

BFI FAN: Access Directory

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Contents

A directory of collated external resources, materials, and toolkits focusing on film exhibition accessibility for Deaf and disabled audiences.

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About the Author

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Introductory Statement

Accessibility is a continuously evolving and developing practice and framework that must be approached holistically for it to be sustainable, reliable, and high-quality. This directory is categorised — beginning with education before moving onto practical step-by-step actions for the planning and delivery of a film event. For genuine, holistic access and inclusion, accessible best practices have to be embedded into a project blueprint, as accessibility cannot be treated as an afterthought.

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An Introduction to Disability Awareness

Before developing and embedding accessible practices within your activity, it's important to educate yourself on disability, access needs, and ableism in order to create a safe and welcoming space for disabled audiences. You can find more information and links to providers of disability and Deafness awareness training further below.

- Social model of disability

Below are a variety of explanations of the social and justice models of disability from an array of UK-based disability-focused and disability-led charities and groups. Do bear in mind that the language may differ across these resources:

- **Scope's** explanation of the [social model of disability](#)
 - **Disability Rights UK's** [explanation of the social model of disability](#)
 - **Sense's** explanation of the [social model of disability](#)
- **Language**

The BFI adopts **identity-first language**, and when

referring to 'disabled people', is inclusive of the Deaf community and neurodiverse people. This practice is rooted in the social model of disability based on the disability civil rights movement. An example of identity-first language is saying 'disabled person' as opposed to 'person with a disability', which is an example of person-first language.

The language surrounding disability is always evolving, and there may be international differences and individual preferences within the disability community. It's important to remember that the disability community is not monolithic, but a vast spectrum of individual experiences of disability. There are also some individuals and groups who don't identify with the term "disability", including some members of the Deaf community. It's always best to ask an individual how they prefer to identify and what language they use if they are being referred to in a specific way. You can find out more below:

- **Disability Rights UK**'s explanation of [language surrounding disability](#)
- **Autistic Self-Advocacy Network**'s exploration of [identity-first language](#)
- **Disability Wales**' information on [inclusive language](#)

- **Disability awareness training**

Education around disability, ableism, and access issues is imperative as part of anyone's "accessibility and inclusion journey" - to learn how to be a genuine ally. Below are a variety of training providers of Deaf awareness training, and wider disability awareness:

- **RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People)**'s [Deaf awareness training](#)
- [Deaf awareness training](#) from **Remark!**
- [Deaf awareness training](#) from **Deafinitely Theatre**
- **Independent Cinema Office**'s cinema guide of [British Sign Language \(BSL\) phrases](#)
- [Disability training](#) from **Little By Little Films**
- [Disability equality training](#) from **Shape Arts**
- **Quiplash**'s [disability and accessibility training](#)

An Introduction to Accessible Film Exhibition

Below is an introduction to the provision of accessible screenings and the industry and audience terms used to describe accessible screenings and access materials. You can also familiarise yourself with the **UK Disability Arts Alliance's** [Seven Principles](#).

- An introduction to accessible screenings

The phrase “accessible screenings” is a catchall, umbrella term for screenings that centre audiences with access needs. These can be categorised into three main screening formats; descriptive subtitled, audio-described, and relaxed. Below are introductory and comprehensive guides on accessible screenings and access provisions within a film exhibition context.

- Guide on why you should [make your cinema inclusive](#), by **Independent Cinema Office**
- **FWD-Doc's** [toolkit for inclusion and accessibility](#), (which includes a section on audiences)
- **Film Event Accessibility Working Group's** checklist and resources on [accessible film exhibition](#)

- **Scottish Queer International Film Festival's** guide to [Deaf and disabled accessibility](#), including accessible screenings
- **Sidecard's** [guides for festivals and venues](#)

- Terminology

The terminology around access materials isn't standardised across the sector, and this can cause issues within operations, and, ultimately, for audiences. Even though there may be technical differences, some terms are used interchangeably by audiences and industry professionals, so it's vital to be sure of what you're referencing!

Access materials refer to materials and files surrounding cinema accessibility and would commonly refer to descriptive subtitles and audio description.

Descriptive subtitles (DS) transcribe dialogue as well as descriptions of relevant and important aspects of a film's soundtrack i.e. sound effects and music (also known as HoH, SDH, and captions).

