



Guide to progressing 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 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.

Back to basics continued

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](#).

Why should disabled people be given extra support for their career progression?

There is plenty of anecdotal and empirical evidence to show that disabled people are disproportionately excluded from senior editorial and/or leadership roles in our industry.

There are a host of specific reasons why disabled people don't get the experience, support or opportunities they need to progress in the same way as their non-disabled counterparts – from being pigeonholed into only making disability-related content, managing the additional burdens of self-advocacy and education of others, or not being able to access networking events, to having unconventional CVs (for example due to enforced career breaks or lack of opportunities meaning their progression isn't linear or specialised) or just plain old-fashioned discrimination and prejudice.

In order to redress the balance and make sure we are truly inclusive at every career stage, this is an area in which we need to take deliberate, positive action as an industry. And not just in formal schemes and initiatives, but also in the day-to-day proactive support of disabled people as they progress in their careers.

We all have a role to play in this.

I'm now in a position to correct and overrule discriminatory thoughts about disabled talent – and have hired disabled people who have proved me right and everyone else wrong. But I doubt they would have been hired if I hadn't been in the room.

Anonymous
Senior level

12 principles for progressing disabled talent in the longer term

Anticipate

12 principles for progressing disabled talent in the longer term continued

1 Expect to be working with disabled people

Start with the likelihood that anybody who you are looking to develop and progress might well be disabled (whether apparent or not), and make your professional development support as accessible as possible for everybody from the outset.

Ask

12 principles for progressing disabled talent in the longer term continued

2 Never assume anything, of anybody

Always take your disabled team member's lead; offer regular opportunities for them to discuss their career development plans and how being disabled may have resulted in additional barriers to their progression. Let them direct any conversations, asking open questions if you need to.

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 to career progression. 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

12 principles for progressing disabled talent in the longer term continued

4 Be creative in the development routes you discuss

Work with your disabled team members to dig down into their transferable skills, unlock their passions and think about sideways moves as well as upwards progression which might get them to where they want to be.

Adjust

12 principles for progressing disabled talent in the longer term continued

5 Be open to doing things differently

When it comes to disabled team members' development and progression, provide the option for them to do things in more than one way or at a different pace, according to what best suits them so they can fulfil their career ambitions.

Advocate

12 principles for progressing disabled talent in the longer term continued

6 Think long term

For every disabled person you work with, at whatever level, consider how you might develop them beyond their current contract. And don't just support them to develop skills for their next role, but think three or four jobs ahead – whether with you or elsewhere.

7 Be fair in the career progression opportunities you offer

Make sure that any 'extra-curricular' chances you provide for your disabled team members to learn new skills or try new experiences, such as work experience or shadowing in addition to their contracted hours, doesn't tip over into any form of mistreatment; anybody delivering value to your company or production needs to be remunerated in the usual way. Make sure the usual access needs and reasonable adjustments are in place for these opportunities, and the disabled person is fully supported.

8 Support self-development

Strongly encourage your disabled team members to consider their own professional development and career progression; actively signpost them to training, mentoring or networking opportunities. Make sure that anything you recommend has access provisions already in place and be confident yourself that it is disability-inclusive.

9 Work at getting to know disabled talent

Regularly assess the pool of talent you work with and actively add disabled talent to this mix. Follow freelancers and groups on social media, attend events, and offer mentoring or other bespoke support for disabled talent to develop their skills and experience.

Advocate

12 principles for progressing disabled talent in the longer term continued

10 Build up your own understanding

Engage with the experiences of disabled people within our industry and beyond, for example, by following the organisations listed on page 12 on social media; develop your empathy and challenge your own bias about the skills, talent and potential among disabled people. You could also make yourself available for reverse mentoring by a disabled person.

11 Celebrate what disabled people bring

Remember that disabled people have much to offer in the creative process precisely because of their lived experience of disability and not just in spite of it. As with other typically under- or misrepresented groups, they bring distinctive skills, experiences and perspectives which mean it is both wise and worthwhile to invest in supporting their career development.

12 Actively champion disabled talent

Challenge assumptions and ableism/disablism; be an advocate and ally among your peers and networks for the fantastic, experienced and passionate disabled people out there in our industry.

To increase disability representation off screen we need commissioners and other senior level people to step up and become allies and champions. The productions where I thrived were the ones where people didn't shy away from disability, but made sure I had the support structures I needed and continued to check in.

Caroline
Series Producer

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:

disabledtalent@channel4.co.uk

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