State of Theatre Access

2023

VOCALEYES >> StageTEXT cae Centre for Accessible Environments Part of Habinteg

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1. Introduction

This report is about the identification and the removal of barriers through offering access services and individualised performances for theatregoers in the UK.

The State of Theatre Access reports started in 2016 and have been produced in alternate years since 2017. Three access organisations, VocalEyes, Stagetext and the Centre for Accessible Environments have coordinated a team of volunteer researchers with lived experience of access barriers, to review the websites of professional theatres across the UK. They recorded the disability access information each website provided (or didn't provide) and, where relevant, the number of upcoming productions and performances listed as having an access service. These include audio description (AD), British Sign Language (BSL), captioning or individualised performance (dementia friendly or relaxed).

Based on data collected in April and May 2023, this report shows that the total number of venues who list professional arts performances on their website has decreased from the 659 reported in 2017, to 465 venues in 2023. However, the number of accessible productions reported in 2023 has steadily increased to 85%, although there are fewer venues, a greater number of them are providing access to their productions. These are most commonly performances with BSL (88%) and/or audio description (85%) and/or a relaxed or relaxed environment performance (85%) with captioning (81%) not far behind. 85% of those websites also offered additional access information such as how to get to the theatre and details of the venue layout.

However, improvements are still needed. Of the websites surveyed, 15% didn't provide any access information at all and even where information was available, it was often hard to find. While 5% of UK theatres offered filmed performances streamed online, allowing disabled people to watch them from the comfort of their own home at a convenient time, only 31% of those performances offered any type of access. More accessible productions are being offered but we believe the UK theatre industry can offer more to welcome and support patrons who rely on access. We urge venues to note the recommendations offered in this report.

As well as statistics relating to the types of access on offer, this report contains practical recommendations or 'takeaways' on the steps venues can take to make their access information clearer and more accessible. The most accessible websites have been mentioned as examples other venues may wish to follow. In addition, the report is illustrated by comments from the volunteer researchers which brings their search experience to life.

2. Data summary

The availability of online access information has increased since the last State of Theatre Access reports (SOTA, 2019; SOTA, 2021).

Of the UK theatres included in the survey, 396 (85%) had at least one type of access or adjusted performance listed on its website.

- 392 websites (84%) listed at least one audio described performance.
- 410 websites (88%) listed at least one BSL interpreted performance.
- 378 websites (81%) listed at least one captioned performance.
- 406 websites (85%) listed at least one relaxed or relaxed environment performance.
- 289 websites (62%) listed at least one Dementia-friendly performance.
- 232 websites (50%) listed at least one performance with integrated access.

The effects of the pandemic are still playing out: Although social-distancing restrictions in theatres officially ended on July 19th, 2021, some theatres have continued to offer performances with limited audience numbers that allow for greater distances between people.

Some 250 (54%) of the theatres surveyed offered at least one socially distanced performance and 25 (5%) offered filmed performances streamed online. These may be easier for disabled people to 'attend', however, only 31% of online performances offered any type of access and there is still some way to go to make online access information easily available to all users.

3. Background

According to the UK Disability Survey 2021, 48% of disabled people say that going to the theatre, cinema, or arts is the activity they have most frequently been unable to take part in due to difficulty accessing public buildings.

In line with the social model of disability, we recognise three main types of barrier that get in the way of equal participation. These are **environmental**, including attitudinal, architectural, and ecological factors; **interactive** barriers relating to skill challenge incongruities and communication barriers; and **intrinsic** barriers associated with each individual's level of physical, psychological, or cognitive function.

Theatres across the UK seek to remove environmental and interactive barriers by providing various initiatives to make performances accessible. These include **captioning** for audiences who need access to audio, primarily people who identify as Deaf, deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, **British Sign Language** (BSL) interpreting for audiences who identify as Deaf; **audio description** (AD) for audiences who want access to visual information, primarily people who identify as blind or visually impaired, and individualised performances that are **dementia-friendly** (D-F) or **relaxed**. We also recognise that many other people benefit from access provision, for example, captions are used to support concentration and can be helpful for people who are neurodivergent. Captions can also support literacy and are helpful to people who have English as an additional language. Audio description can be helpful for people who are neurodivergent, those who speak English as a second language[1] (Walczak,2016) and people who struggle with emotion recognition (Garman, 2011; Starr & Braun 2020).

In terms of accessible performances "simply providing x is not sufficient if the means to access it is not also provided" (Greco, 2018). Tourism research has shown that "lack of knowledge is one of the major barriers for disabled guests" (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Equally, "the provision of information about

the state of accessible features at the destination represents a key functional need" (Eichhorn et al., 2008) and "Uncertainty about any aspect of travel can deter someone from making a trip" (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

3.1 Terminology

We recognise that there are many experiences: in this report we use Deaf with a capital 'D' to refer to anyone who identifies as Deaf, uses BSL as their preferred language, and may be part of the Deaf community of BSL users; and deaf with a small 'd' to refer to anyone who identifies as deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, having a hearing loss, a cochlear implant user, or anyone who identifies by a similar label relating to their experience of hearing. We have used the term blind and visually impaired, the latter as "the most commonly used term in the UK context" (Hutchinson et al., 2020, p. 5).

3.2 Method

In April and May 2023, we coordinated a team of volunteer researchers to survey the websites of 797 professional theatres across the UK. Websites run by a school, college or amateur society, those predominantly for community hire, or those which only show films, stand-up comedy or concerts/music acts, were excluded from the research. Those within the scope of the study had to have at least one upcoming professional theatrical production, all others were excluded.

The number of theatres meeting the above criteria has steadily decreased over the years the State of Theatre Access Report has been produced (659 theatres were included in the detailed report in 2017 and 629 in 2019). Of the 797 professional theatres surveyed in 2023, only 465 were found to meet the scope of the study.

4. Disability access information online

In this section we share some of the key findings from our research. The figures for individual theatres are aggregated within the English regions and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The areas reflect the three nations (Scotland, Wales, N. Ireland) and nine English regions used by the Office for National Statistics (2021).

4.1 The headlines

A total of 396 (85%) of the UK theatres included in the survey list one or more types of access service for an upcoming production. A total of 25 (5%) of websites included in the survey, offered at least one production online, meaning it was filmed and streamed via the internet and watched wherever and whenever the audience preferred. Of these, 31% came with some type of access provision and 5% had multiple types. A total of 250 (54%) of websites included in the survey offered at least one socially distanced performance. Of all the websites included in this survey 69 (15%) provided no access information at all.

The next sections present the data in more detail. The information is arranged following the steps in planning and executing a theatre visit:

- finding out what's on
- finding access information
- booking your ticket
- getting to the theatre
- parking
- getting into the theatre
- moving around the venue

4.2 Finding out what's on

The main task of the volunteer researchers was to find out what productions were featured on each website and how many performances of those productions were accessible.

