



Expanding horizons – Opening doors

Accessible social events for Deaf and disabled people - audiences and performers.

Most of us want to have a fun social life and to enjoy cultural events and to entertain others.

It is the law (Equalities Act 2010) to make reasonable adjustments to make your event and/or venue accessible. It is best practice to make sure everyone can attend and make an effort not to exclude anyone.

The social model of disability, the model used by public bodies and voluntary organisations, says we should think about the barriers we put in the way of disabled people, not that the 'thing the person has wrong with them' is the problem. Barriers are not just physical; they include our attitudes and prejudices too.

This checklist is to help you ensure that your venue and event is accessible to Deaf and disabled people and to identify any barriers that may prevent equal access. It is also a useful checklist if you are booking events in someone else's venue. If you are planning a festival with on-site temporary accommodation there are elements to think about not included here.

Finally this is a check list, not a training manual. You might need to find out more information from some disabled people or a local disabled people's organisation, invest in some training, and employ an access auditor. There is some credible and useful information on line – make sure it is written to apply to the UK, or the country of the UK the event is happening in.

Let's start at the very beginning – it's a very good place to start

Hopefully you are using this checklist weeks, if not months, before your event ...

Including disabled people is not only just a human rights issue. It makes economic sense too. Disabled people have money to spend and often miss out on cultural events because they are not well planned. Disabled performers might be the best in the area you are trying to hold your event in – make sure you don't miss out on booking them.

In your budgeting stage make sure you understand the costs of making your event accessible. Build that into any funding bids.

In your planning stage make sure that you understand the needs of disabled people. If you don't know find someone who does by involving disabled people in your event design, publicity and booking logistics.

Please note some disabled people cannot access electronic communication and you need to be prepared to use the post or phone. Remember to build this into your planning.

Your attitude

Most disabled people will say that the single biggest difference to whether an event or venue is accessible to a disabled person is if someone 'just asks me what I want and need.' This doesn't need training or a special skill set.

You can say on all your materials something simple like – Do you have access needs? Tell us what they are.

If you need to have a face to face conversation stick to practicalities.

If you are polite, respectful and confident this goes a long way.

Don't be nosy or ask intrusive questions. Just find out what you need to know.

Do not offer sympathy or anecdotes from family members.

You may need to find out more about a workshop participant or performer's impairment, condition or health. Are you confident asking the person if they have a:

Physical or mobility impairment(s) – do they face problems using their arms and legs

Sensory impairment(s) – are they a Deaf person, are they living with a sight loss and/or hearing loss

Cognitive impairment (s) – a difficulty processing information, written or verbal

Brain or head injury (s) – these can impact on mobility, speech and behaviours

Speech or other communication impairment(s)

Learning disability or difficulty

Mental health service user

Neuro divergent condition (such as someone who is on the Autistic Spectrum, who has dyslexia and or dyspraxia, who has epilepsy) long term health condition or chronic illness which impacts on their ability to enjoy your event or venue.

Other?

Accessible buildings

In an ideal world all buildings would conform to part M of the building regulations and go above and beyond that to be fully accessible. This is the real world. Many older buildings are not accessible. Try to hold your event in an accessible building whenever possible – more people can come, it will be more successful. However if this is really not possible (and you have to have a pretty good reason why not) then you can think creatively and still make it as accessible to as many people as possible.

Not all disabled people are obsessed about going to the toilet but having an accessible loo can make the difference between a fun relaxed evening and a miserable one.

You can hire in an accessible portaloos.

You can check with neighbours. Perhaps a local café or restaurant will let you promote their accessible loo for your event.

Accessible buildings and events are not all about physical access. Many disabled people do not have mobility impairments. How you design your event and communicate about it can make all the difference.

Health and Safety

Make sure your building evacuation procedure:

- a. includes evacuating disabled people in case of emergency
- b. is accessible to disabled people (if you have notices or explanatory talks then can everyone understand them?)

Thinking about evacuating your building in an emergency – you might need to agree with an individual service user what they want you to do in case of emergency.

Access information

If you own or run a building how good is your access information?

It should reassure all users that you have thought of most people's needs (make it the best that you can but welcome feedback when people point out missing information)

It should be relevant to your target audience.

It should describe what is possible not what isn't.

e.g. the building has 6 steps up to the main venue. The steps have hand rails on both sides. They are straight with no turns in them and the front edges are clearly marked. The steps are a standard width and two people can side by side on them. We have someone who can help you get up and down the steps if you let us know you need assistance.

