

Organising an accessible event

An introduction into how accessibility arrangements can be managed

Why does accessibility matter?

It's the Law - The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 aims to ensure that people with disabilities not only receive the same standard of service but also aren't treated less favourably than people who aren't disabled.

Thinking inclusively each time an event is planned means thinking about attendees, staff, chairpersons, speakers, performers and exhibitors who may be disabled people. Access for disabled people isn't only about physical access to buildings for wheelchair users it includes access to written information for people with visual impairments.

This note outlines principles that will lead to the development of best practice and increase access for disabled people to a range of exhibitions, conferences and events.

1. Selecting a venue

It's necessary to think about a venue that's equally accessible for everyone.

Venues should be considered if people can enter, exit and move around the building with ease. Adapted toilet facilities must be offered and ideally the event should take place on one floor only. Areas for performers, speakers and exhibitors must also be considered, as they may be disabled people.

Information about how to reach the venue and about public transport must include arrangements for disabled people. Arrangements for cars, taxis and coaches to set down passengers as close as possible to the entrance of the venue must be considered.

2. Car parking

The car park must be clearly signed with disabled car parking bays identified. Forty-five metres is the maximum recommended distance from the main entrance.

Arrangements for leaving must be considered especially if there are likely to be crowds and long queues. Some disabled people may not be able to stand for long periods of time.

3. Promoting the event

If disabled people know that accessibility has been planned for it could have an impact on their decision to attend an event. Disabled people including people who are visually impaired, hard of hearing or who have learning disabilities will benefit from accessible information.

It is important for disabled people to know what adjustments have already been made so that they can acquire tickets. This must be included in promotional information, especially for events such as music concerts that may sell out quickly.

Forms can let people know what adjustments are already in place such as sign language interpreters, deaf-blind communicators and large font text and give a description of any physical features.

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4. Support workers (carers)

How support workers will be accommodated must be decided in advance. Each situation will be different but consideration must be given to; not charging admission, charging a reduced ticket rate or just charging to cover basic costs such as catering.

5. Accessible information

There are a number of different formats for visually impaired people including large print, Braille and audiotape. Many visually impaired people welcome receiving copies of papers before an event, this gives them an opportunity to read them and to be able to concentrate on what is being said once they are at the event. Deaf and hard of hearing people can be supported by Language Support Professionals (LSP).

It's necessary to think inclusively about the commissioning of any video or film to be shown at the event and plan for it to be audio described and subtitled.

6. The Event Team

Disability awareness training can be tailored to meet the needs of organising staff and venue staff will need to know about any adjustments and changes to be made for people with disabilities.

Conference Chairpersons, speakers and presenters need to be aware of the requirements of disabled people in the audience before the event. Chairpersons may have additional responsibilities like explaining evacuation procedures and need to be aware that they should describe exits in terms of left, right and north south rather than pointing or saying 'over there'.

A positive attitude by staff can make all the difference on the day. It is important that the event team respond appropriately to requests for assistance and put things right if they go wrong.

7. Sound, lighting and other technology

People will need to know if the event involves the use of flash lighting, strobes and other special effects. If the lights are required to be dimmed it is necessary to ensure that speakers and any LSP's are suitably spotlighted and there is good light for reading.

At conferences and seminars where only the presenters to have a microphone and members of the audience will ask questions from the floor it's necessary to provide portable microphones.

8. Additional Services

Staff must be available in self-service facilities to assist disabled people with their choice of food and carrying trays to the eating area also reserved seating should be considered. There must be room for everybody to manoeuvre safely between tables.

Information or booking services should be accessible for disabled people and it's good practice to provide information about hotels that are accessible.

It is a good idea to provide a quiet room for rest especially if the event is going to be long and crowded.

It is important that associated events like evening entertainment are inclusive as this is part of the service being provided and is also covered by the DDA.

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