

Written evidence submitted by Attitude is Everything

Submission to the DCMS Select Committee - The Impact of COVID-19 on DCMS Sectors

19/06/20

1. About Attitude is Everything

- 1.1. [Attitude is Everything](#) is a disability-led charity and Arts Council England Sector Support Organisation that connects Deaf and disabled people with live music and event industries to improve access together. Through our work:
 - Deaf and disabled people lead the change
 - Industry professionals learn from real-life experience and expertise
 - Barriers are identified and removed
 - Good practice is celebrated and rewarded
 - More Deaf and disabled people play their part in live music and outdoor events
- 1.2. Over 200 venues and festivals across the UK have been awarded via our Charter of Best Practice, an industry standard for live venue and event accessibility.
- 1.3. Our guidance is informed by the lived experience of hundreds of Deaf and disabled mystery shoppers of gigs and festivals from across the UK.

2. About this submission

- 2.1. Attitude is Everything fully supports the feedback and points raised in the submission to this committee by What Next?
- 2.2. Due to mitigating circumstances, we have not had the capacity to produce a fully comprehensive submission as we would have wished, but offer reflections from our perspective as an SSO with 20 years of experience in assisting a largely commercial sector to improve accessibility and disability awareness, and as an active member of the Events and Entertainment working group.

3. What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

- 3.1. There are 13.9 million disabled people in the UK. Deaf and disabled people are bearing the brunt of COVID-19's impact. Beyond the elevated medical risks for many (but not all) disabled people, the recent ONS report *Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain: May 2020* highlights the deep social impact of COVID-19 on Deaf and disabled people. Nearly two-thirds (64.8%) of disabled adults said COVID-19-related concerns were affecting their well-being.

- 3.2. It is important that access to live music, heritage, cultural and sporting events is not taken off the agenda within the context of a focus on 'vulnerability' and 'risk'. Attitude is Everything has worked with the live music and events industry for 20 years as of May 2020, so we are deeply invested in supporting DCMS, ACE and the wider industry to maintain and expand upon all of the progress made to date.
- 3.3. For disabled audiences and volunteers, going to gigs and festivals and interacting with others is a big part of gaining confidence, boosting wellbeing, shared experiences with other disabled people and making friends for life. When we surveyed our volunteers last year, 75% of them reported that volunteering at festivals made them feel valued and appreciated for the first time in their lives. COVID 19 is isolating everyone but for disabled people, this isolation can be further compounded by other factors, such as not having online access, friends, family and assistants not being able to visit them.
- 3.4. It is crucial that Deaf and disabled people can feel confident that their access requirements will still be met as sectors reopen, alongside being sure that the necessary COVID safety measures are being adhered to. DCMS industries need to anticipate disabled people wishing to return to venues and events from day one of reopening.
- 3.5. Since our Next Stage Initiative began in April 2018, focussed on removing the barriers Deaf and disabled artists face in the music industry, there has been a gathering momentum of disabled artists being placed on festival line-up's. Like all artists, disabled artists have lost income and promotional opportunities, but this is further compounded by factors such as reduced access to support workers and needing to self-isolate longer than other artists because of specific conditions.
- 3.6. Cancellations have a direct impact on Attitude is Everything as an organisation working within the sector. The first is fundraising - there is a growing list of festival promoters, such as Festival Republic, Glastonbury and Bluedot Festival, now joined by 2000Trees who have chosen us as their charity partner. They gather donations from their guest list and / or ticket sales and help promote the charitable benefits of our work to their audiences and artists. The second is our business activity – during these months and throughout the summer we'd be supporting the events sector to be ready to welcome disabled people through our extensive training and consultancy programmes.
- 3.7. We are pleased to report that there is growing interest in our remote services, and we have strong support across the sector in terms of guiding the industry to ensure that, for example, festivals in 2021 are more accessible than ever before. We wish to discuss this work with DCMS, as there is significant scope for collaboration around issuing supportive calls to action.

3.8. The impact of the sudden and unplanned closure of music venues and festivals 'en masse' and the financial hardship of those working in the sector, which is predominately freelance, has been well-documented by organisations such as the Music Venues Trust, UK Music, Ivors' Trust, PRS for Music, PRSF, Help Musicians UK, AIM and AIF.

4. How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

4.1. All DCMS sectors need clear instruction and guidance on the importance of placing considerations of the access and personal health requirements of Deaf and disabled audiences, artists and employees at the core of their reopening plans.

4.2. Attitude is Everything is now in discussion with Ramps on the Moon and Paraorchestra as the three disability-led members of the Events and Entertainment group on the best ways in which we can support DCMS and related sectors with meeting this need. We are also in close contact with the What Next? group of disabled artists and freelancers.

4.3. With our support and input, we believe that there is massive scope for DCMS to embed key disability-led messages in the publication of guidance, as well as helping to ensure that access and inclusive practices are not eroded by reopening.

4.4. This guidance will be most effective if it is uniform across all DCMS and DCMS-endorsed guidance. We look forward to discussing this further. As an ACE SSO that specialises in supporting a largely commercial industry to improve accessibility, we are uniquely placed to play a role here.

