

attitude
is everything

**NEXT
STAGE**

Next Stage Snapshot 2024



**Insights from 71 music creators
with access requirements**



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

Foreword

Navigating the music industry as a disabled artist with complex mental and physical health has often felt frustrating and disheartening. I spent years in music going through difficult, unsafe and humiliating situations - all in the name of music. But truthfully, it really doesn't have to be that way.

My most recent funded project 'Accessible Dreamscapes' (funded by Unlimited and Glasshouse International Centre for Music) enabled me to make a carefully considered performance that thought about accessibility for both audience members and artists. It let me directly talk to audience members beforehand, to figure out what they needed for an accessible performance - and also what they found interesting from their perspective.

The funding allowed me to respect my own needs and the needs of the other performers with built in support throughout the whole project to create a multi-sensory, immersive and cross-art form journey that celebrated the disabled experience in both performance and practice.

My most recent residency with Brighter Sounds (A week with Wu-Lu) had an amazingly diverse team with different experiences, an access consultant throughout and clear access suggestions before and during the project that made me feel comfortable enough to go away to Leeds for a week while going through cancer treatment.

The funding, support and care in these two examples made all the difference between me being able to engage in performance projects and learning opportunities that further my career, or not being able to attend at all.

With access funding often being seen as 'optional' or treated as a hassle, it can feel like organisations and events miss the point that access funding is necessary for diverse expression in the arts. After all, art is about sharing experiences - how can we have a well-rounded arts industry if we are depriving it of the D/deaf, Disabled and neurodivergent perspective? What unique viewpoints are we missing by not encouraging solutions to access barriers? Most importantly, what damage is being done by making artists participate at the expense of their health and finances?

I'd like to imagine a future in which it's normal for funding opportunities to recognise and support access needs - from application to project end. Where alternative, flexible ways of working and marketing become widely accepted. Where live showcases are supportive of both audience and artists' needs. I truly believe that with more accessible funding and approaches we can create a music industry that empowers disabled artists to have fulfilling, sustainable and safe careers.

A black and white portrait of Elle Chante, a Black woman with voluminous curly hair, wearing a dark, high-collared top. She is looking directly at the camera with a thoughtful expression, her hands are raised near her chest.

Elle Chante

Introduction

In late 2023, we asked a group of 71 Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent music creators to share their experiences in applying for funding, self-promoting their music and performing live.

Many reported that they had faced discrimination whilst trying to develop their careers.

'Ableism' and 'disablism' are two words that some disabled people including participants of this survey use to describe experiences of discrimination.

Ableism means prioritising the needs of non-disabled people, such as designing a space with no consideration of physical access.

Disablism is a word for negative opinions, behaviour or abuse against disabled people, which could include ignoring or speaking down to a disabled person, or assuming that they can't do something because they are a disabled person.

Many people use these words interchangeably.

Some disability activists prefer the term 'disablism' as it removes reference to a person's 'ability'.

Both of these words are used to place disability discrimination alongside more established terms such as sexism and racism.

Music both influences and is impacted by culture, and many of the disabling barriers music creators face are linked to wider issues such as the social media platforms aspiring performers have to use.

At the same time, avoidable barriers thrown up by the industry featured heavily in the findings.

This offers the opportunity for change – change that has to involve everyone.

We want to see a world where accessibility is not a luxury but default practice that music creators can expect.

A world where it doesn't feel burdensome or risky to ask for access adjustments to ensure you can perform safely or apply for funding.

A world where disabled music makers can contribute their talent and passion and forge successful careers.

Investment in accessible practice benefits everyone and is an investment in the future of the music industry.

