with the Support Worker and the dictate them accordingly. Structuring answers to meet the set criteria required a lot of evidence and research (WAU, 2019).

A physical copy of the application guidelines was printed on yellow paper for reference purposes. The document from ACE (2020) 'Access Support' was insightful. However, Audio description files for guidance were not obvious on the website and following a specific email request, were later downloaded. This enabled the applicant to process the information more effectively than in a visual format. It was not easily available on the website. This could be easily rectified to assist access; as many people would not request it or enquire of its existence.

The Author benefited from the additional support, which motivated her to allocate a set time every week. Fluctuating concentration was difficult at times and the Support Worker was able to support the task centred process.

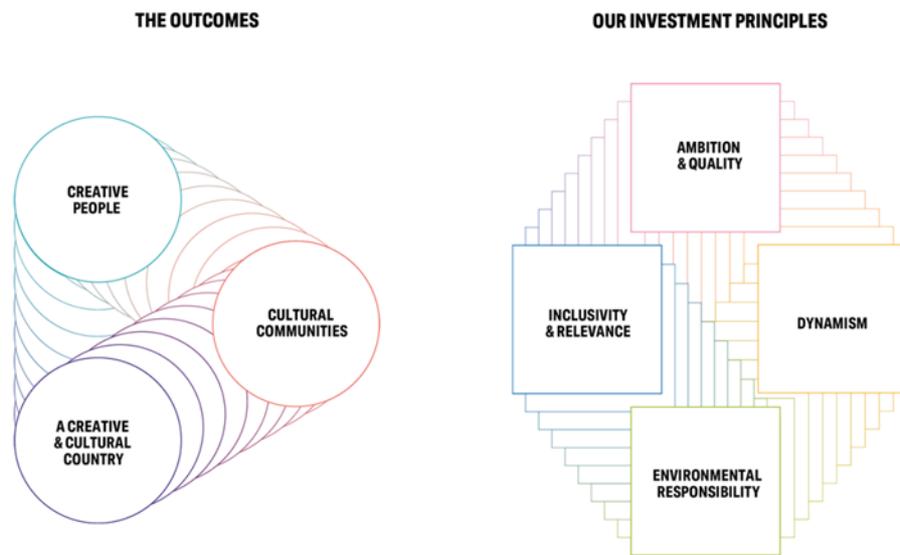


Figure 1: Let's Create 2020-Outcomes & Investment Principles

Figure 1. demonstrates that any project application must meet these objectives (Let's Create, 2020). The Grantium Under £15,000 National Lottery Project Grant Form is structured under four main sections: Quality, public engagement, finance and management. Dynamism and Inclusivity are investment principles, particularly in favour of neuro-divergent Artists due to their unique processing differences and alternative perspectives. Unfortunately, the Pandemic lock down meant all applications were frozen. The Author was eligible for a Bounce Back Loan from The Government based on the previous year's earnings to assist with loss of earnings (Gov.uk, 2020). She was also included in a project bid under another organisation: Arts La'Olam. This was part of the first round of ACE Covid-19 Emergency Support Funding (ACE, 2020). The Author assisted in putting together the proposal as part of a larger project, to provide Online Art for Wellbeing Workshops (Hannaharia.com, 2020). This was successfully granted in May 2020.

Following a training event facilitated by *Mercury Creatives*, The Author was encouraged to apply for emergency funding as an individual Artist (Roberts, 2020). Consequently, a further application was submitted for the second round. This form was much simpler and did not require 10% match funding. The Author completed this without a Support Worker, using assistive technology. The acceptance process required additional support from customer service as the forms were not clear,

which delayed payment by a further three weeks. The Author was shocked to have been approved an allocation which demonstrated the significant changes in ACE funding priorities (ACE, 2020).

Historically, larger more established arts organisations appeared to be favoured over individual artists (Cavallaro, 2001). Conversely, the relaunch of project grants had reassessed the impact of Covid 19 on Freelancers. The Black Lives Matter movement had significantly impacted the political landscape and therefore highlighted the need for BAME representation that addressed these issues specifically. Five equality objectives have since been implemented. Two of these key principles are particularly relevant to neuro-divergent artists and participants. These include 'improving access to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds' and in improving access for 'disabled neuro-divergent and deaf audiences' (ACE, 2020). Arnold *et al.* (2020) found that people with ADHD are likely to have poorer long-term outcomes, which includes economic stability (Arnold *et al.* 2020).

