Extant

*The Chairs* tour - project evaluation report

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# Background and objectives

Extant is the leading national organisation for the development and delivery of opportunities for visually impaired people to engage with the performing arts; through artistic programming, participatory activities, training, consultancy and advocacy.

As a pilot to explore how to strengthen appreciation for visually impaired-led theatre, build visually impaired audiences, and extend their geographic reach, Extant developed a 12-month programme which was delivered with venue partners in Manchester and Birmingham.

Alongside the touring show, of Ionesco's *The Chairs*, the programme included supported attendance and development workshops, to encourage participation by visually impaired audiences, and a series of staff development workshops, to support the delivery of an improved experience for visually impaired audiences and artists.

**Partner venues**

* Mac, Birmingham
* The Lowry, Manchester
* Stratford Circus, London (partner outside of STB funded activity)

To measure the success of the project against their audience development objectives, Extant commissioned The Audience Agency to conduct research with workshop participants, staff training participants and audiences.

This report presents the findings of that research, in the context of wider cultural engagement and the current levels of accessible theatre provision for visually impaired audiences.

## Audience development and engagement objectives

* To create a benchmark figure for current levels of engagement with visually impaired audiences in the regions covered by the tour, and for the partner venues.
* To measure the engagement levels of visually impaired people during the project, both as audiences and participants, and measure progression routes of visually impaired people engaged through the project into participation opportunities provided by Extant, hub venues and other mainstream providers
* To measure the impact of the venue training/mentoring on hub venues’ ability to independently engage with visually impaired audiences
* To maximise use of the project as an audience development tool for future work by identifying and sharing key learnings

## Research objectives

* To use findings to evaluate the success of the project and inform future strategic audience development planning
* To evaluate the impact of staff training and development activities on partner venue’s capacity to engage independently with visually impaired audiences
* To identify and assess existing data for levels of engagement with theatre by visually impaired audiences in the regions covered by the tour and at each partner venue; with a view to establishing a benchmark if the data supports this.

**Key themes**

* Audiences – impacts of the project on levels of awareness, confidence, and engagement
* Venues – impacts of the project on organisational change (staff awareness and confidence, sustainable approach to access for visually impaired audiences as ‘business as usual’ - beyond a supplementary audio descriptive offer and including approaches to marketing, staff training etc.)

# Sources of data and methodology

## Audience surveys

Face to face surveys were carried out at each of the performances. The surveys were conducted by Extant staff and volunteers.

**Sample sizes and margins of error**

In total, 150 audience surveys were collected over the period, from 3 venues; this gives a margin of error of c. ±8% at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% sure that if we had asked any of the questions shown to the entire population, a proportion of between 8% higher and 8% lower than the one given in this report would have also picked that answer.

The margin of error is affected by the number of responses that you have in your sample. If you have less than 100 responses, then the margin of error will be quite high so you should use the results in an indicative way only.

A breakdown of surveys from each venue is given below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Workshop** | **Audience surveys** |
| Mac Birmingham | 53 |
| The Lowry | 54 |
| Stratford Circus | 43 |

## Workshop participant surveys

Participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire before and after taking part in the workshop programme. They were also encouraged to complete a learning journal to document their thoughts and personal development through the course of the programme.

**Sample size and margins of error**

In total, 71 workshop surveys were collected over the period, from 9 workshops; this gives a margin of error of c. ±12% at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% sure that if we had asked any of the questions to the entire population, a proportion of between 12% higher and 12% lower than the one given in this report would have also picked that answer.

The margin of error is affected by the number of responses in the sample. If there are less than 100 responses, the margin of error will be quite high and the results should be seen as indicative only.

A breakdown of participant surveys from each workshop is given below. Note that not every participant may have filled out both a pre- and a post-workshop survey.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Workshop** | **Participant surveys** |
| Jan - March 2016 Move It Sportivate Birmingham | 10 |
| Jan - March 2016 Move It Manchester | 12 |
| 2nd March 2016 Birmingham Vision Harbourne Group | 7 |
| 2nd March 2016 Living with Sight Loss Course Rochdale | 5 |
| 9th March 2016 Birmingham Vision St Peters Group | 6 |
| 21st March Rochdale / RNC | 6 |
| 13th April Mac workshop | 3 |
| 16th April Chairs Lowry Workshop | 10 |
| 29th April Living with Sight Loss Bolton Group | 12 |

## Telephone interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted with 6 visually impaired attenders, 2 of whom had taken part in the supporting programme of workshops.

**Interviewee profiles**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Pseudonym** | **Participant / Attender** | **Demographics** |
| A | Attended 13/04 performance at the Mac | Female, 35-39, White: British, Severe sight impairment - blind |
| B | Attended 13/04 performance at the Mac | Male, 65-69, White: British, Severe sight impairment - blind |
| C | Attended 12/04 performance at the Mac | Male, 40-44, White: British, Severe sight impairment – blind |
| D | Attended 29/04 performance at Stratford Circus | Female, 45-49, Black or Black British: Caribbean, Severe sight impairment - blind |
| E | Birmingham workshop participant, attended performance at the Mac | [Unknown – recruited through Jodie, didn’t complete screening survey] |
| F | Birmingham workshop participant, attended performance at the Mac | [Unknown – recruited through Jodie, didn’t complete screening survey] |

## Staff workshop surveys

Staff were asked to complete a survey before and after participating in the staff training workshop. Surveys were distributed and collected by the event leader and venue staff.

Training participants were also encouraged to complete a learning journal to document their personal and professional development.

**Sample size and margins of error**

In total, 75 staff surveys were collected over the period, from 3 venues; this gives a margin of error of c. ±11% at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% sure that if we had asked any of the questions shown to the entire population, a proportion of between 11% higher and 11% lower than the one given in this report would have also picked that answer.

The margin of error is affected by the number of responses that you have in your sample. If you have less than 100 responses, then the margin of error will be quite high so you should use the results in an indicative way only.

A breakdown of surveys from each venue is given below. Note that not every participant may have filled out both a pre- and a post-workshop survey.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Workshop** | **Staff surveys** |
| Mac Birmingham | 25 |
| The Lowry | 44 |
| Stratford Circus | 6 |

# Summary of key findings and measures of success

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| --- |
| **The audience**   * The performance successfully engaged a visually impaired audience, with a third (33%) of attenders identified as having a limiting disability or health problem. This is significantly higher than the UK performing arts 2014/15 benchmark, which is 10%. * 8% of attenders said that they had been motivated by involvement in an Extant project or workshop. Although this proportion may seem low, it indicates that Extant has successfully engaged their participants with theatre; and should be seen in the context of the audience sample size and the degree of opportunity for respondents to have engaged with Extant prior to attendance. * The 20% of attenders cited “Theatre is an important part of who I am” as their main motivator to attend; this was the most prominent motivator overall and was true of both visually impaired and non-visually impaired attenders. * Travel times and distances increased considerably for visually impaired attenders who, on average, travelled 21 miles with a drive time of 48 minutes; this may be compared to averages of 9 miles, and 27 minutes, for the overall audience.   The audience mapping indicates that impaired audiences living in the more rural areas, such as the South Midlands, had furthest to travel.   * The programme successfully engaged new audiences with the work of visually impaired artists, with nearly two thirds of attenders (61%) experiencing this for the first time.   **The audience experience**   * The overall experience ratings given by attenders were consistently high for all elements of the production and across all of the venues. * 98% of the respondents rated the overall experience as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’; for visually impaired attenders the rating was 88%. * 98% rated the staff welcome as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’. * 96% rated the quality of the performance as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’; for visually impaired attenders the rating was 88%. * The performance also had a positive impact on the attenders’ likelihood to engage with visually impaired art in the future. * 75% said that they ‘Strongly agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ that they felt inspired to engage with more visually impaired art; this rose to 92% for visually impaired attenders.   **The workshop programme**   * The workshops had a demonstrable impact on the confidence levels of the participants, and on their likelihood to engage with visually impaired arts and with the partner venues. * 91% of participants said that they felt ‘Very confident’ (31%) or ‘Confident (60%); a significant increase on the 43% who said the same prior to taking part. * 63% had not visited the Mac or the Lowry prior to taking part in the programme.  Most of those that had visited previously had done so as attenders (71%), rather than participants in an activity. * 86% said they were ‘much more, or more, likely’ to attend performances involving visually impaired artists. * 77% said they were ‘much more, or more, likely’ to attend a performance at the Mac or the Lowry.   **The venue staff training**   * 75 staff members at the partner venues completed the before and after questionnaire; this exceeds the target number of 50 participants in the training workshops. * Following the staff training workshops, the participants expressed a significant rise in their levels of confidence when engaging with both visually impaired audience members and artists. * 90% of participants said that they felt ‘very confident’ or ‘confident’ when engaging with visually impaired audiences; this may be compared to 35% giving the same response prior to the training. * 96% of participants ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the training had improved their ability to engage with visually impaired audiences and artists. * 93% of participants ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the training had improved their understanding of the difficulties and barriers faced by visually impaired audience members; and 98% that it had improved their awareness of visual impairment in general. |