Nation/region	No. of theatres surveyed 2023	Theatres offering online access information 2023	Percentage of theatres with online access information 2023	Percentage of theatres with online access information 2019
East Midlands	28	22	79%	79%
East	50	39	78%	73%
London	96	89	93%	81%
Northeast	13	13	100%	84%
Northwest	36	30	83%	63%
Northern Ireland	4	3	75%	80%
Scotland	25	21	84%	82%
Southeast	70	67	96%	67%
Southwest	64	52	81%	62%
Wales	21	11	52%	67%
West Midlands	28	23	82%	76%
Yorkshire	30	26	87%	69%
Total	**465**	**396**	**85%**	**72%**

Table 1. Number of theatres per UK nation and region providing online access information.

Table 1 gives the number of theatre websites per UK nation and region that provide online access information. This shows that 85% of the UK theatres (396 of the 465 meeting the scope of the study) list one or more types of access service for at least one upcoming production. This compares with 72% of the websites surveyed in 2019. Many theatres provide more than one service in 2023, but overall:

- 232 (50%) offered performances with inclusive access (also known as integrated access)
- 126 (20%) offered relaxed performances
- 392 (84%) offered audio description (AD)
- 410 (88%) offered British Sign Language (BSL)
- 117 (19%) offered captioning
- 26 (4%) offered dementia-friendly performances

However, the websites of 69 theatres (15%) provided no access information at all. There was a large variation by region. In the Northeast, 100% of the 13 websites provided access information online. In Northern Ireland 4 websites were surveyed, 3 of which (75%) provided access information. This compares with the 2019 survey when the best performing region was Northeast England (80%).

The increase in availability of access information online is great news, but how easy is it to find out if the type of access service you need is available for the performance you want? How easy is it to find information about getting to, and getting into and around the venue? Are tickets available? How easy are they to book?

The next section looks at the information barriers between finding out an accessible performance is on and getting to see it.

5. Finding access information

Of concern is not only whether or not access information was provided but also what type of information was available and how easy it was to find. Volunteers were asked "How do you get to the access information from the home page?" The wide range of possibilities included:

- 183 (40%) provided access information via a link in a sub-menu of main menu at the top of the home page
- 107 (23%) websites provided access information in a dedicated page or section
- 27 (6%) provided access information as part of the general visitor information page
- 27 (6%) provided access information via a link in the footer at the bottom of the page
- 80 (17%) provided access information via a top-level link in the main menu at the top of the page
- 1 provided access information via a top-level link and then required the user to select a specific theatre
- 8 provided access information on the home page
- 1 provided access information via a small paragraph in the 'About us' section
- 3 provided access information within FAQs
- 1 provided access information via a general paragraph of text within "Ticketing Information" which the volunteer assessed as "Not easy to find"
- In some instances, there were multiple routes
- 5 volunteers were unable to answer this question

The following comments from volunteers reflect a general feeling of frustration relating to the themes of website navigation, usefulness and website accessibility.

5.1 Website navigation

> "Some way down the Home Page was a 'Visit us' link, clicking this takes you to the 'Visit Us' page, about halfway down this page, is a 'Your visit' link, clicking on this takes you to the 'Your Visit' page and about halfway down this page, after a bit about 'the Ambassador's Lounge,' is the 'Accessibility' section."

Some volunteers found the information provided online was good, but finding it was difficult:

> "Some really good information but I found the website quite complex – lots of clicks required."

Another volunteer found the access requirements were miscategorised:

> "The layout of the accessibility page is not intuitive for navigation or reading purposes as certain items such as BSL interpreter information was listed under 'Visually impaired' rather than 'Hearing impaired' section of the page etc..."

Some were unclear what the functions of the website were:

> "Not clear at the start where the access information is, but when I found it, it is quite good giving some useful information. There is also a blue symbol top right on home page. When you click on this you get viewing screen options, is this usual? I clicked on this by accident."

5.2 Website usefulness

Some people found it confusing as to what access was available:

> "Access details across two pages, 'Access' and 'Box Office'. The access page was a bit misleading as it discussed types of access, many of which do not seem to be on offer."

Others noted that the information provided was not sufficient:

> "At first glance, this website appears OK as the access page is quite long. It is organised by different access needs e.g. 'for neurodiverse guests,' 'for hearing impaired guests' etc. But actually, very little information is provided, it just repeats 'Get in touch if you need anything.'"

Some of the feedback suggests that the website information was not clear:

> "It was really confusing and unnecessarily time consuming to read through as they combined the information for three separate sites. This was especially disappointing as you had to read through a lot only to learn that they weren't giving much detail or actually useful information."

5.3 Website accessibility

Some users found that the websites themselves were not accessible:

> "The 'What's on' section is colour coded, but using colours that are very similar to one another, and with poor text colour contrast. No option to filter."

This resulted in some sites being hard to read:

> "Website is incredibly hard to read (thin pale grey letters on white) to the point it is causing eye strain trying to read Access information."

Some did not appear to be fit for purpose:

> "They don't use 'alt-text,' so Voiceover just reads 'image, image, image.' [They] could address this and make it even better.... This would also give a screen-reader user a bit more concise information about access information for blind people."

However, there was praise for some of the websites with some being a helpful source of information:

> "Exemplary. Easily the most comprehensive access information I've come across." Home Theatre, Manchester (www.homemcr.org/theatre)

And others having useful functionality:

> "Honestly, best one so far – you can actually search by accessible performance." Warwick Arts Centre (www.warwickartscentre.co.uk)

Others were held up as a model for accessibility:

> "Completely excellent. A real 'blueprint' for Access :). Their audio-described videos on the website, to help blind and visually impaired customers with navigation and orientation in the building, to feel welcome and to explain what's available to help them [are] excellent! :)" Polka Theatre (www.polkatheatre.com)

> "It was very easy to find and is very clear and comprehensive. In fact, excellent! They state that not only do they take access seriously in their venues (this 'permanent' one in London, but also a 'pop-up' at the Edinburgh Fringe) but take Online Access seriously… which is apparent from the clarity and navigability of their website."
> Hull Truck Theatre (www.hulltruck.co.uk)

> "The Palace Theatre [which] is one of 6 Nimax West End Theatres, with a very good, combined Accessibility Page, which details all current Access Performances, and how to book. The 5 other theatres with the same process are Apollo, Duchess, Garrick, Lyric, and Vaudeville."
> Palace Theatre (www.nimaxtheatres.com/palace-theatre)

Takeaways

Make sure your access information is:

- easy to find (clearly labelled, just one or two clicks away from the landing page)
- provides specific information relevant to your venue
- is itself accessible to disabled visitors

6. Booking tickets

With regards to booking tickets, 282 (61%) venues provide some kind of discount for access users. Many offer tickets for the disabled audience member's support worker. Sometimes these are free. Sometimes this is only for certain performances. Sometimes these are specified for certain types of disability (e.g. wheelchair users) and not others. Overall volunteers reported that this information is inconsistent from one venue to another or unclear. Volunteers encountered the following range of information on venue websites:

- companion/PA (personal assistant) free
- people accompanying a disabled guest can have a free ticket to nearly every show
- carers' tickets available (but no indication of whether or not there is a charge)
- wheelchair users (and one companion if you are unable to attend the theatre without assistance) can claim discounts where authorised by the production company
- for some shows different wheelchair rates are available
- purchasers may be eligible for discounts if they join the in-house Access Scheme

Only 55 (12%) venues reserved tickets for access performances. This can be important for certain types of access performance, ensuring that the seats have good sightlines for captions or signing, or good headset reception for AD.

