

State of Access Report

Surveying the Facilities for Deaf and Disabled Customers at UK Live Music Venues

Executive Summary

“Attitude is Everything’s State of Access Report represents the first piece of systematic research into access and inclusion within the music industry. It examines views and approaches to access across the industry and sets out recommendations to ensure that all venues follow best practice. In particular, it includes suggestions for an ‘Event Standard’ to which all venues should subscribe.”

Matthew Hancock MP and Patron of Attitude is Everything.

The purpose of the State of Access Report and its methodology

After our previous success in making music and outdoor arts festivals accessible, Attitude is Everything turned our attention towards a project that focused more narrowly on permanent music venues (i.e. excluding outdoor music festivals) and how inclusive those venues were for Deaf and disabled audiences. We realised that we could use our mystery shoppers’ qualitative and quantitative feedback to publicise what access was like at these venues for Deaf and disabled people. And so we decided to produce a report to show current trends in access, make recommendations, offer solutions and inform the music industry of what their Deaf and disabled customers want from them.

Profile of the State of Access within the UK’s live music venues

The analysis for our report was based upon 130 mystery shops conducted at music venues across the UK, completed by 100 volunteers between March 2009 and March 2011. Our volunteers all self-define as Deaf and/or disabled people. They are based all over the UK, with the largest regional group being in the South East (this does not include London). Nevertheless, Arts Council England funding enabled our Mystery Shoppers to travel all over the UK to collect feedback. They are asked not to identify themselves as Mystery Shoppers to music venue staff or management whilst collecting feedback.

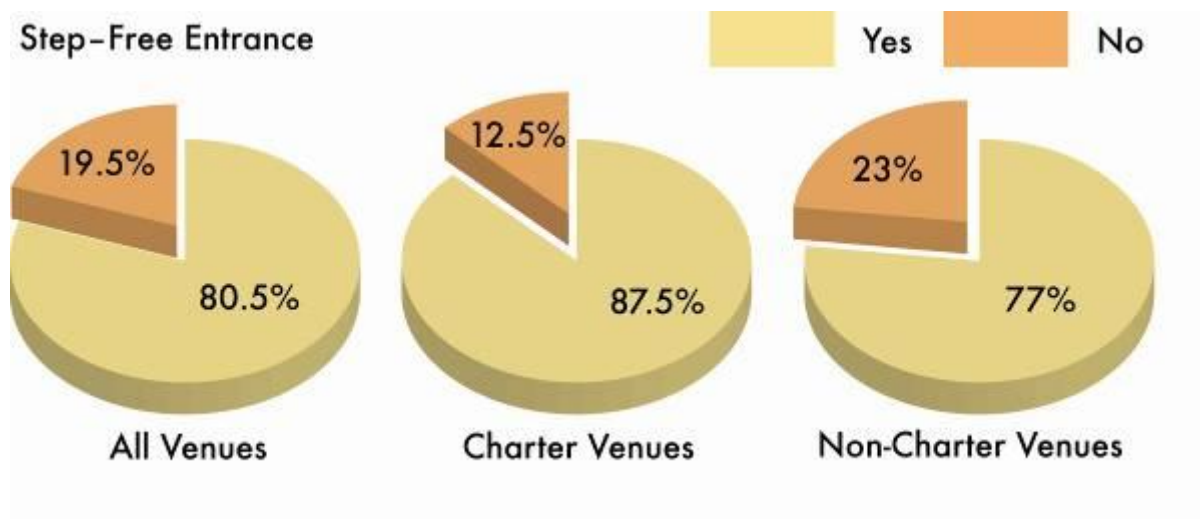
Each volunteer assessed a venue from a variety of impairment perspectives. Information was collected via questionnaires that had both “tick boxes” and open questions. A sample questionnaire can be found as an Appendix.

We felt that it was important to show that accessibility is both achievable and affordable in a wide variety of venues. Therefore the Mystery Shoppers reported on different types of music venues ranging from small, local pubs (e.g. Guildford’s Boiler Room) to large arena-sized venues. We included both independently-run venues (e.g. KOKO) and venue chains (e.g. the O2 Academies) and included both commercially funded and publicly funded venues (e.g. The Sage, Gateshead). We also included club nights and we made sure that the venues were spread regionally across the UK, even though Attitude is Everything is based in London.