# Conclusions and recommendations

|  |
| --- |
| **The main theme that emerged throughout the research was the disparity between the low levels of provision of accessible theatre for visually impaired audiences, and the strong appetite for the performing arts expressed by the visually impaired participants and audiences.**   * Audience behaviours are not dictated by their visual impairment, but by the type of person and their levels of engagement. Theatres should ensure that they take a social approach to accessibility (what will meet this person’s needs?) rather than a medical one (what’s wrong with this person?) * Visually impaired audiences are aware that it may be beyond the scope of many theatres to provide audio description for every performance, but the limited programming currently on offer means that they feel marginalised and without choice. Extending the accessible performances across a range of evening, matinee, weekend and midweek performances would give more choice and support attendance. * Where it’s not possible to offer audio description, there are simple things that theatres can do, such as running touch tours before the performance and having braille or large print programmes available, that will significantly improve the experience for visually impaired attenders. * Theatre as an art form is important to this audience; they are not just looking for anything that’s accessible to them, but have the same range of likes and dislikes as other theatre audiences. The variety of programming and availability needs to reflect this. * There is a need for a shared experience, with friends and family but also with audience as a whole. Audio description is good and opens up more content, but the experience is often solitary and sets the visually impaired attender apart from the rest of the audience. * The equity of the offer needs to extend to marketing materials. Accessible materials are often offered ‘on demand’ rather than being generally available as for other audiences. Theatres can support the needs of visually impaired audiences by ensuring that materials are available on line and at information points. * Staff should be familiar with the offer for visually impaired audiences. They should be encouraged and supported to attend an audio described performance or join a touch tour; they should know where support equipment is and how it works, so they can check it before each performance. They should also build an understanding of bus routes and car parking, for example, so that they can communicate more confidently with all audiences, including the visually impaired. * The perceptions of staff pre-training, particularly in terms of what they felt the main difficulties were for visually impaired audiences – access and unfamiliarity – don’t chime with the main difficulties expressed by visually impaired audiences – the lack of provision. This indicates a lack of understanding and theatres may need support to engage more with visually impaired audiences, through local support networks or national organisations such as Engage, so they can make the most of this potentially frequent and regular audience and not see accessible programming as an add-on to their regular programme. * This research has delivered a robust overview of the experience and needs of visually impaired audiences in general, but it might be helpful in future research to look in more detail at the different needs for people who have lost or are losing their sight, and those who have had a visual impairment since birth or early childhood. It’s likely that they will experience different levels of confidence, awareness and access to support networks and so on, which would impact significantly on their levels and experience of engaging with visually impaired arts and accessible theatre. |

# Full results

# Audience survey

150 audience surveys were completed in total, with the numbers split fairly evenly across the three venues; 35% at the Mac, 36% at the Lowry and 29% at Stratford Circus.

|  |
| --- |
| Key findings |
| * A third (33%) of attenders identified as having a limiting disability or health problem. This is significantly higher than the UK performing arts 2014/15 benchmark, which is 10%. * Of those who identified as having a limiting disability, 54% said that this was related to sight.  69% identified their sight impairment as severe / blind, 19% as partially sighted / moderate sight loss and 8% as partially sighted / mild sight loss. * The average distance travelled was 9 miles, with an average drive time of 27 minutes. This was significantly higher for visually impaired attenders, who travelled an average distance of 21 miles, with an average drive time of 48 minutes.  As indicated by the mapping visually impaired audiences living in the more rural areas, such as the South Midlands, had furthest to travel. * 20% of attenders cited “Theatre is an important part of who I am” as their main motivator to attend; this was the most prominent motivator overall. * 8% of attenders said that they had been motivated by involvement in an Extant project or workshop. Although this proportion may seem low, it indicates that Extant has successfully engaged their participants with theatre; and should be seen in the context of the audience sample size and the degree of opportunity for respondents to have engaged with Extant prior to attendance. * Nearly two thirds of attenders (61%) had no previous experience of visually impaired artists’ work. * A third (33%) had not previously visited the venue. The main reason given for non-attendance was a lack of awareness; 65% of respondents who hadn’t visited the venue previously gave this as a reason. Difficulty with transport was also a significant factor, with 19% of non-attenders to the venue giving this as a reason for not visiting. * The reasons for non-attendance, and their relative prominence, were consistent for both visually impaired and non- visually impaired attenders. * Attenders described the experience as ‘interesting’, ‘entertaining’, ‘inspiring’ and ‘engaging’. In the responses from visually impaired attenders the same words still feature prominently, but words such as ‘awesome’, ‘imaginative’ and ‘overwhelming’ were also frequently used; perhaps indicative of a more emotional experience.   The overall experience ratings given by attenders were consistently high for all elements of the production and across all of the venues. Although the pattern was consistent, there were differences in the ratings given for some elements by visually impaired attenders.   * 98% of the overall respondents rated the overall experience as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’; for visually impaired attenders the rating was 88%. * 98% rated the staff welcome as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’. * 96% rated the quality of the performance as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’; for visually impaired attenders the rating was 88%.   The lowest ratings, although still positive, were given for the information about the accessible performance.   * 79% of attenders rated the information about the accessible performance as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’.   The performance also had a positive impact on the attenders’ likelihood to engage with visually impaired art in the future and on their confidence levels. There were some differences between the overall responses and those given by visually impaired attenders, but the pattern remained the same.   * 75% said that they ‘Strongly agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ that they felt inspired to engage with more visually impaired art; this rose to 92% for visually impaired attenders. * 60% said that they ‘Strongly agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ that the performance had made them feel more confident to engage with the arts in the future; 75% of visually impaired attenders gave the same ratings. |

**Overview of respondents**

Base: all respondents: Mac Birmingham 12/04: 30, 13/04: 23. The Lowry 15/04: 19, 16/04: 35. Stratford Circus 28/04: 13, 29/04: 29. Margin of error: ±11%, ±19% / ±4%, ±12% / ±15%, ±17%

## What did *The Chairs* audience look like?

* 57% of the attenders identified as female. This is in line with cultural audiences more widely, where the survey data often shows a higher proportion of women attending.
* The performance attracted a broad age range, with attenders from across all age bands from 16-74. The largest single group was 20-24, at 13%.
* 84% of the audience identified as being from a White background; 3% as being from an Asian background and 8% as being from Black background. This is more diverse than the UK performing arts 2014/15 benchmark of 94% of audiences being from a White background.
* 33% identified as having a limiting disability or health problem. This is significantly higher than the national average for arts and cultural attendance, which is 10%.
* Of those who identified as having a limiting disability, 54% said that this was related to sight.
* 69% identified their sight impairment as severe / blind, 19% as partially sighted / moderate sight loss and 8% as partially sighted / mild sight loss.
* 97% of attenders were UK resident.

Sex

Are you…

Base: all respondents: 145, those visually impaired: 26, those not visually impaired: 119  
Margin of error: ±8%, ±19%, ±9%

Age

Which of the following age groups do you belong to?

Base: all respondents: 148, those visually impaired: 26  
Margin of error: ±6%, ±16%

Ethnic origin

What is your ethnic group?

