

Working Safely through Covid-19

Seven Inclusive Principles for Arts & Cultural Organisations

The suite of guidance documents produced by the UK and Devolved Governments to support the reopening of the cultural industries largely focus on headline safety issues. Many Sector Support Organisations have also developed additional guidance but access has often been overlooked.

This document gives arts and cultural organisations and individuals the tools to approach delivery and recovery specifically through the lens of Disability and relevant Equality legislation. By offering a set of seven clear principles, we wish to support the industry to make decisions inclusively, to go beyond compliance and celebrate diversity. We believe this will have wide-ranging social, economic and ethical implications for arts and culture.

The Principles and the examples of good practice offered here are an essential resource for staff at all grades across arts and cultural institutions. They contain implications for artistic and managerial staff, technical, as well as public-facing front of house and box office teams. Adherence to the Principles will assist arts organisations to support disabled people's vital participation as audiences and visitors, the creative workforce including artists, freelance creative practitioners and the sector's salaried workforce.

The term "disabled" in the context of this document covers people who self-define as D/deaf, as neurodiverse, as disabled or as learning disabled.

The Seven Inclusive Principles are:

1. All organisational activities must comply with the requirements of The Equality Act (2010) and make reasonable adjustments to operating practice that ensure disabled people are not unlawfully discriminated against
2. All actions relating to disabled people should be undertaken in accordance with the Social Model of Disability and aim to combat and eliminate ableism
3. Co-production with disabled people: disabled people should be consulted when organisations develop bespoke operating or re-opening plans, and undertake Equality Impact Assessments before making decisions
4. Organisations need to provide clear, accurate and comprehensive information about Covid-19 measures to enable disabled artists, practitioners, employees, visitors, audiences and participants to assess their own levels of risk, and be prepared to adapt to specific enquiries or requests



5. The customer journey for disabled audiences and visitors should be thoroughly mapped, ensuring it is equality impact assessed, clearly communicated in multiple formats to the public, and prioritises free companion tickets to maintain essential access
6. Disabled artists are an important cultural asset in the UK and their engagement in all new creative projects should be prioritised
7. Organisations should ensure they celebrate diversity, embed anti-ableist principles to support and protect disabled people, and should demonstrate due care for the disabled workforce when making decisions about redundancy, restructuring and new ways of working

The Detail and Examples of Good Practice

1. Recognising the supremacy of the Equality Act

Any arrangements made to minimise risk of Covid-19 transmission must be consistent with your legal duties under the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) and in Northern Ireland, the [Disability Discrimination Act \(1995\)](#) applies. This means that in designing and delivering your policy and practice around Covid-19, you need to:

- a) ensure you do not discriminate against anyone on the grounds of their protected characteristic(s)
- b) make [reasonable adjustments](#) for disabled people so that they do not face disadvantage in relation to those arrangements (for example access to information or services) or to your buildings, facilities, events and activity as a result of your Covid-19 measures

Broad guidance on access to buildings and the Equality Act can be found in the Arts Council England document [Building Access](#) which contains links to resources and a glossary of terms.

Covid-19 does not absolve organisations from the duties required by the Equality Act. In fact Covid-19 brings more actions into the sphere of what might be considered reasonable or essential to maintaining accessible facilities. For example, a rigorous hygiene regime around accessible toilets (and who has access to them) is almost certainly easier to characterise as a reasonable adjustment because of the dangers to disabled people of exposure to the virus.

It is important to bear in mind that practices will need to be actively reviewed and adjusted as time goes on and the national guidance changes. This will ensure that the measures are still appropriate and fit for purpose.

2. Understanding the Social Model of Disability



The Social Model of Disability and the [Cultural Model of Deafness](#) should be central to your approach and action to working safely through Covid-19. Essential to understanding the Social Model is accepting that people with impairments are 'disabled' by the barriers operating in society that exclude and which discriminate against them. The Social Model identifies these barriers and recommends ways that these barriers can be removed, minimised or countered by other forms of support. Inclusion London provides a useful [factsheet](#) to develop understanding of the Social Model, whilst Unlimited offers an [animated version](#).

