

Guide to hiring disabled production talent in the TV industry



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Fantastic, experienced and creative disabled talent abounds in our industry, but disabled people are significantly under-represented, both on and off screen.

Welcoming and empowering deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people across all levels and roles is sure to enrich your output and organisations, and broadcasting as a whole. And identifying, hiring and working with disabled people is often more straightforward than you may think.

To fulfil their roles, people usually (but not always) just require some adjustments and a bit of extra support and planning. Most disabled people themselves know what they need and will be open with you if you ask, as long as you create an environment where they feel comfortable and confident to discuss their needs and know that this information won't be used unfairly against them. It is best practice for you, as employers, to take the lead in these conversations.

This brief guide is here to support you when you hire disabled employees and freelancers, and to explain our expectations when it comes to working with disabled talent on productions for Channel 4 as a part of fulfilling our Commissioning Diversity Guidelines. You will probably find that the principles and suggestions outlined here will help you create workplaces and cultures which are inclusive and welcoming of all talented people, not just disabled people.

There are additional guides for fully including and supporting disabled talent within your teams once they are hired, and for progressing disabled talent in the longer term.

Disability has been left behind, it isn't talked about enough and it has now become a real problem in our industry. Our job at Channel 4 is to help change it. People have rights to go and get jobs, this is not a favour, it's not charity, it's about thinking about where there are skills in our industry which we're not accessing.

Alex Mahon
Chief Executive
Channel 4

Back to basics

Who is disabled?

To paraphrase the **UK's Equality Act 2010**, a disability is a physical or mental condition that is long-lasting and has a substantial adverse effect on day-to-day activities. This covers a wide and diverse range of conditions, impairments, injuries and illnesses, including those which are not immediately apparent such as mental ill health, chronic illness, neurodivergence or learning disabilities or difficulties. Under this definition, 20% of the population – ie one in five people – are disabled in the UK today (source: Department for Work & Pensions, **Family Resources Survey 2019/20**).

It is for each person to decide if they identify as disabled under this definition. Many people have conditions or impairments which are not immediately apparent to an outside observer, but definitely entitle them to identify as disabled. Some have conditions or impairments which, to an outside observer, might meet the criteria and will choose not to identify as disabled. Others may choose not to disclose or share openly that they are disabled. Please note, you may still have legal duties towards all these groups under the Equality Act 2010 (see below).

Everybody is different; the best rule of thumb is to avoid any assumptions and to be led by the individual.

What are employers' responsibilities towards disabled people?

Employers must make reasonable adjustments to make sure disabled workers, both freelancers and employees, are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs. This means removing any barriers they may face in doing their job because of their conditions or impairments, enabling them to perform on equal par with their peers. It is not necessary to know *what* an individual's impairment, condition, injury or illness is; the only information you need is the reasonable adjustments they require. Adjustments can be in terms of the working environment and process, technology and equipment, or communication methods. Many disabled people say this is the most important thing an employer can do to support them.

Why the emphasis on adjustments?

Focusing on adjustments that the employer needs to make for a disabled person originally stems from the **social model of disability**. This way of thinking about disability says that people are disabled by barriers in society, and not by their conditions, impairments, injuries or illnesses. Barriers can be physical, like buildings not having step-free access, or they can be caused by people's attitudes to difference, like assuming disabled people can't do certain things.

The social model of disability looks at how to remove the barriers that restrict or exclude someone from taking part, rather than what is 'wrong' with someone. It helps us all to recognise the external barriers which make life harder for disabled people, and to identify solutions. Rather than expecting the disabled person to fix or change themselves, it puts emphasis on wider society to adapt to ensure disabled people aren't excluded or disadvantaged.

You can find out more about the social model of disability at the **Scope website**.

7 principles for attracting disabled talent

7 principles for attracting disabled talent continued

1 Get ahead of the game

Consistently work on building up a good network of disabled talent, so that you already have fantastic disabled people on your radar before you come to hire into specific roles or crew up particular productions. Regularly offer CV and/or application masterclasses to everyone, actively including disabled talent; do not just reach out to disabled talent only when you are making content directly related to disability.

The biggest shame on reaching the end of a job is the surprise from those who have engaged you, at how talented they have found you to be and how capable you are. Why should that be a surprise?

**Anonymous
Director**

2 Expect to be working with disabled people

Start with the likelihood that people applying for your roles might well be disabled (whether immediately apparent or not) and make things as accessible as possible for everybody from the outset.

3 Never assume anything, of anybody

Ask everybody, clearly and explicitly, if they need any adjustments or have any access requirements for the hiring process. Do so respectfully and sensitively – and then let the disabled person direct the conversation, asking open questions if you need to.

4 Remember that every disabled person is different

Allow as much time and budget as possible, and make any adjustments to the hiring process on an individual level, to address specific barriers. Bear in mind that not all conditions or impairments are easily apparent, and that people can often have more than one. The impact of their conditions and impairments are also likely to fluctuate on a regular basis as well.

7 principles for attracting disabled talent continued

5 Focus on adjustments, not conditions or impairments

In these conversations, always put the emphasis on any adjustments you can make, rather than challenges or limitations related to any conditions or impairments.