Base: all respondents: 149, those visually impaired: 25Margin of error: ±7%, ±19%

What other ethnic origin?



Base: all respondents who indicated an “Other” ethnic origin – 20

Disability

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

(The UK Performing arts 2014/15 benchmark and UK population base figures include all respondents self-identifying as having a limiting health problem / disability; these figures are not specific to visual impairment)

Base: all respondents: 145, those visually impaired: 26, those not visually impaired: 119

Margin of error: ±8%, ±19%, ±7%

If yes, what is the nature of your health problem or disability?

Base: all respondents: 145, those visually impaired: 26, those not visually impaired: 119.   
Margin of error: ±6%, ±14%, ±5%

If visually impaired, what is the severity of your impairment?

Base: visually impaired respondents: 25   
Margin of error: ±18%

Residency

Do you live in the UK?

Base: all respondents: 144, those visually impaired: 26, those not visually impaired: 118.   
Margin of error: ±2%, ±8%, ±2%

Drive time (minutes)

Derived from: If you live in the UK, what is your postcode?

Base: all respondents (with a valid UK postcode): 114, those visually impaired: 19, those not visually impaired: 95

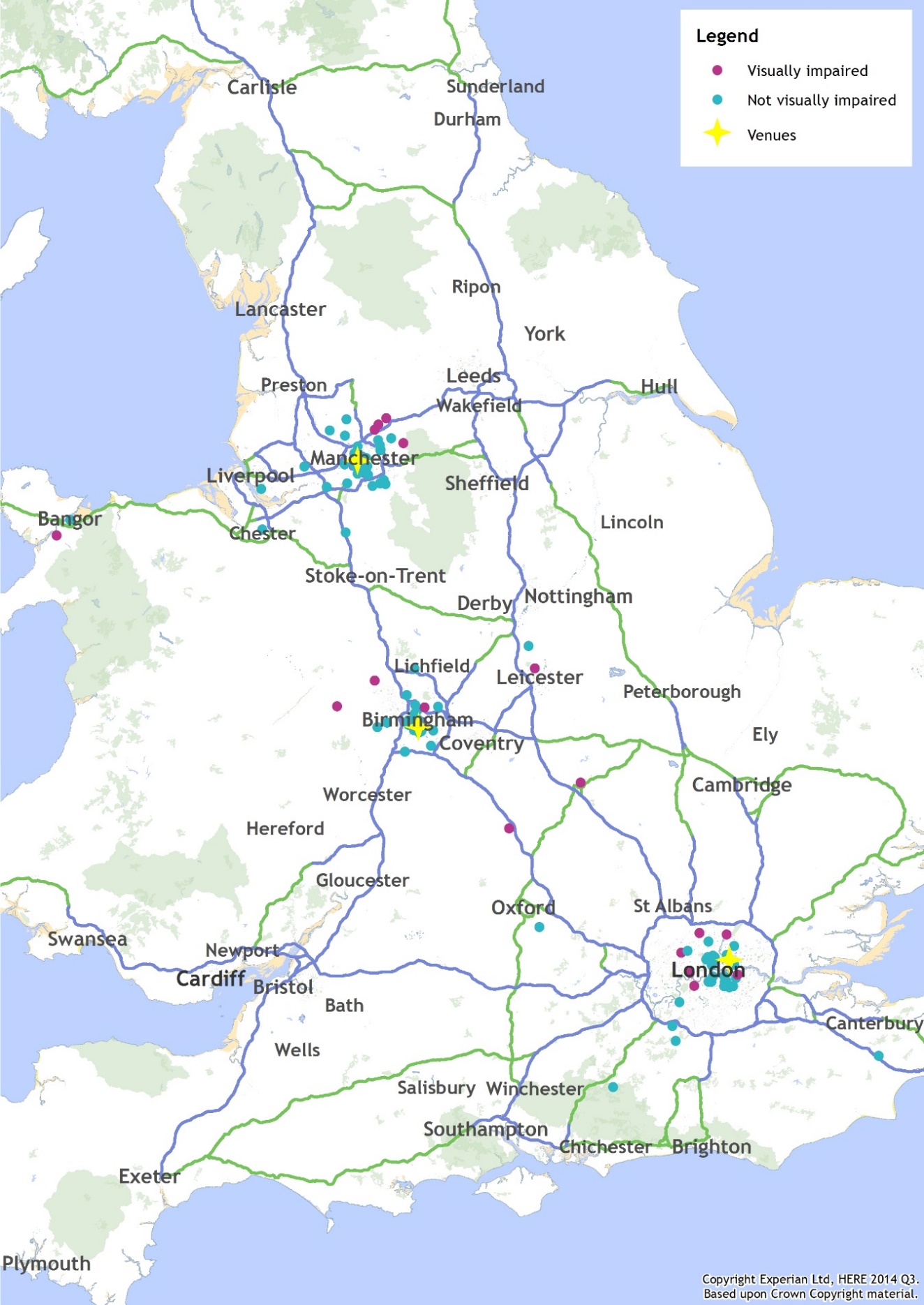
Distance analysis

Derived from: If you live in the UK, what is your postcode?

Base: all respondents (with a valid UK postcode): 114, those visually impaired: 19, those not visually impaired: 95

Visitor map (UK)

Derived from: If you live in the UK, what is your postcode?



Base: all respondents (with a valid UK postcode): 114, those visually impaired: 19, those not visually impaired: 95

## Why did the audience engage?

* The most cited motivations for attending the performance were “To be entertained”, given as a motivation by 58% of respondents, and “Theatre is an important part of who I am” which was cited as a motivation by 46% of attenders; the latter was also the main motivator, with 20% of attenders saying this was their main motivation to attend.
* Overall, 8% of attenders said that they had been motivated by involvement in an Extant project or workshop. There was a high level of variation across the three sites, the highest being 13% and the lowest 0%.  
  Although this proportion may seem low, it should be seen in the context of the audience sample size and the degree of opportunity for respondents to have engaged with Extant prior to attendance. It indicates that Extant has successfully engaged their participants with theatre.
* Of the ‘other’ motivations, given by 32% of respondents, an interest in the play and an interest in visually impaired arts were the two most cited reasons for attending. Typical responses included:

“I’d wanted to see The Chairs for some time and this was an opportunity to see it”

“I love the authors work”

“Since I lost my sight I wanted to go to more theatre”

“I was really curious how theatre for and by the visually impaired could work”

*Which of the following describe your motivations for attending the performance?*

Base: all respondents, all reasons: 147, main reason: 146, those visually impaired: 26, those not visually impaired, all reasons: 121, main reason: 120.   
Margin of error: ±8%, ±6% / ±19%, ±16% / ±9%, ±8%

## Engagement with the venues and visually impaired art in general

* Nearly two thirds of attenders (61%) had no previous experience of visually impaired artists’ work.

The previous experience of art involving visually impaired artists was largely centred on theatre and gained through engagement with previous work by Extant, or other specialist productions by organisations such as Graeae.

“Extant – the Chairs and Amelia’s show in Trafalgar square”

“Other Extant productions, various venues”

“Performances by Graeae – in Manchester (the Green Room) and in London”

“Graeae Second Stage in Northampton”

* A third (33%) had not previously visited the venue.
* The main reason given for non-attendance was a lack of awareness. 65% of respondents who hadn’t visited the venue previously gave “I hadn’t heard of the venue before this” as a reason; 54% gave it as the main reason for not visiting.
* Transport was also a significant factor, with 19% of non-attenders to the venue giving ‘Difficulty with transport’ as a reason for not visiting, and 10% as the main reason.

The responses to the question about what the venue could do to encourage more frequent attendance largely reflected the main reasons for not visiting, with many attenders referring to a need for more awareness and for venues to address transport and access issues.

Interestingly, although cost wasn’t cited as main reason for not attending, many of the responses referred to ticket pricing and the possibility of targeted discounts as a way of encouraging attendance.

It’s also notable that there was a significant difference in the prominence of these three factors at each of the individual venues. Awareness was the key issue for attenders to the Mac and Stratford Circus, but wasn’t cited by attenders to the Lowry. In contrast, ticket pricing was repeatedly cited by Lowry attenders, but didn’t feature highly in the responses from the other two venues.