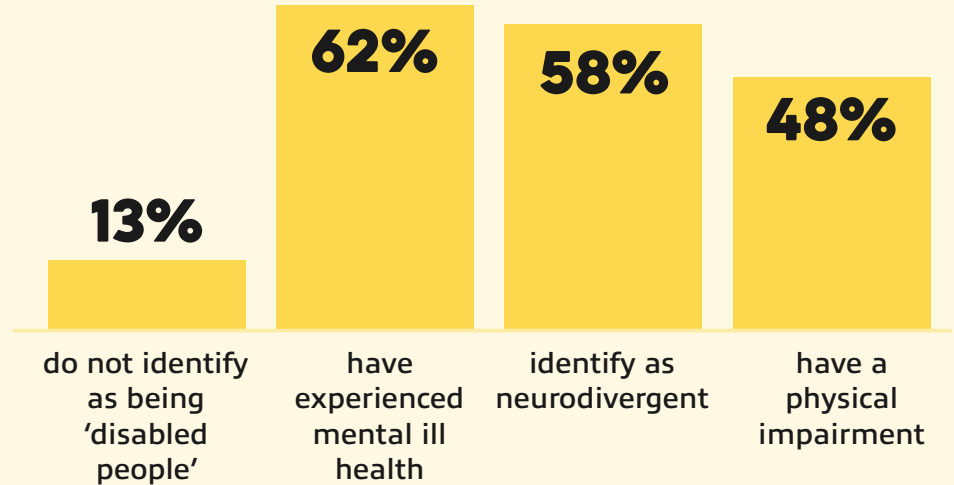
Our Next Stage initiative is working to make this future a reality. This report shares some of the things we are doing in collaboration with our network of over 300 disabled music creators.

What can you do?

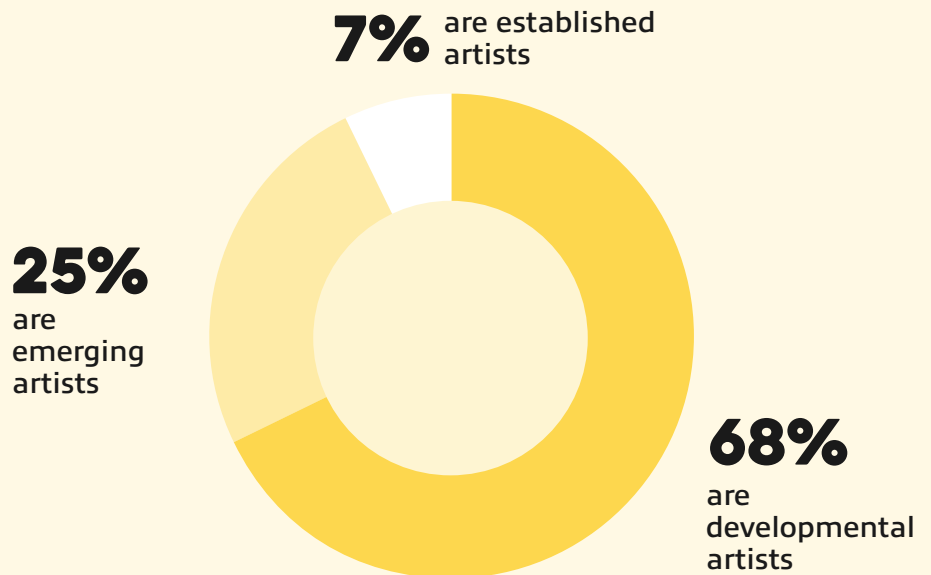
The 71 music creators

This snapshot includes solo artists, songwriters, musicians, producers, and band members.

