



Guide to including disabled talent in the TV industry

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Introduction

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 organisation, 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 once you have hired disabled employees and freelancers, and to explain our basic 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.

As you will see, Channel 4 has adopted the TV Access Project (TAP) Guidelines for Disability Inclusion in UK Television Production, known as The 5As. The 5As are:

- 1. Anticipate**
- 2. Ask**
- 3. Assess**
- 4. Adjust**
- 5. Advocate**

We use these as a framework in this guide.

There are additional guides for hiring disabled talent within your teams in the first instance, 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 – i.e. one in five people – are disabled in the UK today (source: Department for Work and 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 yet they 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](#).

Back to basics continued

Is there financial support for putting adjustments in place?

Many disabled people have minimal adjustment needs and for those who do require them, the costs can range from nothing (e.g. for flexible working hours or clear communication of instructions) to very little (e.g. for adapted computer equipment or a portable chair to take on location), to a few hundred pounds (e.g. for assistive software to help use a computer or alternative furniture).

For more costly adjustments, there is Access to Work. This is a grant from the Department for Work and Pensions made to an individual disabled person to help them with support or adjustments. To receive an Access to Work grant the disabled person makes an application, not their employer or prospective employer – but we would encourage you to support them with both the original application and any subsequent admin (e.g. booking interpreters, claiming expenses etc.). Job offers for disabled talent should be made as early as possible so that an Access to Work application – and subsequent adjustments – can be put in place in good time. Some disabled freelancers who require regular support at work already have their funding in place and won't need any additional support in setting it up.

The funding covers expenses such as communication support, a support worker, assistive software for IT systems, or taxi fares if a person cannot use public transport. It does take time to apply and set up, so you may need to cover some costs which you can later reclaim when the funding is confirmed. Funding for ad hoc expenses such as transport or support workers is always paid retrospectively, so it is good practice for you, as an employer, to pay up front and recoup the costs, rather than leaving employees or freelancers (albeit temporarily) out of pocket.

Access to Work does not cover items that are considered standard equipment, standard business costs, or health and safety requirements; these you have to fund. Depending on your size, you may have to share some costs, but the lion's share will probably be covered – particularly for those with costly or extensive needs. There is no set amount awarded, it depends entirely upon the individual disabled person's circumstances, but the total amount awarded is capped per year.

Access to Work is not a silver bullet; it doesn't provide the answer for all access requirements and reasonable adjustments – especially because funding is limited and only for specific purposes. There remains an obligation to employers to invest in support for disabled team members, both freelance and staff, and to create fully inclusive teams and ways of working.

How can Channel 4 help with adjustments costs?

Where possible, any significant actual or potential costs for reasonable adjustments which are not going to be covered by Access to Work or by you directly as an employer should be anticipated and included within the original programme budget.

These should be discussed with your Production Finance Manager prior to the commission being submitted to the Business Approval Board (BAB). Where the costs are anticipated they may be ringfenced as a Specific Contingency for use as required and agreed.

If significant additional costs for reasonable adjustments occur after the programme budget has been agreed, and the absence of those adjustments is prohibitive to the inclusion of a disabled contributor who otherwise would be cast in a programme, this should be raised with the Commissioning Editor and Production Finance Manager as soon as possible, who will explore funding options.

6 principles for truly including disabled talent in your team

Anticipate

6 principles for truly including disabled talent in your team continued

1 Expect to be working with disabled people

Start with the likelihood that people joining – and already in – your team might well be disabled (whether apparent or not), and make working life (both in and out of the office) as accessible as possible for everybody from the outset.

Ask

6 principles for truly including disabled talent in your team continued

2 Never assume anything, of anybody

Ask everybody, clearly and explicitly, if they need any adjustments or have any access requirements for carrying out their role. Do so respectfully and sensitively – and then let the disabled person direct the conversation, asking open questions if you need to. Always take the disabled person's lead and always speak directly to the disabled person, especially if they have an interpreter or support worker.

3 Remember that every disabled person is different

Allow as much time and budget as possible, and make any adjustments 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.

Assess

6 principles for truly including disabled talent in your team continued

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

Use language and make regular references which signal you understand what is involved in working with disabled talent. For example, explicitly confirm that you allow flexibility in the working schedule for condition or impairment-related treatments or appointments, both expected and unexpected – as you would any health appointments. Or, openly communicate how often you provide compulsory disability inclusion training for your teams.

Adjust

6 principles for truly including disabled talent in your team continued

5 Be open to doing things differently

Provide the option for team members to carry out tasks and achieve objectives in more than one way, according to what best suits them in order to fulfil their role. In doing so, focus on the outcomes required for any task rather than the technique or process you expect the person to use to achieve it.