The decision-making principles used by ACE are preference-based. An appraisal against criteria is carried out, often by two relationship managers (ACE, 2020). Therefore, these recent changes have significantly improved the chances of neuro-divergent Artists gaining equal access to arts funding. In addition to this, the 10% match funding requirement has been relaxed and advice surgeries for new applicants have been facilitated online (Catchpole and Willmore, 2020). While the pandemic has caused unprecedented destruction to the economy, significant barriers to arts funding have been removed. This radical intervention is ground-breaking progress for neuro-divergent Artists.

### Chapter 3: Self-Critique

Within Chapter three the Author reflects upon the extensive and thought-provoking research undertaken in Chapters one and two. This evaluation incorporates exciting new recommendations for funding bodies to explore regarding access to arts funding for Neurodivergent Artists. This self-critique combines the work from The Major Project, for examination. This Chapter will commence with detailed reflections of the application process, as referred to in Chapter two. The assignment will conclude having explored the research question from of a variety of perspectives.

The initial ACE proposal for the under £15,000 National Lottery Project Grant brief, was to create an installation for *Firstsite*, Colchester; as part of The Borders Exhibition (IAS, 2020; Firstsite, 2020). Firstsite is part of Tate Plus which is a visual art network led by The Tate Gallery in London (Tate Plus, 2020). After an initial discussion with the *Firstsite* Head of Programmes, the proposed ideas were not feasible in the allocated room. Here are the initial mock-up presentations to demonstrate process planning:

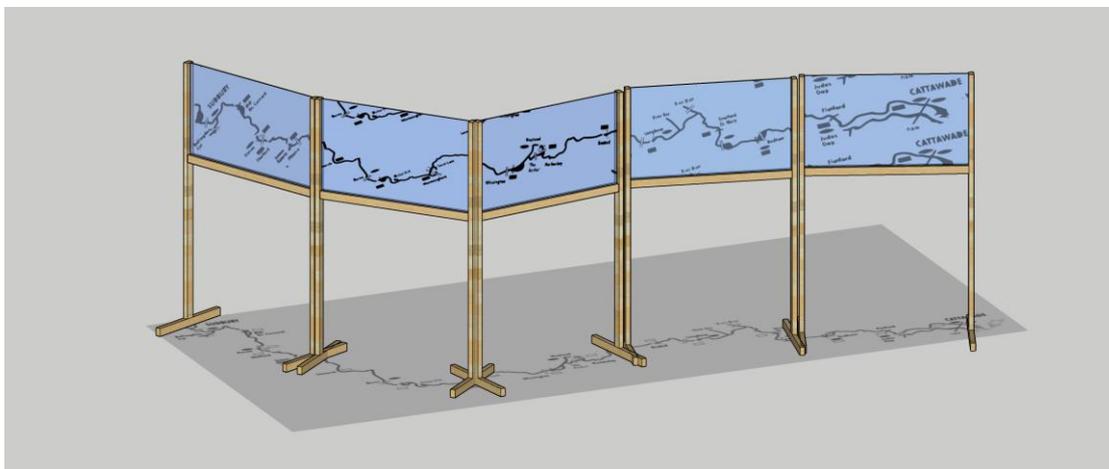


Figure 2. – CAD Proposal ‘Water Border’

Here is an extract from the Project Summary, used for the first application form:

*This funding application is to produce an immersive installation for Firstsite Colchester, part of Borders Exhibition. The exhibition's theme is centred around the River Stour as a geographical border between Essex & Suffolk counties. My proposed installation will be a short film made in collaboration with Mercury Creatives (Professional Creative Development Programme) & Creative Change Workshops at Quay Place (Art for Wellbeing), including audio recorded interviews of Essex & Suffolk residents and a futuristic led-lit map built 3D standing two-sided Perspex & metal structure in a dark room.*

(Aria, 2020)

