

Events checklist – disability and access

Providing opportunities for people with all types of abilities isn't simply about meeting legal requirements. It is about making decisions on all aspects of your activities to ensure that a wide a range of people can be involved and take part. This includes being aware of what barriers might be in place, and how to remove them, when planning, publicising and running your events and activities.

Measures put in place to help people with a range of impairments and long term conditions can – and often do – benefit everyone. This Briefing includes some useful definitions and links, practical guidance and a simple events checklist to help you plan, publicise and run an event that is open and accessible. It has been produced with support from **Euan's Guide** – the website and app that features disabled access reviews by disabled people, for disabled people.

What do we mean by disability access?

[Euan's Guide](#) explains the social model of disability:

“The social model of disability refers to disabled people and not to people with disabilities - the thinking being that it is society that disables people and not the impairments or long term conditions they may experience. We would never say ‘people with a disability’ or similar expressions. It is always ‘disabled people’, ‘visually impaired people’, ‘hearing impaired people’, ‘sensory impaired people’, ‘wheelchair users’, ‘powerchair users’, or sometimes ‘people with impairments or long term health conditions’.”

The Equality Act 2010*, defines disability as *‘having a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on one’s ability to do normal daily activities.’*

The Act was established to promote equality of opportunity for people who are disabled and to provide disabled people with protection from discrimination.

Under the Equality Act employers and organisations have a responsibility to make sure that disabled people can access jobs, education and services as easily as non-disabled people. This is known as the ‘duty to make reasonable adjustments.’



*[The Equality Act 2010](#) applies to England, Wales and Scotland but not Northern Ireland, where the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) still applies.

When planning and coordinating creative events, it's important to consider:

Physical accessibility - the venue, place or space in which your event is taking place and how people access it (i.e. how do people move around the space? Is there a ramp, wheelchair accessible lift, disabled toilets etc.).

and

Event accessibility – the content and delivery of your event i.e. is the activity accessible for someone who uses a wheelchair and / or is partially sighted, deaf or hearing impaired? Is there a hearing loop available, a large print version of the event programme and/or adjustable tables etc.

Accessibility measures

Below is a list of accessibility measures that you may, or may not, have come across when booking and / or attending cultural events. If you are providing any of these facilities at your event, make sure you are aware of what people will expect to find:

Wheelchair access – the doors are wide enough to comfortably accommodate a standard wheelchair (70cm) and there is sufficient space to move around, with a good sight line and no steps to navigate. If access to upper or lower floors is required, a lift is available.

Wheelchair accessible toilets – the door is wide enough to accommodate a standard wheelchair with room for turning space, grab rails and transfer space. The toilet must be free of unnecessary equipment (i.e. it's not being used as a storage space).

Level access – access to the event / activity is step and ramp free.

Hearing / induction loop – a sound system is available that produces an electromagnetic signal which can be received directly by hearing aids, used by some people who hearing impaired.

Captioning – a textual representation of anything being spoken is available. This is usually presented as subtitles on a screen positioned alongside the performance / workshop.

Audio description (also known as visual description) - additional narration intended primarily for blind and visually impaired audience members and participants. It consists of a narrator talking through a performance, describing what is happening on the screen or stage during natural pauses in the audio, and sometimes during dialogue if deemed necessary. This is often pre-recorded and played through infrared headphones but can also be spoken in real-time, which may be better suited to a workshop or guided tour.

Some organisations also provide optional 'touch tours', that can be pre-booked, to complement audio-described events. This offers people a chance to visit the set, feel the props and hear about any visual components of the show to enhance their enjoyment and give context to the performance.

Guide Dogs and assistance dogs are welcome – assistance dogs are welcome at the event / venue and people are encouraged to contact the organiser to find out about any special effects that might affect the dog's comfort.

Signed performance – a trained British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter is present to interpret the script and language used by the performers / tour-guide / tutor at the same time it is being performed / spoken. The interpreter is usually positioned to one side of the stage or, in the case of a workshop, beside the tutor. It is worth noting that, different languages have their own sign language.

Relaxed performance – a relaxed performance welcomes people with additional needs (including Autistic Spectrum Conditions and / or learning disabilities) and, crucially, their families and friends to a performance where those needs are accounted for with a more relaxed atmosphere and some changes to the production itself. These changes may include the lowering of lights, house lights never being taken down to total darkness and reduction or removal of loud noises in the performance. With this type of performance, it is expected that the audience may move around, make noises and interact with the performers.

