



University of  
Sheffield



Centre for  
Equity+  
Inclusion



Critical  
Disability  
Studies



# Accessibility Guide for University led events



This leaflet is in  
Easy Read

# About this Guide



This guide has been made for **The University of Sheffield**.



It is to talk about how events organised by The University can be made **accessible to all**.



This guide has been made to help anyone organising an **event at a University**. It might also help other people think about accessibility.



This guide was co-written by researchers and professionals working in the fields of **race, accessibility, and public engagement**.



This guide is a starting point to improve **issues around accessibility**. And it suggests ways to make things better. **It doesn't cover everything**.



This leaflet is in **Easy Read**. Easy Read makes information accessible for people with Learning disabilities. We do this by using **Plain English and pictures**.

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# Introduction



Conferences, workshops, talks, and showcases are an **important part of university life**. This guide is designed to help organisers make university-events **accessible to all**.



If organisers don't think about accessibility when planning and delivering events, they could continue to **make people feel excluded**. This causes harm to the most **marginalised and vulnerable people**.



Organisers need to make sure that events are accessible to all. This is a legal requirement under **The Equality Act 2010**.

The Act says that it is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of a **protected characteristic**, which includes:



Race



Sexual  
Orientation



Religion



Disability

We have to consider everyone in our events and think about ways we can: .



Get rid of  
discrimination,



Promote equal  
opportunities



Build good relations  
between different people



**Places like the university** have to make events accessible. It is not the audience's responsibility.



The **wrong way to approach to accessibility** is to wait for individual audience members to say they need something or ask for reasonable adjustments.



This puts **extra burdens on people** who already have barriers to going to events and taking part in things. This doesn't work.

People who face barriers to access may not come forward because they:



Feel vulnerable and unsafe.



Have not been formally diagnosed and be afraid to ask.



Feel bad for causing extra work for organisers

The view of accessibility as 'additional work' is a problem.  
We will address this problem in this guide.