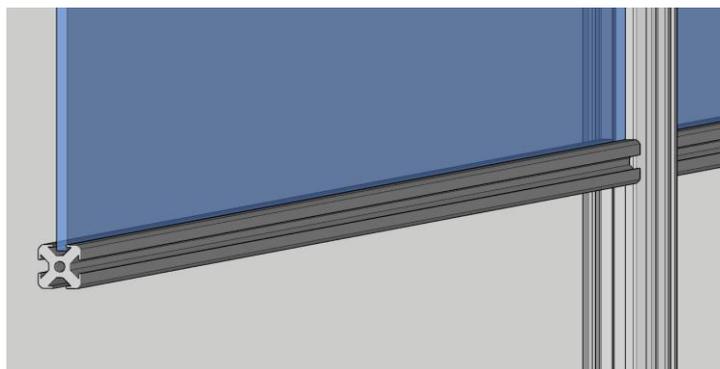


Figure 3. Alternative Structure Design Material Ideas 'Water Border'.

The ACE funded Support Worker assisted the Author with consolidating ideas for the Water Border Project. Consultation advice from both the Art Society and Firstsite, prior to proceeding with the application, demonstrated the importance of effective communication amongst arts organisations and practitioners. This consultation saved valuable time and the Author adapted the work significantly to fit the exhibition brief. The successful entry to the Firstsite Borders exhibition, independently funded, is currently on display July-September 2020 (Firstsite, 2020).



Figure 4. Firstsite Colchester. Photograph by Hannah Aria.

The focus of the new ACE application was to facilitate an equal access showcase exhibition as demonstrated in this project summary:

*To produce an inclusive showcase exhibition. Creative Change Workshops combine Art for Wellbeing with Social Action. I am The Artist in Residence at Quay Place Ipswich and the group meets weekly and produces art for public display. Topics covered include; The Impact of Plastic, Human Trafficking, Male Mental Health, Kintsugi Philosophy etc.*

(Aria, 2020)

While researching inclusive practice, the Author discovered an audiobook entitled 'New Ways of Seeing' from the organisation Shape Arts (Shape Arts, 2019). This book prompted a call to action and a consultation group was formed. This included visually impaired contributors and access support organisations such as Sensing Change and Suffolk Guide Dog Forum (SensingChange.org.uk 2020; SGDF, 2020). All meetings were recorded and resulted in a core team of volunteers. Partnership working and inter-agency collaboration provided an environment for learning and empowerment of disabled people to see their recommendations applied to practice. The Mercury Creatives Podcast in March 2020 discussed this at length which forms part of the Major Project work (Mercurytheatre.co.uk, 2020). ACE approved further access funding for the new application and work continued until the Covid19 lockdown, that meant the application portal then closed. A significant amount of practice-based training occurred during this time. Even though the document was

not submitted; the Author gained a new understanding of the criteria required to effectively complete the form.

The concept of sensory perception was a vital theme of the Major Project visual artwork 'Neuro-Insurgent Horizons'.



**Figure 5. 'Neuro-Insurgent Horizons', Abbey Field Centre, Colchester.**

A Live Art Performance was planned with the support of the consultation group but due to ill-health this sadly did not proceed. The Author was challenged by the research to consider whether they identified as a Neuro-divergent Artist or simply an Artist. The implications of this labelling can provide both additional opportunities and limitations (Matthews, 2009). Consequent reflections led the Author to publicly identify as a 'neuro-divergent Artist'. Branding and publicity materials have been adapted accordingly. This was a powerful process of embracing authenticity that enabled the Author to tackle the stigma surrounding neurodivergence, publicly. A video was published on Mental Health Awareness Day, entitled 'This is Me', in which the Author disclosed her personal journey regarding mental health and diagnosis (Aria, 2020). This acceptance process was a direct result of the research and work undertaken for this course and has shaped the direction of future practice significantly.

The Author presents an extract from a reflective log entry:

How Can Neuro-divergent Artists Gain Equal Access to Arts Funding?

