

# State of Theatre Access 2017

A survey of UK theatre website access information for disabled audiences



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# Executive summary

Our researchers visited the websites of 659 professional theatres across the UK, seeking out access information which a D/deaf or disabled person would find essential when planning their visit. Our main findings were:

- **72% of theatres provide access information on their website**
- **25% mentioned that they provided audio-described performances and/or touch tours**
- **25% mentioned that they provided British Sign Language performances**
- **21% mentioned that they provided captioned performances**
- **17% mentioned that they provided relaxed performances**

This report gives a breakdown of how these figures vary across the UK nations and regions, and provides an introduction to each type of access service, information about resources and alternative formats, a checklist to help develop your theatre's access information, and useful links and contacts.

# Introduction

There are 11.9 million disabled people in the UK. That's around 19% of the population, nearly 1 in 5 people. There are also 11 million people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. Following the social model of disability, a person is disabled through the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal basis with others due to physical, sensory, intellectual, attitudinal or other barriers. Therefore access – in the theatre context – is the combined means by which the venue helps address such barriers, through information, access services, resources and alternative formats.

In 2016, VocalEyes published the [State of Museum Access 2016](#) report presenting the results of an audit of 1700 UK museum websites: based on the premise that a lack of access information contributed significantly to lower attendance among disabled people. It cited evidence that disabled people rely on pre-visit information far more than non-disabled people; using a venue's website is a vital step in the decision-making / planning process. The absence of useful access information lowers people's confidence that barriers to access will be addressed at the venue itself, and they may change their mind about visiting, feeling excluded from the venue's target audience.

This report applies the same principle and audit methodology, with our researchers visiting the websites of 659 professional theatres, all of which programme performing arts, auditing their access information, and any mention of access services or resources. We omitted from the survey amateur, school and college theatres, and those whose programming was predominantly live music, film or stand-up comedy.

We acknowledge that the survey does not represent the many theatre companies, projects, events or initiatives that produce inclusive and accessible theatre, but do not fall within one of the standard types of access performance. Many venues across the UK are increasing access to theatre through creative partnerships and programming and are making an enormous contribution to an inclusive arts sector.

For example:

The **Audience Club** is a project bringing together three theatres in Exeter (Phoenix, Northcott and the Bike Shed) to provide an audience club for learning disabled adults, intended to be a social event providing access to a range of cultural opportunities in a safe and fun environment.

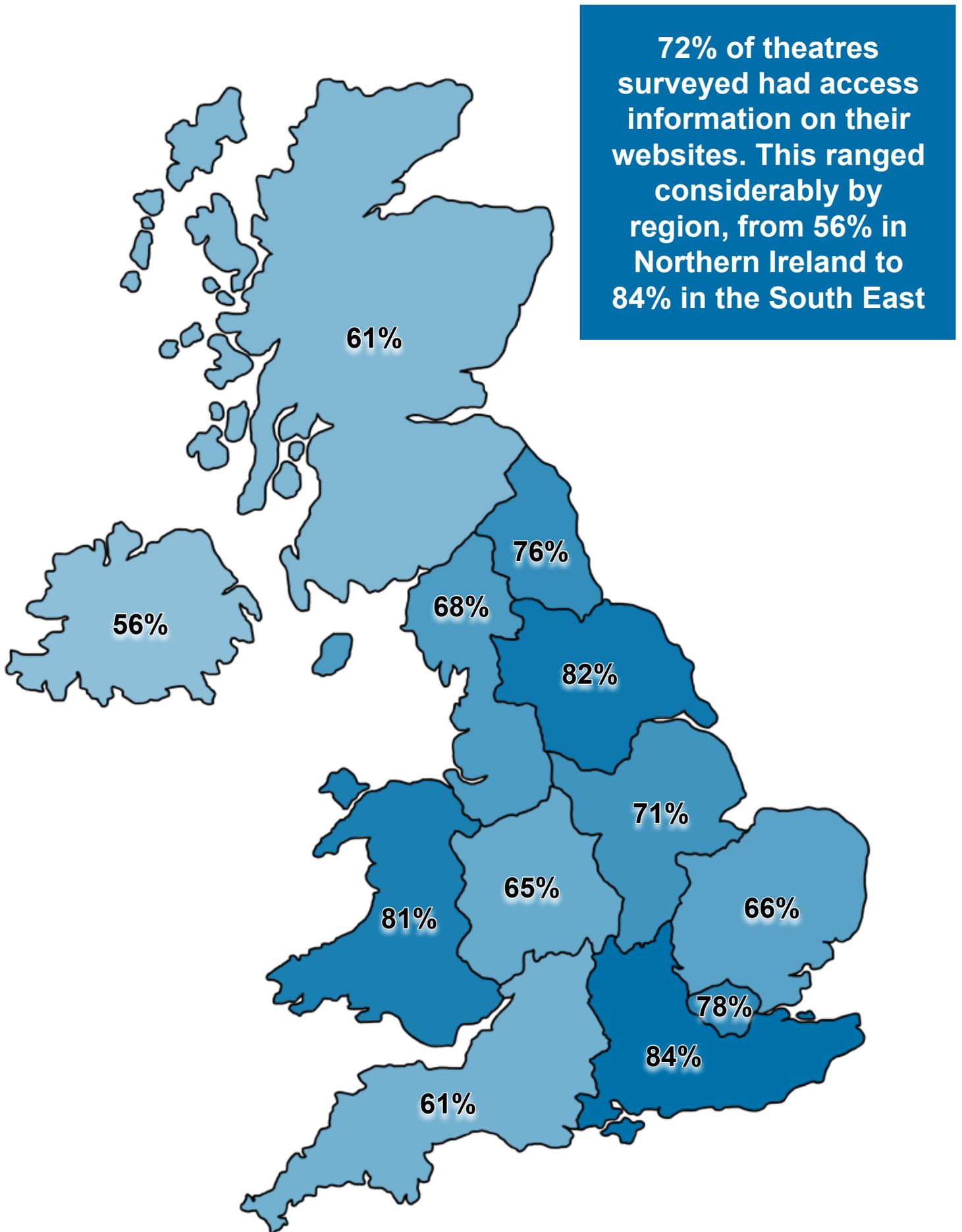
The **Blackwood Miners Institute** in Caerphilly is making great strides diversifying audiences by programming work by companies such as Frozen Light (who make work for people with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities).

A pioneering project is being developed between **Mac Birmingham and Sense** (a charity for deafblind people) to increase access to theatre for people with complex communication needs.

A consortium of theatres and companies (New Wolsey, Ipswich; Birmingham Repertory; West Yorkshire Playhouse; Nottingham Playhouse; Sheffield Theatres; Theatre Royal Stratford East; Graeae Theatre Company) are undertaking a six-year project, **Ramps on the Moon**, which integrates disabled and non-disabled performers and practitioners in a programme that aims to achieve a step change in the employment and artistic opportunities for disabled performers and creative teams, and a cultural change in the participating organisations to enable accessibility to become a central part of their thinking and aesthetics.

We hope that the increase in funding for many disability and inclusive arts organisations in Arts Council England's 2018-22 funding round supports and sustains the excellent work done of this type.

