



Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais  
National Disability Authority

# Annual Conference 2024

**Promoting the participation of disabled people in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport in Ireland – UNCRPD Article 30**

## Meet the Speakers



# Introduction and Opening Addresses



**Dr Aideen Hartney**

**Director, National Disability Authority (NDA)**

Aideen joined the NDA in 2016 and became Director in 2020.

She has a long career in research, working in UCD and in the private sector.

She managed a number of major research projects.



**Kathryn O'Donoghue**

**Chairperson, NDA**

Kathryn has been a member of the Board of the NDA since 2018.

She is Chairperson since 2022.

She worked in important management and information technology roles in different companies in Ireland and Europe.



**Anne Rabbitte T.D.**

**Minister of State with responsibility for Disabilities in the Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth**

Anne Rabbitte went into politics in 2014.

She was elected to Galway County Council for Fianna Fáil.

In 2016, she became a T.D. in Dáil Éireann.

In 2020, she was made Minister of State with special responsibility for Disabilities.

# Panel A: International and European Perspectives



**Chair: Colm Ó Conaill**

**Assistant Secretary General, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)**

Colm is responsible for the Disability Division. The new team aims to bring positive changes to disability services and develop the new National Disability Strategy.

Before this, Colm worked in the Department of Health and the Department of Foreign Affairs.



**Jason Smyth**

**Strategy Manager, Paralympics Ireland**

Jason is one of Ireland's best athletes.

He has an 18-year career in Paralympic sprinting, winning 21 major medals.

Jason retired from athletics in 2023.

He has taken up a leadership role with Paralympics Ireland.

Jason won Dancing with the Stars in 2024.



**Professor Delia Ferri**

**Professor of Law, Maynooth University**

Delia works at Maynooth University School of Law and Criminology.

She is a Director of the Assisting Living and Learning Institute at Maynooth University.

She has written about the rights of people with disabilities.

She has taken part in a number of projects on disability rights.



**Ivor Ambrose**

**Managing Director, European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT)**

Ivor helped set up ENAT in Belgium in 2008.

Ivor has been an advocate for persons with disabilities and older persons for 40 years.

He worked as a lecturer and researcher in accessibility and Universal Design.

He has worked on many projects on accessibility and tourism.



**Antoine Fobe**

**Head of Advocacy and Campaigning,  
European Blind Union**

The European Blind Union has a network of 42 national members.

Before this job, Antoine worked for European Citizens' Action Service, Amnesty International, the Council of Bars and Law Societies.

He also worked for the French data-protection authority.

## Panel B: Arts and Creativity



**Chair: Feargal Ó Coigligh**  
**Secretary General at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media**

Feargal has been Secretary General since January 2024.

Before this, he worked in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. He was Assistant Secretary for Culture and Arts from 2015 to 2018.



**Pádraig Naughton**  
**Executive Director, Arts & Disability Ireland**

Pádraig has a Masters degree in disability law and policy from the University of Galway. He also has qualifications in art and craft design.

Pádraig was given an award for Excellence in Accessibility Leadership from the Kennedy Center in 2022.



**Petal Pilley**

**Artistic Director, Blue Teapot Theatre Company**

Petal has lots of experience in theatre.

She grew up in a travelling theatre company touring Europe.

She put together new plays, directed plays, and chose creative projects and people to work on them.

Petal likes working as part of a team.



**Kieran Coppinger**

**Actor, Blue Teapot Theatre Company**

Kieran has been working on stage and screen for over 15 years.

He was in Sanctuary, an award-winning play and film.

He is rehearsing a new children's play.

He will be leading inclusive theatre workshops in schools across Galway.





## **Emilie Conway**

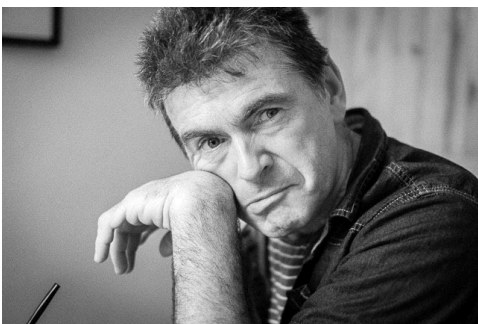
### **Artist and Founder, Disabled Artists and Disabled Academics**

Emilie is a jazz artist and writer.

She has performed across Ireland, the US, and Europe at festivals and venues.

Emilie is a passionate activist.

She works with many organisations to make sure disabled people can take part in arts and culture.



## **Peter Kearns**

### **DPO Development Officer, Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)**

Peter started working in ILMI in 2019.

Peter lectures at St. Angela's College, Sligo.

Peter worked at the United Nations.

Now, he helps set up DPOs in Ireland.

He has produced and directed shows with disabled performers, including 'No Magic Pill'.