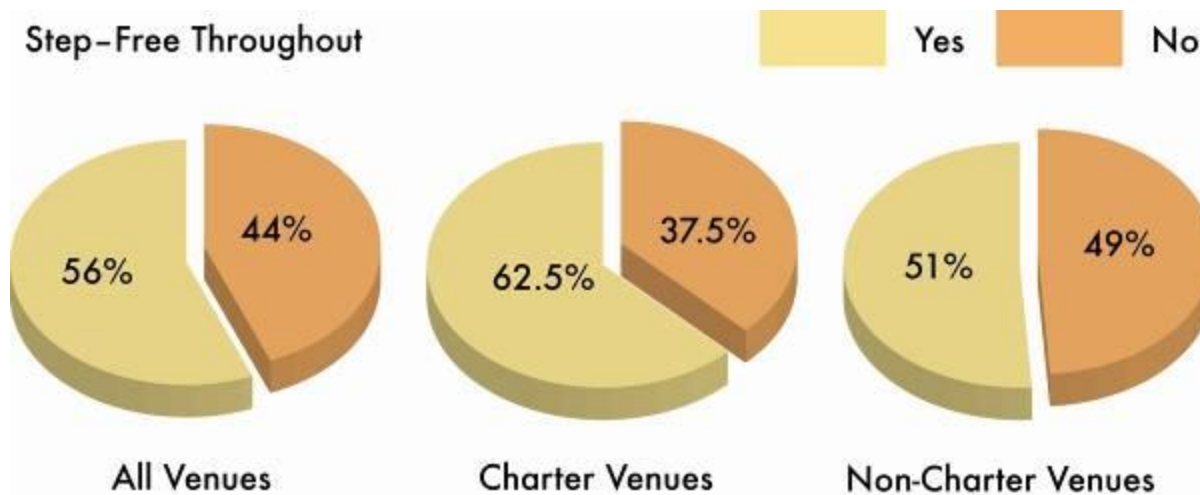
Key Findings

At 130 live music events across the UK, our Mystery Shoppers found:

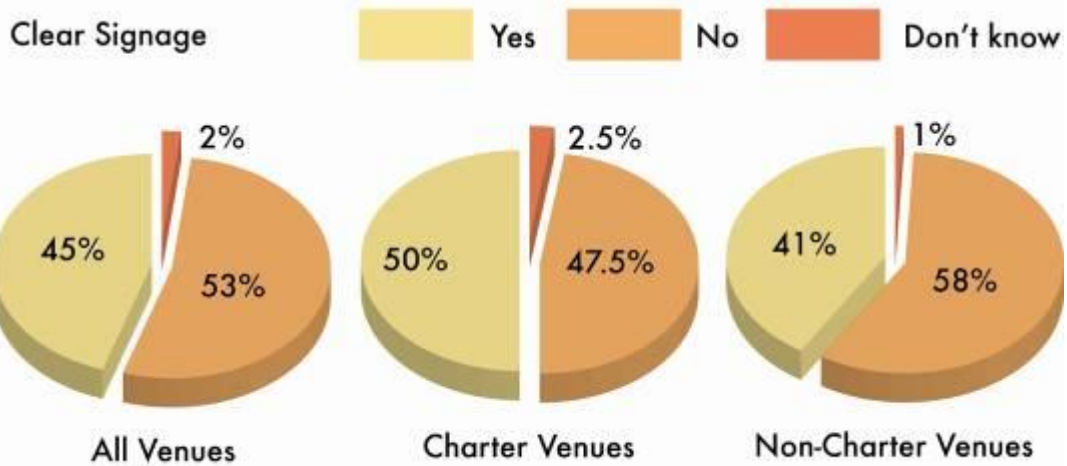
- 81% had a step-free entrance



- 82% had an accessible toilet
- 61% offered a viewing area specifically designated for disabled people and their guests
- 24% had a lowered counter or bar
- 64% of the access information gathered before the event correctly represented the actual access facilities at the venue
- 56% provided step-free access throughout



- 93% of the venues with step-free access throughout have an accessible toilet while only 68% of venues lacking step-free access throughout have accessible toilets
- For venues whose websites were rated 5 (out of 10) or under, only 49% of mystery shoppers found that the information available prior to the event was reliable, compared to 73% for websites rated 6 or over
- 8.5% of the venues mystery shopped were reported to have clear signage, a hearing loop system and accessible performances



- 25% had a hearing loop or infrared system
- 17% advertised that they could provide their publicity materials in accessible formats
- 38% offered accessible performances
- 56% offer a 2-for-1 ticket policy for disabled customers
- Venues offering 2-for-1 tickets averaged 6.6 (out of 10) for their website and 7.2 for their booking system, compared with just 5.6 and 5.7 respectively for venues that did not offer 2-for-1 tickets
- Disability Equality Training would be beneficial at 100% of the venues where the staff attitude rated 5 (out of 10) or lower
- Access facilities were rated 7.3 (out of 10) at venues with viewing platforms, compared to just 4.9 at venues without
- Enjoyment ratings fell from 9 (out of 10) at venues with viewing platforms to 7.7 at venues without
- Venues signed up to Attitude is Everything's Charter of Best Practice were rated roughly 10% higher than Non-Charter Venues for Access, Staff, Website, Booking and Enjoyment.