Identity and lived experience



Career stages

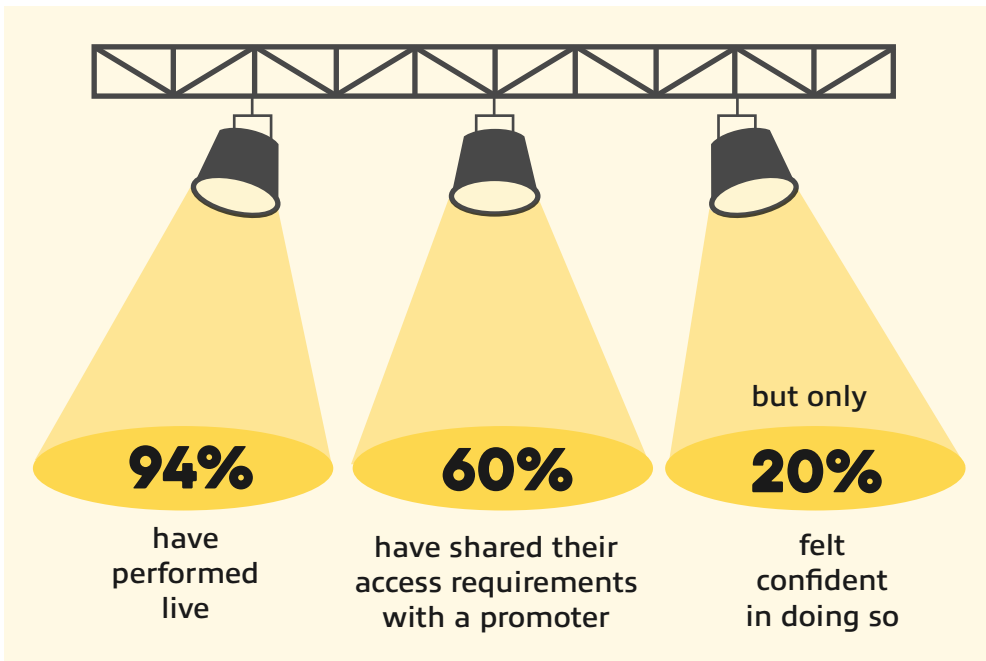
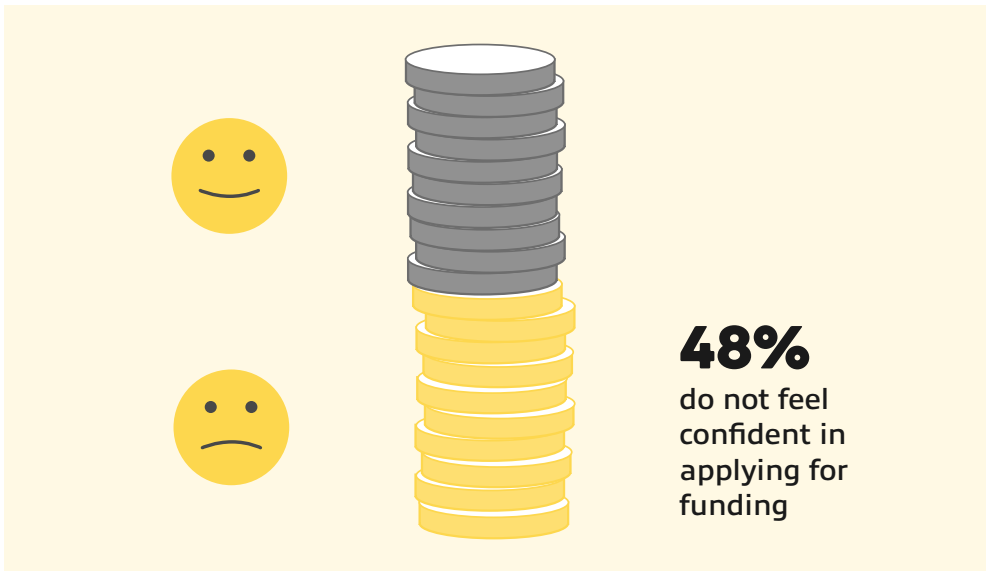


Genres

The top five genres within respondents were

ELECTRONIC *Folk* **ROCK**
Instrumental **Jazz**

The 71 music creators



Funding

48%

do not feel confident in applying for funding



The Musician's Union's 2023 Census found disabled artist experienced a pay gap of £4000. Funding is critical catalyst for music makers to make a living from their music.

This finding suggests a lack of consistency across funding opportunities is impacting confidence. Accessibility needs to be considered for the whole funding journey - from advertising opportunities to support provided for the delivery of a funded project.

“ It's going to be difficult for me to continue developing as an artist without securing funding. ”

“ [I've experienced] a lack of flexibility of potential changing of access needs throughout a project. ”

“ A lack of visibility of similar artists (with similar intersectionality in particular) makes me feel not confident to apply. ”

“ I couldn't have applied for it or been successful with it without my support worker. ”

Funders want a fan base rather than providing help to build one. I can understand this but it's a catch 22.