410 (88%) venues either did not reserve tickets or made no mention of it on their website.

On 169 (36%) websites, visitors were either unable to book tickets/seats for access and companions online or were only able to book online if they were members of an access scheme (see below, Section 6.2).

In 8 cases, no mention was made of the process.

Some of our volunteers experimented with booking tickets online but found it difficult or confusing. The cost, in particular was not always clear:

> "Ticket prices are set by outside companies, (so can differ between shows) and the purchaser was advised to call the box office."

Others found it more difficult:

> "I did have a go at dropping some tickets in the basket and was successful! :). However, I found this to be quite overwhelming and not very accessible to voiceover on my iPhone... too much talking at me"

As many as 281 (60%) websites stated that access tickets could be booked by phone. In 111 cases (24%) it was either not possible to book access tickets by phone or there was no mention on the website.

A total of 5 websites explicitly stated that visitors were unable to book tickets/seats for access and companions in person, but 193 websites (42%) did not mention whether this was possible.

6.1 Limits on accessible tickets

A total of 90 venues (19%) limited the number of tickets that could be booked online, with ten or more being counted as a 'group booking' which then had to be booked by phone. An example of this is:

Parties of up to 10 can book online for most shows, but if your group is larger, please either call or visit the Box Office at the Connaught Theatre.

However, some venues had lower limits applied to wheelchair users and other disabled people:

...limited to one access customer and companion.

A maximum of two wheelchair tickets can be purchased online – one for a wheelchair position, plus one companion.

There is only one wheelchair accessible space, but they say that if that has already been purchased then to contact them and they will try to make alternative arrangements.

You can book a single ticket for yourself and your carer.

Many volunteers found the websites confusing or non-functional:

"Website states there is a limit of 30 tickets for a particular production. This is 'per order' and it is unclear whether you can have more than one order."

"Link to further info about group bookings didn't work."

Takeaways

Make the process of booking access tickets:

- as easy as possible by enabling disabled people to book online, by email, by phone, and in person just as non-disabled people can
- state the ticket price (and any concessions) clearly

6.2 Access schemes

As mentioned above, some access information was only available to members of an access scheme. For example, one venue only released details of the plan of the auditorium to visitors registered with their access scheme:

If you are already registered with us online and have selected 'I am an audio description user', you will be able to select the best available seats from the seating plan and receive the discounted access rate. The best seats will appear as stars.

A total of 167 (36%) theatres required customers to be part of an access membership scheme, to book a ticket or qualify for a discount. These included venue specific schemes, ones covering a group of theatres and local authority schemes:

Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people are encouraged to join our scheme so that we may assist them in finding suitable seating, and ensure that ticket prices are adjusted to reflect their requirements. This scheme aims to assist you in booking tickets and helping us to understand your specific needs.

The aim of an access scheme is to enable theatres to know the access requirements of individuals in advance and keep note of them so that the audience member doesn't have to repeat their needs for every booking. However, Some disabled people regard them as yet another barrier and they can deter one-off bookers.

Some require users to pay a membership fee:

Some access schemes can be joined free of charge, but if free companion tickets are required, then one will have to [...] pay the £15 charge for three years, to gain a card with 'plus 1' on it, in the event that one meets the evaluation criteria and supplies the documentary evidence.

Others used:

"wording [that] is negative and makes it feel like another barrier, and like they are using it as way to exclude people who might be stating they are disabled to get benefits to which they aren't entitled."

Takeaways

Access to information should not be conditional on membership of an access scheme.

Disabled people should not be charged more for their access needs to be met.

If your venue uses an access scheme, make sure there are other ways to book too.

7. Other access information

7.1 Guide/assistance dogs

According to the University of Warwick[2], seven thousand people in the UK rely on an assistance dog, the majority of which are guide dogs, but also include dogs trained to help wheelchair users, people with other physical disabilities, Deaf, deaf or autistic people, as well as medical detection dogs.

Assistance dogs are governed by the UK Equality Act (2010). This states that disabled people have the right to be accompanied by their assistance dog in public places. However, there was wide variability in information relating to guide/assistance dogs.

A total of 147 (32%) websites explicitly state that guide/assistance dogs are welcome. Of those theatres welcoming dogs, over half (80/128) offered a sitting service, while a quarter stated there was water available. However, 124 (27% of all websites) made no mention of dogs at all.

There was a variety of instructions around the process of bringing your dog with you. This ranged from a polite "please contact us in advance and request a seat at the end of the row in the Main Theatre or ask our Box Office staff to reserve a seat for you in the Studio" to the helpful "If mentioned when booking the tickets, spectators will be informed about any special effects that may affect the dog's comfort and be offered an aisle seat; the dog can also be left in the care of front-of the house staff" to the more prescriptive: "Customers are required to sit in reserved areas within the auditorium to safely accommodate their assistance dog."

Some information was less than clear:

> "The website stated that 'Guide/assistance dogs are welcome' but 'guide dogs' are mentioned in the section about AD performances, but 'assistance dogs' are not mentioned (so I assume they only are talking about guide dogs for blind and VI (visually impaired) people and not, for example, hearing dogs.) No mention of water, spending areas or minding."

Again, the information was not always readily available:

> "Guide/assistance dogs are welcome. Had to search in the help section to find this out."

Clearly, guide/assistance dogs are more welcome in some theatres than others.

Takeaways

Make sure any information about assistance dogs is:

- easy to find
- clear whether it refers to all types of assistance dog or to only one type e.g. Guide dogs
- provides information about any seating restrictions if accompanied by a dog
- provides information about other services offered e.g. sitting services, water availability, spending areas

7.2 Hearing loops

One fifth of the UK's population and a third of those aged over sixty-five are Deaf, deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, therefore access to audio information should be a top priority when providing accessibility and promoting inclusiveness. According to the RNID, a charity which supports people who are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus (RNID, n.d.)

A hearing loop helps people with hearing loss to hear conversations more easily. It works when a person's hearing aids, cochlear implant or loop listener is switched to the hearing loop setting. Sound is transmitted wirelessly directly to the hearing device. This reduces the distracting background noises.