Advocate

6 principles for truly including disabled talent in your team continued

6 Set high standards for everybody

Make your expectations clear for everybody in the wider team when it comes to disability inclusion and don't tolerate any inappropriate behaviour, language or attitudes.

Unless you make the industry accessible to disabled people, the same old stories with the same characters, aimed at the same audiences will continue to be churned out again and again, and you'll be ignoring 20% of the population.

Neil
Writer/Director

Tips for: being disability-inclusive when onboarding

Anticipate

Offer as long a lead time for new roles as you possibly can

- This is to ensure that any practical arrangements and/or funding applications can be put in place before a disabled team member starts working with you

Ask

Have inclusion conversations with all new starters

- Create a working culture and environment where conversations about adjustments and inclusion of all kinds are par for the course, and always framed as something positive and constructive
- As a part of this, make it your policy to specifically ask everybody who you have invited to join your team if they have any access or adjustment requirements, as a matter of course and as part of the onboarding process. It is helpful at this stage to mention any access provisions you already have in place

Talk about adjustments and access requirements constructively and sensitively

- Have the conversation about any adjustments needed in a confidential, safe way – at a time, in a place and using a medium, which works best for your disabled team member
- Ask open questions and listen to what reasonable adjustments or access requirements your disabled team member has, if any. Bear in mind that many disabled people know what reasonable

adjustments work for them, so offering and pushing for alternative solutions – whilst meant with the best of intentions – is often counterproductive

- If you have specific questions which you would like to ask for clarification, ask sensitively, in private and only on a need-to-know basis; always give the option not to answer
- If you are unsure of the appropriate language to use, ask the individual what their preference is
- Make sure it is only those people who definitely need to be in the conversation who are attending
- Throughout the conversation, put the emphasis on any adjustments needed rather than challenges or limitations related to any conditions or impairments
- If you are unsure that your conversation has covered everything; the situation is complex; and/or your disabled team member is unsure what adjustments might be available to them, consider arranging a specialist assessment by an Access Coordinator, or a third-party organisation (see resources below for suggestions)

We should be able to declare without fear of not being hired. We all have different needs and different support [...] It's about effective communication, it's about how can we support you? [...] it's about fostering a place that makes you feel welcome and valued.

Maria
Producer/Filmmaker

Tips for: being disability-inclusive when onboarding continued

Adjust

Be creative, clear and confidential

- When it comes to discussing and agreeing adjustments, aim for what is sensible and effective and try not to be overly prescriptive in the solution – there is often more than one way
- Keep a confidential and secure record of what has been agreed, inviting your disabled team member to make any changes or clarifications, and then to confirm they are in agreement with it

Hidden disabilities are often forgotten about once you're in post or seen as moaning if you ask for adjustments – or at least you, as a disabled person, feel this could be the case.

Jack
Writer/Director

Tips for: being disability-inclusive when working together as a team

Anticipate

Have inclusive practices as a matter of course

- Carefully consider your working hours and practices to make sure that these do not exclude disabled people. Long working hours don't just impact on pain, energy or concentration levels, but can also affect the availability of, or funding for interpreters and support workers, for example, or access to medical treatment or appointments
- If a disabled team member is, or is feeling, excluded by some of the working practices within the team, look at ways to adjust how the team works to fit them in, rather than putting emphasis on the disabled team member to find a workaround. Consider this even if it means the majority of the team doing things a different way in order to include your disabled team member(s). You will probably find that any new way of working has multiple other benefits too, for lots of people. For example, having a calmer working environment, having meeting-free days, using bigger font on scripts, or setting daily goals and tasks every morning as a team might be useful for everyone

Adjust

Only explain any adjustments, access or support in place on a need-to-know basis

- Never disclose to the wider team that someone is disabled, or any details of their condition, impairment, injury or illness to anyone else without express permission and clear justification
- If adjustments are obvious to everybody in the team but might benefit from some explanation (e.g. a disabled team member working shorter days, or having an interpreter or support worker with them), then – with their permission, in a way they request, and using an explanation of their choice – have this communicated upfront to the wider team as a matter of fact and without any fuss, and then move on
- Always give the disabled team member the option of communicating information about their adjustments or access requirements themselves – but do not put them in a position where they are required to justify their adjustments to other team members

Always respect the adjustments that have been put in place

- Don't put the disabled person in a position where they have to remind you (or any team members who are already aware) of the adjustments in place for them
- Never move or remove assistive equipment (such as adapted chairs, specialist screens etc.) without the express permission of the person who uses them
- Be mindful of social plans and remember to consider adjustments and access requirements for events and plans made for outside the working environment