Typical responses included:

“I think more advertising of the events that take place here and the location would help” (Mac)

“More advertisement, I have never seen anything from this place” (Mac)

“I’m now aware of it, wasn’t aware of it before” (Stratford Circus)

“Make lower priced student tickets available” (Lowry)

“I like to bring the children but it is too expensive to come as often as I would like” (Lowry)

“I have some difficulty getting there and have to take a taxi” (Stratford Circus)

“More disabled parking” (Lowry)

“We don’t come here very often because of the distance” (Mac)

* Of those who had attended the venue, most (81%) had seen a performance or event. This may be compared to 16% who had participated in an activity.
* For almost half of the respondents (46%) their previous experience was with an accessible performance, event or activity.

Have you ever experienced any art (eg. theatre, museum, gallery etc) involving visually impaired artists before?

Base: all respondents: 150, those visually impaired: 26, those not visually impaired: 124  
Margin of error: ±8%, ±18%, ±8%

Prior to this performance, have you visited this venue before?

Base: all respondents: 148, those visually impaired: 26, those not visually impaired: 122  
Margin of error: ±8%, ±19%, ±8%

If no, why have you not visited the venue before?

Base: all respondents (who had not been to the venue before): 48, those visually impaired: 15, those not visually impaired: 33  
Margin of error: ±13%, ±14% / ±24%, ±25% / ±16%, ±17%

If yes, which of the following have you done at this venue in the last 5 years?

Base: all respondents (who had visited the venue before): 93, those visually impaired: 11, those not visually impaired: 82  
Margin of error: ±9%, ±29%, ±8%

If you saw a performance/event, or you took part in something, was it an accessible performance / event?

Base: all respondents (who had seen a performance/event or taken part in something): 64, those visually impaired: 10, those not visually impaired: 54  
Margin of error: ±12%, ±28%, ±1

## Overall perceptions of The Chairs and visually impaired art in general

Asked to describe their experience in three words, the most words most frequently used by attenders were ‘interesting’, ‘entertaining’, ‘inspiring’ and ‘engaging’.

Looking at the language used by visually impaired attenders, ‘entertaining’, ‘inspiring’ and ‘engaging’ still feature prominently; but words such as ‘awesome’, ‘imaginative’ and ‘overwhelming’ were also frequently used - perhaps indicative of a more emotional experience.

Which three words would you use to describe your experience of the performance?

Base: all respondents: 141



Base: those visually impaired: 22

The experience ratings given by attenders were consistently high for all elements of the production and across all of the venues. The highest ratings were for the overall experience, the staff welcome and the quality of the performance.

Although the pattern was consistent there was an indication of some differences in the ratings for some elements by visually impaired attenders; where the difference was significant this is indicated.

* 98% of the overall respondents rated the overall experience as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’; for visually impaired attenders the rating was 88%.
* 98% rated the staff welcome as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’.
* 96% rated the quality of the performance as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’; for visually impaired attenders the rating was 88%.

The lowest ratings, although still positive, were given for the information about the accessible performance and way finding around the site.

* 79% of attenders rated the information about the accessible performance as ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’ and 87% gave the same ratings for wayfinding; the rating for the latter from visually impaired attenders was 73%.

The responses to questions about the longer term impacts resulting from attending The Chairs were also very positive, particularly in terms of raising understanding and awareness of work by visually impaired artists.

* 96% of respondents said that they ‘Strongly agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ that they had learnt or discovered something new about visually impaired art as a result of the performance.
* 82% said that they ‘Strongly agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ that it increased their awareness of visually impaired art.

The performance also impacted on the attenders’ likelihood to engage with visually impaired art in the future, with almost three quarters of respondents (74%) saying that they ‘Strongly agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ that they felt inspired to engage with more visually impaired art.

In terms of wider impacts on future arts engagement, over half (54%) said that they ‘Strongly agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ that the performance had made them feel more confident to engage with the arts in the future.

Two key themes emerged from the responses to how the performance had affected the attitude of attenders to visually impaired art and artists, which reflected the respondents’ level of previous engagement and their own experiences of visual impairment.

For those with no previous experience, the performance inspired them to both engage more with the work of visually impaired artists and also offered them a better understanding of what can be achieved.

“I haven’t seen much of it before, it was intriguing and interesting to see how positively people engaged in theatre, regardless of impairments.”

“It has inspired me, as I want to go into acting. There are main stream opportunities but made to feel invisible. They were amazing, couldn’t tell they were visually impaired”

“Interested to see more, didn’t know it was a ‘thing’”

“Made me more thoughtful. I would not of thought of visually impaired actors acting. Would have thought that the actors would play at being visually impaired.”

For attenders who had engaged with the work of visually impaired artists previously, the experience confirmed their belief that visual impairment is not necessarily a barrier to engagement with and delivery of a high quality, professional theatre experience.

“It has confirmed what I already knew, performing is for everyone”

“It… has enhanced my belief that VI [sic] people can achieve anything”

“It gave me hope and perspective that visually impaired artists can be recognized for their talent, and not their impairment”

“You showed that the visual impairment of the performers was no impediment to the quality of the artistic achievement.”

The responses to being asked for any other comments about the visit largely reflected the positive experience captured through earlier questions, and in some cases attenders used this opportunity to offer detailed accounts of their personal experiences.

“The staff gave me the confidence to come again”

“Very enjoyable experience. Learned something new about visual impairment, this performance showed that this was irrelevant to the performance and enjoyment of it.”

“I’ve seen a positive change in my brother’s attitude to life. Prior to Extant he didn’t have much hope for his future or his life, but Extant has shown him there is still a life worth living with visual impairment. It’s given him confidence, a purpose.”

There were some critical responses, largely relating to the use of the audio description.

“I felt the production as a whole was good and very positive, however I felt the use of audio description didn’t have as strong an impact as it could have done, it was not a concept that was used continually throughout the piece…”

“I think the audio description could have been a bit more thorough. I can see and found myself describing some scenes to my friend”

Please rate the following elements from Very good to Very poor

Base: (excluding Don’t know / Not applicable responses) from top to bottom: How welcoming the staff were: 25, 120, 145. The ticket booking experience: 19, 99, 118. Finding your way around the site (i.e. directions): 23, 118, 141. The ease of physical access in and around the site: 24, 115, 139. The quality of the performance: 26, 123, 149. The information about the accessible performance: 25, 94, 119. The whole experience: 26, 122, 148.   
Margin of error (top to bottom): ±18%, ±8%, ±7% /±20%, ±10%, ±9% / ±20%, ±9%, ±8% / ±19%, ±9%, ±8% / ±18%, ±8%, ±7% / ±19%, ±10%, ±9% / ±18%, ±8%, ±8%

As a result of the performance, how far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: (excluding Don’t know / Not applicable responses) from top to bottom: I learnt / discovered something new about visually impaired art: 24, 119, 143. It increased my awareness of visually impaired art: 25, 121, 146. I feel inspired to engage with more visually impaired art: 25, 119, 144. I feel more confident to engage with the arts in the future: 24, 105, 129. Margin of error: ±20%, ±9%, ±8% / ±20%, ±9%, ±8% / ±19%, ±9%, ±8% / ±20%, ±9%, ±8%

# Workshop participant survey

71 workshop participants completed surveys in relation to 9 workshops delivered in Birmingham and Manchester\* as part of the supporting workshop programme.

As not all participants completed surveys, due to time constraints or particular group needs, this indicates that Extant was successful in meeting the objective for the number of people engaged through the supporting workshop programme.