# Access information



72% of theatres surveyed had access information on their websites. This ranged considerably by region, from 56% in Northern Ireland to 84% in the South East

## Theatres that provide online access information

1	South East	83 out of 99	84%
2	Yorkshire	29 out of 35	82%
3	Wales	25 out of 31	81%
4	London	91 out of 116	78%
5	North East	16 out of 21	76%
	<b>UK total</b>	<b>473 out of 659</b>	<b>72%</b>
6	East Midlands	22 out of 31	71%
7	North West	40 out of 59	68%
8	East	47 out of 71	66%
9	West Midlands	31 out of 48	65%
10	South West	54 out of 89	61%
11	Scotland	27 out of 44	61%
12	Northern Ireland	9 out of 16	56%

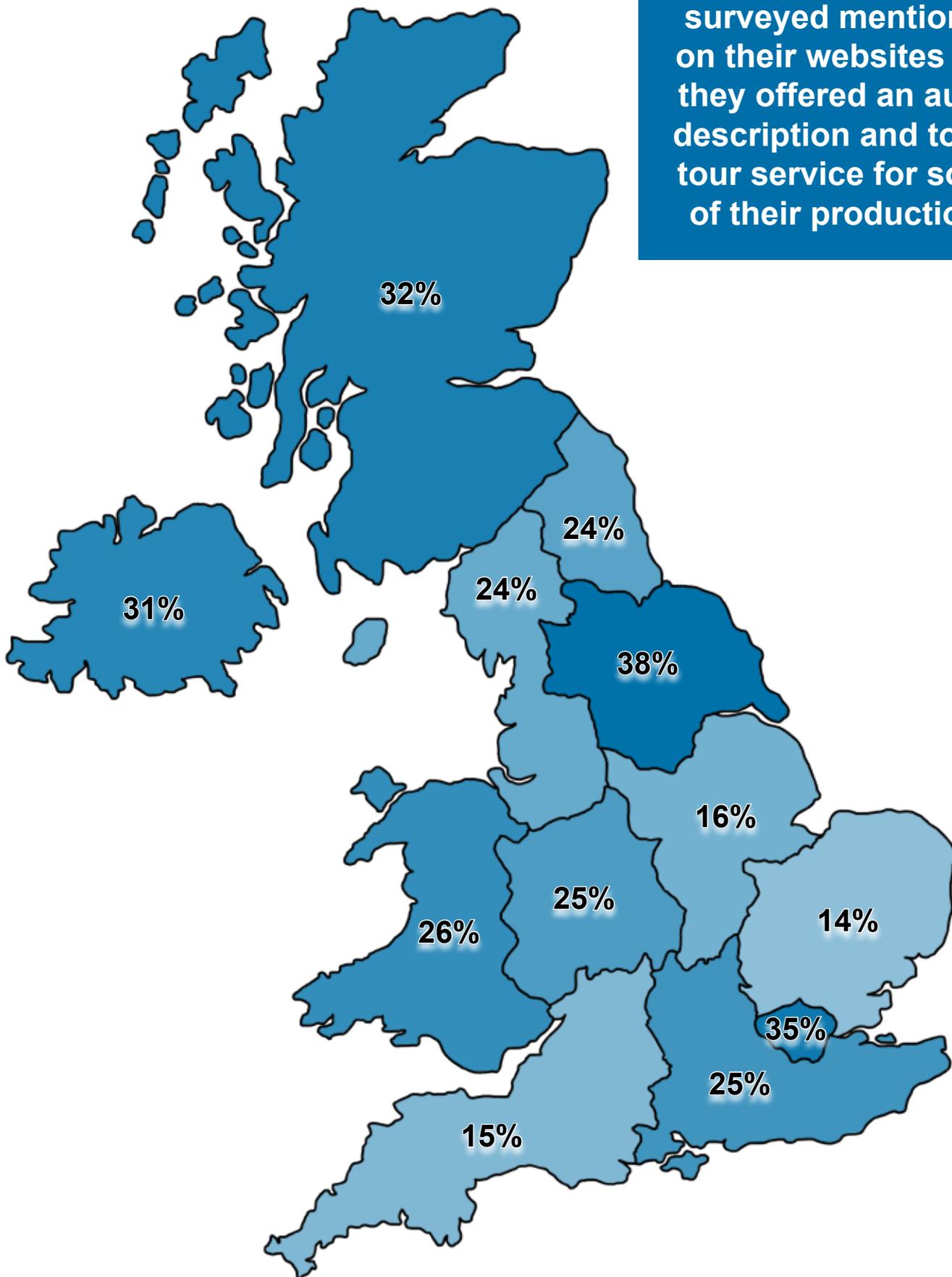
The access information provided on theatre websites ranges from a few lines of text to detailed information in multiple formats relevant to a wide range of people.

Access information needs to be clearly written for the benefit of the audience - rather than in formal and legalistic language. Access statements and policies are important, but are part of internal processes. While it is good to make commitments public, the access information itself needs to be accessible - in content and format.

# Access services

## Audio-described performances

25% of theatres surveyed mentioned on their websites that they offered an audio description and touch tour service for some of their productions



## Theatres that provide audio-described performances

1	Yorkshire	13 out of 34	38%
2	London	41 out of 116	35%
3	Scotland	14 out of 44	32%
4	Northern Ireland	5 out of 16	31%
5	Wales	8 out of 31	26%
6	South East	25 out of 99	25%
7	West Midlands	12 out of 48	25%
	<b>UK wide</b>	<b>165 out of 659</b>	<b>25%</b>
8	North East	5 out of 21	24%
9	North West	14 out of 59	24%
10	East Midlands	5 out of 31	16%
11	South West	13 out of 89	15%
12	East	10 out of 71	14%

### What is audio description?

An audio description service makes theatre more accessible to blind and partially sighted people. By 2020 the number of people in the UK with sight loss will be over 2,250,000. Currently, around 360,000 people are registered with their local authority as blind or partially sighted.

Ideally an audio description service comprises three elements for each performance:

An **audio introduction**, with a description of the set, characters and costumes, giving the blind and partially sighted audience information about the visual style and design of the production. Audio introductions are often delivered live by the describer just prior to the performance, over the headsets.

For those who don't want to take their seat early to listen, these introductions are also made available a few days before the performance, on audio CD and online, accompanied with access information detailing how to get to, and navigate around the venue.

For some blind or partially sighted people this is all they need to attend on their own. For others the introduction enables them to be an active, engaged participant in the theatre outing with the confidence of knowing what to expect when they get there

A **touch tour**, which enables people to familiarise themselves with the layout and scale of the stage, meet some of the actors and begin to associate voices with characters to help them follow the action. They also have an opportunity to touch or handle the set, important props and costumes, all accompanied by description.

The **live description** of the visual elements of the performance as it takes place. Delivered through headsets, the describer speaks in the often short gaps between dialogue, song, music and sound effects, describing characters' actions and reactions, as well as set changes, shifts in location and lighting effects. This element can also be pre-recorded.

## Suppliers

Audio description is done by specialist audio describers, working solo or in pairs. Many theatres have a long-standing relationship with their describers, and it is important that they are provided with tickets, a recording of the production to give them opportunity to script and rehearse their description before the audio-described performance. The largest supplier of theatre audio description in the UK is VocalEyes (working mainly in England and Wales), which has a team of highly experienced and skilled freelance describers. There are several other smaller companies working independently across the UK: the Audio Description Association has a directory of freelance describers.