NOT The building is not wheelchair accessible

It should enable people to make up their mind whether they are going to attend without asking you lots of supplementary questions.

It should be written in plain English and available in print and electronically.

It should be easy to find on your website – give it its own menu header e.g. Access Information or How Easy is it to use our building.

It should include photos of main entrances.

A floor plan or layout of the building is a good idea.

Communication

Think about your posters, flyers and programme.

Can you provide information and communication before an event and during an event in an accessible format?

Things to consider:

Use plain English with no abbreviations or acronyms

All written and printed information should be in a clear font such as Arial at 14 point size (12 point size is a minimum)

Large print should be a minimum of 16 point as standard but ideally at the size requested by the service user

Large print documents should be formatted to fit on A4 pages (not enlarged on to A3 as this is difficult to hold and read)

Avoid complex diagrams or graphics, provide a text description of photos, pictures and diagrams

Easyread materials should be available and produced by a specialist

Easyread materials should use a combination of words and pictures

There should be a good contrast between the print and the colour of the paper (i.e. do not use dark blue print on a lighter blue paper).

Do not use capitals to make an impact. They are much harder to read. We recognise words by their shape as well as being able to see all the letters.

Do not let fancy graphical treatments get in the way of legibility. Good design means attractiveness and readability.

Some people may only be able to see certain colours and this should be recorded in their preferred format for communication if you are providing a workshop.

For programmes have a free alternative version as a simple Word (or equivalent) document available on request electronically and in print, in advance and on site during the event. This is particularly important for events over several days and/or venues.

For workshop style events:

check that BSL or other interpreters have been arranged if required either by the service user or making arrangements yourself if necessary. Allow plenty of time to book interpretation services and ensure funding is in place.

Allow longer for sessions where an interpreter is required. Build in breaks for both the service user and interpreter.

Allow longer for sessions for a service user with speech impairment, with or without an interpreter

Ensure all materials are available in the preferred format of the service user.

Offer to take notes for a participant that they can take away with them.

Website – electronic access for all.

Is your website accessible? Think about

Ability of user to change size of font and colour contrast

Use of plain English

Menus and drop downs that make sense

Contact us information clearly visible and in all formats – email (do not use an email form without providing your email address), phone, address.

Access information clearly signposted and comprehensive.

Label buttons and caption pictures

If you use Facebook instead of or as well as a website then include contact us and access information too.

If documents are available then make sure there is a simple Word (or equivalent) version for people with access technology.

Remember some people do not have access to online information regularly or at all. This may be due to a lack of access technology or being able to afford a smart phone or internet connection. You will need to be able to market information, take bookings and enquiries in an alternative way.

Physical Access

Are your premises accessible?

Things to consider:

Parking nearby and/or blue badge space

Is it possible to reserve a parking space?

Directions for people arriving by car, scooter on foot or by public transport are:

- a. in different formats to suit different communication needs
- b. written in plain English
- c. compiled or reviewed by someone who understands access needs and how to describe getting to your front door which takes account of different access needs
- d. include a photo of the front of your building and a local map

Clear signage to the building

Path to front door a minimum of 830mm wide

Keep paths free of potholes and obstacles, deep gravel is not accessible for many wheelchair users and lighter scooters.

Notice in minimum of 14 point plain English (and not in capitals) on how to gain entry to your building

Level access or ramp to the front door, or clearly signed alternative entrance

Doorbell/intercom at an accessible height

Inside your premises:

Keep corridors clear of obstacles

Allow for large electric wheelchairs to turn into and out of rooms (avoid angles of 90 degrees or less)

Advise people if there are long internal walks

Front doors and door to other public spaces a minimum of 830mm wide

Wheelchair accessible lift if needed to accommodate even large motorised wheelchairs and most scooters

Accessible toilet in working order and clear of clutter. Please note the loo is not disabled! Signs should read "Accessible Toilet" with the wheelchair symbol.

Toilets labelled in an easy to understand way. You could say 'men' and 'women' and have the symbols too. It might be good fun to label them something quirky but think about how confusing some people would find that.

Area for assistance dog toileting

Can disabled people exit your building in a timely manner in case of emergency evacuation?

Are your fire marshals trained in what to take into account of if disabled people are in your building when an alarm is sounded?

If not what action are you taking?

Access to events and workshops

Things to consider:

Do you offer discounts to disabled people? It often costs more to be a disabled person and many disabled people are on low incomes.

Is your booking procedure accessible?