\* No participant surveys were completed at Stratford Circus.

|  |
| --- |
| Key findings  * 83% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability; of these, 62% identified as having a visual impairment. * At the start of the workshops the participants were asked how they felt and the two most frequently used words were ‘nervous’ and ‘excited’. * Asked to describe their feelings after participating in a workshop, the most frequently used words were ‘happy’ and ‘confident’. * 83% were new to Extant and hadn’t heard of the organisation previously. * 63% had not visited the Mac or the Lowry prior to taking part in the programme.  Most of those that had visited previously had done so as attenders (71%), rather than participants in an activity. * Following the workshops, 91% of participants said that they felt ‘Very confident’ (31%) or ‘Confident (60%); a significant increase on the 43% who said the same prior to taking part and a clear indication of the positive impact of the workshop programme on the confidence levels of participants. * 87% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the workshop had increased their awareness of visually impaired art * 83% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that they felt inspired to take part in further creative or theatre activities * 86% said they were ‘much more, or more, likely’ to attend performances involving visually impaired artists. * 77% said they were ‘much more, or more, likely’ to attend a performance at the Mac or the Lowry. |

**Breakdown of respondents**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Workshop** | **Participant surveys** |
| Jan - March 2016 Move It Sportivate Birmingham | 10 |
| Jan - March 2016 Move It Manchester | 12 |
| 2nd March 2016 Birmingham Vision Harbourne Group | 7 |
| 2nd March 2016 Living with Sight Loss Course Rochdale | 5 |
| 9th March 2016 Birmingham Vision St Peters Group | 6 |
| 21st March Rochdale / RNC | 6 |
| 13th April Mac workshop | 3 |
| 16th April Chairs Lowry Workshop | 10 |
| 29th April Living with Sight Loss Bolton Group | 12 |

## What did the workshop participants look like?

* 59% of the participants were female
* Most fell into the younger age categories, with over half (56%) being under 30; the most prominent age group was 16-19, with over a third (34%) of participants falling into this group.
* 65% identified as being from a White background. The largest number of attenders from a single BAME background identified as being Asian / Asian British: Pakistani (14%).
* 89% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability\*   
  Of these, 50% identified as having a visual impairment and 19% as having a cognitive or learning disorder.

\*Disability questions were only asked at three of the workshops

Sex

Are you…

Base: all respondents: 69  
Margin of error: ±12%

Age

Which of the following age groups do you belong to?

Base: all respondents: 58  
Margin of error: ±13%

Ethnic origin

How would you describe your ethnic origin?

Base: all respondents: 67  
Margin of error: ±11%

Disability

Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

Base: all respondents: 18  
Margin of error: ±14%

If you answered yes, please tick the relevant options below:

Base (those who consider themselves disabled only): all respondents: 16   
Margin of error: ±25%

## 

## Pre-workshop attitudes and perceptions

At the start of the workshops the participants were asked how they felt and the two most frequently used words were ‘nervous’ and ‘excited’. This captures the predominant feeling indicated by the participants’ responses; a mixture of anxiety and excitement.

 Base: all respondents: 62

Typical comments included:

“A little anxious but looking forward to something different”

“I was very nervous at the beginning”

“Quite nervous, but excited to see what we would be doing”

* 42% of participants said that they felt ‘very confident’ (3%) or ‘confident’ (39%)

### Engagement with Extant, the venues and visually impaired art in general

* 83% were new to Extant and hadn’t heard of the organisation previously.
* 63% had not visited the Mac or the Lowry prior to taking part in the programme. Most of those that had visited previously had done so as attenders (71%), rather than participants in an activity.
* For those who had attended the venues previously, 48% said that the event they attended had not been an accessible one.
* The most frequently cited sources for finding out about the workshops were through local support services such as Birmingham Vision, from teachers or lecturers at school / college, or via direct contact with Jodie

Have you heard of the company Extant before?

Base: all respondents: 69  
Margin of error: ±9%

Have you visited Mac Birmingham / Lowry Salford before?

Base: all respondents: 68, those at Birmingham workshops: 23, those at Manchester workshops: 45  
Margin of error: ±11%, ±20%, ±13%

If yes, which of the following have you done at Mac Birmingham / Lowry Salford in the last 5 years?

Base: all respondents: 21  
Margin of error: ±19%

If you saw a performance / event, or you took part in something, was it accessible?

Base: all respondents who had seen/taken part in something at their relevant theatre: 31  
Margin of error: ±18%

Have you ever experienced any art (eg. at a theatre, museum, gallery etc) involving visually impaired artists before?

Base: all respondents: 54  
Margin of error: ±8%

### 

### What were their expectations?

The participants’ expectations of what they would be doing in the workshop fell into three distinct categories: most didn’t know what to expect, some thought they would be doing something active – singing, dancing or acting, and others thought it would be about learning and confidence building.

Examples of typical responses:

“Hadn’t a clue”

“No idea but looking forward to it”

“Drama, dance, singing”

“To be told to stand like a tree”

“Learn new things and gain confidence”

Asked how Extant could support participants within this project, most cited help with transport and access. There were also mentions of increased opportunities, and helping to build confidence.

“By providing any reading materials in contracted Braille”

“Someone to help me get to MAC Birmingham”

“Extant can give me new ideas and encouragement and help me meet new people”

“Talk to you to make sure I’m ok”

## Post-workshop attitudes and perceptions

Asked to describe their feelings after participating in a workshop, the most frequently used words were ‘happy’ and ‘confident’. This reflects the positivity of the participants’ responses to this question – particularly in relation to performing in front of an audience, and how that raised confidence levels.

Base: all respondents: 57

Examples of typical comments:

“Brilliant, pleased at my improved self-confidence”

“I feel really good, because I was nervous but people were understanding; the coach was nice”

“Proud of the group and myself for putting myself out there”

“I feel proud that I’ve completed the workshop and performed the end piece twice to an audience”

“Happy, motivated, confident”

In the few instances where the response was less positive, this was largely due to the physical impact of the workshop:

“Tired, more physical work than expected.”

* Following the workshops, 91% of participants said that they felt ‘Very confident’ (31%) or ‘Confident (60%); a significant increase on the 43% who said the same prior to taking part and a clear indication of the positive impact of the workshop programme on the confidence levels of participants.

### What impact did participation have on their propensity for further engagement?

Participants indicated a significant increase in their likelihood to engage with theatre and visually impaired artist’s work, following participation in the workshops:

* 86% said they were ‘much more, or more, likely’ to attend performances involving visually impaired artists.
* 82% said that they were ‘much more, or more, likely’ to attend performances at other venues.
* 77% said they were ‘much more, or more, likely’ to attend a performance at the Mac or the Lowry.

The slightly lower likelihood of attendance at the partner venues, than other venues, is likely to be a reflection of the geography of the participants; not all were from the local area.

### What were the personal impacts of taking part in the programme?

Participants also responded positively to statements exploring the personal impacts of attending the workshop:

* 87% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the workshop had increased their awareness of visually impaired art
* 83% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that they felt inspired to take part in further creative or theatre activities
* 82% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that they had learnt or discovered something new about visually impaired art

**How can Extant support further development?**

Asked if there were any ways in which Extant could support them with what they had learnt in the workshops, many of the participants said that they were happy with the level of support given. Where additional support was mentioned, the key theme was increased access to further workshops – including extending the range of activities covered.

* “I am interested in attending further workshops with a group of people I am already familiar with”
* “More of these types of sessions, more of these sorts of opportunities”
* “Would like to do music workshops. I play piano. Support with music notes”
* “I’d love to attend more”

**What other support is available?**

Asked if they had access to other opportunities, other than those offered by Extant, which would enable them to explore and express their creativity many of the respondents indicated that they had limited, if any, access to this kind of support.

In stark contrast to the limited opportunities they felt were available to them, the participants expressed high levels of interest in a wide range of creative activities and an appetite for more participation; including some ambition to become professional artists.

“Amateur dramatic group, they don’t use me though, too scared to let me on the stage on my own”

“I don’t have any opportunities at the moment”

“I used to take part a lot in performing arts at college but there isn’t much for me to explore outside in the community”

“… would really like to do more creative expression experiences to get over barriers of experiencing life to the full”

“We don’t have many perf [sic] workshops, first time we’ll ever take part”

“I am a singer, but would like to be a professional singer”

How self-confident do you feel, on a scale of 1-5?

Base: all respondents: pre-workshop: 67, post-workshop: 62  
Margin of error: ±12%

Has the workshop made you more or less likely to attend the following in future?