*I also reflected upon an incident during the course that I attended training with an outside agency. This agency provided free training to arts professionals. I had requested reasonable adjustments prior to attending. My needs were not met and as a result I felt very uncomfortable and unable to participate in one of the sessions. On the feedback form I gave fair but honest feedback. As a result, this organisation had a large amount of their funding removed. When I heard about this, I felt awful because I was offered a free place and given a great opportunity. However, if I had not highlighted their lack of accommodation, other people may have had a similar experience. The organisation had been fully trained in the Equality Act (2010) and had equality and diversity policies which it had failed to implement. On reflection I believe I did the right thing and would still like to work with this organisation knowing that I have brought about positive change.*

(Aria, 2020)

This demonstrates improved confidence and assertiveness skills, developed in the last year. Having studied equality legislation and being empowered by the reasonable adjustment's movement, the Author is now able to actively state the *Case for Change* without feeling ashamed (ACE, 2020). In addition to the National Lottery Project Grant application, the Author applied to the organisations listed in Appendix 1. and was able to request video recordings and telephone calls in some cases (One recording is a Major Project submission). The table in Appendix 1. gives a visual overview of the applications and outcomes.

The Author recognised that being able to verbally pitch to commissioning boards allowed them to express the passion and excitement surrounding the project ideas. This was delivered far more effectively, in their opinion, than in written format. Recognition that video applications must relay the same information requested in the written format did pose additional challenges. For instance, short term memory loss, meant that the Author had to refer to a printed copy of the questions, possibly defeating the object. Equally, the need to present positive body language, awareness of voice tone and pitch could also come under scrutiny (Thompson, 2011). This is particularly relevant in the case of neurodivergent people where

body language could be misinterpreted. Lack of eye contact and restlessness for example could present as concerning to funders (Thompson, 2011). Assumptions can be made of people by what they wear and the background of the filming environment which could result in further prejudice, otherwise hidden in written applications (Thompson, 2001). Furthermore, the recording may become more of a performance than a job interview in delivery style; creating pressure to entertain the viewer while also communicating the necessary information. Socio-economic factors could affect film quality due to varying filming equipment and editing experience. Therefore, while film can present some positive alternatives, it may also create other inequalities.

Some of the organisations in Appendix 1. provided insightful feedback for the submissions which were gratefully received. Others did not respond or explained that they did not have the capacity to give individual feedback. Practitioners must develop resilience to unsuccessful applications in order to progress (ACE, 2015). Learning from unsuccessful applications can provide insight to develop practice further. For example, one of the feedback comments stated that the budget was not clear enough and while they were excited by the idea, it was underdeveloped. This provides constructive advice regarding areas to improve upon. Furthermore, having the feedback conversations, establishes contact with influential organisations. Implemented feedback can also model determination and a willingness value professional advice. A further organisation stated that the application had not met the brief, which illustrates the need to look carefully at criteria objectives of funders before applying (ACE, 2020).

When identifying future projects, the Author was inspired by Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby (2018), who has produced a film entitled *Nanette* (Gadsby, 2018). Gadsby has autism and regularly tours in theatres doing stand-up comedy. In the 2018 film, she 'reshapes standard stand-up by pairing punchlines with personal revelations and gender, sexuality and childhood turmoil' (Gadsby, 2018). The combination of art history jokes, giving context to mental illness in the creative arena, is complemented by underlying social justice messages that created a unique tension which challenged the audience to re-evaluate their initial perspectives. Many neuro-divergent Artists are perceived as quirky or comical and

yet have stories that need to be shared with a much more serious tone (Gadsby, 2019). The Author related to this conflicting balance between entertainment, laughter and the need to make a difference.

Gadsby stated in the film 'there is nothing stronger than a broken woman who has rebuilt herself' (Gadsby, 2018). This concept and open recognition of neurodiversity and its impact has inspired the researcher to develop an autobiographical performance art piece entitled *Fugly*. The emergency Covid-19 funding was provided to allow the applicant to undertake research and development for the progression of this project. The Author intends to apply for a further digital commission in August 2020 to proceed with the project.

Having benefited from Mentoring with Louise Wildish, the Author acknowledged that by establishing SMART goals (Mindtools.com, 2020), applications should be more strategic and not be rushed. This support enabled the Author to understand the importance of having space and time to consider and plan before pursuing various opportunities. People with ADHD tend to be reactive and spontaneous, so this pragmatic approach was revolutionary for future practice (Karalunas *et al.* 2018) Due to brain processing differences, these conversations allowed time for reflection and evaluation. Having a clear three-year plan allowed for realistic and focussed progression. This mentoring support has significantly impacted the viability of the business and the Author began turning over a profit.