Audio description (AD) is an additional audio track that describes important visual information such as body language, movements, and locations. This would be integrated with the film's original soundtrack so it wouldn't overlap with dialogue. In cinemas, this

is typically delivered through headsets that can be collected from the box office.

All screenings can be played with AD if an AD track is available, as it can only be heard through the headset, not through the screening room speakers.

- **Sidecard's** detailed [glossary of terms](#) surrounding access files and materials

Accessible Screenings

- **ICO's** information on [subtitling and audio description](#)

(**Note:** This resource provides a basic overview of **DS** and **AD**, and contains further blog posts, reading materials, and practical resources.)

Below is more detailed information on descriptive subtitled, audio-described, and relaxed screenings:

- **Descriptive Subtitled Screenings**

- Charlie Little's blog on the [importance of descriptive subtitles](#), written for **ICO**
- Guide to [developing Deaf audiences](#) from **ICO**
- **RNID's** information on attending the [cinema for Deaf audiences](#)

(**Note:** This resource is intended for Deaf audiences attending multiplex cinemas, but provides an overview of assistive equipment available at some cinemas.)

- **Reclaim The Frame**'s blog on [standardising accessible cinema](#) for Deaf audiences
- **YourLocalCinema** is a website that [lists subtitled screenings](#) in your local area

(**Note:** This website provides information on both descriptive-subtitled screenings and language-subtitled screenings, so be mindful of this, as only descriptive subtitles are fully accessible to Deaf audiences. See the **Terminology** section to learn more.)

- **Accessible Screenings UK** is a [searchable listings database for accessible screenings](#) in UK cinemas. The **UK Cinema Association (UKCA)** runs and manages this website

(**Note:** This website includes screenings with descriptive subtitles and screenings with language subtitles, so be mindful of this when using the website. Only descriptive subtitles are fully accessible to Deaf audiences, and it's important to clarify the distinction between the two types of screenings. See the **Terminology** section to learn more.)

- **Audio Described Screenings**

- **ICO**'s toolkit for [welcoming visually impaired](#)

[audiences](#)

- **FAN The Bigger Picture**'s [article on audio description](#)
- **RNIB**'s [overview on audio description](#) for blind and partially sighted audiences

(**Note:** This resource is a basic outline of mainstream audio description provision across cinemas, streaming, and physical media, which is intended to educate blind and partially sighted people.)

- **MySoundCinema** is an [online viewing platform for audio-described films](#)

- **Relaxed Screenings**

It's important to note that "relaxed" is an umbrella term, and doesn't specify the type of format adjustments made to include audiences with access needs. Screenings intended for neurodiverse audiences may not be suitable for audiences with dementia or audiences with learning disabilities. It's crucial to provide accompanying context and specific information about the access provisions you intend to provide, i.e., seating capacity, dimming lights, lowering volume, etc.

(**Note:** Best practices across the different forms of relaxed screenings differ from one another, so do speak with those with experience and expertise in facilitating the format of relaxed screening you wish to provide.)

- **BFI Southbank** has a regular programme of relaxed screenings and a [guide to delivering these screenings](#)
- For the **BFI**, film critic and programmer **Lillian Crawford** has written about her [experiences with relaxed screenings](#)
- **ICO**'s [blog on relaxed screenings](#)
- **Inclusive Cinema**'s guide to [screenings for audiences with autism](#)
- **Film Hub Scotland** hosted an online session with Hannah Murray of Spectrum Film Club to discuss [screenings for neurodiverse audiences](#)
- **Oska Bright Film Festival**'s guide to [welcoming learning-disabled audiences](#)
- **Inclusive Cinema**'s guide to screenings for [audiences with dementia](#)
- **Inclusive Cinema**'s information pack on [Dementia-](#)

[friendly screenings](#)

- **Alzheimer's Society**'s guide to [Dementia-friendly screenings](#)

- **Access materials**

As discussed in the **Terminology** section, the term “**access materials**” primarily refers to the subtitle and audio description files created by access materials providers, which are then used by exhibitors to facilitate accessible screenings.

- **Sidecard** is an online database of [film exhibition access materials](#)

Sidecard is an online database designed to record and track access materials made for films. Users can search and upload details of descriptive subtitles, audio description files and other materials related to cinema accessibility.