4.5. As a disability-led organisation, we have deep concerns that in general, Deaf and disabled communities aren't being supported enough. Much of the official messaging implies that all of our community are universally vulnerable and thus should stay home for the foreseeable future. Within shielding conversations, only elderly people are referred to in public statements. Deaths of Deaf and disabled people seem to be filed as 'but they had underlying health conditions' as if our community's lives aren't valuable. The Coronavirus Bill has effectively wiped out the duties of local authorities to carry out provisions under the Care and Mental Health Acts.

4.6. The implications of furloughing when an organisation is in receipt of public monies has been very unclear but thankfully we've relied on our key funders – ACE, PHF and TNLRCF - for good guidance.

4.7. We've had a positive response from Access To Work about continuation of support, new support applications and furlough of disabled employees but we feel that the measures didn't go far enough – one example is that we feel that the grants need to

be provided in advance e.g. in case disabled people's support workers became ill with COVID-19 and they needed to quickly find new employees.

4.8. Attitude is Everything would welcome any opportunity to discuss Access To Work and the impact on Deaf and disabled professionals in the sector with DCMS.

5. What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

5.1. The public and industry's perception of Deaf and disabled people may regress – they might be perceived as 'too vulnerable' to attend, play or work in live music. They may be deemed to be universally at 'high risk', with discriminatory consequences.

5.2. At the same time, Deaf and disabled people may lose their confidence about socialising and attending events which they perceive could put them at risk.

5.3. There urgently needs to be public and industry-awareness campaigns, including around the nuances within the broad demographic that is 'disabled people' in relation to COVID-19, and the importance of accessibility and compliance with duties under the Equality Act 2010.

5.4. Currently we're not sure how many event businesses, promoters, music venues and festivals will survive in the long term and how new social distancing guidelines may decrease audiences and this impacts on annual turnover. As stated previously, we believe that there is a significant risk of duties under the Equality Act 2010 being overlooked in the push to reopen without the provision of clear messaging and dedicated guidance on implementation of reasonable adjustments alongside social distancing.

5.5. Businesses will need to prioritise their spend and access and training may be way down their lists of priorities – we need to make a solid economic as well and legal argument - £9.3 million was spent by disabled people and their households last year at Attitude is Everything Charter venues alone and there is an economic benefit to providing access.

5.6. Like many organisations, we're revising and planning in response to COVID-19. We will be sharing revised plans to support the music industry over the coming weeks and months, and are already holding wide and positive conversations with industry partners on this front looking ahead to 2021.

5.7. One positive is that what once was deemed not possible to do – i.e. making events and working environments online – is now possible and a workable solution thanks to technology. Anecdotally we know of one disabled VJ artist who has been offered

more work because she can access venues remotely. However, the flip side is the increased risk that disabled people are only offered remote / online access as an option, and the perceived need for venues and festivals to become physically accessible is diminished.

6. What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

- 6.1. A key point we wish to highlight is the missed opportunity to bring together relevant disability organisations experienced in supporting DCMS sectors to consider and improve accessibility early on in the reopening guidance process. We do understand, however, the immense pressure DCMS staff are working under and the impact this may have had on convening consultations.
- 6.2. However, it is not too late for this to have an impact as guidance evolves, and we are ready and willing to play a role in assisting in this, starting from the baseline of Attitude is Everything, Ramps on the Moon and Paraorchestra already being active members of the Events and Entertainment working group.
- 6.3. It would be massively beneficial, for example, to have DCMS-level discussions around this topic with our three organisations and specialist disability-led providers of industry-specific guidance such as Level Playing Field and the Museums Disability Cooperative Network who are feeding in on guidance for museums currently.

7. How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

- 7.1. Deaf and disabled people can and should be at the heart of all efforts to support and encourage innovation in recovery.
- 7.2. Many Deaf and disabled people have had to isolate for long periods in their lives; they've had to adapt their lives and innovate at short notice; they had to drop and amend plans – but currently more could be done to properly include us in the conversations about how society can cope, how you approach the mental health and wellbeing aspects of this etc. Deaf and disabled people have to be flexible most of the time about their living, working and social conditions so this is the time to be fully engaged with them and learn lessons.
- 7.3. It's time to look at Deaf and disabled artists, and their approaches to learn about flexible practice, periods of isolation and how their narrative is told through art.
- 7.4. It's time to look at the financial support that's given in care packages and Access To Work packages – that the UK wouldn't have been able to sustain the pandemic if it wasn't for an army of frontline, low paid workers.

- 7.5. It's time to value our freelancers and how small creative business have an economic impact on the UK; how much business and tourism live music brings to us; how the culture sector has responded to COVID-19 in offering people support in their mental wellbeing.
- 7.6. As stated above and highlighted in various conversations being had, there is a significant opportunity for all guidance produced within and under DCMS to play a part in instilling a new foundation of disability awareness and consideration of access requirements across industries currently home to beacons of best practice, and operators not yet engaged as they should be with their duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- 7.7. With evolving guidance, the sector can implement new practices in access and inclusion, with innovations led by disabled practitioners. It will no doubt re-define how it can engage audiences and artists.
- 7.8. Culture needs to be valued alongside financial stability because it is art and cultural events that will be a large part of people's mental recovery. A sustainable, financial package needs to be created to support venues, festivals, events, artists and all those employed in the sector.
- 7.9. DCMS can look to Attitude is Everything as allies in seeking to further the ambitions of Let's Create. Having said this, we shouldn't be 'segmented', we should be part of all industry and art-form discussions. Because Deaf and disabled people are all people.