**VocalEyes** ([vocaleyeyes.co.uk](http://vocaleyeyes.co.uk))

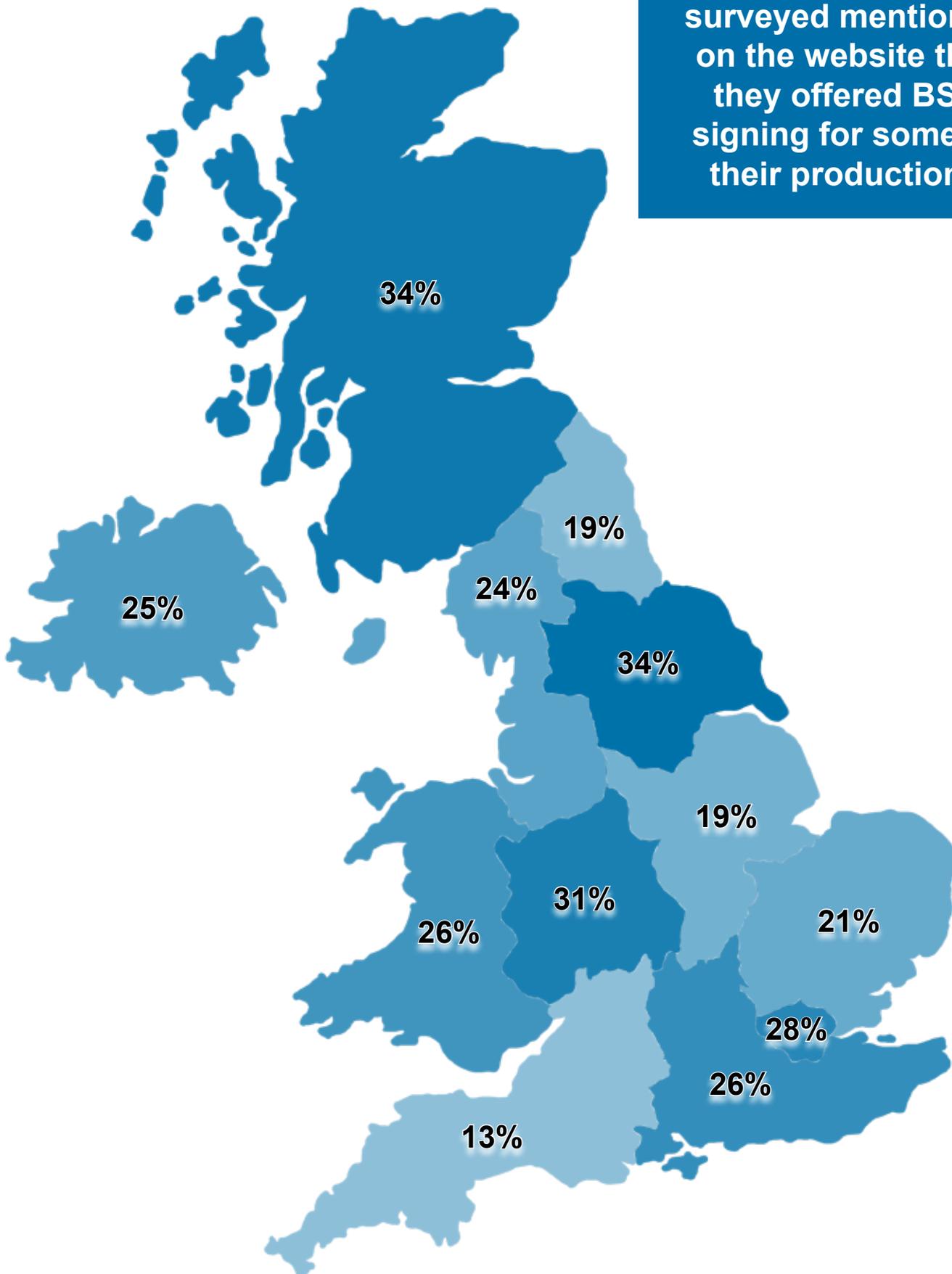
**Audio Description Association** ([audiodescription.co.uk](http://audiodescription.co.uk))

**Audio Description Association Scotland** ([adascotland.com](http://adascotland.com))

# Access Performances

## British Sign Language (BSL) performances

25% of theatres surveyed mentioned on the website that they offered BSL signing for some of their productions



## Theatres that provide BSL signed performances

1	Yorkshire	12 out of 35	34%
2	Scotland	15 out of 44	34%
3	West Midlands	15 out of 48	31%
4	London	33 out of 116	28%
5	South East	26 out of 99	26%
6	Wales	8 out of 31	26%
7	Northern Ireland	4 out of 16	25%
	<b>UK wide</b>	<b>163 out of 659</b>	<b>25%</b>
8	North West	14 out of 59	24%
9	East	15 out of 71	21%
10	East Midlands	6 out of 31	19%
11	North East	4 out of 21	19%

### What are BSL signed performances?

British Sign Language (BSL) is the preferred language of over 87,000 Deaf people in the UK for whom English may be a second or third language. At a signed performance, trained sign language interpreters, usually standing to one side of the stage or in a Box, interpret the script and language used by the performers at the same time it is being performed.

Specific seats are allocated in the theatre (mostly within the first eight rows) so that the theatre goer can follow the signers' interpretation clearly, enabling everyone to access the spoken word.

Good BSL interpretation depends on how much involvement the interpreter has with the production team and a good relationship with the stage manager is essential, especially when it comes to last-minute script changes. Ideally, a video recording of the production rehearsal is provided to the interpreter for preparation. It is good practice for the BSL interpreter to attend rehearsals and read the scripts to adjust their signing to suit the dialect of the region they are working in.

It is important that the BSL interpreter is positioned in a suitable area so that audiences can see the signs and the on-stage action. This positioning should be part of the pre-production planning process.

BSL-interpreted performances can be compromised if the dialogue is fast paced and having many actors on stage at the same time can be challenging to interpret and words can become lost in the signing. Some production companies use two BSL interpreters to overcome this challenge, although it depends on the stage directions of actors who could be moving and changing roles quickly.

**Graeae Theatre** ([graeae.org](http://graeae.org)) are exemplary in that they integrate their BSL interpreters into the productions so that the interpreter is part of the entire process from the beginning.