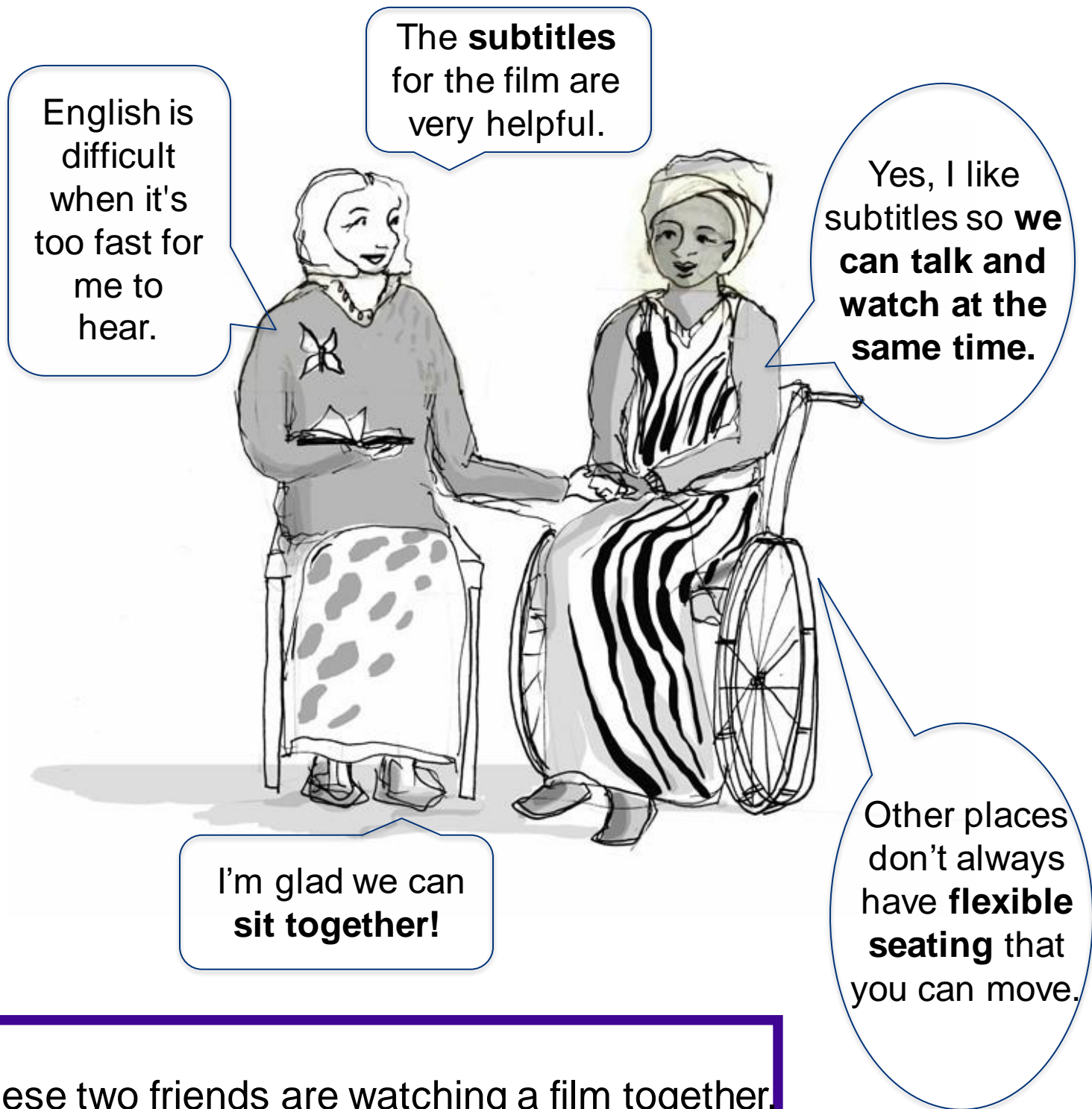


We don't expect people with **accessibility needs to point out problems**. We believe organisers should take the lead and prepare for accessibility from the **beginning of event planning**.

This guide has been designed to support organisers in this process.

# EXAMPLE 1

This guide has 5 examples showing situations of accessibility measures at events



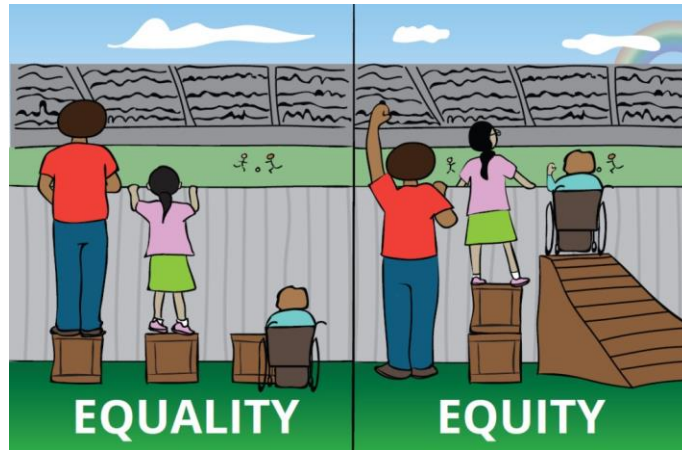
These two friends are watching a film together.  
One speaks English as a second language.  
The other uses a wheelchair

# Framework

We support an equitable, instead of an equal approach to accessibility.

## **Equality:**

everyone is given the same support, resources and opportunities.



## **Equity:**

everyone is given whatever support, resources and opportunities they need to get an equal outcome



By asking for an **equitable approach to accessibility**, we are encouraging organisers to adapt to the needs of **individuals or groups**.

In **event organisation**, this means thinking about everything that is needed for an event, including:



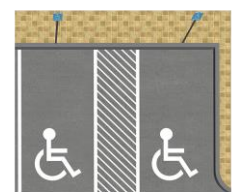
Physical access



Roles in teams



Budget planning



Venue facilities



Safeguarding



Catering/ food



Sending things out



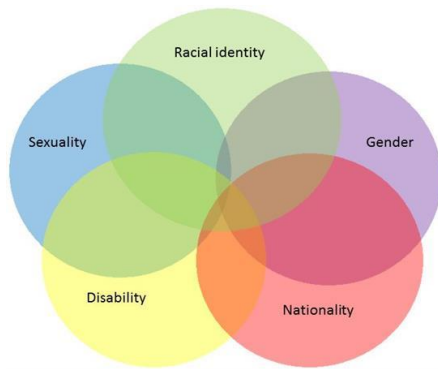
Posters and promotion



We think that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. This causes accessibility issues. This is the **Social Model of disability**



All organisations should aim to **remove barriers** to access and make their organisation accessible to all.



Lots of things can cause people to feel **excluded**  
**Including barriers related to:**

- Disability
- Race
- Class
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Faith

In this guide we recognise that **people are complex** and usually affected by more than one of these things at once. This is called an **intersectional approach**.