Have you got a phone (non-premium rate) alternative to online bookings?

Timing of workshops (avoid rush hour travelling and take into account people with care needs might find early morning events difficult to make)

Height of ticket desk for wheelchair users and people of restricted height

Have the front of house staff been informed of any access requirements of the service user?

Have the front of house staff had disability awareness training?

Do you require people to complete a form and is this accessible both in format and language?

Does your form request any information that may be sensitive for the service user? Such as personal health information that needs to be kept confidential.

The foyer and other public areas should be uncluttered, free of obstacles and have sufficient space for people using a wheelchair or other mobility aids and people with an assistance dog. The same goes for back stage areas.

Waiting chairs should be easy to get in and out of as well as comfortable

Reception notices, including greeting messages, instructions or promotions should be in legible font in plain English

If not what action are you taking?

Face to face

Are you able to engage appropriately? Think about the language you use and the attitudes you have.

Things to consider:

There are specific skills required when working with Deaf or disabled people and you may need training to learn skills such as:

Understanding what reasonable adjustments are and recognise requests for adjustments

Wheelchair etiquette

Guiding visually impaired people

Ensuring your verbal communication is accessible to visually impaired people

Using plain English when speaking and writing

Ensuring your verbal communication is delivered in an organised way – introduce the next topic of conversation, don't hop about between topics, stick to one topic at a time, ask if you need to repeat anything, check what you say has been understood, find a different way of saying something if it hasn't.

If you have problems understanding someone, ask them to repeat what they said or spell out a difficult word.

You may need to:

Communicate with a Deaf person whose first language is British Sign Language or Makaton.

Communicate with a Deaf person who lip reads

Communicate with someone who is hard of hearing and does not lip read

Communicate with someone who has a speech impairment

Managing challenging behaviour

If you require training what action are you taking?

In addition:

Is the temperature and lighting appropriate?

What are the acoustics like? Try to have a rug or carpet and soft upholstery

Do you have a hearing loop?

Do you have a microphone and PA system even for 'quieter events' e.g. poetry?

Can everyone see, feel safe, and have room to feel comfortable? A raised platform in the audience area meets a lot of needs.

Always face the audience when talking and talk clearly, not too fast, using concise sentences and without covering your face or mouth.

Maintain eye contact with the audience but don't be surprised if some people don't want to. They are not disinterested or bored. For some people with certain learning difficulties they may prefer not to

Is the audience area uncluttered, free of obstacles and have you made a space for people using a wheelchair or other mobility aid such as an assistance dog?

Ensure space in the audience area for a large electric wheelchair/scooter to enter, exit and manoeuvre

If tables used (e.g. cabaret style) ensure it is high enough to accommodate a wheelchair

Provide an alternative to low seating, soft sofas etc. such as a regular height chair

Carers and support staff

The disabled person may ask to attend an event with a carer, personal assistant, support worker, advocate, family member or friend.

Carers and other support staff may be present to provide access support, personal care needs or emotional support.

Things to consider:

Offer free places as standard to support staff/carers. Usually this is one additional place but someone with complex needs may need more support to attend.

Always address the disabled person and not the other person unless told to by the disabled person.

Always listen to the answer given by the disabled person in their own words.

If the disabled person has a communication difficulty:

Adjust your way of working so that a disabled person can communicate directly with you if there is not a trained support worker/personal assistant present. Discuss securing the services of trained support worker for future sessions if the event is a workshop type activity.

Refreshments

If you offer refreshments to all your audience make sure:

The bar staff are disability aware

Price lists are well lit

A large print price list/menu available

There is low level bar access at some point, and if not possible then alternative arrangements have been made.

There is an alternative to plastic cups for a water dispenser such as a mug with a handle.

Keep a supply of drinking straws which can bend

Use mugs with a large handle for hot drinks

Ask if a disabled person needs an alternative to a glass or plastic cup for cold drinks

Describe to a visually impaired person where you have put their drink

If food is on offer to all then think about different dietary needs.

Some disabled people have conditions which mean they are more likely to be intolerant or allergic to some foods.

Clearly labelling all food is helpful to vegetarians, vegans, anyone with food intolerances or allergies, or people who are just particular about things they don't like the texture of.

The End – or not

This check list probably does not include everything. If you spot something missing do let us know. Additional actions will be required to meet the access requirements of longer festivals providing on site temporary accommodation.

This checklist has been produced by various disability groups including Unlimited Oxfordshire who can be contacted as follows:

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March 2017



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