Recording which files are in existence and who may be contacted to make use of them will, by extension, **promote accessible screenings** and ensure that films can reach the **widest possible audience**. As a resource, Sidecard also hopes to bridge the knowledge gap which discourages filmmakers, distributors and exhibitors from facilitating accessible screenings.

- Access Materials Providers

The below resources detail providers of access materials:

- **Sidecard's** [list of access providers](#)
- **Inclusive Cinema's** [list of access providers](#)

Venue Accessibility

Ensuring the venue meets standards of physical access, such as wheelchair accessibility, is crucial to welcoming audiences with access needs. There can be physical constraints with older buildings, but this should be met with transparency for audiences and a proactive commitment to create positive changes and solutions as part of a long-term strategy.

- **ICO's** guide to making your [venue more accessible](#) for Deaf audiences
- **Scope** has a comprehensive and informative [guide on venue accessibility](#)

(**Note:** This guide is from the perspective of someone researching if a venue or event is accessible to them. This outlook provides insights and information into the different aspects of venue accessibility you should consider for your cinema and space.)

- **Euan's Guide** is a [review website for venue accessibility](#), where users can upload their experiences of access at different establishments. You can see if your venue has been logged and

where to improve

- **AccessAble** is a website that list [venue access guides](#)
- **WelcoMe** is a [digital customer service system](#) for customers with access needs

Live Access Measures

There is an array of access measures you can provide at live events. It is important to consider your capacity and resources when arranging access provisions for your film events. For sustainable and reliable provision, you should focus on what is realistically achievable for your format and timeframe, concentrate on providing high-quality access for your audiences, and learn to budget, embed, and expand these practices into your planning and delivery so you can improve and increase your provision over a long-term strategy. The aim is to involve access considerations from the beginning of project planning to avoid barriers and issues later on.

- **Live captioning**

For film events with introductions and post-screening activities, such as live Q&As, you can book live captioning so that audiences who need subtitles can experience and engage in the whole film event, not just the film screening. If you provide a screening with descriptive subtitles, additional activity should have live captions where possible; if you provide an activity with live captions, then the screening should have descriptive subtitles.

- **Inclusive Cinema's** list of [access providers](#)
- **British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation**

BSL-English interpretation may be required for live elements of a film event, such as an introduction or post-screening conversation so that attendees who use BSL can experience the full event. The film screening should also be presented with descriptive subtitles if BSL-English interpretation is being provided for the event. BSL is not synonymous with deafness; not every Deaf or hard-of-hearing person uses BSL and may instead prefer live captions.

- You can email the **LGBTQIA Interpreter Network** to send out BSL interpretation booking requests. Their email address can be found here: lgbtqia.itn@gmail.com
- [Interpreters of Colour Network](#)
- **Inclusive Cinema's** list of [BSL interpretation providers](#)

Additional Access Measures

- **Access roles**

It's important to engage with dedicated Access Consultants and Access Coordinators who can best advise on the accessibility of your film event, especially as this is a field that is in constant development. It is also of value to have trained staff or team members who are able to provide on-site support for access requests or access provision coordination during an event or festival.

- **Dial F for Freelancers** is a platform in the UK & Ireland dedicated to those freelancing in film exhibition and distribution. You can search their [directory for access freelancers](#)

- **Assistance dog awareness**

It is important that your staff and team members are aware of the laws surrounding assistance dogs and that guide dog refusals are illegal. See below for more information:

- [Assistance Dogs UK](#)

- You can learn more about [Guide Dogs UK's work and campaigns](#)

- **Sliding scale ticketing**

Affordability in film exhibition is a wider access issue, and ticket pricing can be a barrier to many different audiences. With regard to disabled audiences, disabled people are much more likely to experience poverty and/or unemployment compared to non-disabled people. **Scope** provides more information and statistics on [disabled people in employment](#).

- **Matchbox Cineclub's** guide to [sliding scale ticketing](#)
- **SQIFF's** guide to [Deaf and disabled accessibility](#), including accessible screenings
- **BFI FAN's** resource on [reducing socioeconomic barriers for cinema audiences](#)

- **Online screenings**

Hosting online screenings and live discussions, as well as making pre-recorded content available online, can make film festivals and film events more accessible to those who may not be able to travel and those who may have caring responsibilities.

- **Matchbox Cine's** article on [hybrid film events and accessibility](#) for Film Feels

- **Access notes and content notes**

Content notes (sometimes known as content warnings, trigger warnings, or CW/TW) provide references to any themes or subject matter that may cause distress or harm.