Accessible for non-English speakers – a performance or event with no spoken dialogue, such as an exhibition or musical performance, where it is not necessary for people to be able to read and speak English in order to attend / participate.



Have a 'can do' attitude

Making provisions for disabled participants / attendees when planning your events and activities is a step in the right direction but it's important not to make assumptions about what an individual's accessibility requirements might be. Being welcoming, approachable and open to suggestions is helpful regardless of who you are trying to engage.

That said, factors beyond a group / organisation's control can make it difficult to be as accessible as you might like. Such as limited funding for additional materials or equipment, venue availability and difficulty recruiting additional volunteers / staff.

Euan's Guide say it's OK - not every event can be fully accessible to all. However, what is important, is to make reasonable adjustments, remove barriers where possible, and be up front about the set-up of the venue and what support is available when advertising your event.

"Without good information before you visit an event, you can't decide whether to make the visit" - Paul, a wheelchair-user based in Edinburgh.

Planning an accessible event: venue & set up

When planning when and where to hold your event, always consider accessibility for disabled visitors. This not only means physical access to the space but also movement around the space, signage and access to facilities such as toilets. Below is a list of points to consider when booking a venue and / or preparing your own venue for an event.

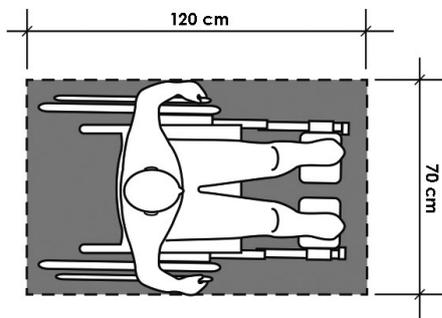
Is the venue you're planning to use listed on the Euan's Guide website? If so, this will give you a good idea of how accessible it is and means you can use the [Euan's Guide logo](#) on related publicity to let people know where they can go for more information.



If the venue is not already listed on Euan's Guide, you could suggest they sign up. Creating a listing is free and comes with a range of resources that can be used to promote the venue and encourage disabled visitors to leave a review on [Euan's Guide's venues page](#).

Moving in and around the space - When contacting venues, ask them about the accessibility of the space and a list of what facilities and additional equipment is available, such as ramps, hearing loops, a projector for captioning etc. See the Event Checklist on page 8 for some useful prompts.

Not sure there is enough space to accommodate wheelchair users at your event? Simply cut a rectangle of cardboard or paper, 70cm x 120cm, the footprint of a standard wheelchair, and lay this on the floor to help you set up the space. You can also use this to check if doorways, halls and walkways are wide enough to accommodate wheelchair users.



The venue you are working with may also be able to offer advice on how to deal with specific access requirements, and have useful contacts you can call upon if needed – so be sure to ask for their help.

Set-up of the space – It's important to plan the layout and design of your event to ensure that all visitors can safely and easily move around it. Access routes must be free from unnecessary obstacles and flooring should be even, level and solid. A step of more than 1cm can present a barrier to some disabled people. In this case, a ramp needs to be incorporated into the flooring or a portable ramp made available.

Advance booking / Publicity - If taking online bookings for your event, ask people to note any access requirements they have so you can contact them in advance to ask what their preference is regarding seating and room set-up.

It's also good practice to include a line on any event pre-publicity (in print and online), asking people with access requirements to get in touch

prior to the event to discuss how you can best support them on the day. Remember one size doesn't necessarily fit all:

For example, someone who has difficulty hearing, and needs to use a hearing loop, might prefer to sit at the front of a performance so they can lip read if required but in a smaller group situation, might prefer the chairs / tables to be in a U shape or circle to enable them to see and hear everyone's contribution. The acoustics and furnishings in a space might also impact on where best to sit and whether a Hearing Loop would be beneficial.

Flooring – This should be slip resistant even when wet. Glossy finishes should be avoided as glare can cause hazards to partially sighted visitors, and carpets should be firm, to prevent wheelchairs sinking in, and well secured. Routes around the venue should be well lit; gravel or grass may need to be covered and stewards available to guide visitors and open any heavy doors, if necessary.

Lighting - If possible, avoid fluorescent lighting if an indoor event will be lengthy. Consider using uplighters or tungsten bulbs that are kinder on the eyes and aid concentration. If using a projector at your event, for captioning, do a test run if possible, to check the light levels are suitable and note any adjustments that need to be made.