Organisations should develop an understanding of the concept of [ableism](#) and aim to eliminate it from their organisational culture. Ableism is the behaviour which unintentionally excludes or actively discriminates against disabled people and is most commonly manifested in poor physical access or not putting in place sufficient support mechanisms to enable disabled people to succeed. Assuredly as racism, sexism, ageism and homophobia, ableism wrecks opportunities for disabled people and the behaviour is increasingly called out and challenged.

Different forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. So it is important that [intersectionality](#) is recognised alongside ableism and acknowledged.

3. Consulting with disabled people to inform your decision making

Through their lived experiences, disabled people themselves are the experts in this field and can assist all your decision making and processes around working safely through Covid-19. The maxim of the Disability Movement, "Nothing about us without us" is useful to reference here.

A [co-production model](#) should be adopted. Experienced, professional disability consultants should be engaged as well as seeking input from your disabled users and audience members. It is imperative that all disabled people should be properly paid for their work, all the more important as most disabled people in the cultural sector are freelancers. If you consult with disability organisations, ensure they are organisations of disabled people, not organisations for disabled people.

Organisations should undertake Equality Impact Assessments on the decisions they propose to make in relation to disability. The Arts Council Wales has produced a useful [step-by-step guide](#) for this process. This assessment should be given the same status as a Risk Assessment, carried out with professional experts, shared widely and clearly, and cover changes to all aspects of your operation as a consequence of Covid-19. Many disabled people are continuing to shield and work from home during the pandemic. Littlecog have produced a very useful [guide](#) to hosting accessible online meetings.

4. Providing clear and comprehensive information

Disabled people in the UK are exceptionally impacted by Covid -19. The pandemic threats to health, livelihoods, social care and creativity are all significantly magnified for disabled people.



The Office of National Statistics published [statistics](#) in June 2020 that revealed more than 22,000 disabled people died between 2 March to 15 May, two-thirds of all UK Coronavirus deaths, making disabled people the worst impacted protected characteristic population by Covid-19.

The UK Government defines people (including some disabled people and other protected characteristic groups) who are vulnerable to Covid-19 in two ways:

- [Clinically Extremely Vulnerable People](#) refers to people who have specific underlying health conditions that make them extremely vulnerable to severe illness if they contract Covid-19
- [Clinically Vulnerable People](#) refers to people who may be at increased risk from Covid-19, including those aged 70 or over and those with some underlying health conditions

Whilst many disabled people are placed in these categories, **not all disabled people are medically vulnerable to Covid-19** and it is important that the social model of disability still applies. As Baroness Jane Campbell told [BBC News](#) ‘We are not vulnerable people. We are people in vulnerable situations’.

Consequently, the cultural sector should assume **that assessing risk around Covid-19 is a personal decision disabled people will make for themselves** and that the role of the organisation is to work to enable that individual make the right decision. This makes the provision of clear, accurate, comprehensive, timely and honest information essential. Be as clear and as detailed as possible about the processes and procedures you have in place and any alterations to traditional ways of working.

5. Mapping the Customer Journey

According to the [Family Resources Survey](#), disabled people make up 21% of UK population, amounting to 14.1 million people. The annual spending power of these households is [assessed](#) by the disability charity Scope to be £274 billion, whilst Arts Council England [report](#) that disabled people made up 12% of the national audience in 2018/19. So alongside the moral case these Principles make to support inclusion of disabled people in culture through and after Covid-19, there is also a compelling business argument.

To enable disabled audiences and visitors undertake their own assessment of personal risk, the customer journey needs to be thoroughly mapped, equality impact assessed and clearly communicated. Specialist resources are already available to support this. Shape Arts have compiled a useful list of questions for producers to ask of themselves in [Making Events Accessible](#). Whilst Attitude is Everything’s guide to [Reopening Your Venue](#) shares practical tips on maintaining accessibility whilst implementing the DCMS Performing Arts Guidance measures.