We have tried to think about all the things that can exclude people in this guide. We have focused on **disability and race** because this reflects the lived experience of the authors.



This **first version** of this guide.  
We will keep working to make it better and produce **updated versions** in the future.



# How to Use this Guide



This guide is for all sections of **setting up an event**.

1. Before The Event,
2. During the Event,
3. After the Event.

There are some **final thoughts** and reflections at the end



**Accessibility is complicated** and there are no quick fixes. This guide has suggestions about how to think about **accessibility in different ways**.



No guide can provide all the information on how to help **every accessibility need**.

You might not get everything right.

Using this guide should be part of **long-term learning** for developing accessible events.



Understand that improving accessibility **gets better over time**.

You don't have **not to be an expert**. You should:

- Reflect on your work
- Be open to getting things wrong
- Invite constructive feedback
- Learn from past mistakes.



# EXAMPLE 2

That room where I could **feed my daughter** and take her out when she cried was such a lifesaver.

My **partner** could join **online** while looking after the other children at home.

There was somewhere clean to go and **pray** with a midday break



This **Muslim mother** needed to bring her **baby** with her to an event.

# Before the event

## Project Team



Make sure you have capacity and knowledge **on your project team** to manage **accessibility needs** for each event.



The best way of doing this is to have an **Accessibility Committee**. The people on this committee will be responsible for identifying, organising, and reviewing accessibility at your event.



Members of this committee should include people who **know a lot about accessibility**. This might need hiring external consultants, people with lived experience, or training existing staff members.



We recommend that organisers have a **skilled facilitator** to manage the event's activities.



At least one staff member should be assigned to the role of **managing accessibility issues** that come up during events.



Everyone in the project team should work together to find out the **accessibility needs for your event**.

This will give a starting point for planning and delivering the event. For example:



only to book venues with wheelchair access



Gender-neutral toilets

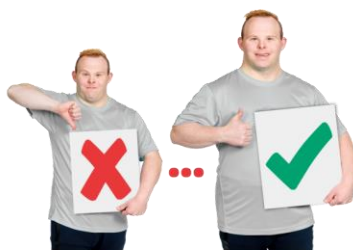


Trans-inclusive policies

**Plan time to think about accessibility as a team, to:**



Think about issues that could come up



Learn from mistakes



Improve what is available to help with accessibility



It is important to think about who else should be part of the early **planning stages of an event**.

For example, include **British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters**. They will tell you the type of venue and event layout that allows them to work best.

It can be challenging to sign on sensitive issues.

Think about the diversity and skillset of signers when inviting them to **join event planning**.



We recommend an organisation called '**Interpreters of Colour**' as a good starting point when looking at diverse professional BSL interpreters



# Budget



The amount of **money used for a specific things** is known as a budget. The size of your event budget can be a barrier to **making your event accessible**.



When there is a policy that says they will **pay for accessibility measures for events**, this shows that organisations are taking accessibility seriously. We encourage organisations to **make this a priority**



It is your job as an organiser to make sure **no one with accessibility needs feels guilty** for taking up resources or funding.



There should be enough money to make sure that everyone in the audience has the **same quality of experience**. The money needed will change depending on the event.



**An accessibility committee** can give advice about how much accessibility measures will cost.



If the budget is small, it is **better to make an event smaller**. You should pay for accessibility and keep in your budget rather than anyone's experience of your event being inaccessible.

When working out **your budget**, think about including:



experts to help with the early planning of an event.



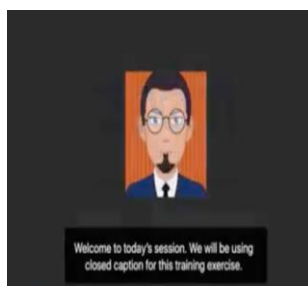
travel and childcare bursaries.



reflection after an event to improve accessibility



BSL interpretation



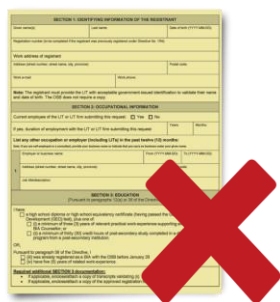
live captioning



Support



free registration



**Do not make people wait for support.** When the budget has been set, pay for things straight away. For example, bursaries should be paid in advance, rather than leaving people to work through **complicated forms**.