Conclusions

Clear information on access provided prior to events is crucial to the customer being able to make an informed choice about whether to buy a ticket. What is equally important is that the information matches the reality of what is provided at the venue once customers arrive. Wheelchair users are a small proportion of the disabled community. Venues are required to provide access information and accessible facilities for a wide range of impairments.

Under the Equality Law, disabled people must receive an equal experience to their non-disabled peers (in fact, the law goes further, acknowledging that in order to provide an equal level of service, venues may treat disabled people more favourably than others). This means that sightlines should no longer be compromised, and full access should be provided to the bar. Venues must actively work towards eradicating these inequalities.

There is clear evidence from our Mystery Shoppers' feedback that Disability Equality Training is important because it leads to a better awareness of the issues disabled people face at venues, a better understanding of access requirements and a better understanding of what facilities must be put in place. It also leads to more positive and welcoming staff attitudes towards disabled customers. The impact of Disability Equality Training is that disabled customers have a much better experience and enjoyment of music events.

Attitude is Everything's Charter of Best Practice states that disabled people should be independent at gigs and Attitude is Everything can advise venues on how to achieve this.

Our Charter of Best Practice Venues receive better ratings from our Mystery Shoppers and have better facilities in place than venues who have not signed to the Charter. Therefore, all music venues should consider signing up, using the Charter as an Event Standard and implementing Best Practice.

The support and practical assistance that Attitude is Everything gives through our Charter of Best Practice, Mystery Shopping Programme, Disability Equality Training and Access Auditing makes a real difference to the way access has improved at UK music venues.

The Way Forward

The research contained in this State of Access Report now enables Attitude is Everything to make the following recommendations to influence strategic change in two key areas:

1. The need for the music industry to adopt the Charter of Best Practice as an Event Standard in access. Our Charter Venues and Festivals, leading festival and event organisers (such as Festival Republic, Glastonbury, and MAMA Group) and local authorities (such as London borough Tower Hamlets) can now vouch for our Scheme and demonstrate the real benefits of it.
2. The need for a coalition of supportive music venues, key festival organisers, local authorities and Licensing Officers to join together and work in partnership with Attitude is Everything to make access a condition that music venues must meet to qualify for entertainment licences, including the granting of temporary licences.

Scotland made this change to its entertainment licensing laws in October 2011. England, Wales and Northern Ireland must follow.

At the moment, there is no regulatory body that regularly checks on access improvements and developments in music venues throughout the United Kingdom. With the exception of our Mystery Shoppers, no one systematically measures access in music venues. Access requirements are seldom enforced, often only when a disabled person sues a venue under the Disability Discrimination part of the Equality Law.

If access were made a condition for entertainment licences, an access question could be added to the club/venue/festival licence application that would both capture information about the current state of access among music venues and enable Licensing Officers to enforce required access facilities as individual licences come up for renewal.

Under Scotland's 2011 licensing rules, establishments that apply for alcohol licences as part of their full, new licence (the new rules do not cover temporary or renewal licences) have to provide a statement, in a prescribed form, that contains information about provisions made for access to the subject premises by disabled people, facilities provided on the subject premises for use by disabled people, and any other provision made on or in connection with the subject premises for disabled people. Scotland's new rules do not require pubs and other venues to change their existing facilities, but they do require them to detail what access facilities they do or do not have.

These new licensing rules have two goals:

- a) The information provided by applicants will be compiled into an access guide, allowing consumers to make informed decisions about where they want to spend their night out.
- b) Licence applicants will be required to think about access at an early stage. Applicants for Premises Licences are required to submit, along with their operating plan and layout plan, a statement on the venue's access and facilities for disabled people. Applications must include a "statement of compliance" with the 2005 Disability Discrimination Act, detailing where changes have been made to remove barriers for disabled people.