“ People who specialise in writing funding applications charge a lot of money for their services. I can't afford this. I avoid applying unless it is necessary. ”

“ There's a lack of neurodivergent-let opportunities. ”

“ Some funding doesn't ask about disability as a category for diversity, but some do. I feel more confident if disability is already thought-out in the application. ”

'Intersectionality' refers to the ways in which people and groups can face discrimination such as sexism, ableism, racism and queerphobia can happen at the same time to create a unique form of discrimination such as misogynoir, which is the combination on Sexism and Anti-Black Racism.


What we are doing

We will be publishing Accessible Funding resources for both disabled music creators and funders in early 2025, produced with input from Next Stage artists and members of our Talent Development Group:

- Arts Council England
- Help Musicians
- BPI
- Youth Music
- BAPAM
- PRS Foundation

What we need from the industry

- Proactive inclusion of marginalised groups including disabled people who have been previously successful in the promotion of funding opportunities.
- Better support for disabled artists in sourcing and managing appropriate support workers for funded projects.
- Provision of separate access requirement funding as standard for creative funding and application-based talent development opportunities.
- Providers of income streams for music makers to examine their own practices through the lens of our Accessible Employment Guide.



“Over the years, I have had two successful funding applications - one from Help Musicians and one from PRS Foundation for their International Showcase Fund. I saw on Twitter that Help Musicians were running 1:1 sessions for support with applying. It was really useful to understand what they were looking for and I genuinely don't think I would have got the funding without it. PRSF funded me to travel to New York music festival Mondo NYC. This led to me signing a publishing deal and from that I got a music sync placement in Grey's Anatomy. ”

Hannah Scott

Self- promotion

Only
10%

feel confident in
self-promoting
their work



Marketing plays a critical role in building audiences for music creators, which in turn supports revenue creation.

This finding might be explained by multiple factors such as how disability is perceived on social media by other users, overwhelm at the pace required to 'keep up' and how the accessibility of platforms impacts usability.

When it comes to engagement with music journalists, many disabled music creators are concerned that their music will be seen as secondary to their lived experience of disability.

“ I’ve always felt very anxious using social media as a neurodivergent person. I see it as a necessary evil. As an autistic person, I struggle to maintain social contact and communications - part of the same skillset necessary to build and grow a fan base. ”

“ I find it honestly exhausting marketing myself and sometimes triggering having to think of so many different ways to tell what a very personal story is sometimes. ”

“ Sometimes I feel all that is focused on is my disability and advocacy and not my music. I would like to be able to feel my music is significant enough for press by itself but often it is not given the same weight as my disability. ”

“ It can be hard to decide how much and in what way to reference my disabled identity and disability as it often feels a bit like clickbait/ gets more views when I do but it makes me uncomfortable as social media can be pretty simplistic in the interpretation of our lived experiences. ”

What we are doing

We empower Next Stage members to navigate the industry and develop confidence in self-promotion through workshops, events, collaborative projects, and resources.

Our event programme, coordinated with our [Beyond The Music initiative](#), has featured industry experts talking on a range of topics including how to engage with press and managing wellbeing whilst using social media.

We also create peer-support spaces so that disabled music makers can come together around shared experience, exchange information and ideas and provide mutual encouragement whilst navigating the early stages of their careers.

What we need from the industry

- Career development workshops and events marketed to music creators to be fully accessible and provide access information in advance.
- Industry journalists to respect the level of disclosure any artist wants to share about their experience of Deafness, disability or neurodivergence in line with the IPSO code of conduct.
- Social media platforms do more to investigate algorithmic bias, online abuse and platform accessibility so that artists are not excluded in self-promoting their work.
- Labels and distributors to ensure that accessibility and wellbeing is at the heart of marketing conversations with music creators.
- Companies to adopt the recommendations of our [Accessible Employment Guide](#)

Benny B



“ Independently trying to navigate the rising costs of living, mental health difficulties, neurodivergence, whilst building a career in music can be quite the challenge. I accept that but when you add the gate keeping, high prices of creative and marketing services, and underrepresentation to get your song heard as an independent musician, you do start to wonder if at all it is worth it. At times the only things that keep me going are the fans and the few charities and organisations who hold space for us. The underdogs, misfits, and different ones. ”

Live showcasing

94%

have performed live.