Tables and chairs - These are often produced as one-size-fits-all, which can be problematic. Stools, high tables and workbenches can be particularly difficult for wheelchair users or those with physical impairments. Ask to see the range of tables and chairs available at the venue and if these aren't suitable seek an alternative so you have other options available if required.

Your venue should ideally offer a range of seating. If a seat is too low or too high, or has inappropriate arm rests or side supports, visitors may experience discomfort. A variety of seating options enables people to choose the most comfortable option for them. If you can only provide one type of seating, another option is to inform people they can bring cushions or support aids to help them sit comfortably.

Remember to keep aside seats for personal assistants / companions.

Travel and transport – It is important to consider how people will travel to and from your event. For example, is there public transport for those without private vehicles? Is the approach well lit and welcoming so that people are comfortable walking into your event? Is the timing of the event conducive with good transport links and at a sociable hour that will allow assistants / companions to attend?

Are there disabled parking spaces available? The accessible parking space is often thought of as being a simple space which is near the entrance for blue badge holders. However, they vary in so far as some are simply spaces marked in yellow and closer to the entrance, whereas 'proper' accessible spaces have a marked out area at the side, or ideally on both sides to allow for wheelchair access to either driver or passenger doors (see below). This can be the difference between someone being able to use an accessible space or not.

Signage & Access to Building – People may be visiting your event and / or the venue for the first time, so if there isn't already sufficient signage in place, add your own so people know

where to go. This could be as simple as printing some signs that include the name of your event (in large font), a friendly welcome and arrows that point people in your direction.

If an intercom system is used to access the building, this may cause problems for those who are deaf or have a hearing impairment. In the best case scenario, you would have a 'meet and greet' person at events. Removal of a doorbell or intercom could create another barrier in that some mobility impaired people would want to use the doorbell or intercom to get help with the door.

A simple conversation and / or email exchange with your attendees prior to your event can help resolve any accessibility issues and will make sure you are both prepared on the day. Sending photos of the space and / or arranging a visit prior to your event can also be a helpful way to ensure there are no un-expected surprises.

Comfort breaks - Thought should be given to people's needs when designing the event programme. This includes incorporating sufficient comfort breaks and opportunities for people to move around in between activities / speakers.



Planning an accessible event – event content

Positioning of items and information – Make sure items that are part of your event, such as materials, equipment or products etc. and information such as signage, event programmes and visuals are displayed in a position and at a height that can be accessed by everyone. If this is not possible, try to have staff / volunteers / helpers available during your event to assist visitors in obtaining the information/items they require.

A typical counter top is not generally accessible to wheelchair users. Therefore, a low-level section will ideally be provided. If this is not feasible, a lightweight clipboard or lap tray is an alternative.

Spoken information - If there is spoken information at your event, hearing induction loops can be used to help to cut out background noise which hearing aids would otherwise amplify. An induction loop contains a microphone that picks up spoken word from the speaker and transmits it to a hearing aid set in the 'T' position.

Check whether the venue you're working with has access to an induction loop and if they do, familiarise yourself with how it works prior to your event and signpost that it is available, so people can ask for it if required.

Alternatively, or additionally, deaf people can be supported by Language Support Professionals (LSP). If you have received a request for a LSP, first check with the attendee and/or venue you are using to see if they have a contact, or see the links section at the back of this Briefing for information on LSP providers.

Captioning and audio description can also be used to aid those with hearing impairments and is particularly relevant if you are planning to showing a film at your event.

Written information - If visitors are required to write during your event, for example to fill out forms, ensure someone is on hand to provide assistance if required.

For visually impaired people and people with communication support needs, it may be beneficial to receive a copy of any information to be used at the event beforehand. This will allow them to read the information in advance, enabling them to concentrate more fully on what is being said at the event itself. If working with a signer, having access to this information in advance will also be useful.

Special effects - If you are planning on using special effects such as flash or strobe lighting at your event, and / or photography and flash photography, let people know about this beforehand – or ensure that there are notices clearly displayed in the venue informing people as they go in.

Food and dietary requirements – If providing food and / or refreshments at your event be sure to request details of any dietary requirements as part of the event booking process. Allow enough time between receiving responses and finalising your catering arrangements, in order to cater to as many different needs as possible.