6 Be open to doing things differently

At every stage of the hiring process, provide the option for applicants to do things in more than one way, according to what best suits them.

7 Engender the confidence among disabled people that you are truly inclusive

Be very clear that you welcome applications from disabled people, and actively demonstrate how you are a great place for disabled people to work.

For example:

- Point to any adjustments or access provisions your organisation already has in place (ie step-free access or flexible working arrangements)
- Consider providing a guaranteed interview to any disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria for the job, even if you are not an official Disability Confident employer
- Use language and make references which signal you understand what is involved in working with disabled talent
- Showcase content you have made with both on- and off-screen disabled talent

Many people with ‘invisible’ disabilities are afraid to declare them on their CV or at interview because of past bad experiences. We’ve all heard the expression ‘but you look normal’. Be more open to all kinds of disability not just the physical. As you could be missing out on the best person for the job.

Hannah
Floor Manager/Producer

Tips for:

being disability-inclusive in adverts and posts

Actively encourage applications from disabled people

- Say more than once that you welcome applications from disabled people, mentioning explicitly that you will support disabled people with any reasonable adjustments required
- Offer support with Access to Work applications and related paperwork
- Include disabled people in any promotional material you have for your company – making sure that you cover a range of different conditions or impairments and are aware of intersectionality among the disabled people you feature (eg in gender, age, race and ethnicity etc)

Make sure adverts and job descriptions are clear and comprehensive

- Be sure that the job spec only includes what you really need (eg does every runner have to have a driving licence?) and focus on the outcomes required for any task rather than the technique you expect the person to use to achieve it (eg 'can take detailed meeting notes' rather than 'must use Microsoft Word and have a typing speed of 80wpm')
- Be clear from the start exactly what the job entails, so that disabled talent can make a fair assessment as to whether they are likely to be suitable, rather than having to do extra work to reach out to you for clarification
- Be open to questions from disabled people who may be unsure about applying based on the job criteria you have given and/or may need information on the accessibility of your offices or locations. Provide a named point of contact for this and respond as promptly as possible

Produce adverts and posts which are accessible and inclusive

- Advertise in multiple spaces and across a wide range of networks (including the organisations listed at the end of this guide), and be sure that all websites you use are fully accessible, including your own
- Keep the wording clear and simple; use plain English
- Give descriptions of any pictures or visuals such as logos (known as Alt Text or Image Description)
- Consider producing accessible video (with audio description and subtitles), infographic or British Sign Language versions of your job adverts

Tips for:

being disability-inclusive in applications

Be flexible about how people apply

- Avoid having just one fixed means of applying for roles
- Offer and/or encourage alternatives to long written applications (eg sending in a video)
- When setting closing dates, allow long enough for people who might need support or more time to apply

Look for ways to be inclusive and accessible in the application process

- If possible, create a dedicated section of the application form for asking about people's access requirements and reasonable adjustments for attending any interview. If you have a less formal application process, make sure you ask about this as part of your communications
- Ensure that any tasks you set in the application process are clear and fully accessible
- Make yourselves available to answer any questions prior to application, preferably via a named point of contact

Be open-minded when reviewing applications

- Don't discriminate against spelling mistakes in CVs
- Recognise that the career history of disabled talent might be unconventional – with gaps and enforced career breaks, crossing multiple genres/roles, or non-linear progression

You need to look beyond 'who has the most experience on their CV?' because all you're doing then is reinforcing historical inequalities.

Jack
Writer/Director

Tips for:

being disability-inclusive in interviews

Take the disabled person's lead on access and adjustments

- Where possible, ask people their preferences for how, when and where they would like to be interviewed; they may prefer to meet in person or on a video call; they may want to meet on neutral territory or at a location they are familiar with rather than your offices; they may be unable to meet very early in the morning or late in the day; they may prefer a quiet space
- If you are conducting interviews in your office, assess the space for accessibility and ensure you are aware of any information you may need to provide when requested
- If your building is not fully accessible, identify an appropriate nearby accessible space in advance where you can offer to meet candidates
- If you are interviewing on a video call, avoid imposing specific tech or platforms
- Be prepared to pay for British Sign Language interpreters and other external support if required
- Don't offer adjustments at the interview stage that would not be feasible if needed for the job (eg giving extra time to complete a task in hiring that would not be possible in the job because of real-time constraints). However, always bear in mind that you do have an obligation to provide adjustments that are reasonable, both at interview and when working in the job
- Any information you are given about adjustments and access requirements should be kept sensitively and only shared on a need-to-know basis

Communicate clearly and regularly throughout the process

- Offer the opportunity to provide questions in advance
- Ensure that any tasks you set are clear, fully accessible, and communicated with plenty of time in advance
- Offer 360 feedback afterwards – both to support applicants from under-represented groups to actively learn for next time, and also to allow you to reflect on what worked and where you can improve, in terms of being fully inclusive of disabled applicants. However, don't put pressure on disabled people to inform you on topics about which information is widely available

Stay focused on the applicant's skills and experience

- Always speak directly to the disabled person, especially if they have an interpreter or support worker
- Don't ask about conditions, impairments, illnesses or injuries, even if the person has shared that they are disabled. The only exception here is if you need to find out whether the applicant will be able to carry out an intrinsic part of the job for which they are applying
- If you have any doubts about a person's ability to carry out that intrinsic function of the job, simply ask how they would do it – and accept the same level of evidence from them as you would anybody else
- Don't get drawn into too much detail. You simply need to be confident that the applicant has the skills and experience you need and that there are adjustments that could be made to enable them to do the job. The detail of those adjustments can and should be discussed once the job offer has been made

Networks to help widen your talent pool

DANC (Disabled Artists Networking Community)

– triplecmanchester@gmail.com

Have a weekly mailout for industry opportunities and will soon be launching their Talent Finder.