Provide support to speakers and performers for working through **the university payment processes**. These can be complicated and **cause anxiety**.

# Event practicalities

Below are some important things to think about when planning events:



**Platform:** In-person, online, and hybrid platforms change accessibility in different ways

**Time:** think about things like peak travel times or working hours. Provide frequent breaks.



**Language:** Think about the languages your audience speak. Think about accessible language and captions.

**Style:** Make sessions accessible for people with different learning styles.



**Recording:** Ask speakers what they are comfortable with. Provide an option for participants to opt-out of this. Ask if people are ok with online meetings being recorded.



**Support:** Have an **accessibility contact** available during the event who can sort out any issues or questions. Provide travel and childcare bursaries to help people **facing financial barriers to come to the event.**



**Refreshments :**Think about people's dietary requirements,. This could include **allergies, halal, vegan, or gluten free.** Ask participants about their diet and food needs before an event, for example when they register

# Venue Accessibility

There are lots of things to think about when it comes to venue accessibility including:

## Location.



Where is your venue? Is it in a central area or near public transport links? Is there enough accessible parking?



Are there any factors that might put anyone off attending? For example, negative associations people may have with **locations, religious or political buildings?**



Will you need to provide **travel information, maps, or expenses payments** for any barriers that exist with the venue location?

## Building



Does the venue provide step-free access?

Are doors and other entrances wide enough for everyone who will come?



Are lifts available for activities above ground level?

Is there a plan of the venue space that can be made available to participants? This can help people decide if the building caters to their needs.



## Atmosphere.



Have you considered the sensory features of the event, such as acoustics, **lighting, seat and table layouts**? Can this be adjusted in the venue on the day?

## Facilities



**Does the venue have things like:**

Gender neutral toilets?

Prayer rooms/quiet spaces?

Creche or children's play area?

## Signposting



Are there clear warning signs within the venue that explain what to do in **emergency situations**? Are they everywhere that might be used in your event?

## COVID-19



What protective measures are provided to help stop the **spread of COVID-19**?



Does the venue provide antibacterial gel and face masks? Is it possible to **use social distancing**?

When all this information has been found out, share this with your event attendees **as soon as possible in accessible ways.**

It is a good idea to **visit the venue** at least once before the event to find out any accessibility **concerns or issues.**

# Sharing and Receiving Information

**Information** you need to share before an event might include:



**Date, time, location and cost** of event



Available **expenses**  
**payments** or **bursaries**



Event **timetable**,  
activities, and breaks



**Travel information**  
public transport,  
**maps**, images of the  
venue



**Who** the event is  
for



**BSL**  
**interpretation**, and  
live captioning,



Information about  
**navigating** the venue



What accessible **facilities** are in  
the venue.



**Contact** information  
including staff responsible  
for accessibility



**Dress code.** Participants should  
know they can wear what they  
want.



Providing event information before the event is important. It helps people make informed decisions about whether they will be comfortable at the event and properly prepare for it.



Put in place accessibility measures **without being asked**. We can't anticipate every need, so it is important to also **invite people** to ask for anything else they might need.



The person responsible for accessibility on the day of the event should make sure audiences feel comfortable talking about accessibility provision and try to answer any issues that are raised.



You may want to explain why these accommodations are being made in outgoing communications.

Make all event information shared with participants accessible by using:



easy read



alt text for images



dyslexia friendly fonts



subtitled videos



mixture of visual and audio media



**Tell** guest speakers and performers **about all accessibility information** You could do this at meetings before and after the event..

**Make sure** speakers and performers know:.



**How long** they are expected to perform



Audience **size** and **demographic**



Technological **support** available

Offer support for presenters to work in an accessible way. For example:



**Accessible colour schemes** for PowerPoint presentations



**Avoid** audiovisuals that are **disorientating** or trigger seizures



Set **deadlines** for speakers to **submit anything** they will use at the event. This gives you a chance to **share them before the event** on the event day, with audience members who like more processing time.



**Support**

**BSL interpreters** need presentation scripts **before** the event to prepare for their work.



Audiences should be able to **feedback on accessibility**; this could be as part of an evaluation form or done in another way.



# Write ups and filming



Recordings and reports of your event **should be made available** to people who couldn't attend your event live (in person or online). People who did attend might also like to revisit what was said.



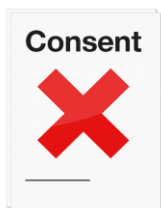
To ethically record your event, **informed consent must** be given before the event. This guide does not include instructions on how to do this. Please look at our **source list for further information**.