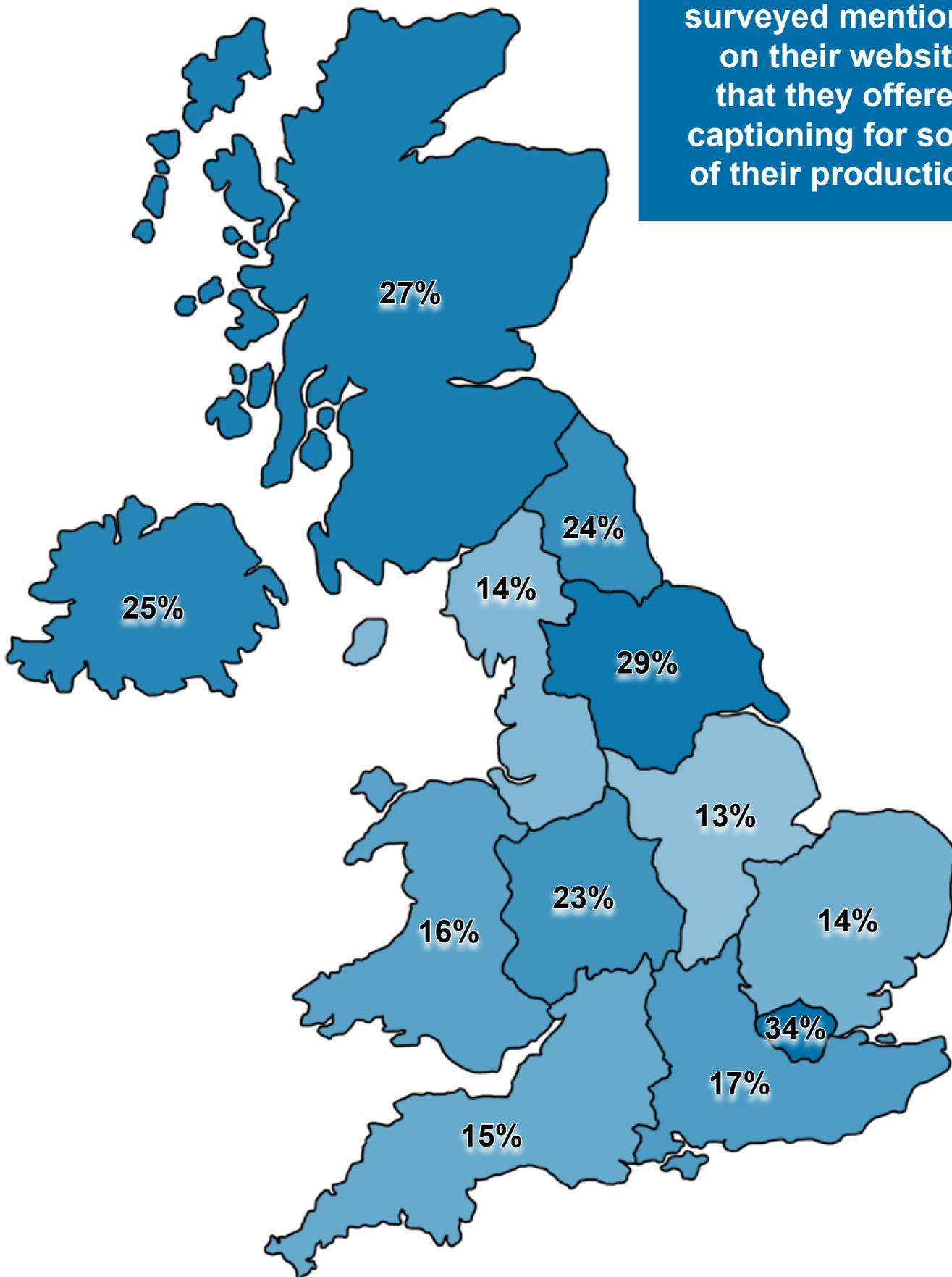
**Deafinitely Theatre** ([deafinitelytheatre.co.uk](http://deafinitelytheatre.co.uk)) combine the use of BSL with spoken English, enabling both languages to be accessed at the same time.

Venues programming touring productions may need to negotiate with the producers as part of the initial contract as to how quality BSL interpretation may be provided throughout a tour.

# Access services

## Captioned performances

21% of theatres surveyed mentioned on their website that they offered captioning for some of their productions



## Theatres that provide captioned performances

1	London	40 out of 116	34%
2	Yorkshire	10 out of 35	29%
3	Scotland	12 out of 44	27%
4	Northern Ireland	4 out of 16	25%
5	North East	5 out of 21	24%
6	West Midlands	11 out of 48	23%
	<b>UK wide</b>	<b>139 out of 659</b>	<b>21%</b>
7	South East	17 out of 99	17%
8	Wales	5 out of 31	16%
9	South West	13 out of 89	15%
10	East	10 out of 71	14%
11	North West	8 out of 59	14%
12	East Midlands	4 out of 31	13%

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## What are captioned performances?

Theatre captions are similar to television subtitles and give people who are d/Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing access to live performance. The actors' words appear on an LED or LCD caption unit (or units), placed next to the stage or in the set, at the same time as they are spoken or sung.

Unlike opera surtitles for hearing audiences, captions include additional information such as speaker names, sound effects and offstage noises. A trained captioner prepares the captions in advance, checking them several times at the theatre beforehand to make sure that they match the actors' delivery.

The captioner also works closely with the production team, usually the Deputy Stage Managers or Stage Managers, to ensure that any changes or deletions to the script are incorporated. They also add speaker names, sound effects and offstage noises.

At the performance, the captioner cues the lines as the action unfolds on stage. Should an actor miss a line, the captioner will try and skip over it so that it doesn't appear on the caption unit, although this may not always be possible in very fast dialogue. Similarly, if lines are said in a different order, the captioner will try to follow the actor, depending on the speed of delivery.

Timing of the captions is crucial so as not to pre-empt the actors, especially if the text involves a key punchline or joke. It's important that the text does not lag behind the actors because the ability of many people to 'hear' the actors more clearly is then lost.