A total of 364 (78%) of venues were equipped with a Hearing Loop. While this is quite a high percentage, it suggests that 22% of venues are failing to meet this basic access requirement:

> "Despite having no mention of hearing loops that I could 'see,' I thought they are giving a reasonable access offer, but more detail could be given with further education of different access audiences' needs. And an understanding of how this helps many people".

7.3 Access enquiries

- 401 (86%) websites gave contact details for enquiries about access.
- 186 (40%) provided an email address and a phone number.
- 8 provided an online form.
- 24 (5%) provided all three means of communication.

Where contact details were given for enquiries about access there was a named access person or a dedicated team in 102 (22%) cases. 235 (51%) directed potential bookers to general enquiries.

A total of 399 (86%) websites had a link to an access community site, most commonly Euan's Guide, AccessAble and Symbol Story.

However, as one volunteer commented:

> "I looked at the EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) Policy, which is very generic and shows little understanding. There is also a link here to some kind of access consultancy, with 'Access' in their title. But they have shared this organisation's material as a kind of 'tick-box' exercise. Very unimpressed."

Of theatre websites surveyed:

- 14% had no access information
- 26% had very little detail (one or two sentences about physical access only)
- 26% had some detail (a paragraph, one or two access audiences catered for, e.g. providing AD and/or captioned performances)
- 21% had detailed access information (three access audiences catered for)
- 13% had very detailed access information (very comprehensive, multiple audiences, resources and access performances)

8. Arriving at the theatre

A total of 231 websites (about 50%) included detailed directions on how to find or identify the theatre; the remainder (234) did not.

Of those that did, some were singled out:

> "This [website] is exemplary in really understanding the fears and concerns of access customers in getting to and into the venue. This is something that most venues don't account for, and then wonder why, there aren't, for example, many blind guests at audio-described events. They should be commended in doing everything they can to alleviate these concerns and give confidence through the great Access Information they have provided on their very accessible and navigable website :)." Pleasance Theatre, Islington (**www.pleasance.co.uk**)

> "Venue offers familiarisation visits to view space and ask questions about their visit." Mill Arts Centre (**www.themillartscentre.co.uk**)

> "Website also provides 360 virtual tour of theatre and 2 Widgit guides – one for going to the theatre and one for going to the pantomime." Beacon Arts Centre (**beaconartscentre.co.uk**)

8.1 Parking

A total of 461 (99%) websites gave information about parking, although not all the parking was specifically for disabled people.

A total of 174 websites (37%) provided information about parking/drop off for disabled people. Most commonly this included the distance from parking/drop-off to venue.

In one case:

> "The accessibility page simply redirects readers to another page with information about parking."

A total of 4 (0.9%) asked patrons to phone or email for information or to book a disabled parking space. A total of 16 (3%) provided the location of a drop-off point. Only 1 provided the postcode of closest car park, which has one disabled space, advising that charges apply, including to Blue Badge holders.

Some of the most helpful websites provided the following:

Location of accessible/Blue Badge parking, Location of drop off point. You can book a space online whilst buying your tickets and there is a safe comfortable space to wait in the box office area with level access to the pickup area.

*Mercury Theatre (*__www.mercurytheatre.co.uk__*)*

This is a very small-scale venue, in an Islington pub, doing a marvellous job, from what I can 'see' from the website. Because of location, in a busy part of London, and the fact that it is an historic pub building, none of the above are really possible, which they make clear, recommending that customers use public transport, which they provide a great deal of information about. They do, however, provide a link to Islington's council website about parking.

*Old Red Lion Theatre (*__www.oldredliontheatre.co.uk/theatre.html__*)*

Takeaways

The best websites provide information on:

- location of accessible/Blue Badge parking
- location of drop off point
- detailed description of route from closest car park to venue
- public transport links if no parking available

8.2 Getting into the theatre

A total of 124 (27%) websites had no information about access using the main entrance.

The best provided detailed and specific information:

Entrance has steps, Staff required for access. The front door opens towards you and has a width of 64cm. There is a shallow step into the building. There are no handrails to the entrance.

*Angles theatre Wisbech (**www.anglestheatre.co.uk**)*

Only partially accessible to wheelchair users. Unfortunately, we do not have a lift. The wheelchair entrance is 72cms at its narrowest point.

Takeaways

Provide detailed, accessible and specific information, even if you think your venue is not accessible. This way, users can make an informed decision as to whether or not the venue is accessible to them.

9. Inside the theatre

9.1 Accessible toilets

A total of 368 (79%) websites gave information about accessible toilets, although 97 (21%) provided no information, and 9 venues did not have any. The most helpful websites included photographs and other details including toilet height, room dimensions and door widths.

A total of 29 (6%) venues had a Changing Places toilet, and 8 provided a link to information about nearby Changing Places toilets, although most websites (76%) gave no information about this. A total of 81 (17%) gave information about rest or chill out spaces.

9.2 Venue layout

Providing information about the layout of the venue is critical in encouraging disabled people to visit. For example, details of the layout of an auditorium allows a visitor to make an informed choice when choosing their seat(s). Consider that people may have multiple access needs: are the caption units visible from the wheelchair spaces? Does the AD reach the wheelchair spaces and is the signal clear?

9.2.1 Wheelchair access

A total of 34 (7%) websites provided detailed information about wheelchair access. This included the number and positions of wheelchair spaces in the auditorium. Some venues required wheelchair users to contact the box office, so seats could be removed to accommodate wheelchairs. The most forthcoming gave the location of wheelchair-user spaces, information about seat width/depth/height, and provided photos and a video of the stage and auditorium.

However, some websites appeared to have confusing information about wheelchair access:

> "Repeatedly claims to be a 'fully accessible venue'. This seems to just mean wheelchair users even though the theatre circle can't be accessed via the 'accessible' lift."

> "First floor venue with wheelchair seating but I cannot find mention of the lift on the access page."

> "…need to be an access user and log in to see wheelchair spaces."

Even some venues that have no wheelchair access, tried to be helpful, as one volunteer commented:

> "Clearly this isn't a physically accessible space, because it is an historic pub building, with theatre upstairs. That said, they have gone 'above and beyond' in their conveying access and a welcoming approach. There is much detail about the physical realities of the pub building and the 'auditorium' space." Old Red Lion Theatre (**www.oldredliontheatre.co.uk**)

Takeaways

Provide detailed, accessible and specific information about the layout of your auditorium, even if you think your venue is not accessible. This way, users can make an informed decision as to whether or not the venue is accessible to them. All disabled people are different and have different access needs. The tone of your approach will help disabled people decide whether or not to visit.

Remember that a single visitor may have multiple access needs. An AD user may have impaired mobility and may also need a hearing loop.

9.2.2 Step-free access

A total of 460 (99%) of venue websites gave details of step-free access. The most helpful were specific, others less so:

> "Steps from foyer to auditorium. Wheelchair access to auditorium via alternative entrance but no information given as to how to access."