# Research Spotlight



**Niamh O'Donnell**

**Director, Irish Theatre Institute**

The Irish Theatre Institute supports theatre artists and makers across Ireland.

Niamh has over 30 years' experience in the arts and cultural sector.

She worked with many organisations and was on the Board of different companies.



**Grainne Pollak**

**Project Manager, Safe to Create**

Safe to Create is a Dignity at Work programme. It tries to make safe and respectful workplaces for everyone in the arts sector in Ireland.

Gráinne is an arts producer and project manager from Dublin.

She produced work for organisations, companies, and festivals in Ireland and the UK.

## Panel C: Sports, Recreation and Leisure



### **Jack Kavanagh**

#### **Authority Member, NDA**

Jack is a Pharmacist, Speaker, and Director. He runs a company called 'Move The Needle'. He works with the World Health Organisation on digital and assistive technologies. He is looking at accessibility in air travel. Jack likes adventure and enjoys cycling, sailing, and skiing.



### **Stephanie Mac Sweeney**

#### **Strategic Operations Manager, Active Disability Ireland**

Stephanie's role helps develop the organisation. It supports others to give people with disabilities a chance to take part in sport and physical activity. Stephanie knows how important it is to make sure everyone has an equal chance to take part.



## **Sarah Kerrigan**

### **Able Active Project Co-Ordinator, Surpass Sport Systems**

Sarah Kerrigan is also known as troubleonapegleg.

She is a keen outdoor adventurer.

She swims, hikes, and more.

She loves the freedom of the outdoors.

Sarah works to break down barriers and make outdoor activities more accessible.



## **David McKay**

### **Disability & Inclusion Officer, Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU)**

David leads programmes to make rugby accessible for everyone.

He gives support and training to the IRFU's volunteers and staff.

David played rugby for 28 years.

He coached players with different disabilities.



**Laurence Colleran**

**Senior Executive Parks Superintendent,  
South Dublin County Council**

Laurence works in architecture.

He works on projects about the environment, and sports and leisure spaces in public parks.

He is a strong advocate for Universal Design.

He often speaks about accessible play at events in Ireland and other countries.



**Louise Burke**

**Director of Participation, Sport Ireland**

Louise helps to put Sport Ireland's Strategy 2023 to 2027 into action.

It is important that everyone can take part and be included in sport and the outdoors.

Louise put together a network of 29 Sport Inclusion Disability Officers.

This supports people with disabilities to be active in every community in Ireland.

## Panel D: Cultural Heritage, Identity and Tourism, Media and Film



**Chair: Adam Harris**  
**CEO, AsIAM**

Adam is the Founder and CEO of AsIAM, Ireland's National Autism Charity.

AsIAM supports and speaks up for Autistic people and their families.

It supports organisations and communities to be inclusive and accessible.

Adam has advised many government committees on disability rights and inclusion.



**Niamh Daffy**  
**Inclusive Tourism Manager, Fáilte Ireland**

Niamh joined Fáilte Ireland to lead a new Inclusive Tourism team.

This team will look at accessible tourism across Ireland.

Niamh wants us to work together to make Ireland a leading accessible and inclusive tourist place for everyone.



**Elaine Grehan**

**Advocacy Services Manager, Irish Deaf Society**

Elaine is a champion for the rights of Deaf people.

The Advocacy Service makes sure that the Deaf community have information about their rights, and a voice in consultations.

Elaine was part of the successful campaign for the Irish Sign Language Act of 2017.



**Terri Sweeney Meade**

**Assistant Principal Architect, National Monuments, Historic Properties and Capital Works Delivery, Office of Public Works**

Terri is responsible for the Universal Access Programme under Section 25 of the Disability Act.

She tries to find ways for everyone to have access to environments, to enjoy them more, and have more chance to take part.



## **Dan Airey**

### **Presenter, Podcaster, Producer and Filmmaker**

Dan is a producer and presenter of the Dan and Darragh Do Ability Podcast.

On the Podcast, Dan talks to people with disabilities and tries to get people to see life through their eyes.

Dan worked with different organisations in Ireland promoting disability rights.



## **Louise McLoughlin**

### **Director of Compliance & Complaints – Broadcasting and Video On-demand Services, Coimisiún na Meán**

Louise has worked in media rules and laws for over 17 years.

Her knowledge and experience helps to make sure that the media is safe and accessible.

Louise wants to put people at the centre of media rules and laws in Ireland.



# Closing Address



**Catherine Martin**

**Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts,  
Gaeltacht, Sport and Media**

Catherine is the Green Party's Deputy Leader. She is TD for Dublin Rathdown since February 2016.

Catherine was a teacher and a Councillor before she was elected to the Dáil.

She lives in Dublin with her husband and three children.