## **Suppliers**

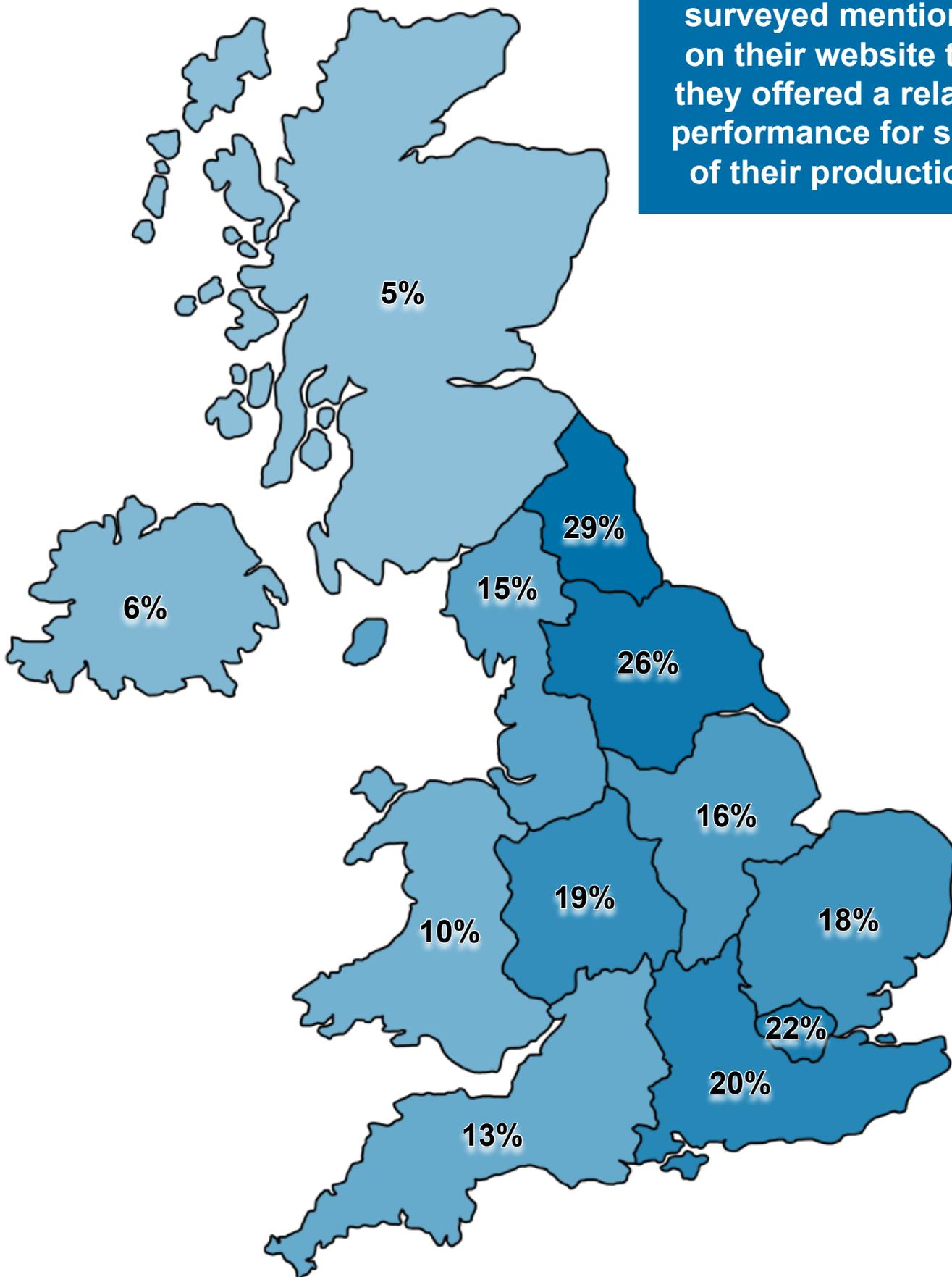
**Stagetext** ([stagetext.org](http://stagetext.org)) is the leading provider of access to d/Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing audiences through captioning for the UK arts sector, supplied with the use of its own caption software and LED or LCD screens.

After completing training with Stagetext, captioners are able to work freelance with Stagetext or direct with venues but will always follow the same best practice guidelines. Trained captioners may also offer advice to any venue on the most effective caption solutions for their auditorium / performance space.

# Access services

## Relaxed performances

17% of theatres surveyed mentioned on their website that they offered a relaxed performance for some of their productions



## Theatres that provide relaxed performances

1	North East	6 out of 21	29%
2	Yorkshire	9 out of 35	26%
3	London	26 out of 116	22%
4	South East	20 out of 99	20%
5	West Midlands	9 out of 48	19%
6	East	13 out of 71	18%
	<b>UK wide</b>	<b>115 out of 659</b>	<b>17%</b>
7	East Midlands	5 out of 31	16%
8	North West	9 out of 59	15%
9	South West	12 out of 89	13%
10	Wales	3 out of 31	10%
11	Northern Ireland	1 out of 16	6%
12	Scotland	2 out of 44	5%

### **Relaxed performances: ‘like the quiet carriage on the train, but the opposite’**

Relaxed performances are designed to offer an opportunity to access live performance for those who prefer a more ‘relaxed’ environment. While open to everyone, they have been specifically designed for the needs of people who have sensory sensitivities and are suitable for people with learning disabilities, autism spectrum conditions or complex communication needs.

There is a relaxed attitude to audience noise and movement. The performance itself is kept as close as possible to the show that the director intended, though with small changes made to lights and sound, e.g. removing strobes or sudden loud noises.

They are an excellent way to attract a more diverse audience and to build a relationship with a new community of theatregoers. Relaxed performances can also transform how a venue caters for disabled people across its whole programme; the audience diversification has a very positive impact by encouraging a change in approach. For example, many venues have developed Visual Stories for their productions, public spaces and for the journey to the venue from local transport options.

Relaxed performances also raise interesting questions about expected audience behaviours and how the theatre's Front of House policies will or should respond.

The figure of 17% compares well with other types of access service given the relative youth of relaxed performances in the UK theatre sector. A handful of venues across the UK have been doing a version of what we now call relaxed performances for many years but they only started to become a regular offering on a larger scale in around 2011.

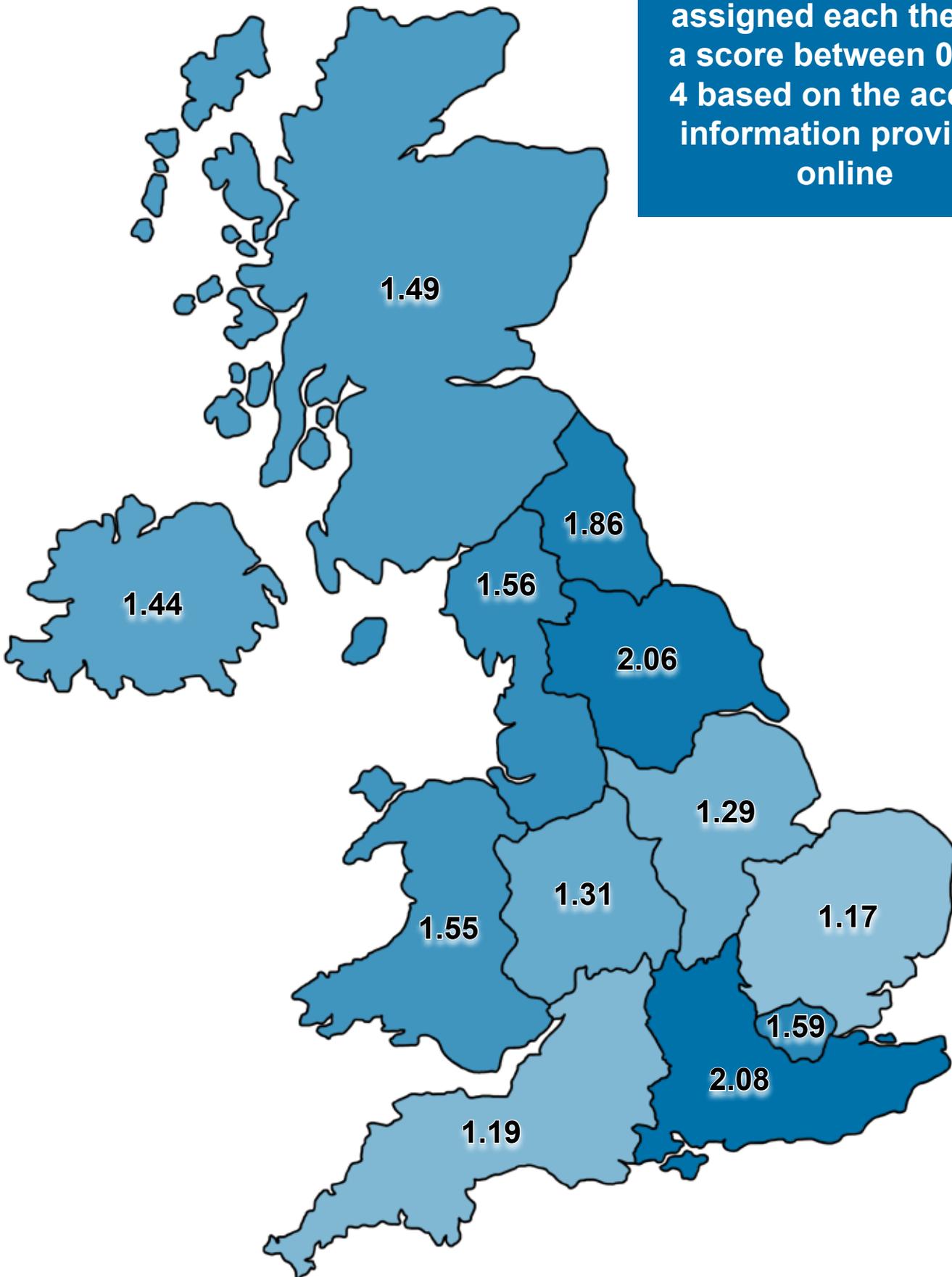
Of course, more theatres should offer relaxed performances: they require little to no equipment and, if scheduled early and given adequate marketing support, are not expensive.