DANDI – info@dandi.org.uk

A branch of TriForce Creative Network who have a UK-wide, fully inclusive talent network with a focus on multiple under-represented groups including disabled people; check if fees apply.

Deaf & Disabled People in TV Facebook group

– deafanddisabledpeopleintv@gmail.com

A closed Facebook group, so admins will post job adverts for you.

FWD-Doc (Documentary Filmmakers with Disabilities) – www.fwd-doc.org/contact

Admins will post relevant roles related to documentaries/factual in their newsletter, listserv and Facebook group, and can recommend talent from their database.

Gritty Talent – www.grittytalent.tv

A talent discovery platform 'where diversity is a given', offering a bespoke talent search of their extensive database; fees apply.

The Neurodiverse Media Community – [facebook.com/groups/neurodiversemediacommunity](https://www.facebook.com/groups/neurodiversemediacommunity)

Their Facebook group is open to join and job roles can be posted with a maximum of once a week.

With Not For – kelly.gordon@withnotfor.co.uk and emma.gardner@withnotfor.co.uk

A traditional recruitment agency specialising in disabled talent from multiple sectors, so fees will apply.

Further resources and information on disability inclusion

| Organisation | Resources/training | Link/contact |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Beacon Films | Inclusive Screen Training – introductory interactive workshops are designed and led by disabled, autistic and neurodivergent filmmakers | <u>Inclusive Screen – Beacon Films</u> |
| BFI | Press Reset resources | <u>Resources BFI</u> |
| Creative Diversity Network | Disability 101 – one hour workshop, facilitated by disabled freelancers | <u>enquiries@creativitydiversitynetwork.com</u> |
| | Doubling Disability hub – practical advice for making productions disability inclusive | <u>Making your production disability-inclusive</u> |
| Deaf & Disabled People in TV | A network for reaching out to disabled production talent in TV, including bespoke advice on disability inclusion | <u>deafanddisabledpeopleintv@gmail.com</u> <u>bit.ly/DDPTV</u> |
| Disability Arts Online | Access to Work Guide – clarifies the Access to Work process and provides specific advice for the arts and cultural sector | <u>disabilityarts.online/projects/access-to-work-guide/</u> |
| Edinburgh International TV Festival | 2021 MacTaggart Lecture by Jack Thorne, spotlighting disabled representation in TV | <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaxwlpbJbbg</u> <u>Transcript: https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/news/mactaggart-lecture-in-full/5162627.article</u> |
| 104 films | Details of training opportunities, short film schemes and talent development | <u>www.104films.com</u> |
| FWD-Doc | A Toolkit for Inclusion & Accessibility: Changing the Narrative of Disability in Documentary Film, in association with Netflix and Doc Society | <u>www.fwd-doc.org/toolkit</u> |
| | Engagement Pack offering information and tips about engaging effectively with disabled colleagues and audiences in association with the BFI Doc Society Fund | <u>www.fwd-doc.org/engagement-pack</u> |
| PACT | Diversity Tool Kit to create a practical strategy to make your workplace and content more diverse | <u>diversity.pact.co.uk/tool-kit.html</u> |
| Screenskills | Working with Disabled Talent and Disability Awareness courses | <u>katherine.parsons@screenskills.com</u> |

Further resources and information on disability inclusion continued

| Organisation | Resources/training | Link/contact |
|-----------------|---|--|
| The Media Trust | Disability in the Media – disability awareness training for the media industry | katieb@mediatrust.org |
| Think Bigger | Online Disability Awareness Training | www.thinkbigger.uk.com/courses-and-workshops/online-disability-awareness-training heloise@thinkbigger.uk.com |
| Triple C (DANC) | Access, Awareness and Action Training | triplec.org.uk/aaa-training |
| | Disabled Artists' Networking Community – regular networking events for the industry to connect with disabled talent | triplec.org.uk/danc/ |
| | FWAQs – videos covering Frequently Worried About Questions | FWAQs 1 Terminology – YouTube FWAQs 2 – YouTube |
| | Start the Conversation – tips for increasing disabled creatives in your production | network.bfi.org.uk/news-and-features/industry-insights/start-conversation |
| WealdBSL | Deaf Awareness Training | Training – Weald British Sign Language |

For further information

Creative Diversity

4Producers

www.channel4.com/commissioning/creative-diversity

Contact us at:

disabledtalent@channel4.co.uk

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