On the day, ensure that someone is available to let people know what food is available and to help carry trays etc. in the eating area if needed. In addition, ensure that there is plenty of room between tables for everyone, including wheelchair users, to move safely and easily. It's helpful for everyone if the food is all clearly labelled (meat, vegetarian etc.).

Provide a range of cups i.e. mugs, cups and saucers, glasses, and straws, to suit people with different requirements and preferences.

Publicising an accessible event

People access information in lots of different ways and it is worth remembering this when creating and distributing publicity for your event. Here are some points to consider:

Access information - Often you will see symbols on leaflets, websites and other information points. Whilst, initially these may seem helpful many disabled people find them problematic - the symbols do not give enough

information that is useful to the reader or user. For example, does a wheelchair symbol mean:

- the doors are wide enough?
- there is level access?
- there is an accessible toilet?
- you can manage as a wheelchair user if you are accompanied?

The major tourism bodies, amongst others, have moved away from symbols and adopted a more textual and picture-based approach to describe facilities. These are often called access guides or access statements.

For more information see [Visit Britain's website](#) or [Visit Scotland's website](#).

A simple solution to not using accessibility symbols on your event poster / flyer, could be to include a line that invites people with access requirements to get in touch or visit your website for more information:

'If you would like to attend this event but have specific access requirements, please get in touch to find out more about the event and how we can support you on the day.'

Or

'For accessibility information, please visit the event listing on our website (www.yourwebsite.com) and/or get in touch if you have any questions - [email address / phone number]'

You can then provide details of any arrangements for disabled people, including induction loops, surtitles, wheelchair access or other such provision, on your website or in an event accessibility document that you can share if required.

Images and photographs - If you are using images of people in your publicity, try to include people with a wide range of abilities to illustrate that your event is inclusive.

Alternatives to print publicity – You might want to consider non-visual promotion, such as a slot on local radio and announcements at other events, to target those with visual impairments and people who may not be able to access print

publicity.

Booking process – If you want to take bookings for your event, sell tickets or get an idea of who is planning to come along, you may want to investigate using an online ticketing platform, such as Eventbrite or Paper Brown Tickets. Sites such as these can be useful particularly for people who cannot easily pick up tickets in person, as well as for your own event monitoring purposes.

However, it is worth remembering that, in the same vein, booking online may present a barrier for some people, particularly those who are less tech savvy or unable to access the information online for whatever reason. So it is worth offering at least two different booking options, i.e. online and on the phone/in person.

Requesting accessibility information - If using a booking form or online booking platform to publicise your event and collect attendee information, use this to ask for accessibility information i.e.

'Please detail any access requirements that it would be useful to know about prior to the event so we can provide the right support on the day.'

Creating accessible publicity materials

It is good practice for event information and associated materials, such as posters / flyers, booking forms and directions, to be available in plain text format if requested. This basically means just text, without the formatting and images/photos, so that this can be read by assistive technology if required.

If feasible, print publicity and event materials can also be made available in other formats such as different languages, large font, Braille and audiotape. The availability of alternative formats should be stated clearly on your publicity and related materials so people know to request it if relevant:

'Please get in touch on [email address / phone number] if you would like to request this poster in plain text format or to let us know what format would be more accessible for you.'

The checklist

You can use the following checklist to help ensure you have considered the following issues in the run-up to your event:

Publicity materials

- Has information about facilities available at the venue (including facilities and arrangements for disabled people) been published?
- Have I asked about specific individual requirements on the booking form?
- If I am planning to use special effects, have I notified people beforehand and / or provided signage at the venue?
- Have I publicised whether I provide free places for personal assistants?
- Have I included access information in my publicity material? (see the section on Access Information on page 6 and 7)
- Can I produce written materials in other formats if requested?
- Have I offered to send copies of written information provided at the event to those that may need it in advance, e.g. visually impaired people?

Venue

- Are there adequate designated parking spaces (for blue badge holders) with the correct dimensions and markings?
- Can all visitors safely and easily travel around the venue (well lit, with firm surfaces for wheelchair users, avoiding deep gravel and grass)?
- Are access routes free from unnecessary obstacles?
- Is the flooring even, level and solid?
- Is a ramp available for a step of more than 13mm?
- Is flooring slip-resistant and without a glossy finish?
- Are carpets firm enough to prevent wheelchairs sinking in and well-secured?
- Are staff / volunteers available to guide visitors if necessary?
- Are accessible toilets provided?
- Are there emergency procedures in place for evacuation / refuge of people with a range of abilities? Are staff / stewards briefed on these?
- How heavy are the doors – do you need someone to assist with opening them?