However, there is a growing trend in relaxed performances becoming a place where any audiences who 'make noise' are encouraged to attend and this can cause issues. For example, some have been promoted to parents and babies, resulting in learning disabled people having to leave as the noise was too stressful. Relaxed performances should be part of a wider range of 'individualised' experiences at the theatre, to include **parent and baby** and **dementia-friendly** performances, and to offer options for a wide range of people. Our survey found 24 theatres across the whole of the UK that offered dementia-friendly performances, which is under 4% of those surveyed.

As with any type of access performance, insufficient marketing or relationship building results in small audiences. Venues should work closely with potential audiences to design and develop their relaxed performances, and they would then feel more confident in their offer and have a larger audience.

# Rating for access information and services

Our researchers assigned each theatre a score between 0 and 4 based on the access information provided online



## Rating for access information and services

### Average rating per theatre

1	South East	2.08
2	Yorkshire	2.06
3	North East	1.86
4	London	1.59
5	North West	1.56
6	Wales	1.55
	<b>UK wide</b>	<b>1.54</b>
7	Scotland	1.49
8	Northern Ireland	1.44
9	West Midlands	1.31
10	East Midlands	1.29
11	South West	1.19
12	East	1.17

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>No access information</b>	<b>Very little detail</b>	<b>Some detail</b>	<b>Detailed</b>	<b>Very detailed</b>

# Access showcase

The theatres with the highest rating for access services, information and resources listed on their website in each of the UK nations and regions.

## #1 South East

**Theatre Royal, Brighton** ([atgtickets.com/venues/theatre-royal-brighton](https://atgtickets.com/venues/theatre-royal-brighton))

**Chichester Festival Theatre** ([cft.org.uk](https://cft.org.uk))

**Churchill Theatre, Bromley** ([churchilltheatre.co.uk](https://churchilltheatre.co.uk))

**Harlequin Theatre, Redhill** ([harlequintheatre.co.uk](https://harlequintheatre.co.uk))

**Leas Cliff Hall Theatre** ([atgtickets.com/venues/leas-cliff-hall](https://atgtickets.com/venues/leas-cliff-hall))

**Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury** ([marlowetheatre.com](https://marlowetheatre.com))

**Mayflower Theatre, Southampton** ([mayflower.org.uk](https://mayflower.org.uk))

**Milton Keynes Theatre** ([atgtickets.com/venues/milton-keynes-theatre/](https://atgtickets.com/venues/milton-keynes-theatre/))

**Minerva Theatre, Chichester** ([cft.org.uk](https://cft.org.uk))

**New Victoria Theatre, Woking** ([atgtickets.com/venues/new-victoria-theatre](https://atgtickets.com/venues/new-victoria-theatre))

**New Theatre, Oxford** ([atgtickets.com/venues/new-theatre-oxford](https://atgtickets.com/venues/new-theatre-oxford))

**The Orchard, Dartford** ([orchardtheatre.co.uk/Online](https://orchardtheatre.co.uk/Online))

**Oxford Playhouse** ([oxfordplayhouse.com](https://oxfordplayhouse.com))

**Rhoda McGaw Theatre, Woking** ([atgtickets.com/venues/rhoda-mcgaw-theatre/](https://atgtickets.com/venues/rhoda-mcgaw-theatre/))

## #2 Yorkshire

**Crucible Theatre, Sheffield** ([sheffieldtheatres.co.uk](https://sheffieldtheatres.co.uk))

**Harrogate Theatre** ([harrogatetheatre.co.uk](https://harrogatetheatre.co.uk))

**Hull Truck Theatre** ([hulltruck.co.uk](https://hulltruck.co.uk))

**Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough** ([sjt.uk.com](https://sjt.uk.com))

**West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds** ([wyp.org.uk](https://wyp.org.uk))

## #3 North East

**ARC** ([arconline.co.uk](http://arconline.co.uk))

**Live Theatre, Newcastle** ([live.org.uk](http://live.org.uk))

**Northern Stage, Newcastle** ([northernstage.co.uk](http://northernstage.co.uk))

**Sunderland Empire Theatre, Sunderland** ([atgtickets.com/venues/sunderland-empire](http://atgtickets.com/venues/sunderland-empire))