Some websites did not provide clear information:

> "Vague information – state public areas are fully accessible with ramps and lift, but do not specify where these are."

> "the website mentions a stair lift but it mentions this is not wheelchair-friendly."

> "Number of steps between spaces specified. No step-free access."

> "There is an option to watch a video that gives access information, but you need a membership and pre-approved access to view it."

Whereas others had a clear understanding of 'step free' and 'level access':

> "Lift access to all levels of the venue. Additional information provided about lifts (e.g. size, type of lift), THEY [sic] have correct understanding of 'step free' and 'level access.' The ground floor, including the Adventure Theatre Auditorium is completely level access, including playgrounds, cafe, shop, toilets, and backstage areas. The main auditorium, meeting rooms, workshop rooms are upstairs but fully accessible via the lift, with no unnecessary level changes." Polka Theatre (www.polkatheatre.com)

Only 4 websites did not have any details of step-free access.

Takeaways

- Almost all venues provide information about step-free access.
- Make information about step-free access specific by including the location of alternative entrances and routes, lift dimensions etc.
- Make information about step-free access easily available to casual and regular visitors.
- Provide information about step-free access for all areas of your venue.
- Ensure information about step-free access is itself accessible.

9.2.3 Auditorium plan

Accessing a plan of the auditorium ahead of your visit, allows a visitor to make an informed choice when choosing their seat(s). This may be to do with sightlines (see Section 6) mobility concerns or ease of exit in an emergency.

A total of 180 (38%) of venue websites either had no plan of the auditorium, or it could not be accessed because it was only available when going through the booking process.

A few of the plans had no key nor any access information marked on them.

Of those websites that provided a plan, the access information was often hard to find:

> "Only plan I could find was at point of booking with very small info typed onto bottom of image, screen reader would not read it and I almost missed it."

> "Trying to access the auditorium plan, leaves the pop up locked onto my screen, and I have to close everything down to get out. Really frustrating. I know this isn't me or my tech, because this site is really very shoddy to my voiceover's access. For instance, 'Xs' to close down other pop ups are read by 'Voiceover' as 'X' and not read out as the word, 'close.' This is where my little bit of residual eyesight can help me to

actually see what a 'car crash' they are making of this for totally blind customers who [sic] totally reliant on the audio reading of the website by their screen-readers! :("

"No plans in access section but eventually found downloads on 'How to Book' webpage and could download them in a not user-friendly 'Technical Detail booklet' elsewhere on website."

Takeaways

Make sure your website is coded properly.

Make sure your website provides information in an accessible way.

9.2.4 Emergency evacuation procedure

A total of 357 (77%) websites gave information about emergency evacuation procedures. Those that did not, failed to inspire confidence in potential bookers, sometimes dramatically so.

"Although no information on emergency evacuation, they recommend that customers whose vision is limited be accompanied, as they may find it difficult to leave the building in an emergency.'"

As with all subsections relating to moving in and around the venue, provide relevant and specific detail about step-free access inside the theatre building, including wheelchair-user spaces and information about seat width/depth/height.

Where possible provide photos and a video of the stage and auditorium. Most importantly, ensure that the information is:

- accessible
- easy to find
- written in a welcoming tone
- transparent

10. Access services for performances

This section looks at the number of productions and performances that were made available with at least one type of access or adjusted performance (Socially distanced, Audio Described, British Sign Language interpreted, Captioned, Relaxed, Dementia-friendly or online).

It is important to point out that the number of productions and performances are conservative estimates. This reflects the fact that some theatres required the potential booker to call the box office for information. In these cases, the number was recorded as 1. Where volunteers were unable to determine the information from the website, the results were recorded as 0. This shows that important information relating to accessible services is often hard to find:

> "Although this offer is mentioned, unable to find out unless I look at each individual production i.e. no separate lists or means of filtering searches for these categories."

> "I couldn't find any when scrolling through the performances, but the page linked above says that they should always have at least one on offer."

Although some provided information, more detail was required:

> "The website does state that they do AD, BSL, Captioned and Relaxed Performances, but this needs further investigation regarding what is actually 'on'."

> "There is one access production and you have to request what you require ahead of time so they can put on a suitable performance."

"As for most of the theatres' websites I've looked at, [this question] is impossible to answer with certainty without going through every listing as there isn't a filter to search for productions which are available online."

A total of 307 (66%) of the UK theatres included in the survey had at least one type of access or adjusted performance listed on the website.

Some venues used the website to host access provision to complement one or more types of accessible performance:

For the pantomime the venue created online resources, an at home sensory tour and videos of the cast for relaxed performances.

Hazlitt Theatre (www.parkwoodtheatres.co.uk/Hazlitt-Theatre)

Sunflower Lanyards available, Sensory backpacks available to borrow, interpreter service (depending on event, request must be made at least 4 weeks in advance), all counters are low level (85.1 cm)

10.1 Audio description (AD)

A total of 392 (84%) of the 465 surveyed theatres offered AD performances. A total of 10 websites provided an explanation that AD is:

…a live, verbal commentary that explains what is happening visually during the performance that blind or visually impaired people may need to understand and enjoy the show. You listen to the commentary by using a personal headset that we will provide.

In one case described performances were limited to shows with a long run:

AD provision is available for productions which run for 2 weeks or more.

Table 2 shows that all regions had more theatres offering AD in 2023 compared with 2019. However, the number of productions offering AD (414) was reduced compared with 2019 figures (527). The number of performances (635) was also reduced compared with the 897 performances in 2019. Overall, the data suggests that all productions had at least one AD performance.

Nation/region	Theatres offering AD 2023	Compared with 2019	No. of Productions with AD 2023	No. of Performances with AD 2023
East Midlands	26	Up 20	54	52
East	43	Up 35	18	123
London	79	Up 43	71	136
Northeast	9	N/A	25	32
Northwest	30	up 27	26	35
Northern Ireland	4	Up 3	1	11
Scotland	23	Up 12	4	18
Southeast	53	Up 34	56	64
Southwest	59	Up 54	34	12
Wales	20	Up 14	3	12
West Midlands	22	Up 12	67	65
Yorkshire	24	Up 12	55	75
Total	**392**	**Up 265**	**414**	**635**

Table 2 Number of AD productions and performances per UK nation and region in 2023.

A total of 24 (5%) of websites mentioned touch tours were available, as one explained:

Our audio described performances are generally preceded by touch tours, which provide a chance for visually impaired or blind people to acquaint themselves with the stage, set, and costumes used in the production.

A number of websites also gave information about the technology used to receive the AD:

Headphone style receivers are available at the time of booking.

AD available via Mobile Connect – visitors can pick up a headset (limited number) or use own smart device.

You will receive a Sennheiser Infra-red Enhanced Hearing System

Requires smartphone (and app download)/headphones. Smartphone device can be provided by venue on request, but patrons must bring their own headphones.