Information and products at the venue

- Are products and information displayed in a position and at a height that can be reached by everyone?
- ... or are staff / volunteers available to assist visitors in obtaining the information?
- Are hearing induction loops present and clearly signed?
- ... and / or, are Language Support Professionals available?
- Is the lighting sufficient for lip readers?
- Are any films subtitled or audio described?
- Will visitors need to write during the event? If so, have I considered disabled people and if they need assistance?
- Do tables have a clear 400mm horizontal depth to accommodate wheelchairs? Or are lightweight clipboards or lap trays available?
- Are emergency evacuation instructions clearly visible and available in a range of formats?

Seating arrangements

- Is a range of seating available?
- Do seating arrangements allow access for wheelchair users?
- Can wheelchair users move from their seats to the toilets with ease?
- Has seating been provided for personal assistants?
- Can people use alternative support aids if the seating is one-size-fits-all?

Catering arrangements

- Have you advertised that food will be available on publicity material sent out beforehand and asked to be notified of any specific dietary requirements?
- Have you allowed enough time between receiving responses and finalising my catering arrangements?
- If the event has self-catering facilities, are staff / volunteers available to assist disabled visitors?
- Has seating been reserved for disabled visitors?
- Is there plenty of room between tables for all visitors to move safely and easily?
- Has the caterer been asked to label different foods (e.g. meat, vegetarian) and ensure that these options are not served on the same platter?

And finally...

It's important not to make assumptions about what a person's requirements will be. Everyone has different needs that are as individual as they are, whether or not they are a disabled person. Explain what will be required of people attending your event, highlight any potential difficulties by all means, but allow the person to explain their own needs in their own words.

It may also be useful to have a number of people involved in planning your event that are representative of as wide a range of people as possible. This will help the event to be planned from more than one perspective. Remember to also work closely with the venue owners / managers at an early stage to ensure that any avoidable barriers to attendance are dealt with in good time, and partner up with local disability and access organisations that can offer support and advice.

Further Resources

Voluntary Arts Briefings

Available to download from the Voluntary Arts website's [Briefings section](#).

149 – Making your performances accessible to people with hearing and sight loss

141 – Finding a venue

134 – Welcoming speakers of different languages

127x – Understanding and creating accessible PDFs

110 – Whose Board? Whose Agenda? Including disabled and deaf people in your management committees

86 – Making your website for everyone

67 – Risk assessment for event organisers

44 – Disability Discrimination Act Part III

10 – Access

Organisations

[Euan's Guide](#) – a disabled access review website and app run by disabled people for disabled people

[Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) – the all-embracing body for equality and human rights in the UK

[DisabledGo](#) – access information on thousands of venues across the UK and Republic of Ireland

[Adapt NI](#) – services to support arts organisations in Northern Ireland to improve accessibility

[The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Arts and Disability Directory](#) – arts and disability directory and information for the island of Ireland

[National Disability Authority](#) – state agency on disability issues including accessibility

[Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission](#) – independent national institution to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland

[Disability Arts Wales](#) – promotes equal opportunities in the arts for disabled people, providing training, information and advice

Other resources

[RNIB Clear Print Guidelines](#) (RNIB)

[Action Hearing Loss - Equality Act 2010 guide](#)

Do you need this publication in an alternative format? Telephone 02920 395395 or email info@voluntaryarts.org

Organisation Information:

Voluntary Arts is the operating name of *The Voluntary Arts Network (VAN)* which is registered in Scotland as Company No. 139147 and Charity No. SC020345. Registered Office: The Creative Exchange, 29 Constitution Street, Edinburgh EH6 7BS.

Disclaimer:

Reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure that information in this document is accurate. However, it is not intended to be legally comprehensive; it is designed to provide guidance in good faith at the stated date but with accepting liability. We therefore recommend you take appropriate professional advice before taking action on any of the matters covered herein.

© Copyright Notice:

Unless otherwise stated, all materials published by *Voluntary Arts* are subject to copyright. However, we do encourage members of the voluntary arts sector to copy and disseminate this material for non-commercial purposes. Prior to doing so, please send details of your requirements to info@voluntaryarts.org. We also require that you acknowledge *Voluntary Arts* where such material is used.



Voluntary Arts