Many neurodivergent people remain undiagnosed and unless they have been to university, may not have been made aware of the assistive technologies or support available. Could access support be given for self-diagnosed applicants? Finance also remains a barrier to quality assurance for many emerging Artists. For example, presentation, graphic design and high-quality website sustainability are affected by lack of cashflow. In conclusion, without the extensive assistive technologies, access support, mentoring, business centred training in the Arts sector and emergency funding interventions, it is unlikely that the Author would have progressed so quickly. Prior to this, she was given many opportunities to exhibit but did not have the business knowledge or support to remain financially viable in the industry.

In conclusion, reflecting upon the findings from all three chapters, the Author has presented some recommendations for funding bodies to consider.

1. The profile of Access to Work Support needs to be raised across all platforms and people need support, to access it.
2. Grantium is not an accessible system for many applicants even with additional support interventions and alternatives should be investigated.
3. Video applications may be beneficial for some applicants as an alternative to written documents or telephone interviews.
4. Solutions could be explored to mitigate financial risk when working with people affected by specific disabilities linked to financial management concerns. For example, alternative holding accounts or allocating budget tasks to Producers or Access Support Specialists.

Nevertheless, there has never been a better time in history for neurodivergent Artists to gain equal access to Arts funding. Barriers have been removed and extensive support has been provided. The evidence of this has been demonstrated by the professional development of the Author and successful receipt of emergency funding. Targeted allocation of funding has transformed the opportunities for marginalised demographics and the future of the Arts will benefit as a result. Harnessing the dynamic approaches of neurodivergent creatives will present fresh and bold works to inspire change at a critical time in history (Silberman *et al.* 2019; Aria, 2020).

## Figures

Figure 1.

ACE (2020) Available at <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate> (Accessed: 1 January 2020)

Figure 2.

CAD Proposal 'Water Border'

Figure 3.

CAD Alternative Structure Design Material Ideas 'Water Border'

Figure 4.

Firstsite Colchester. Photograph by Hannah Aria

Figure 5.

'Neuro-Insurgent Horizons', Abbey Field Centre, Colchester. Photograph by Hannah Aria

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1:

*Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is characterised by a persistent pattern (at least 6 months) of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity, with onset during the developmental period, typically early to mid-childhood. The degree of inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity is outside the limits of normal variation expected for age and level of intellectual functioning and significantly interferes with academic, occupational, or social functioning. Inattention refers to significant difficulty in sustaining attention to tasks that do not provide a high level of stimulation or frequent rewards, distractibility and problems with organisation. Hyperactivity refers to excessive motor activity and difficulties with remaining still, most evident in structured situations that require behavioural self-control. Impulsivity is a tendency to act in response to immediate stimuli, without deliberation or consideration of the risks and consequences. The relative balance and the specific manifestations of inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive characteristics varies across individuals and may change over the course of development. (ICD\_11: 6A05, 2019).*

## Appendix 2:

Organisation	Outcome	Format	Application Category
Main Spring Arts: 2 Metres ApART	Unsuccessful	Online Form	Art Submission (Paid)
The Katherine Arraniello Bursary	Unsuccessful- Helpful Feedback	Video & Online Form	Bursary
DYSPLA Residency	Unsuccessful	Online Form	Development opportunity
Mercury Creatives	Training and Support-Successful	Face to face discussion & online form	Business Support development opportunity
South East Creatives	Funding- Ineligible Training- Successful	Online Form. Face to face contact.	Bursary and business support training.
Suffolk Foundation Trust	Unsuccessful	Written application.	Grant
Space	Support offer- Successful	Online Form	Creative development support
Together 2020- Ju Gosling	Unsuccessful- Helpful Feedback	Online Form	Commission
Ipswich & Colchester Museums	Successful	Online Form	Exhibition Submission
Freelands Foundation Emergency Fund	Unsuccessful	Online Form	Grant
ACE Emergency Support Fund	Successful	Online Form	Grant

## Declaration

I declare that the work submitted is my own and the material contained herein has not been substantially used in any other submission for an academic award.

Signed:

Date:

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All dissertations submitted as part of an assessment process for a degree become University property once handed in, and are not normally available to be returned. It is therefore recommended that candidates retain a personal copy. The submitted copy may be retained by the Library for reference by others.