**Theatre Royal, Newcastle** ([theatreroyal.co.uk](http://theatreroyal.co.uk))

## #4 London

**Barbican** ([barbican.org.uk](http://barbican.org.uk))

**Lyric Hammersmith** ([lyric.co.uk](http://lyric.co.uk))

**Polka Theatre** ([polkatheatre.com](http://polkatheatre.com))

**Prince Edward Theatre** ([princeedwardtheatre.co.uk](http://princeedwardtheatre.co.uk))

**Rose Theatre, Kingston** ([rosetheatrekingston.org](http://rosetheatrekingston.org))

**Roundhouse** ([roundhouse.org.uk](http://roundhouse.org.uk))

**Royal National Theatre** ([nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk))

**Savoy Theatre** ([atgtickets.com/venues/savoy-theatre](http://atgtickets.com/venues/savoy-theatre))

**Shakespeare's Globe and Sam Wanamaker Playhouse**  
([shakespearesglobe.org](http://shakespearesglobe.org))

**Stratford East Theatre Royal** ([stratfordeast.com](http://stratfordeast.com))

**Trafalgar Studios** ([atgtickets.com/venues/trafalgar-studios](http://atgtickets.com/venues/trafalgar-studios))

**Tricycle Theatre** ([tricycle.co.uk](http://tricycle.co.uk))

**Unicorn Theatre** ([unicorntheatre.com](http://unicorntheatre.com))

## #5 North West

**Coliseum Theatre, Oldham** ([coliseum.org.uk](http://coliseum.org.uk))

**Empire Theatre, Liverpool** ([atgtickets.com/venues/liverpool-empire](http://atgtickets.com/venues/liverpool-empire))

**Everyman Theatre, Liverpool** ([everymanplayhouse.com](http://everymanplayhouse.com))

**The Lowry, Salford** ([thelowry.com](http://thelowry.com))

**Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester** ([royalexchange.co.uk](http://royalexchange.co.uk))

**Theatre By The Lake, Keswick** ([theatrebythelake.com](http://theatrebythelake.com))

**Unity Theatre, Liverpool** ([unitytheatreliverpool.co.uk](http://unitytheatreliverpool.co.uk))

## #6 Wales

**New Theatre, Cardiff** ([newtheatrecardiff.co.uk](http://newtheatrecardiff.co.uk))

**Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff** ([wmc.org.uk](http://wmc.org.uk))

## #7 Scotland

**Citizens Theatre, Glasgow** ([citz.co.uk](http://citz.co.uk))

**Dundee Repertory Theatre** ([dundeerep.co.uk](http://dundeerep.co.uk))

**Festival Theatre, Edinburgh** ([edtheatres.com](http://edtheatres.com))

**King's Theatre, Edinburgh** ([edtheatres.com/kings](http://edtheatres.com/kings))

**Lemon Tree Theatre, Aberdeen** ([aberdeenperformingarts.com/venues/the-lemon-tree](http://aberdeenperformingarts.com/venues/the-lemon-tree))

**Macrobert Centre, Stirling** ([macrobertartscentre.org](http://macrobertartscentre.org))

**Perth Theatre & Opera House** ([horsecross.co.uk/perth-theatre](http://horsecross.co.uk/perth-theatre))

**Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh** ([lyceum.org.uk](http://lyceum.org.uk))

**Tron Theatre, Glasgow** ([tron.co.uk](http://tron.co.uk))

## #8 Northern Ireland

**Courtyard Theatre, Newtownabbey** ([thecourtyardtheatre.com](http://thecourtyardtheatre.com))

**Lyric Theatre, Belfast** ([lyrictheatre.co.uk](http://lyrictheatre.co.uk))

**Millennium Forum Theatre, Derry** ([millenniumforum.co.uk](http://millenniumforum.co.uk))

**Theatre at The Mill, Newtownabbey** ([theatreatthemill.com](http://theatreatthemill.com))

## #9 West Midlands

**Birmingham Hippodrome** ([birminghamhippodrome.com](http://birminghamhippodrome.com))

**Birmingham Repertory Theatre** ([birmingham-rep.co.uk](http://birmingham-rep.co.uk))

**Wolverhampton Grand** ([grandtheatre.co.uk](http://grandtheatre.co.uk))

**Royal Shakespeare Theatre and Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon**  
([rsc.org.uk](http://rsc.org.uk))

**Warwick Arts Centre** ([warwickartscentre.co.uk](http://warwickartscentre.co.uk))

## #10 East Midlands

**Curve, Leicester** ([curveonline.co.uk](http://curveonline.co.uk))

**Derby Assembly Rooms/Guildhall (Derby Live)** ([derbylive.co.uk](http://derbylive.co.uk))

**Theatre Royal, Nottingham** ([trch.co.uk](http://trch.co.uk))

**Royal & Derngate, Northampton** ([royalandderngate.co.uk](http://royalandderngate.co.uk))

## #11 East

**Cambridge Arts Theatre** ([cambridgeartstheatre.com](http://cambridgeartstheatre.com))

**New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich** ([wolseytheatre.co.uk](http://wolseytheatre.co.uk))

**Theatre Royal, Norwich** ([theatreroyalnorwich.co.uk](http://theatreroyalnorwich.co.uk))

**Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds** ([theatreroyal.org](http://theatreroyal.org))

**Pomegranate Theatre, Chesterfield** ([chesterfieldtheatres.co.uk](http://chesterfieldtheatres.co.uk))

## #12 South West

**Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham** ([everymantheatre.org.uk](http://everymantheatre.org.uk))

**Hall For Cornwall, Truro** ([hallforcornwall.co.uk](http://hallforcornwall.co.uk))

**Northcott Theatre, Exeter** ([exeternorthcott.co.uk](http://exeternorthcott.co.uk))

**Salisbury Playhouse** ([salisburyplayhouse.com](http://salisburyplayhouse.com))

**Theatre Royal, Bristol** ([bristololdvic.org.uk](http://bristololdvic.org.uk))

**Theatre Royal, Plymouth** ([theatreroyal.com](http://theatreroyal.com))

# Other findings

## **36% of theatres provided a dedicated access contact**

An access contact can support people with specific access-related queries and bookings, or those requesting personal assistance during their visit to the theatre. We recommend that you provide alternative means of contact, primarily telephone or email. Online forms should be carefully tested, as they can be inaccessible to blind and partially sighted people, particularly if they use a CAPTCHA.

## **46% of theatres welcome guide dogs; 7% offer a sitting service.**

Do remember that for every guide dog user, there are many blind and partially sighted people who do not own a guide dog. They may use a cane, or be accompanied by a companion, or come alone. Providing support for them – through access information on getting to and around the venue, large print and braille programmes and cast lists, is equally important.

## **10% of theatres offered an email newsletter providing details of access performances**

Developing and nurturing audiences for access performances is very important. It is recommended to have both a dedicated newsletter as well as publicising access performances through your general audience channels. d/Deaf and disabled people are part of family and social networks, and word of mouth plays an important role: make sure all your followers and subscribers know about your access performances.

## **14% of theatres have an access/carer membership scheme**

The practice of offering disabled people a free ticket for a carer / personal assistant / essential companion can cause complications when booking tickets. For useful advice read **Making ticket sales accessible for disabled customers: a best practice guide** ([star.org.uk/bpg](http://star.org.uk/bpg)) commissioned by STAR (Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers).

# Resources and alternative formats

## Symbol

Symbols are images which are used to support text, making the meaning clearer and easier to understand. They provide a visual representation of a concept. Symbol stories are an excellent way to create accessible learning materials for children with special educational needs (SEN). For example, ATG collaborated with Widgit Software ([widgit.com](http://widgit.com)) to create symbol resources to support pantomime audiences during the Christmas season in 2015 ([atgtickets.com/access/symbol-resources/](http://atgtickets.com/access/symbol-resources/))

## Visual / Social Stories

**Visual Stories** are a way of providing accessible information to relaxed performance audiences. They are designed to provide information about a venue or performance in an accessible way for anyone, but particularly for people who have a learning disability. Visual Stories contain images which show the reader the 'visual journey' to, and through, the venue so that they can prepare for their visit.

They also provide information on what theatre is, and explain commonly used terms, something often not explained to audience members generally. They are a low-cost, high-impact way of making theatre more accessible and can benefit a wide range of audience members. Many theatres and theatre companies have started to offer them, but they vary in quality and often no research is done into what is best for the audience.

The model most widely used is that developed by Kirsty Hoyle in 2010 while at the Unicorn Theatre. It is predicated on **Social Stories**<sup>™</sup> (trademarked and owned by Carol Gray) and uses the principles of EasyRead, a way of making information more accessible to people with learning disabilities. Although they look similar, Visual Stories are different to Social Stories. Social Stories are in the first person and are used primarily for people who are on the autism spectrum and are developed specifically for an individual. Visual Stories are designed to be general enough to suit most readers and are not instructive (e.g. 'you can clap your hands if you enjoy the show') but more informative (e.g. 'An usher is someone who checks tickets and shows people to their seats').