Base: all respondents: Performances at the Lowry, Salford or mac Birmingham: 49, Performances at other arts venues: 45, Performances involving visually impaired artists: 49. Margin of error: ±14%, ±13%, ±14%

As a result of the workshops, how far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: I learnt / discovered something new about visually impaired art: 44, It increased my awareness of visually impaired art: 45, I feel inspired to engage with visually impaired art: 44, I feel inspired to take part in further creative / theatre activities: 53, I feel more confident: 53, I feel inspired to use what I've done or seen here in other aspects of my life: 51  
Margin of error: ±15%, ±15%, ±15%, ±13%, ±13%, ±14

## Workshop participant case study

The workshop participants were encouraged to complete a learning journal to document their thoughts and feelings before, during and after the workshop programme.

The following case study is based on the learning journal completed by participant in the Move It series of workshops which ran from January to March 2016 in Birmingham. In addition to taking part, he was also a volunteer – supporting others in the workshops, conducting audience surveys and supporting the Disability Day activities.

In the first part of the journal, the participant describes the activities he took part in at each workshop, *“The first session was a warm up with body movements and stretches… I noticed Hayley tested our creative skills too, using the warm up - making up our name with a sound and a movement”.*

This section finishes with his thoughts on the performance in the final session, *“I thought it was really nice the people there watching us. It was great for us participants to get this opportunity to perform, and doing it twice”.*

In talking about how he felt before taking part, the participant expressed some anxiety – particularly in relation to travelling – but felt that the support given helped to reduce this, *“I felt good that there was someone meeting me at the train station as that usually makes me nervous … I would prefer not to travel … Once I was in contact with Jodie, I felt more secure with the company and what was going on.”*

After the workshops, the participant felt inspired to start up similar projects nearer to home but felt he would need support to do so, *“So happy with the good vibe and what I achieved with the project … I felt inspired to start projects in Leicester but would need back up from Extant”*

The three words he used to describe his experience were *“Fantastic, Inspiring, and Grateful”*

The participant felt most confident in what he had achieved through supporting another attendee with a more severe visual impairment, *“Supporting T and guiding meant that I had more self-belief in myself … confident when I wasn’t before because I felt my life had disappeared (socially)”*

This experience also made him think about how he might feel if he lost his sight completely, *“It made me think if I went completely blind how I would want to be supported. Working with T who is completely blind, I felt emotional because I hope how I treated T is how someone would treat me in a workshop if all my sight went.”*

He felt less confident when affected by changes in light conditions and when travelling alone, *“It would be, when I go into the room it is light and leave the room outside and it is dark … my confidence weren’t [sic] great … sitting on the bus I get nervous because it is all dark.”*

In response to a question about how taking part might change the way he did things in his everyday life, the participant indicated that it had inspired him to do more, to take charge of his life in a way that he hadn’t felt able to since beginning to lose his sight, *“It made me more motivated to get my mojo back, my drive back. I didn’t have a lot of energy before because of losing my sight. Since meeting Extant, it completely changed my outlook on what I can do. What can I achieve, the kids did the show with an impairment, so why can’t I? This is a kick up the bum for me.”*

Thinking about changes in his everyday life, he went on to say that, *“I have started to mow my grass, didn’t do that before. Sounds silly but it has given me the motivation, to use my body in motion, feeling the space / objects … I have also started to get up earlier now…”*

He also indicated that the programme had helped him to establish a structure, something that had been missing since he stopped working, *“I feel I have more of a structure in my life since meeting Extant. I don’t work anymore when I used to every day.”*

The journal also includes dated highlights from some of the workshops, which give an indication of which aspects of the programme held most meaning or had the most impact on this participant. It also records significant moments of self-realisation prompted by taking part, and hopes for future personal development:

2nd March 2016

“Really enjoyed meeting the artists Aiden and Robyn – wow what an inspiration, a Paralympian teaching me!!”

“I enjoyed learning new skills and sharing my feelings through conversation to create an artistic vision.”

12th March

“The disability day: I was shocked I was getting paid, it was a great confidence boost … I also supported Lucy in teaching 2 short drama workshops. I really enjoyed this aspect but was a bit nervous as it has been a while since teaching in general. I’m glad I was supporting, breaking me in gently.”

“I felt super confident talking to people approaching the stall but got quite panicked about writing details down. I made excuses and handed stuff to Lucy … when it came to taking details. I realise I do this a lot – I want to find way of recording information down without feeling nervous about it.”

13th April

“The Chairs workshops was the best lesson out of all of them … so funny and I enjoyed myself”

“I didn’t quite get the Chairs when I watched it, I was quite tired because of helping with the surveys … I didn’t understand the storyline… I think I wasn’t able to concentrate fully really”

“The Touch tour – that was amazing, the set design I loved it … I love the fact as a visually impaired person I can go on stage and feel everything … if I hadn’t done the touch tour the show would have been a completely different experience for me.”

The journal ends on a positive reflection of how the participant felt at the end of the programme, *“I feel inspired by people like Maria and motivated and proud that I am visually impaired and seeing what they can achieve. It makes me feel that I can achieve too.”*

# Telephone interviews

The interviews were designed to take a closer look at the themes explored through the participant and audience surveys.

Starting with questions about the subject’s experience of theatre more generally, including motivations to attend and barriers to attendance, the interviews then moved on to asking about their experience of The Chairs in particular and finished with questions about their experience of works by visually impaired artists.

|  |
| --- |
| Key findings |
| * The thoughts and experiences expressed largely reflected those captured through the other research, but offered a more personal perspective. * Asked about their engagement with theatre, some referred to the transformative nature of the experience; which seemed to echo the descriptions of The Chairs given by visually impaired attenders – imaginative, awesome, overwhelming. * The accessibility of the experience also featured highly, with many of the interviewees commenting on the positive impacts of any support offered to them by the theatre; for example, touch tours and audio description. * All the respondents were highly engaged with theatre, and motivated to attend by a love of what it can offer them; this reflects the main motivation for attendance captured in the audience survey, “Theatre is an important part of who I am”. * This passion for theatre is also captured in the responses to what would deter the interviewees from attending, with the main barrier being the lack of opportunity to attend accessible performances. * The main areas of support that they looked for from the theatres and from Extant are to provide more choice, improve communication about what’s available to them, and to educate service providers to support greater accessibility. * Curiosity played a big part in encouraging the interviewees to attend The Chairs, coupled with the support provided for those who attended the workshops. * Most weren’t sure what to expect, but found the experience to be both enjoyable and unique in its approach to audio description; supporting a shared experience for the audience rather than being an add-on only for visually impaired attenders. * Previous positive experiences of Extant workshops motivated the participants to attend this programme, which they enjoyed. * Levels of previous experience of the work of visually impaired artists were mixed, and largely centred on the work of specialist organisations such as Extant or Graeae, local and personal networks. There was no mention of any more mainstream encounters. * Most felt it was important to know that a visually impaired artist was responsible for creating work, but only in the context of being an inspiration to other visually impaired people; not if it’s used to marginalise the work or imply that it’s of a lower quality. * Most of the interviewees said that their knowledge of visually impaired artists was limited, and that they would like to know more; they were also unsure about where they could find additional information, most citing a general web search or going to sources such as Extant. |

**Interviewee profiles**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Pseudonym** | **Participant / Attender** | **Demographics** |
| A | Attended 13/04 performance at the Mac | Female, 35-39, White: British, Severe sight impairment - blind |
| B | Attended 13/04 performance at the Mac | Male, 65-69, White: British, Severe sight impairment - blind |
| C | Attended 12/04 performance at the Mac | Male, 40-44, White: British, Severe sight impairment – blind |
| D | Attended 29/04 performance at Stratford Circus | Female, 45-49, Black or Black British: Caribbean, Severe sight impairment - blind |
| E | Birmingham workshop participant, attended performance at the Mac | [Unknown – recruited through Jodie, didn’t complete screening survey] |
| F | Birmingham workshop participant, attended performance at the Mac | [Unknown – recruited through Jodie, didn’t complete screening survey] |