Attitude is Everything recommend that similar changes to the licensing rules be established for the rest of the UK so that access becomes a condition for receiving an entertainment licence, including the granting of temporary licences.

We therefore want to lead a coalition of supportive music venues, leading festival organisers, local authorities and Licensing Officers to work in partnership to make this happen. This change in the law will have a huge impact, not only on Deaf and disabled music lovers but also on the Deaf and disabled population as a whole.

About Attitude is Everything

Attitude is Everything improves Deaf and disabled people's access to live music by working in partnership with audiences, artists and the music industry to implement a Charter of Best Practice across the UK.

Attitude is Everything began as a pilot project in September 2000 in direct response to Deaf and disabled people's calls for fair treatment at music venues, clubs and festivals. We set out to address the music industry's apparent lack of awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and its obligations. Spurred on by its success, in April 2008 Attitude is Everything separated from its host organisation, Artsline, and became an Arts Council England Regularly Funded Organisation. In April 2011, our National Portfolio Bid to the Arts Council was successful and as a result, we secured a 48.4% increase in our funding over 4 years, until March 2015.

Over the past 11 years, we have developed a series of strategic programme strands that support the Live Music and Outdoor Arts sectors to become accessible.

Track record

Assistance:

We now have 45 music venues and festivals signed to our Charter of Best Practice and have worked with live music industry leaders such as Academy Music Group, Glastonbury Festival, Festival Republic, MAMA Group, the National Arena Association, Ticketmaster and the UK Festival Awards. We are becoming the UK authority on access to music venues and festivals.

We have helped over 200 organisations improve their access in 2010, and will assist over 200 more by the end of 2011. We offer Disability Equality Training and undertake Access Audits to advise on changes that may be required.

Our Access Toolkit: Making Outdoor Arts Events Accessible to All was awarded the London 2012 Inspire Mark.

Festivals:

As a result of our work with Glastonbury Festival to improve its access facilities, disabled people's attendance increased from 195 in 2007 to 565 in 2010.

Similarly, the attendance of disabled people at Reading and Leeds Festival increases by at least 25% each year, demonstrating the impact of our partnership with Festival Republic.

In 2010 London borough Tower Hamlets made the Charter an 'Event Standard' for all festivals that take place in Victoria Park. In July 2011, High Voltage, Field Day, Lovebox, Underage, The Apple Cart and LED (London Electronic Dance Festival) all signed up to the Charter of Best Practice.

Attitude is Everything's Charter of Best Practice:

In our original pilot project, we set out to address access issues with a ground-breaking creation – the Attitude is Everything Charter of Best Practice – and it is upon this Charter that all of our programme strands are still based. We created it to assist the music industry in understanding the requirements of Deaf and disabled people at music venues and festivals, building equality into the strategic thinking for events (instead of, for example, providing access facilities as an add-on or after-thought) and fostering a culture of providing an equal experience for Deaf and disabled people. The ethos of the Charter is that Deaf and disabled people should be enabled to be as independent as they want to be at music venues and festivals.

The Charter is divided into three levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold – each one has conditions that must be fulfilled to achieve that status. Venues and festivals who sign to the Charter are expected to work through all of the levels and aim for Gold, which is a commitment to achieving Best Practice in Access and Attitude over a period of 5 years. Part of the process is for Charter Venues and Festivals to create a realistic action plan for achieving each of the 3 levels, as well as making a commitment to go beyond the Equality Law and achieve Best Practice. Having regular Disability Equality Training is an integral part of Charter conditions. Managers and event organisers are also encouraged to share their experiences with the network of Charter Venues and Festivals.

The full Charter of Best Practice can be found as an Appendix to the State of Access Report.

Mystery Shopping:

Attitude is Everything's first organisational objective is to be user-led at every level. Our Mystery Shopping programme strand does exactly this.

With help from a team of 100 Deaf and disabled volunteers, we run a programme of Mystery Shopping at music venues and festivals across the UK. Our volunteer shoppers attend events and fill in a detailed feedback form about what they experience, covering staff attitudes, physical access and a broad range of access issues. Charter Venues and Festivals also agree to be "mystery shopped". The feedback provided by our shoppers enables Attitude is Everything to assess the accessibility of music venues and festivals as well as examining how they are managed from a customer's perspective. We discuss this feedback with managers and provide constructive advice so that they can make improvements. No other disability organisation collects real-life experiences and analyses feedback in the way that Attitude is Everything does - our Mystery Shoppers directly and strategically influence the conditions of access within the Music sector.