Tips for: being disability-inclusive when working together as a team

continued

Advocate

Make disability inclusion part of your working culture

- Lead by example and talk about disability inclusion as a matter of course with the wider team, working actively to encourage it
- Actively support your team to continue to develop their understanding of disabled people and their experiences – point the team to resources, use positive and enabling language, set up training, and mark occasions such as Disability Pride Month or Mental Health Awareness Week
- Make disability inclusion a truly team effort; don't expect a disabled team member to single-handedly educate others, don't assume they want to be a subject matter expert on disability for the team, and don't hold them up specifically as an example

Tips for: being disability-inclusive when reviewing and appraising

Assess

Review any adjustments

- Be open to adding or changing adjustments and support as time goes by, as circumstances can often change or unpredicted situations can arise. Arrange regular check-ins to ensure your disabled team member still has everything they need to fulfil their role and be prepared to adapt the support you have put in place

Regularly check in with everyone

- Consider catching up with all team members after a little time has passed on their contracts, as to whether they need any adjustments or support. Someone who wasn't comfortable disclosing to begin with, might feel more confident to have this conversation once they have built a relationship with you

Carry out appraisals as usual

- Review and assess your disabled team members' performance in the same way and with the same regularity as you would anyone else. Always check your bias to make sure you are not putting them under any extra or unnecessary scrutiny. Equally, don't avoid reviewing their work just because they are disabled
- If there are performance management issues, consider – and ask first – if this could be due to a lack of adjustments in place or support not being sufficient. If and when you have ruled this out, then address your concerns in the same way you would with any other team member

Access assessments and inclusivity advice

These are just some suggestions to highlight the range of expertise and specialist support that is available in this field. Please carry out your own research and follow your usual due diligence if hiring third-party contractors to work with you.

- **Bridge06** is an agency and consultancy working to bring an Access First Approach to the media and entertainment industries and beyond
- **Celebrating Disability** provide support for businesses developing their workplace culture to be inclusive of disabled people
- **Centre for Accessible Environments** provide consultancy, training, research and publications on building design and management to meet all user needs, including disabled and older people
- **Local surveyors** can provide disability access assessments for buildings and spaces
- **Maximus** carry out workplace assessments of individuals and case management for putting adjustments in place, as well as assessing buildings and spaces
- **Proudlock Associates** are a disability access consultancy who provide expert plan appraisals, professional access audits, and intelligent access strategies
- **With Not For** are mainly a recruitment agency but offer support services for workplace inclusion

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	Inclusive Screen – Beacon Films
BFI	Press Reset resources	Resources BFI
Creative Diversity Network	Disability 101 – one hour workshop, facilitated by disabled freelancers	enquiries@creativitydiversitynetwork.com
	Doubling Disability hub – practical advice for making productions disability inclusive	Making your production disability-inclusive
Deaf and Disabled People in TV	A network for reaching out to disabled production talent in TV, including bespoke advice on disability inclusion	www.ddptv.org
Disability Arts Online	Access to Work Guide – clarifies the Access to Work process and provides specific advice for the arts and cultural sector	disabilityarts.online/projects/access-to-work-guide/
Edinburgh International TV Festival	2021 MacTaggart Lecture by Jack Thorne, spotlighting disabled representation in TV	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaxwlpbJbbg Transcript: https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/news/mactaggart-lecture-in-full/5162627.article
104 films	Details of training opportunities, short film schemes and talent development	www.104films.com
FWD-Doc	A Toolkit for Inclusion and Accessibility: Changing the Narrative of Disability in Documentary Film, in association with Netflix and Doc Society	www.fwd-doc.org/toolkit
	Engagement Pack offering information and tips about engaging effectively with disabled colleagues and audiences in association with the BFI Doc Society Fund	www.fwd-doc.org/engagement-pack

Further resources and information on disability inclusion continued

Organisation	Resources/training	Link/contact
PACT	Diversity Tool Kit to create a practical strategy to make your workplace and content more diverse	diversity.pact.co.uk/tool-kit.html
ScreenSkills	Working with Disabled Talent and Disability Awareness courses	katherine.parsons@screenskills.com
The Media Trust	Disability in the Media – disability awareness training for the media industry	katieb@mediatrust.org
thinkBIGGER!	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 more information about Channel 4's support for disability inclusion on productions, please visit <https://www.channel4.com/commissioning/4producers/disability-inclusion>

For further information

Creative Diversity

4Producers

www.channel4.com/commissioning/creative-diversity

Contact us at:

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