



Grand Theatre Disability Access Policy

The *Disability Discrimination Act* defines disability as:

A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

Disability affects people who use a wheelchair, are blind or visually impaired, deaf, have epilepsy or diabetes, but also those who have a much wider range of conditions, for example, facial disfigurement, dyslexia, learning difficulties, heart disease, depression and other forms of mental illness.

Disabled People's International sees the above as defining 'impairment' and has used a different definition of disability since 1981:

Impairment is the loss or limitation of physical, mental or sensory function on a long-term and permanent basis. Disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities for people with impairments to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers.

By this definition, it is not someone's impairment which creates barriers for them in accessing the world at large; it is the way that society often fails to respond to their needs. The Disability Discrimination Act requires all service providers, including the Grand Theatre, to plan ahead to meet the requirements of their disabled theatregoers.

Where necessary and reasonable, we must adjust the way in which we provide our services so that disabled people can use them. There are estimated to be around 8.6 million disabled people in Great Britain, and over 6 million carers: they have considerable collective spending power. One in four families in the UK has a disabled person within them. Adjustments for disabled people may also benefit other theatregoers (and staff), enabling us to improve our overall level of service, and to gain and retain more theatregoers.

Discrimination is often unintentional or unwitting and most often stems from a lack of awareness about disability and equality issues. It may also result from mistaken assumptions or decisions based on speculation, generalisations or stereotypes. Many people adopt learned behaviour towards disabled people as children and never challenge themselves to change that. We must not assume that we could not cope with serving a disabled person or that a particular service would be of no interest or benefit to a disabled person.

Disabled people are not all alike – disability does not discriminate and anyone can become a disabled person at any time. This means there isn't 'one way' of treating all disabled people. Many people who are regarded as 'disabled' under the Disability Discrimination Act may not see themselves in this way. Asking people about any access needs they might have, or about the options we can provide, may be more useful than asking people directly if they are a disabled person. The dignity of a disabled person must be respected when services are provided.

Discrimination against disabled people often involves treatment which would be regarded as humiliating if accorded to other people. Disabled people are entitled to be consulted about how they might be served. Unfounded assumptions about what is best for them should not be made or acted upon. Disabled people are entitled to make the same choices and to take the same risks within the same limits as other people. If in doubt, ask the disabled person themselves and let them choose.

Our practice and reasonable adjustments

We have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to enable them to access the Grand Theatre. At first, we may be unaware that any disabled people have had difficulty in accessing our services. We do not assume that this means that we do not need to make adjustments.

Presently, we aim to:

- audit physical and non-physical barriers to access for disabled people;
- consider what adjustments we need to make to remove such barriers
- assess our current policies, practices and procedures for discriminatory practice (as required by the DDA)
- consider what adjustments we need to make to remove any discriminatory practice
- put those adjustments in place
- provide training to staff relevant to the adjustments made

- draw the adjustments to the attention of disabled people
- let disabled people know how to request assistance
- Train our staff in disability equality issues/awareness issues

We will regularly review the effectiveness of adjustments and act on the findings of that review.

The best solution is often the simplest and most practicable. Listening carefully and responding to what disabled people really want helps us find the best way of meeting disabled peoples requirements and expectations. We will review the way we deliver our services to the public to discover whether there are any less obvious or unintentional problems of access for disabled people. We will carry out periodic disability audits of the Grand Theatre, including all areas of provision – such as marketing, programming, governance and consultation, physical access, employment practices and theatergoer care issues. We will seek the views of disabled customers and disabled staff. Disabled people know best what hurdles they face in trying to use the services provided. They can help identify difficulties in accessing services and might also suggest solutions involving the provision of reasonable adjustments. Blackpool and national disability groups have extensive experience which we can draw on.

It is not possible to anticipate every difficulty which a disabled person might have in accessing or using the Grand Theatre. Therefore we will be flexible in our approach. We will try to anticipate the types of problems which could arise and should make every effort to know who our customers are. If we become aware of the requirements of a particular disabled person who uses or seeks to come to the Grand, we will take a reasonable temporary step immediately, even if this may not be the best long term solution. Staff should be generally aware of the requirements of disabled people and should appreciate how to respond appropriately to requests for a reasonable adjustment. They should know how to provide an auxiliary service and how to use any auxiliary aids which we might have. We encourage staff to acquire additional skills in dealing with disabled people, for example, communicating with hearing impaired people and those with speech impairments.

The Grand Theatre has a designated Access Officer, Robbie Pendlebury, who leads implementation of our Disability Access officer.