In two cases, there was a suggestion that headsets were limited as they needed to be pre-booked:

…requirement to book headset 24 hours in advance.

Headsets should be reserved 10 days in advance.

In three cases, there was information about who was delivering the AD:

Audio Described Performances are discounted and are delivered by Mind's Eye or Caroline Burn, Talking Theatre. Usually a touch tour preceding AD performances.

Live through headset by trained audio describer.

AD provision by venue volunteers.

Some AD performances are preceded by an audio introduction, as this volunteer commented:

> "Pre-show descriptions offered, some of which are also available on the website."

As with other types of access, information on AD performances was not always easy to come by:

> "The show with BSL interpretation had an easily visible icon marking it as such when browsing all performances – Audio Described I had to click on a specific performance to find out it was Audio Described."

Takeaways

Venues are encouraged to:

- filter productions by types of accessibility service(s) provided
- use the website to host pre-performance access information like audio introductions
- give information about technical equipment provided, especially if patrons are required to bring their own
- acknowledge who will be providing the access service

10.2 British Sign Language (BSL)

British Sign Language (BSL) is the preferred language of over 87,000 Deaf people in the UK for whom English may be a second or third language. At a signed performance, trained sign language interpreters, usually standing to one side of the stage or in a box, interpret the script and dialogue used by the performers at the same time it is being performed.

Nation/region	Theatres offering BSL 2023	Compared with 2019	No. of Productions with BSL 2023	No. of Performances with BSL 2023
East Midlands	25	Up 19	73	126
East	45	Up 34	20	52
London	79	Up 54	95	132
Northeast	13	Up 9	21	14
Northwest	32	Up 23	36	24
Northern Ireland	4	Up 4	9	1
Scotland	25	Up 14	13	12
Southeast	57	Up 34	60	32
Southwest	56	Up 47	46	42
Wales	21	Up 11	14	20
West Midlands	25	Up 13	45	44
Yorkshire	28	Up 14	64	67
Total	**410**	**Up 276**	**496**	**566**

Table 3. Number of BSL productions and performances per UK nation and region in 2023.

A total of 410 (88%) of the 465 surveyed theatres offered BSL performances. Table 3 shows a comparison between the number of theatres offering BSL performances in 2023 and the figures for 2019. This shows that all regions had more theatres offering BSL in 2023 compared with 2019. The number of productions offering BSL (496) with 566 performances listed in 2023,

compares with 379 productions and 447 performances listed in 2019. This indicates that while the number of productions offering BSL has risen by 117, the number of performances is up by 325, suggesting there are more BSL performances per production than in 2019.

It is worth noting this comment from one volunteer:

> "their Relaxed performances may also be signed (information is incredibly confusing)."

10.3 Theatre captions

Theatre captions are similar to television subtitles and give people who are Deaf, deaf, deafened or hard of hearing access to live performance. The actors' words appear on an LED caption unit (or units) placed above or either side of the stage or via other display devices such as tablets or glasses, at the same time as they are spoken or sung.

Nation/region	Theatres offering captions 2023	Compared with 2019	No. of productions with captions 2023	No. of performances with captions 2023
East Midlands	24	Up 19	53	105
East	43	Up 36	29	72
London	84	Up 45	106	161
Northeast	9	Up 7	19	38
Northwest	29	Up 21	29	41
Northern Ireland	4	Up 3	5	6
Scotland	22	Up 10	10	19
Southeast	48	Up 36	37	29
Southwest	55	Up 49	38	31
Wales	17	Up 12	3	4
West Midlands	20	Up 9	45	124
Yorkshire	23	Up 14	35	44
Total	**378**	**Up 261**	**409**	**674**

Table 4. Number of captioned productions and performances per UK nation and region in 2023.

Table 4 shows that 378 (81%) of the 465 surveyed theatres offered captioned performances in 2023. All regions had more theatres offering captioned performances in 2023 compared with 2019; The total number of productions offering captions (409) is lower than the 416 productions listed in 2019. The number of performances (674) is lower than the 720 listed in 2019. This may

be because fewer theatres met the criteria for the 2023 survey or because the number of performances was estimated conservatively, as explained on the previous page.

Volunteers were also asked to note how the captions are displayed. This information is shown in Table 5. This question has not been asked in previous years so no comparison can be given.

Nation/region	Open (viewed via a display unit on the stage)	Closed (viewed via glasses, tablets or phones)	Not clear from the information provided
East Midlands	6	0	1
East	3	1	3
London	17	3	25
Northeast	5	0	0
Northwest	7	0	3
Northern Ireland	0	0	2
Scotland	3	1	3
Southeast	10	3	3
Southwest	7	2	2
Wales	1	0	1
West Midlands	7	0	0
Yorkshire	6	0	3
Total	**72**	**10**	**46**

Table 5. Captioning: method of display.

Table 5 shows that the majority of captions (72/128 – 56%) are open, viewable via a caption display unit, on or near the stage so that everyone in the audience can read them. 8% (10/128) are closed (viewed via glasses, tablets or phones). However, these figures are not definitive as in 36% of cases (46/128) the method of display was not clear from the information provided on the website.

Takeaways

Venues should ensure the method of captioning display is clearly stated on the website so that all bookers can make an informed choice.

10.4 Relaxed or relaxed environment

A relaxed environment performance allows for:

- noise and movement in the auditorium
- re-entry when needed
- a space outside the auditorium where audience members can sit if they need time away from the show
- lights to be left on at a low level throughout to allow for easier exit and entry
- may supply a Relaxed Environment Pack ahead of the performance on request, that can help with planning a visit. This could include a scene-by-scene summary of the plot and highlights triggering content and sensory triggers, such as loud noises
- no (or very minimal) technical adjustments made to the production on stage, so they are not suitable for people with sensory sensitivities

A Relaxed performance is one that also makes technical adjustments to the production on stage like lighting, sound levels, and loud noise reduction.

In 2023, 406 of the 465 surveyed theatres (87%) offered relaxed or relaxed environment performances.

Nation/region	Theatres offering relaxed or relaxed environment performances 2023	Compared with 2019	No. of productions with relaxed or relaxed environment performances 2023	No. of relaxed or relaxed environment performances 2023
East Midlands	26	Up 19	4	14
East	47	Up 31	5	21
London	74	Up 54	78	201
Northeast	13	Up 10	7	14
Northwest	29	Up 22	18	20
Northern Ireland	3	Up 3	0	1
Scotland	21	Up 15	6	9
Southeast	62	Up 38	25	35
Southwest	57	Up 47	35	9
Wales	21	Up 15	7	11
West Midlands	28	Up 12	21	41
Yorkshire	25	Up 14	6	18
Total	**406**	**Up 280**	**212**	**394**

Table 6. Number of productions and performances classified as "relaxed" or "relaxed environment" per UK nation and region in 2023.