**How would you describe your experience of going to the theatre?**

“I feel transformed, taken into a different world … theatre is a powerful thing – I can’t get enough!” (A)

“I went to see the Bodyguard in Oxford recently and it was really good, the show was wonderful but the audio descriptive headset didn’t work properly which spoiled it a bit – theatres need to check the equipment they issue, there’s a lack of attention to detail” (B)

“I like the arts … takes you to another world” (D)

“A good experience has to cater for my guide dog, it has to be accessible … I find previews or “touchy feely tours” as I call them useful. If it really is accessible I feel I don’t have to struggle.” (E)

**What motivates you to attend a show?**

“Live theatre is something I love … I would go to things like The Chairs everyday if I could!” (B)

“Love the theatre … It’s a night out, an occasion … quite expensive so don’t do it often” (C)

“It depends on the programme [but] there’s no point if it’s not audio described. I’m not worried about the price and the names don’t mean anything, it’s about the subject and having audio description.” (E)

“If I like the look of it, I go see it” (F)

**What would deter you from attending a show?**

“Being blind isn’t a barrier, but lack of accessibility is … limited number of audio descripted performances … we are dictated to, not given a free choice” (A)

Where we live provision is very poor” (A)

“Nothing would deter me” (B)

“If they couldn’t accommodate my dog” (C)

“Lack of audio description” (D)

“I sulked for a few years at the onset of the diagnosis, so now I’m getting to the ‘give it a go’ stage … [but] there are certain things I’m not interested in … basically, if it had a bad review that would put me off … if it’s very noisy that puts me off … and distance [would put me off] … I would travel to Birmingham now, especially if it was an afternoon show as I’m not good in dark or with crowds” (E)

**How do you think theatres of organisations like Extant could support your attendance?**

“I was turned away from a dance class and told I couldn’t attend without a carer – blind people were seen as a liability and excluded … Extant and other places could help with that, educate people who provide classes and support equal access.” (A)

“Communication could really be improved … don’t see any reason why large theatres shouldn’t have braille programmes” (C)

“When they do have audio described, for it to be all performances (not just matinees) … for Wicked, they were few and far between, not for all shows, I feel a bit excluded and can’t plan. I’m dictated to.” (D)

**What made you want to see this particular show (The Chairs)?**

“I was interested in the approach to audio description – how it worked for the whole audience and was inclusive” (A)

“… from the brief description [received by email] I was curious … had heard a lot of good things about Extant but hadn’t seen anything they’d done.” (B)

“I had seen descriptions of it on the Extant website a few years ago … and was quite excited to know it was visually impaired performers, that’s fantastic. I wanted to be an actress when I was little, but thought being visually impaired meant that being an actress wasn’t an option.” (D)

“Well I was told that if you were doing the workshop you agreed to go the performance, but I would have gone anyway” (E)

“As I knew the workshop was happening I thought I might as well go and see the performance as well. I’m glad I did, it was decent.” (F)

**How would you describe your expectations before going to see the performance? Was it different to what you expected?**

“I didn’t really know what to expect, but that was exciting” (A)

“Knowing about the story gave me an idea of what it might be like, made me curious and it sounded interesting … [the experience] was a bit different … I felt I could smell the decay from the run-down workplace … it was magnetic … it drew me in like metal to a magnet” (B)

“My mind was fairly blank … [but it] was probably better than I expected, the way they used the sound and dialogue” (D)

“I thought as it was Chekov or some Russian guy … I thought I was going to get something heavy … where you really have to concentrate.… it taught me don’t prejudge, I can imagine it being reviewed as being highbrow not mainstream but to me it was quite accessible” (E)

**In what ways (if any) did your experience of The Chairs differ from other experiences you’ve had?**

“The audio description was unique – not having to wear headphones, which are often uncomfortable.” (A)

“It was written for blind people, sighted people were guests – the opposite to my usual experience, where even if there was no audio description it would still go ahead … with The Chairs, nothing needed to be added for sighted people to enjoy it, it was a hell of a bullseye for Extant” (B)

“The touch tour was brilliant … usually I have no idea about what’s on stage or what the clothes are like, I have to imagine it all – this added a different dimension and brought it to life … the opportunity to do this should be there at more performances” (B)

“Audio description built in was unique – it did work as it was part of the script” (C)

“It was the first time I’ve experienced sound used in that way” (D)

“It doesn’t differ from the good ones. If it’s accessible … and they make an effort to involve you. It only takes a little thought; we don’t want to be patronised or have it assumed to be beyond our intelligence, but it has to be accessible.” (E)

“The audio description was different as it was integrated, I thought it was very clever” (F)

**What motivated you to take part in the Extant workshop?**

“It was the fact that it was Extant as I had experience of a London workshop with Extant and it was excellent. And that it was local, and free”

(E)

“I’m interested in acting and thought I could use it for something, and I like it was aimed at the visually impaired. I had done one before at Sight Village which was an incentive to take part as I found it interesting.”

(F)

**Did participation encourage you to go and see The Chairs?**

“I assumed that one followed the other, so whilst it didn’t encourage me, it didn’t discourage me.”

(E)

“Yes, as it was there. I’d seen Extant before in Hereford and wanted to see them again.”

(F)

**Have the workshops or your experience of this performance encouraged you to see more performances at the venue?**

Not necessarily at Mac as I haven’t heard anything, I don’t know what’s on … we live in Shropshire so it’s a fair journey to get to Mac so whilst it’s accessible, it’s not the most convenient theatre for me. It would need to be something special to get me to go again … I don’t think I’d choose an evening performance due to the difficulty of travelling but maybe if it was very special.”

(E)

“Yes, I like Mac, it’s a nice building, and although I don’t have anything planned I would go there again”

(F)

**How would you describe your overall experience of taking part in the workshop?**

“I enjoyed it, it was good … my dog was no problem which was a real help…It wouldn’t put me off but it needs to be accessible and needs to recognise that people need their dogs; they’re a part of the package.”

(E)

“I really enjoyed it, especially the improvisation”

(F)

**In what ways (if any) have you encountered the work of visually impaired artists?**

“I went to a piano recital once by two blind sisters, they were from Argentina and had been sponsored by the Argentinian government … I’ve never been able to read music – braille music is really difficult to use, and get hold of"(A)

“Not enough! Usually it’s in groups like Extant or Graeae … we are marginalised in ‘our own little cubby hole’ but with a bit of creative thought and consideration we could be part of the mainstream.” (B)

“I’m a writer / director so I am one I guess… have met a few blind producers and a number of blind musicians … I’ve not met any visually impaired artists, like painters or sculptors” (C)

“Did go to an open mic with a visually impaired artist singing and playing piano, sung with a couple of visually impaired people” (D)

“I’ve been to plays, visually impaired artists performing music and dance, the local visually impaired group has various artists in it, and if you include sports there’s lots there too. The big one was that I went to a week’s workshop in London with Extant and we put a show on.” (E)

“Not any really that I can think of, well except Stevie Wonder and I don’t know if he counts as he’s a singer? I’ve not really seen blind people in theatre. Extant’s the only time I’ve seen visually impaired actors.” (F)

**Do you think it’s important to know that the work you’ve encountered has been created by an artist with a visual impairment? Why is that?**

“Yes, it’s good to know … it’s inspiring, shows us that we can be successful as well” (A)

“Both yes and no - it’s inspiring for other blind people to know that you can be successful … it’s not important if it’s being used to marginalise the work or take the quality away” (B)

“It is nice to know because producing art can be quite a lonely/solitary activity, so to meet someone else in your boat it’s nice to compare notes. Nobody likes to work in a vacuum.” (C)

“Yes, I’d like to know … to appreciate they are visually impaired, to know it’s possible and to know that we can do things” (D)

“No, I think we should judge the work on its own merit. I think you should be aware and it might affect some’s perception of the work, but it shouldn’t be token blind people, it should be judged on its own merit; the same goes for everyone.” (E)

“Yes, it’s not easy for visual impaired artists to get into the arts, there’s only one agency representing disabled artists, and it’s good to know that you can do things.” (F)