Access notes provide information on any audio or visual elements that may cause distress or harm, such as rapid flashing, jumpscares, or sudden, loud sounds.

- **ICO's** [blog on content notes](#)
- You can also refer to **SQIFF's** [Deaf and Disabled Accessibility Guide](#)

(**Note:** This subject and access provision is an underdeveloped area within film exhibition, with few resources available.)

- **Visual self-descriptions**

For screenings with introductions or post-screening conversations, it may be helpful for speakers to provide visual descriptions of themselves for blind and partially sighted audiences.

- For **VocalEyes** introduction and guide on [self-descriptions](#)

Accessible marketing and communications

Using the holistic approach, it's important that communications and marketing around screenings with access provisions are also accessible.

- **Film Hub Scotland's** session on [inclusive marketing](#)
- **ICO's** [tips on accessible marketing](#)
- **RNIB's** [guide to accessible social media](#)
- **Vocal Eye's** [best practices for digital access](#) for blind and partially sighted audiences
- **Scope's** [beginner guide to digital accessibility](#)
- **Scope's** guide to [writing hyperlink text](#)
- **Accessible formats**

If you are providing printed or digital documents such as programming notes or festival brochures, you may need accessible versions of these.

- **RNIB's** guide to [accessible formats and](#)

[communications](#) for blind and partially sighted people

- **AbilityNet**'s guide to [creating accessible documents](#)
- **Shape Art**'s [accessible marketing guide](#)
- **British Dyslexia Association** [dyslexia-friendly style guide](#)

Disability Programming

As part of a wider approach to access and inclusion within film exhibition, intersectional and marginalised perspectives should be a part of the programming and the screen stories that we platform. Consider working with disabled curators and film programmers, and review the representation of disability within your own programme.

- **Sandra Alland**'s opinion blog on [disability and Deaf representation in film](#)
- **Kristen Lopez**'s writing on the [representation of disabled women in film](#)
- [Crip Camp | A Disability Revolution](#)
- **Watershed**'s blog by **William Mager** on [Deaf people and silent films](#)

Outreach and Engagement

Disabled audiences are historically underserved so consistent, accessible outreach and engagement efforts are necessary for audience development. Make sure to research local and national disability and Deaf groups in your community.

- **Disability Arts Online** is an [event listing website](#) where you can list events that have access measures and/or features disability
- **FWD-Doc's** [Film Event Accessibility Scorecard](#)

(Note: If you incorporate the Scorecard as part of your surveying and evaluation, audiences can provide feedback on your event(s) accessibility)

Disabled Creatives and Advocacy Groups

There are a vast number of disabled creatives and accessible arts advocacy groups. See below for some examples:

- [Film Event Accessibility Working Group](#)
- [BFI's Press Reset campaign](#)
- [BFI Disability Screen Advisory Group](#)
- [Documentary Filmmakers with Disabilities \(FWD-Doc\)](#)
- [CRIptic Arts](#)
- [Deaf & Disabled People in TV](#)
- [TripleC/Disabled Artists Networking Community \(DANC\)](#)

Deaf and Disability Festivals

There are many UK and international film festivals that centre disabled filmmakers and disability narratives:

- **Together! Disability Film Festival** is a [disability arts, culture and human rights festival](#) based in the UK
- **Busting the Bias Film Festival** is a disability film festival organised by **BFI Inclusion**
- **Osaka Bright** is a [learning disability film festival](#) based in the UK
- **Deaffest** is a UK-based festival that champions [Deaf art and film](#)
- Based in the US, **Superfest Disability Film Festival** is the [world's longest-running disability film festival](#)
- [Easterseals Disability Film Challenge](#)
- [ReelAbilities](#) (US-based)

Additional Resources

- See **Your Fat Friend's** resource for information on [seating accessibility](#)
- **Sidecard's** comprehensive [access resource list](#)
- **ReelAccess'** [guide to accessible film festivals](#)

(**Note:** This document is produced from a project with the Canadian Government of Ontario but may provide useful information relevant to your events)

- **BFI's** [resources on disability](#)
- **Mencap's** guide to [communicating with people with a learning disability](#)
- **Fringe's** [guide to event accessibility](#)
- [Articles on digital access](#) from the **AMA Creative Hive**