Table 6 shows that all regions had more theatres offering relaxed or relaxed environment performances in 2023 compared with 2019. The total number of productions offering relaxed or relaxed environment performances (212) is 84% higher than the 115 productions listed in 2019. All productions had at least one relaxed performance.

> **"**Two relaxed performances are listed but one production has a 'relaxed' run."

A total of 13 of the 406 venues offering such performances specified that they were designed for people with ASD; 14 stated they were Dementia-friendly, 9 did not specify, 1 used the term neurodiverse. The majority described what they meant by a relaxed performance, allowing the user to decide:

> *...performances are suitable for those who may benefit from a more relaxed environment.*

> *Open to everyone, but particularly appropriate for anyone who may find the usual theatre/cinema environment challenging, due to an Autism Spectrum Condition, a learning disability, or a fear of the dark, loud noises or confined spaces.*

> *Created for any audiences who are less comfortable with any elements of the usual panto experience.*

10.5 Dementia-friendly

There is considerable overlap between relaxed/relaxed environment performances and ones that are termed Dementia-friendly (D-F). These have been described as "enhanced theatre experiences for people living with dementia and their supporters".

They aim to create an engaging, supportive, calm, predictable and unhurried experience, designed for the specific needs of people affected by dementia, recognising the wide range of cognitive, physical and emotional challenges associated with the condition.

Pioneered by Leeds Playhouse in 2014, D-F performances are usually adaptations of mainstream shows. The State of Theatre Access Report (2019) stated there had been a recent increase in bespoke shows made specifically for this audience. That trend has continued in 2023, with 289 theatres offering D-F performances (Table 7).

Nation/region	Theatres offering dementia-friendly performances 2023	Compared with 2019	No. of dementia-friendly productions 2023	No. of dementia-friendly performances 2023
East Midlands	19	Up 16	5	5
East	43	Up 40	5	2
London	42	Up 38	8	212
Northeast	5	Up 5	1	1
Northwest	19	Up 18	0	0
Northern Ireland	2	Up 2	0	0
Scotland	15	Up 13	0	0
Southeast	43	Up 38	6	4
Southwest	50	Up 50	2	3
Wales	15	Up 9	0	0
West Midlands	16	No change	3	3
Yorkshire	20	Up 9	10	8
Total	**289**	**Up 163**	**32**	**238**

Table 7. Number of productions and performances classified as "Dementia-friendly" per UK nation and region in 2023.

In 2023, 289 of the 465 surveyed theatres (62%) offered Dementia-friendly performances. The West Midlands had the same number of theatres offering Dementia-friendly performances in 2023 as in 2019, while all other regions had more. The total number of productions (32) offering Dementia-friendly performances is also higher than the 25 productions listed in 2019. The total number of performances (238) is considerably higher than the 32 performances reported in 2019, although this figure should be treated with caution.

The distinction between Dementia-friendly and relaxed performances was sometimes blurred. As with other types of access, rather than defining the audience, it is better to outline the service provided so that disabled and non-disabled people can decide for themselves if it meets their needs.

10.6 Integrated Access

Volunteers were asked "Are there any Inclusive performances (with integrated access) listed?" and the question was clarified by the following comment "This means one or more of BSL, Captioning or Audio Description is integrated within the production and available for all performances." More formally, it has been defined as "thinking about access from the start of a project and throughout, embedding it in the script or finding creative ways to place it centre stage" (Fryer & Cavallo, 2021).

Integrated access is a relatively recent approach, intended to make every performance accessible by embedding access as an integral part of the production. Approaches to integrated access are varied, and audience responses are equally varied, with some raising concerns that integrated access can centre creativity over accessibility. It has not previously been considered in a State of Theatre Access Report. Table 8 shows that 232 (50%) of theatres in the survey staged at least one production with integrated access.

Nation/region	Theatres offering performances with integrated access 2023	No of productions with integrated access 2023	% of performances with integrated access 2023
East Midlands	19	2	100%
East	38	4	100%
London	37	3	100%
Northeast	8	15	100%
Northwest	19	1	100%
Northern Ireland	2	1	100%
Scotland	15	1	100%
Southeast	35	6	100%
Southwest	44	1	100%
Wales	15	1	100%
Total	232	35	

Table 8. Number of productions with integrated access per UK nation and region in 2023.

10.7 Socially distanced

Although social distancing restrictions in theatres officially ended on July 19th, 2021, some theatres have continued to offer performances with limited audience numbers that allow for greater distances between people. This may be in recognition of the greater clinical vulnerability of some disabled people compared with non-disabled people. The Office for National Statistics reported that between January and November 2020, people with disabilities accounted for 60% of deaths involving Covid-19 while representing 20% of the UK population.

The information for the prevalence of socially distanced performances in 2023 is shown in Table 9. This question has not been asked in previous years so no comparison can be given.

> "As the theatre has no access for disabled persons (single line on 'Contact Us' page), there seems to be very little consideration of any other possible access requirements people may have, or that I have been able to find mention of. There is a page dedicated to COVID-19."

Nation/region	Theatres offering socially distanced performances 2023	No. of productions with social distancing 2023	No. of performances with social distancing 2023
East Midlands	18	4	4
East	36	1	1
London	35	3	5
Northeast	4	1	1
Northwest	20	2	4
Northern Ireland	2	1	1
Scotland	15	1	1
Southeast	34	1	1
Southwest	44	1	1
Wales	15	1	1
West Midlands	13	1	1
Yorkshire	14	1	4
Total	**250**	**18**	**25**

Table 9. Number of productions and performances classified as "socially distanced" per UK nation and region in 2023.

In 2023, 250 of the 465 surveyed theatres (54%) offered at least one socially distanced performance. The total number of productions offering socially distanced performances is 18. Although 25 performances have been estimated, the real number is difficult to calculate because the information was not provided or unclear on the website, taking the form of a general statement:

> "The majority of performances in the main house are now being sold to full capacity. We are offering a limited number of performances as socially distanced performances (50% capacity). In these performances, a much smaller selection of seats will be sold."

10.8 Online productions/performances

Another consequence of the Pandemic was the number of theatres putting productions online. Arts Council research showed that 56% of publicly subsidised theatres had at least one online performance during the first eighteen months from March 2020.

Richard Misek, of the University of Kent, who carried out the survey with Adrian Leguina of Loughborough University said, "Digital programming has led to significant access benefits, especially for geographically remote and disabled audiences."

Region/nation	Theatres offering performances online	No. of online Productions offering access
East Midlands	0	0
East of England	2	2
London	9	40
Northeast	1	0
Northwest	1	4
Northern Ireland	0	0
Scotland	0	0
Southeast	6	10
Southwest	4	3
Wales	2	3
West Midlands	0	0
Yorkshire	0	0
Total	**25**	**62**

Table 10. Number of theatres offering performances/productions online

In the State of Theatre Access Survey 2023, 25 (5%) of the 465 theatres surveyed offered performances online (Table 10). The total number of productions online is 62 of which 19 (31%) offered some type of access as shown in Table 11.

