

Final Conclusions

When asking 'how to make virtual events more accessible for those living with a disability' people must first understand that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work with accessibility; event planners and organisers need to be flexible.

The key thing to accessibility is to listen to people asking for adjustments. As well as this, feedback from participants demonstrated how to have a person or team (depending on the size of event) who are specifically looking at accessibility and adjustments, and making this known with their contact details at the time of booking would be extremely helpful as often it can be difficult to know who to contact in this situation.

The primary research in this project consisted of a focus group using the Axis product and follow up interviews. All the participants were disabled, although there is often intersectionality within disability, for the purpose of this research they were categorised as the following:

- Physical disability
- Hearing impaired/deaf
- Visually impaired/blind
- Hidden disability
- Neurodiverse

Each participant explained the pros and cons of both virtual and physical events, with some finding virtual events more accessible overall, but still wanting the option to attend physical events. This leads to an overwhelming point that disabled people should always have the choice - attending virtually should not be seen as the 'accessible' option, physical events must still be made accessible so disabled people can attend physically if they wish.

When discussing physical events, one thing that each participant had their own struggle with was the food. Buffets strike up a number of accessibility issues, as well as issues around allergies and cross-contamination. It may not be something thought about in terms of accessibility, but participants agreed that sit down meals are much more inclusive than buffets.

The participants all got a chance to use the Axis product during the focus group. However, the workshop was not completed due to it running over and therefore the BSL interpreter needing a break. Although this is not ideal, it is a great example of how accessibility issues can lead to exclusion and/or having to cut sessions short.

The main issue was that the researcher could not export the workshop prior to running it, therefore could not send it over in advance. This would help in multiple ways:

- Visually impaired/blind people who use screen readers are excluded when 'screen share' is used because the screen reader classes it as an image. By sending the workshop in advance would mean the participants could use their screen reader with the document in preparation
- BSL interpreters need as much information as possible in advance in order to prepare, learn spellings, jargon and make sure they are clear on what is presented so they do not get it wrong
- BSL users know what is happening ahead of time and therefore can prepare their answers
- Those who are neurodiverse can sometimes like to be prepared and feel more comfortable when they know what is going to happen. This can also mean they can prepare their answers and are not put on the spot
- Those who have learning differences such as dyslexia can take their time to read through the questions and plan their answers, rather than feeling under time pressure to read and write their answers.

This demonstrates how preparation and being able to plan in advance makes events a lot more accessible to disabled people, it also allows people to ask any questions in advance. Approximately 20minutes was spent at the start explaining the activities and answering any questions. When you are under a strict time constraint like at corporate events, this is a huge amount of time. Time that could have been saved if the workshop layout could have been exported and sent to the participants in advance. It is also important to point out that when exporting the workshops, having an option of formats is integral to access as screen readers do not work with certain formats such as PDF.

Overall the participants liked the software, with some stating they would also like to use it at physical events in replacement to the traditional workshop activities that can throw up accessibility issues of their own. Participants also liked that the software could be used on their phones, one participant pointed out this is particularly helpful for those with chronic illnesses.

Feedback from the focus group and interviews demonstrated that each disabled person is different and the participants explained they could speak for themselves and give a background of their disability, but they can't speak for everyone, what will work for one person will not necessarily work for another person with the same disability. Therefore the key thing to accessibility and inclusion in events, whether virtual or physical, is to listen when people ask for reasonable adjustments and be flexible to making changes.