**Written reports should be accessible.** There should be easy-to-read versions and written descriptions of visual images.



There should be a general commitment to making things like video and **reports freely available** to the public.



These outputs should be easy to find and engage with. There might be limits to this like:

- Sensitive information
- Lack of recording consent
- Intellectual property rights



Think about things you can **offer as alternatives** if that is the case to help break down barriers.

# Sign up Forms



**Sign-up forms** are the first contact people have with the event or organisation. Forms should be accessible, inclusive, and fit for purpose.



There is often questions about diversity in sign up forms. This can be useful for identifying groups that are not currently being engaged. There should be **clear reasons for asking for this information** and this should be done inclusively.



For people from **marginalised backgrounds**, disclosing information about disability, race, sexuality, faith and other identities **can feel unsafe** and have negative consequences.



People should have the option to **self-define as they like**. This includes a space in forms to give their preferred terms, such as gender pronouns



Do not make it compulsory for people to share personal information or identities in a group setting. Give an option for people to **share information privately** as well.



**GDPR and confidentiality** must be maintained whether people use a form to sign up or some other way.

# EXAMPLE 3

I came because there was **enough information** for me to decide how difficult it would be for me to attend.

There were **clear directions** for how to get to the venue

Someone was at reception who I **could ask** where to sit.



This person is **visually impaired** has attended an event with their **guide dog**

# During the event



Most accessibility measures will be **planned and put in place before the event.**

Because accessibility needs are very individual, sometimes **problem solving is needed on the day.**



Organisers need to pay attention and be aware of changing needs during an event. We have **some tips** on how to help you with this.

## Event Planning



When planning your event, you will have made a **well-informed team** with enough people to manage all requests. It will include someone **directly responsible for accessibility issues.**

On the day of the event, it is important to remind the team of:



the **accessibility measures** that have been put in place



What to do when **accessibility requests** come during the event.





If you do this, team members will be able to respond **calmly and confidently** to any accessibility issues.



A confident, well-prepared team will give the **audience confidence**.



It can be uncomfortable to watch a team member panic when an issue is raised. This can result in the person **feeling guilty about causing problems**.

# Building Trust



It is important to **build trust** between organisers and audience. You want people to feel comfortable to tell you if they have any **further accessibility needs**.



Make clear it clear that you are committed to accessibility and **open to responding to people's needs**.

Some of this can be done **before an event**. For example by:



Sending out  
**accessible information**  
when people sign up for  
an event.



Inviting people to **tell you their support needs** before the  
event takes place.

This work should **continue during the event**



**Use signs to mark out spaces**  
such as gender-neutral toilets,  
prayer rooms, lifts, and entrances  
and exits.



Make sure food is **clearly labelled** in relation to  
dietary requirements



**Clearly identify** the project team  
member responsible for  
**answering accessibility**  
**questions**.



**When online**, take time to  
introduce different accessibility  
features. For example, **comment**  
**box**, **captioning**, **breakout**  
**rooms**.



Ground rules are important for audience members when **first introducing your event**.

They tell people how they are expected to behave at the event.

Some rules might be around things like:



confidentiality



self-care



prioritising accessibility



zero tolerance for discriminatory behaviour



power dynamics and abuses of power



Ground rules tell audiences **what your values are**. They help build confidence and trust that you will respond **positively to an accessibility need**.



You might **co-produce ground rules with your audience**. You can make a set of guidelines that everyone feels comfortable with.

# Managing conflict



It is important to have things in place for when conflicts happen. The project team needs to talk about their plan before the event.



Difficult conversations sometimes need **trained facilitators to provide support**. It can be necessary for facilitators to help make sure everyone's voice is heard.



One way to manage conflict is to carry out a **risk assessment**. Organisers discuss how to prevent harms, and decide what they will do if they happen.



Some things to put into an **event risk assessment** include:

- Informed consent,
- Signposting to more support
- Asking someone to leave the group if needed



If **conflict increases** or becomes harmful, the project team needs to be clear about what should happen next. They should always choose options that **cause the least harm** and weigh up the risks.





Breakout spaces are used to create more interactive events that engage audiences. When people are asked to **share lived experiences** without safeguards being put in place, this can cause conflict.



There should **always be safeguards** in place. Breakout spaces should be risk assessed and monitored by the project team to avoid harm.

