



# Accessing LGBT+ Spaces



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



Attitude is Everything has supported venues and events to improve access for Deaf and disabled people since 2000.

Over 3 million Deaf and disabled people go to live events every year. We work with partners across the industry to ensure they have an equal experience, including 180+ venues and festivals signed up to our Charter of Best Practice.

We are an Arts Council England sector support organisation.

## **Accessing LGBT+ Spaces Survey**

Our survey asked LGBT+ Deaf and disabled people about their experiences of accessing LGBT+ spaces, particularly venues, events and prides.

The online survey was live for six weeks in autumn 2018. It was shared by many disabled and LGBT+ people's organisations, mainly via social media.

128 LGBT+ identified people with access requirements shared their experiences. 95% identify as Deaf or disabled people.

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**Make it clear that disabled people are welcome.**

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## Demographics

### Location

People from every region of the UK, except Northern Ireland, filled in the survey. 77% were outside of London.

### Impairments and health conditions

73% have more than one impairment or health condition.

Over 17 different impairments were represented, including:

- Mental health condition (53%)
- Mobility impairment (44%)
- Autistic spectrum (33%)
- Non-visible impairment / health condition (30%)
- Hearing impairment (21%)
- Wheelchair user (19%)
- Photo-sensitivity (16%)
- Vision impairment (9%)
- Learning disability (9%)

### Access requirements

100% have access requirements in order to attend events including:

- Accessible seating or viewing platform (45%)
- Accessible toilet (38%)
- Step-free access (35%)
- Personal assistant / carer (27%)
- Quiet space (13%)
- British Sign Language interpretation (13%)
- Lowered bar / counters (13%)

## Key Findings

80%

have been **put off attending** a pride or LGBT+ venue due to access concerns.

70%

reported **feeling unwelcome** at prides or LGBT+ venues as a Deaf or disabled LGBT+ person.

96%

would be **more likely** to attend a pride or LGBT+ venue if they provided **comprehensive access information.**

We asked people about their experiences at both prides and LGBT+ venues. While these are very different spaces presenting different challenges, there were some universal themes.

## Attitudes

Dismissive or hostile attitudes, both from staff and other members of the public, were a key barrier to attending events for many people. A range of issues from other attendees were reported, from cluelessness to outright harassment, especially when alcohol was involved.

Disability discrimination is only part of the picture. Many people felt doubly excluded due to issues such as racism, transphobia and biphobia.

## Awareness

Lack of disability awareness from organisers, staff and volunteers was an issue for many.

Being questioned, disbelieved and even discriminated against by staff, especially security, was a recurring theme. Problems were also caused by staff and volunteers being unaware of access facilities and policies.

## Information

Lack of accurate, good quality, comprehensive access information was a central issue at all kinds of events. People reported finding either no access information, or sparse, poor quality and unreliable information at many prides and LGBT+ venues.

Without reliable and detailed access information, many people did not feel confident attending an event.

## Bad Attitudes

“I get ableist comments from drunk men in gay bars and the gay village.”

“I have problems with people stepping in to try and grab my wheelchair if my carer lets go even for a moment.”

“I was questioned and dismissed by the clearly untrained security guards who only let me in when I offered to show them my diagnosis letter.”

## Limited Awareness

“Security staff don’t seem to have any disability awareness training, and just presume I’m drunk (when I’m sober).”

“I went to see a drag show and the staff directed me to a seated area with no view.”

“I met with the organisers who were of no help as they didn’t understand that they could make it accessible.”

## Lack of Information

“I’m nervous about attending a venue unless I have good access information but this is often difficult to find out.”

“Accessibility information wasn’t released until less than two weeks before the event even though general information had been available for months.”

“Even if they claim to be accessible, it’s often a different story when you actually get there.”

## Prides

66% had attended a pride in the previous 12 months:

- 63% encountered problems with access
- 49% were unable to find out all the information they needed in advance

### Pride attendees faced a range of barriers including:

- Lack of accurate, complete access information available online
- Stewards not briefed on access
- A lack of facilities, including seating, accessible toilets and signage
- Access not considered for the march/parade part of the event
- Overcrowding
- No quiet spaces to get away from crowds, noise and bright lights
- Having to separate from friends to get into accessible areas
- No access to performance provision – e.g. audio description, captioning, BSL
- Inaccessible transport

Respondents suggested some ways to make a march/parade more accessible:

- A designated 'quiet bloc' in the march
- Viewing areas to watch the march
- An accessible bus/float for people with mobility impairments

We recommend that you include Deaf & disabled LGBT+ people in planning the event from the beginning.

“Queue to get in difficult to access. No priority entry - pain levels made it difficult to stand for so long.”

“None of the pride stewards knew where to go for wheelchair viewing.”

“As it's so busy there was nowhere for me to sit and see the parade. I found myself stuck in the middle of a crowd for two hours with no easy way of getting out or sitting down.”

“No places to sit on the route so can't walk with the procession.”

“Not every pride provides BSL interpretation.”

## “Start planning pride assuming disabled people will be there from the start.”

“Access for visual impairment never seems to be a priority.”

“Getting in through the accessible entrance was virtually impossible, and getting through the crowd to the viewing platform was a nightmare.”

“Extremely loud & busy with no quiet areas for sensory-sensitive people.”