## Audio

Recorded audio is a very useful format for blind and partially sighted people. For an example of access information in audio format for users of an audio description service, the **Almeida Theatre page on the VocalEyes website** ([vocaleyeyes.co.uk/venues/almeida-theatre](http://vocaleyeyes.co.uk/venues/almeida-theatre))

For an example of an audio brochure, produced at low cost and using SoundCloud embedded: **Salisbury Playhouse's audio brochure** ([salisburyplayhouse.com/your-visit/access-services/audio-brochure](http://salisburyplayhouse.com/your-visit/access-services/audio-brochure))

## Braille

Guidance on the presentation of Braille can be found on the **UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF)** website ([ukaaf.org/braille/guidance](http://ukaaf.org/braille/guidance)). For suppliers, visit the **RNIB Sightlines Directory** ([sightlinedirectory.org.uk](http://sightlinedirectory.org.uk)) and filter by 'Braille transcription'.

## Large Print

For cast lists and programme notes. The **UKAAF** provides guidance ([ukaaf.org/large-print](http://ukaaf.org/large-print)) for creating Large Print documents, which should be Arial 16 pt minimum. For suppliers visit the **RNIB Sightlines Directory** ([sightlinedirectory.org.uk](http://sightlinedirectory.org.uk)) and filter by 'Large Print transcription'

## Videos/ Trailers

Video is used to support and market many theatre shows. These can include trailers, interviews and behind-the-scenes footage, most of which have longevity beyond the run of the show. 16% of websites surveyed had video content. Only 36% of these were subtitled, leaving 64% inaccessible to people who are d/Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

## Word/PDF documents

Many people find it useful to have access information provided in a downloadable document. This can be printed out or read using assistive technology after the visit to the website, possibly during the journey to the venue, including when offline. We recommend providing documents in Microsoft Word, and an accessible PDF.

# Conclusion

The most shocking finding in this report is that **28% of theatres provide no access information of any sort on their websites**. Even if a theatre provides no access services for performances, efforts should be made to provide information on step-free access, wheelchair spaces in the auditorium, disabled toilets, parking, and other information on how the theatre has removed barriers to access.

We hope to see access performances become even more popular as venues shift their focus from service provision to audience development. The level of opportunities for d/Deaf and disabled people across the UK theatre sector is varied, in parts encouraging, but inconsistent. We know as well that they are often not sustained, which leaves audiences unsure just how and when their local theatres will be accessible to them.

Access performances are only a success if they are properly supported and championed at a senior level in an arts organisation. Many venues that are supported by public funding are not accessible for members of the public. Steps have been taken by funders to include access provisions as an ambition for arts organisations, but there is still no imperative requirement.

Budgets are often cited as a reason for not providing access services. This should be challenged: access and audience development should be included within budgets from the start, and with strategic partnerships and creative access solutions, most venues can afford to do more than they do currently.

We call on organisations to develop access policies that embed access at the heart of the venue; both in terms of staff support but also by publicly listing access and inclusion targets and statements that hold them accountable to their audiences, something we need to see more of if we want d/Deaf and disabled audiences to be regular arts attenders who have access to a range of performances and opportunities.

We will be back with State of Theatre Access 2019, having re-visited the same websites to check on progress. But first, we will be back with State of Museum Access 2018.

# Access information checklist

Section	Notes	Formats
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Welcome message</b>	To demonstrate that the venue intends to be as accessible as possible and to open lines of communication with audience	Text, captioned video, audio
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>How to get there</b>	Detailed directions from local public transport links	Words, images, maps
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Disabled parking</b>		Words, images, maps
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Inside the venue</b>	Step-free access, lifts; entrance; foyer; auditorium, including wheelchair seats; accessible toilets; bars and restaurants.	Words, images, captioned video
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Access contact</b>	For information, booking and enquiries about personal assistance	Phone, email, post
<b>Access services for performances</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Audio-described</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>BSL signed</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Captioned performances</b>	Performance listings, Booking requirements	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Relaxed performances</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Others, e.g. dementia-friendly, parent and baby</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Supporting resources</b>	Alternative formats, synopses, audio introductions for AD performances; Visual Stories, Symbol stories etc.	Audio, braille, Large Print, text, Symbol etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Access newsletter</b>	Details and sign up	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Ticket concession information, Access/carer scheme</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Assistance / Guide dogs</b>	Welcome, minding service, spending area.	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Technical</b>	Infra-red system for hearing enhancement; infra-red, radio or wifi for AD headsets.	

# Useful Links

For a useful toolkit to develop your theatre's access information page:  
**Visit England / Visit Scotland Accessibility Guides**  
([accessibilityguides.org](http://accessibilityguides.org))

## Community websites

### [DisabledGo.com](http://DisabledGo.com)

Established in 2000, DisabledGo.com has surveyed over 125,000 'places to go' and the website has over 1 million users every year. Each access guide is created from a survey completed by a trained assessor using a pan-disability template that asks up to 1000 questions of any one building. The survey has been designed in consultation with steering groups of disabled people and collects objective and quantitative information, overlaid with factual descriptions and photos.

### **Euan's Guide** ([euansguide.com](http://euansguide.com))

The website has thousands of disabled access reviews and listings submitted by disabled people. Reviews can be excellent endorsements and many people have visited new attractions and venues based on a review they have read on Euan's Guide. It can be very reassuring to read about another disabled person's experience beforehand, and it takes away the uncertainty when visiting somewhere new.

## **Access schemes**

### **The Access Card ([accesscard.org.uk](https://accesscard.org.uk))**

The Access Card has been developed as a consistent and reliable way of both evidencing disability and reporting the specific needs of disabled people. It's an optional choice which disabled people sign up for and is accepted at venues and festivals across the UK. Providers have the option to gain access to online verification in order to complete bookings over the phone. API integration into native ticketing software is available.

### **Hynt ([hynt.co.uk](https://hynt.co.uk))**

Hynt is a national access scheme that works with theatres and arts centres in Wales to make sure there is a consistent offer available for visitors with an impairment or specific access requirement, and their Carers or Personal Assistants.

## **Access performance listings**

**Access London Theatre ([officiallondontheatre.co.uk/access](https://officiallondontheatre.co.uk/access))**

**Access Scottish Theatre ([accessscottishtheatre.com](https://accessscottishtheatre.com))**

**Signed Culture ([signedculture.org.uk](https://signedculture.org.uk))**

**Stagetext ([stagetext.org](https://stagetext.org))**

**VocalEyes ([vocaleyeyes.co.uk](https://vocaleyeyes.co.uk))**

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Arts access specialists working with the cultural sector to improve access for all.

[includearts.com](http://includearts.com)

[info@includearts.com](mailto:info@includearts.com)

07854 866417



Making theatre and culture accessible to deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people

[stagetext.org](http://stagetext.org)

[enquiries@stagetext.org](mailto:enquiries@stagetext.org)

020 7377 0540



VocalEyes believes that blind and partially sighted people should have the best opportunities to experience and enjoy arts and heritage.

[vocaleyeyes.co.uk](http://vocaleyeyes.co.uk)

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