Bearing in mind the impact that adjustments will have on disabled people with a range of different needs and requirements, cultural organisations are encouraged to reconsider existing practice in a range of operations including (but not limited to):

- New accessible options for booking tickets
- Provision of free access companion tickets (see 5.1 below)
- Content descriptions and warnings
- Upgrade existing access guides
- Ensure staff are empowered by up to date knowledge to support disabled customers
- Provision of nearby blue badge car parking or drop-off arrangements
- Priority for disabled customers if queue management is in operation, ensure there is a clear policy on who should queue and consider resting points
- Whilst social distancing remains in place, provision of accessible seating with suitable positioning and lighting, use of clearly laid out one way systems and suitably sized gaps for wheelchair users
- Provision and cleaning of accessible toilets (ensuring these are prioritised for disabled customers)
- Provision of 1-2-1 customer support and how this is managed with the requirements of social distancing
- Accessible evacuation procedures

5.1 Access Ticketing

Free access companion tickets should be made available wherever tickets for physical events are bookable to maintain essential access provision during this period. The reasons for this are:

- Disabled people are more likely to require physical and/or emotional support when venturing into a busy building. A free companion ticket may make the difference between someone being able to attend or not
- There are many circumstances in which a disabled person may find it difficult to ensure that others are social distancing. Having a companion who understands their requirements will mitigate the risks of other people's behaviour

5.2 Understanding the latest audience data

The survey [After the Interval Act 2](#) from Indigo Consulting has been documenting audiences' responses to returning to event attendance in the UK throughout lockdown. The July iteration is the first to provide insight into the thinking of disabled audiences and takes account of the views of 4,000 disabled respondents. The survey headlines are:



- 77% of disabled audiences consider themselves to be “vulnerable to Covid-19” whilst only 28% of non-disabled audiences do. This conveys vastly different priorities and concerns between disabled and non-disabled audiences.
- A full quarter of disabled audiences will not consider returning to venues **at all** until a vaccine is in place
- But a majority (41%) **will** if social distancing and appropriate hygiene measures are in place such as availability of accessible toilets and priority access in queue management

But taken as a whole, the survey suggests there is a slump in disabled people’s confidence which may significantly reduce their public event attendance. This makes it all the more vital for organisations to communicate clearly their strategies for keeping their venues and audiences Covid-19 secure, together with keeping up to date with the latest audience research.

5.3 EMBED Reopening and Recommendations Service

One free resource already available is the [EMBED Reopening Recommendations Support Service](#) created in collaboration with the University of East Anglia. It considers potential barriers faced by disabled visitors and customers and offers solution-based guidance for organisations of all types, with the ultimate aim of keeping stakeholders, staff and volunteers, visitors, students, or customers as safe as possible.

6. Supporting Disabled Artists

Most disabled artists and creative practitioners are freelance and available to work. The UK is a recognised global leader in disability and inclusive arts and it follows that engagement of disabled artists should be given high priority in all new creative projects (where it is safe to do so). Flexibility will be key to ensure that disabled artists have the working conditions they need, including provision of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment and face coverings (some disabled people are formally [exempt](#) if a mask obstructs their hearing, sight or induces anxiety). Conversations with individual artists are encouraged to gain better understanding of specific circumstances, which will assist organisations make the correct bespoke adjustments. The BFI has launched a new resource, [Press Reset](#) to support the film & tv industry recruit responsibly and includes a number of useful recommendations around equal pay, allyship and advocacy. The BFI also provides [links](#) to access workers and resources. The UK arts councils will support access funds to projects that enable access to take place. Disability Arts Online offers a [digital guide](#) for disabled creative practitioners and their employers to navigate use of [Access to Work](#) - the employment support programme run by the Department for Work and Pensions. Access to Work can provide grants to remove barriers disabled people face in undertaking paid employment including equipment, travel and support workers.



7. Protecting the disabled workforce

A recent report by Citizens Advice, [An Unequal Crisis](#), provides evidence that 1 in 4 disabled people who are currently in work now face redundancy as a result of Covid-19. This suggests that carers, disabled people and those who have been shielding are at higher risk of redundancy. Through its public funding, the cultural sector has a duty to ensure that equality and diversity is protected and championed when any redundancy process or reorganisation takes place. Arts Council England has created this resource: [Caring for your workforce and making fair decisions in a time of rapid change](#) which aims to support organisations make equitable decisions. This document states, “employers are under a legal obligation to ensure the decisions you make in response to Covid-19 do not directly or indirectly discriminate against employees with “protected characteristics”.

8. About this document

This document has been developed by [Ramps on the Moon](#), [Attitude is Everything](#), [What Next? Paraorchestra](#) and [WeShallNotBeRemoved](#) following a period of consultation with disabled creative practitioners during August 2020. We envisage that this will be an evolving document and that further information and links will be added as needed. Alternative accessible versions are published simultaneously in BSL, Audio and Easy Read.

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