“It's impossible for me to get around the stalls as a wheelchair user.”

“I had to go in a special disabled bloc without my friends.”

## Venues

59% had attended an LGBT+ venue in the previous 12 months.

- 59% encountered problems with access
- 47% were unable to find out all the information they needed in advance

On average, this group said they would spend £28 on a night out at an LGBT+ venue.

### People encountered multiple barriers at LGBT+ venues, including:

- Lack of accurate, complete access information available online
- Staff/organisers not responding to access questions
- Being questioned or discriminated against by staff, particularly security
- No Personal Assistant tickets available at no extra cost
- Inaccessible spaces – steps, no accessible toilet, no lift, high bars/tables, lack of seating
- Facilities not fit for purpose – e.g. accessible toilet used as storage
- No quiet space to get away from crowds, noise and bright lights
- People with hearing impairments found low lighting and loud music a barrier to communication
- People with visual impairments found low lighting, small signage and unmarked hazards a barrier to navigation
- No access to performance provision – e.g. audio description, captioning, BSL

Some people said that more choice of different kinds of events would be more accessible to them.

Suggestions included events that are: in the daytime, alcohol free, autism friendly, family friendly, are less crowded, or have less intense light and noise.

“No place to have a quick time out to process my senses without leaving the venue entirely.”

“It can be hard to get into the venues due to steps. Some nightclubs have flat entrances, which is great, but then have toilets up a flight of stairs with no lift.”

“The venues are great fun, but I trip over steps, can’t see the toilets very well, struggle with payments, and poor lighting makes it hazardous.”

“Bars are really dark so seeing my friends sign is difficult. Sometimes the bouncers think Deaf people are drunk.”

**“Don’t make access an afterthought. Assume disabled people will turn up.”**

“Lack of quiet space - thinking it will be very busy and crowded.”

“Security staff are often so heavy handed and refuse to have a conversation.”

“I can never find seating when I need it, and have on many occasions been kicked out for sitting in the corner for a few minutes.”

“I’m not travelling all the way to a venue just to find I can’t get in without hurting myself.”



## Impact

### On LGBT+ people

Being unable to attend events due to bad access left many survey respondents feeling unwelcome, isolated, rejected, depressed and cut off from the LGBTQ community.

“I think I have missed out on the feeling of community that other queer people seem to have.”

“I felt forced to retreat from a community that I’d given decades of my life to fighting for.”

“As someone who has just come out, the lack of information about access has made it a more difficult journey.”

### On venues and events

A lack of access can mean a lowered income for venues and events, both from disabled customers themselves and their friends, partners and families.

“I understand that venues need to make money. If you do not encourage disabled people to access your venue you are missing out on a lot of money, because we work and have disposable incomes too!”

“Often no access at all, so I cannot go with my friends and girlfriend, and as a result they don’t go.”

### On the bright side...

Despite these issues, there is a lot of goodwill and good work being done in the community. Make it clear people have been thought about, and they will keep coming back.

“I’m aware of organisers of my local Pride events positively working and engaging with peer-led disability communities to share and address issues.”

“I go out a lot more since getting my mobility aid and I have to say that the LGBT community and venue staff do try very hard to make me feel welcome and safe.”

“This pride had BSL interpretation for performances, lift access, accessible loos, gender neutral toilets and quiet space.”

“If a venue has access issues, clear communication online about the access/ lack of access within the venue, plus well-trained staff can make a huge difference.”

“There was BSL access at this pride, which was amazing!”

### Examples of best practice

[Pride Cymru](#) and [Pride in London](#) have both received Gold status on our [Charter of Best Practice](#) for achieving a high standard of accessibility.

**“Make it clear we have been thought about,  
not an afterthought or a burden.”**

## 5 things you can do

- **Consult and involve disabled people in your event or venue**  
Try a local disabled people's organisation (DPO).
- **Make it clear that ableist behaviour isn't tolerated**  
Include ableism in any safer spaces policy, and make sure ableist harassment is properly addressed.
- **Provide good quality access information for every element of your event**  
Our [Access Starts Online](#) guides can show you what to include.
- **Train yourself and your staff**  
Public-facing staff should all have disability equality training, and be aware of all access facilities and policies.
- **Think about the audience experience**  
Think about access at every part of your event. Have a space where people can sit down and get away from crowds, light and noise.

## Resources

These resources can help you put on a more accessible event:

Regard's [Pride Access Guide](#).  
Our [DIY Access Guide](#) for small scale event organisers.

**We can also help.** We offer [Disability Equality Training](#), and venues and prides can join our [Charter of Best Practice](#).

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**Make accessibility  
the default,  
not an added extra.**

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## Contact us

If you'd like some advice about improving access at your event or venue, we're happy to help.

Email: [info@attitudeiseverything.org.uk](mailto:info@attitudeiseverything.org.uk)

Call: 020 7383 7979

## Get involved

If you're a Deaf or disabled person, you can help us improve access, just by going venues and events and telling us about your experience.

Sign up as a mystery shopper: [attitudeiseverything.org.uk/mystery-shopping](https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/mystery-shopping)

## Keep up with our work

Website: [attitudeiseverything.org.uk](https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk)

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Charity number: 1121975 / Company number: 6397532