Access service	No. of online productions offering access
Audio description	1
Audio description, BSL, captions/subtitles	1
Audio description, captions/subtitles	1
BSL	2
BSL, captions/subtitles	1
Captions/subtitles	4
No access mentioned or information unclear	8
Access mentioned but type of access was unclear	1

Table 11. Types of access offered for online productions.

No access was mentioned in 8 (13%) cases. However, 3 (5%) had multiple types of access provision.

Takeaways

Online performances can be more easily accessed by disabled people.

Currently most of these are lacking access provision.

11. Conclusion

Since the State of Theatre Access Report (2019), accessible performances have grown in number and variety in theatres across the UK. The task is now finding the best way to communicate what is available to the audiences who may benefit.

This involves venues using their websites to communicate their access fully and clearly:

> "This website has good Access information and also has more Accessible performances than any other theatre that I have reviewed. There is a very good search function for finding Accessible performances." Opera House, Manchester (**www.atgtickets.com/venues/opera-house-manchester**)

> "This was an excellent example of accessibility. There is additional information on the website which is a pdf explaining how to book access seats online. The theatre also runs touch tours and runs a CFT buddies/ companion scheme to help those with physical difficulties, those with visual and hearing impairment, those on the Autism spectrum and anyone who is socially isolated or anxious." Chichester Festival Theatre (**www.cft.org.uk**)

12. Recommendations for theatres

This section lists recommendations emerging from the sections above with the intention of inspiring venues to go further in giving clear and accessible information about access provision. If your website is the first port of call for non-disabled patrons, it needs to be fully accessible and easily navigable for disabled patrons too.

Make sure access information on your website does the following:

- is easy to find (clearly labelled, no more than two clicks away from the landing page)
- provides specific information relevant to your venue
- is accessible to visitors with various disabilities written in an accessible font with a strong colour contrast
- written in a welcoming tone
- includes Icons indicating the type of access available for each production
- describes what access the service provides, rather than specifying the audience you think it's suitable for
- does not hide information behind access schemes

Make sure your website does the following:

- is coded properly
- allows users to filter productions by types of accessibility services provided
- can host pre-performance access information, for example audio introductions, visual stories, accessible photos and videos
- states the method of captioning display/type of headset used to deliver the AD so that all bookers can make an informed choice
- provides detailed and specific information about access inside the theatre building, including accessible toilets, wheelchair-user spaces and information about seat width/depth/height
- where possible provide photos and a video of the stage and auditorium.
- offers the option for prospective patrons to visit your venue

Most importantly, ensure that the information is:

- accessible
- easy to find
- written in a welcoming tone

The best websites address the fears and concerns of access customers in getting to, into and around the venue, by providing the following information:

- location of accessible/Blue Badge parking
- location of drop off point
- detailed description of route from closest car park to venue
- public transport links if no parking available
- steps and lifts
- accessible toilets, Changing Places
- chill out spaces.

The process of booking access tickets:

- should be as easy as possible
- should state the ticket price (and any concessions) clearly
- should recognise that access schemes can be seen as another barrier

Information about guide dogs and assistance dogs should:

- be easy to find
- be clear whether it refers to all types of assistance dog or to only one type, for example guide dogs
- provide information about services offered like dog sitting, water availability, spending areas
- provide information about any extra access equipment the venue can provide, for example sensory backpacks, headsets, especially if patrons are required to bring their own
- provide information about any extra access service the venue can provide, for example buddy scheme, familiarisation tour

13. References and further reading

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14. Acknowledgements

This research is the work of many people including the following:

Organisations

Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE.org.uk) is a leading authority on inclusive design and management. They offer access consultancy and design appraisals for refurbishment and new-build projects, accessibility advice and guidelines, as well as access surveys for public venues of all types. Contact: info@CAE.org.uk

Stagetext (stagetext.org | @StageText) provides captioning and live subtitling services to theatres, museums and other arts venues to make their activities accessible to people who are Deaf, deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. Established in 2000, Stagetext are committed to improving access to arts and culture for all deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people. enquiries@stagetext.org | 020 7377 0540

VocalEyes (VocalEyes.co.uk | @VocalEyesAD) is the UK's leading audio description company in the working in the arts. Their audio describers and trainers work with theatres and museums to improve access to their performances, events, exhibitions and venues for blind and visually impaired people. VocalEyes also promotes all audio-described performances and events in the UK through their website, social media and What's on guides in a range of formats. Contact them at enquiries@VocalEyes.co.uk or on 020 7375 1043.

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Steering group

Matthew Cock, former Chief Executive of VocalEyes, with Joanna Wood, former Chair of Trustees, VocalEyes; Melanie Sharpe, CEO, Stagetext; Teresa Rumble, Senior Access Advisor, Centre for Accessible Environments, Maddy Rees, Project Manager, Centre for Accessible Environments

Volunteers

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15. Limitations

The figures contained in this report may be unreliable due to the individual decision-making involved in the methodology. Volunteers were making on-the-spot decisions that may or may not have been the same as that made by a different volunteer or by the same volunteer in a different year.

In addition, theatre websites change, and as noted in the first section of this report, it can be very difficult to find details of access performances online, so some omissions may have been made. Also, the boundaries between some types of access are blurred, notably some relaxed performances may also be signed, and some relaxed performances are also listed as Dementia-friendly. Equally, performances with integrated access may include multiple forms of access. In addition, some types of access were easier to track down than others.

> **"**The show with BSL interpretation had an easily visible icon marking it as such when browsing all performances – Audio Described I had to click on a specific performance to find out it was Audio Described."

Some theatres are represented by shared websites e.g. Ambassadors Theatre Group website **www.atgtickets.com/venues/apollo-victoria-theatre** hosts information about shows at the Victoria Palace theatre, the Bristol Hippodrome, the Edinburgh Playhouse, Leas Cliff Hall, Folkestone, Kings & Theatre Royal, Glasgow, the Liverpool Empire, The Manchester Opera House and Palace Theatre among others. Consequently, there is no direct correspondence between the number of theatres and the number of websites. However, we have used the number of websites as a proxy in order to reflect access services provided by theatres in the UK in 2023.

16. Endnotes

1   Research into these topics include Walczak (2016) Garman (2011), Starr & Braun (2020).

2   **https://warwick.ac.uk/services/socialinclusion/projects/ letstalkaboutdisability/assistancedogs/#:~:text=7%2C000%20people%20 in%20the%20UK,as%20well%20as%20medical%20detection.**

VOCALEYES

VocalEyes (VocalEyes.co.uk) bring museums to life for blind and visually impaired visitors.

>> StageTEXT

Stagetext (StageText.org) is a deaf-led charity passionate about making culture accessible to all with the use of captions, live subtitles, digital subtitles and training.

cae Centre for Accessible Environments
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Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE.org.uk) provides access audits for public venues of all types.