60% have shared their access requirements with a promoter but only

20% felt confident in doing so

Live showcases at dedicated industry events, in grassroots venues and at festivals are essential in enabling performers to develop their stage presence, fanbases and exposure to label A&Rs.

The fear of discrimination and inconsistent meeting of communicated access requirements is still a major issue. Even when artists share access requirements there is no guarantee that requests will be implemented.

The three biggest areas respondents felt venues and festivals needed to address were:

- Promoters, venues or festivals not asking about access requirements (**65%**)
- Venues and festivals not sharing detailed or accurate enough information about their access. (**55%**)
- Access being provided for customers but not artists or staff (**47%**)

“ Relatively few venues and festivals at the grassroots level seem to have green rooms/ backstage areas reserved for artists - or, if available, only allocate these areas to headline artists. So having to mingle with the audience before a show doesn't help and only increases anxiety. ”

“ When asking for no strobes or invasive lighting, I can be met with being made to feel guilty as it won't look 'as good'. ”

“ Too often the sound engineers are not prepared for deaf/hard-of-hearing performer and what it takes to get the levels right. ”

“ A promoter I have worked with for several years now uses a venue which is in a basement down a lot of stairs with no lift and no accessible toilet. Although he wants me to play at this venue, and offered to help me down the stairs, I declined because I have osteoporosis and I am not willing to risk broken bones in order to do a gig! ”

“ My agent had told the festival booker that I needed to be able to park close to the stage because of my disability but wasn't then told that the campsite would be closed to vehicles at a certain time so when I returned to the campsite after my set, I wasn't able to park near my tent and had to walk. ”

What we are doing

Our Next Stage initiative has collaborated with Attitude is Everything's Live Events Access Charter team to develop new content and targets reflecting the voices of disabled music creators.

The Live Events Access Charter provides a framework for venues and events to improve accessibility and will be relaunched in late 2024.

In 2025 we will be releasing guidance in bitesize formats across our social media platforms for the benefit of promoters and other industry professionals who might not engage with the Charter.

We are also undertaking work to better understand the unique barriers disabled classical musicians can face when performing live.

What we need from the industry

- > Venues and festivals joining the relaunched Live Events Access Charter.
- > It to be standard practice to have performer access information publicly available and to ask performers about access requirements in advance and provide access information.
- > Festivals with 'apply to play' schemes to ensure the process is accessible and to collect data on protected characteristics to monitor the level of success of Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent performers.
- > Live promoters to ensure that they work with venues that provide accessibility for performers.
- > We also recognise the importance of online showcasing:
- > We ask that Digital Service Providers (streaming services and stores) provide showcasing experiences for Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent artists, and that artist services are designed with accessibility in mind. We are yet to see any major DSPs create editorial playlist or campaigns representing Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent musicians.

Geo Aghinea



“As a hearing-impaired musician with severe hearing loss, I generally feel supported during my live performances and gigs. The few times I did not feel like my access needs were met were more often a consequence of lack of appropriate tech (e.g. on-stage monitors, no routing options for headphone use, etc).

One of the times I had a good experience was at LSO St Luke's during the Drake Music Artist Showcase. The reason for that is probably owed to Drake Music being an organisation working with disabled musicians. They were familiar with the help that I needed and were always there to support during the soundcheck and throughout the whole gig. ”

Our message to music creators

You are not alone

**We want to amplify your
voices so that together we
can create change**

We invite you to join our Next Stage network to receive our monthly newsletter and invites to regular career development and peer support sessions.

We understand that this report shines a light on difficult and upsetting issues that many of you may have faced. Please look after yourself if you feel impacted by what we have shared.

If you'd like to discuss any of the issues raised, please reach out to us via nextstage@attitudeiseverything.org.uk

**NEXT
STAGE**

Snapshot 2024

attitude
is everything

Attitude is Everything
54 Chalton Street
London
NW1 1HS

Tel: 0207 383 7979

Email: info@attitudeiseverything.org.uk

Company No: 6397532 • Charity No: 1121975