# Planning Activities



Send details about **what audiences can expect ahead** of the event. This can reduce anxiety of unexpected activities and lets audiences make **informed choices**.



Think about the **different ways people to learn and interact**. It is important to remember that not all activities work for everyone. It is best to have a **mix of activities to include everyone**.



**Schedule regular breaks between activities**, especially if they are taking place online. How many breaks and how long they are will need to be depends on the event and who is attending. It is best to agree this with participants.

# EXAMPLE 4

This lady **does not** drink alcohol

The barstools are so good for **when I need a rest** but still want to socialise

They have **non-alcoholic** drinks which is great for me, I've been **sober** nearly 5 years



This man has **mobility problems** and needs crutches to walk, he gets tired quickly.

# After the Event



Post-event activities **need to be accessible**.

Important things **often happen after formal events**. For example, social gatherings, reports and talk of what happened in the event.



It is common for presenters and attendees to gather somewhere after an event to continue the discussions that took place during an event and for **further networking**.



Such gatherings often happen at the last minute; decisions about where to go also happen at the last minute. But, last minute decisions can lead to **people feeling excluded**.

For example:

- An **inaccessible pub excludes** both disabled people e.g. wheelchair users, and people from some religious backgrounds.
- Attendees might **rely on public transport** and have leave due to travelling times.



To help with this, Organisers need to plan social events in advance. Organisers can:

- Identify **accessible social spaces** that could host gatherings when looking at the venue.
- Add an optional hour at the event venue at the end of an **event for networking**.



# What did people think of your event?



People attending events **often fill in questionnaires or feedback forms**. These tell organisers what people think about the event. This **helps them understand** what went well and what they need to change.



Using **different ways** of collecting feedback give audiences chance to share their experiences of your event **in their own words**. You could use:



**Informal** feedback, such as using **post-it-notes** to write comments or use an **online** platform.

A printed feedback form on a light blue background. At the top, it says 'Please fill in this easy read form' next to a small icon of a person. Below this are three input fields: 'Your name' with a small person icon, 'Address' with a small house icon, and 'Phone' with a small mobile phone icon.

**Formal** feedback such as printed **forms** asking for written answers.

**Feedback** should be shared and handed back to organisers before the end of an event. Or emailed after the event



Feedback **forms should be accessible**. For example, in different languages or easy read. People should be thanked for their feedback and see how it is used to improve events in the future.



If anyone is invited to give detailed feedback or be '**consultants**' for future events, their work **should be paid**.



# Reflection



When an event is over **organisers should reflect** on its accessibility



You should **take time** to understand when or where **things went wrong**, **learn** from any mistakes, and use that learning to **improve** your next event



**Experts** with lived experience **should be involved** in planning

**Accessibility is not:**



**A tick-box exercise.**

Your attitude to accessibility needs to be **meaningful**.



**A fixed thing.**

Accessibility needs **change** for each event and every person who might need it..



To keep your events accessible, you need to keep **learning** To do this you need constant reflection.

# EXAMPLE 5

The sound guy asked if the music was too loud and **turned it down**, I'm glad because I would have just left - it was getting too intense for me.

The **relaxed atmosphere** means I can be here and **look after my kids**, I don't have to choose one or the other.

One of the facilitators made a **transphobic comment**. I brought it up to the wellbeing person during the break and they were **willing to deal with it**.



This group are at a lunch **after an event**. There is music playing and they are talking about how the event was.

# Final thoughts



This guide is **not a complete list** of how to do accessibility. Accessibility is complicated and individual to different people's needs.



To make events as accessible as possible, the support you arrange **needs to be flexible**. We hope our guide has helped you **think about accessibility from different angles**.



This guide was developed in **three online workshops**, by people working in the fields of race, accessibility or public engagement.



This guide will be changed and updated based on **ongoing feedback**. We want to get things right and keep improving things when given feedback.



There are some wider thoughts about culture and history as well as how we made this guide have **not been included in the easy read version**. This does not mean it is not important, but for easy read accessibility, some things had to be left out.



A full version of this leaflet, **including a source list**, is available on request.

# Extra Information and Contact Details



This guide has been **funded** by the University of Sheffield's "Research Cultures Fund" which seeks to enhance research practice within higher education.



**This Accessibility Guide** was written by researchers from

- Sheffield University,
- Durham University
- Ladders4Action.

A full list of authors is available on request.

**If you have any questions or would like to find out more please contact:**



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