**How would you describe your knowledge of the work of visually impaired artists?**

“Not sure – I do look out for them, but don’t come across much” (A)

“Really limited … would love to know more” (D)

“Fair; I’m not able to rattle off a list of names, I just know that there’s a group of people out there.” (E)

“I don’t know, I just know about Extant, I don’t think there’s a lot” (F)

**How would you find out more?**

“Don’t really know, not sure” (A)

“I don’t really know, other than Graeae and Extant. And the RNIB I suppose” (B)

“I’m sure there are groups, workshops but I don’t know about them – my fault, see myself as a writer, not a blind writer – sometimes have to put that out there if it’s going to give you a leg up.” (C)

“I know I can find out more form Extant website … met an actor friend who does VI and non-VI work, so could find out from him … I’m on Extant’s mailing list.” (D)

“I wouldn’t particularly do it, but if I had to, extant would be one of the first I’d go to and I’d assume they have links of others.” (E)

“I really don’t know; Google? There’s no specific place I’d go to find out” (F)

**Is there anything you’d like to add?**

“It was very enjoyable – more please!” (A)

“Using a performance space rather than a raised stage was really good – more supportive” (B)

“I don’t think there should be segregation, shouldn’t be VI theatre vs. sighted. In an ideal world we would all be together and go out together with sighted friends and family.” (D)

Just keep us posted of what’s on! (E)

# 

# Staff workshops survey

The results of the staff training research indicate that Extant successfully delivered against their objectives for staff training and development at the partner venues.

|  |
| --- |
| Key findings   * 75 staff members at the partner venues completed the before and after questionnaire; this exceeds the target number of 50 participants in the training workshops. * 13% of the staff taking part in the training identified as having a limiting disability or health problem. * Over half (55%) of participants were aged under 39; the largest proportion being aged 25-29 (26%) * Participants represented a range of departments within the organisation, with the largest proportion (40%) being from front of house teams. * A wide range of job roles were also represented. The two most prominent roles were managers (26%) and volunteers (26%). * Over three quarters (77%) of those taking part had no previous experience of art involving visually impaired artists.   Before the training, the main concerns expressed by the participants in relation to engaging with visually impaired audiences or artists centred around a basic lack of understanding and resulting low levels of confidence.  Following the staff training workshops, the participants expressed a significant rise in their levels of confidence when engaging with both visually impaired audience members and artists.   * When engaging with visually impaired audiences, 90% of participants said that they felt ‘very confident’ or ‘confident’; this may be compared to 35% giving the same response prior to the training. * For engagement with visually impaired artists, 81% of participants said that they were ‘very confident’ or ‘confident’. This is a rise from 30% prior to the training, and may be seen in the context of 77% of participants having had no previous experience of art involving visually impaired artists.   When assessing the impact of the training on their levels of confidence for different aspects of engagement with visually impaired audiences and artists, the results were positive across all elements.   * 96% of participants ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the training had improved their ability to engage with visually impaired audiences. * 96% ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the training had improved their understanding of the challenges faced by visually impaired artists. * 93% of participants ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the training had improved their understanding of the difficulties and barriers faced by visually impaired audience members; and 98% that it had improved their awareness of visual impairment in general. |

## What did the workshop participants look like?

Disability

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months??

Base: all respondents: 70  
Margin of error: ±8%

Age

Which of the following age groups do you belong to?

Base: all respondents: 58  
Margin of error: ±11%

Sex

Are you…

Base: all respondents: 70  
Margin of error: ±12%

Ethnic origin

Base: all respondents: 69  
Margin of error: ±6%

Job area/department

Base: all respondents: 75  
Margin of error: ±11%

Job role

Base: all respondents: 58  
Margin of error: ±11

## Engagement with visually impaired art and artists

### Pre-training perceptions

**What concerns did staff have about engagement with visually impaired audiences or artists?**

Before the training, the main concerns expressed by the participants in relation to engaging with visually impaired audiences or artists centred around a basic lack of understanding and resulting low levels of confidence.

This caused heightened sensitivities and a fear of causing inadvertent offence or appearing to be patronising:

“… I don’t fully understand what their needs are. A worry that I would offend by lack of knowledge about the issues involved with visual impairment.”

“Saying or doing the ‘wrong’ thing and offending or upsetting someone”

“That I will be insensitive and potentially patronising towards them”

There were also concerns about the level of help to offer:

“…how to support in the best way – am I being overly helpful & so hindering”

“Don’t want the person to feel like I’m doing things for them, assuming they can’t, when they are in fact perfectly capable themselves”

And some participants identified health and safety issues as a concern:

“… as well as health and safety precautions for them”

“Ensuring that they do not come to any harm”

**What were their perceptions of the difficulties faced by visually impaired audience members?**

Asked to think about the main difficulties faced by visually impaired audience members prior to the training, three main themes emerged:

1. **Access** – perhaps not surprisingly, physical access to the building and navigating the public spaces was cited by many of the participants and was the predominant theme overall.

“… [the main difficulties are] access to the building and navigation around the building”

“Finding their way around the theatre complex where the surroundings are unfamiliar. Managing in a very bustling and sometimes noisy environment such as the foyer. Identifying the correct person to approach for assistance”

1. **Unfamiliarity** - the difficulties associated of being new to the theatre and theatre experience indicated an assumption that visually impaired audiences were infrequent or irregular attenders.

“Coping with all the new experiences at the same time”

“Negotiating way round a busy, unfamiliar environment”

“If visiting the theatre for the first time is must be very daunting”

1. **Quality of experience** – many of the participants felt that visually impaired audiences miss out on much of the theatre experience.

“Although much can be gained through hearing a performance, there is also much to be missed when no sight in relation to the set, colour, costume.”

“Inability to appreciate other audience members’ reactions to non-verbal parts of a performance”

**What were their perceptions of the challenges faced by visually impaired artists?**

Similarly, three main themes dominated the participants’ perceptions of what the challenges might be for professional artists with a visual impairment:

1. **Venue navigation** – as with perceptions of the challenges for visually impaired audiences, the dominant theme was difficulties associated with physical access

“Finding their way round the theatre complex where the surroundings are unfamiliar. Managing in a busy backstage area. Identifying the correct personnel for their project.”

“Negotiating way round a busy, unfamiliar environment. Different venues. Not being able to see the full stage, screen, theatre.”

1. **Access to opportunities** – participants felt that it would be harder to get commissions and take up networking opportunities

“Pigeonholing; lack of support network, geographical distances between artists”

“Getting employment /commissions – being treated as a professional artist in your own right regardless of VI [sic]”

1. **Professional status** - linked to the perceived lack of opportunity, participants felt that visually impaired artists might struggle to gain credibility and professional recognition

“Being accepted as a credible professional”

“Maybe any stigma that may be attached to being a visually impaired artist, maybe that there will be limitations or not knowing how other people view the creation.”

### Post-training perceptions

**How did the workshops support their personal professional development?**

Following the workshop, the responses to being asked what they might do to improve the experience of visually impaired audience members were indicative of the rise in levels of confidence they expressed. A wealth of ideas emerged along with positive indications that the staff felt empowered to make these changes themselves.

1. **Ask, don’t assume** - one of the most significant changes was in regard to the recognition of the need to talk to visually impaired attenders; to eliminate uncertainty and assumption by finding out their level of need and how staff might offer assistance.

“Ask them whether I can help, not assume their needs”

“Important to communicate, not be scared of offending.”

“The importance of open communication and the negative effect of being overly conscious / nervous about their experience”

1. **Make changes to service delivery** – an identification of simple, practical steps that could be made to improve accessibility

“Look at contrasting door frames and toilets. Buy some more audio description receivers.”

“Increase signposting and access support. Consider adding more / clearer access info”

1. **Share the learning** – participants felt that all staff would benefit from the increased understanding and confidence that they gained from the workshop, and that this would ensure a consistently positive experience for visually impaired attenders.

“Increase guidance for staff, so that confidence isn’t just with training and audiences don’t have mixed experiences depending on who they meet”

“I will speak to my staff and make sure they are confident and comfortable in dealing with visually impaired audiences.”

**How did the training support organisational development?**

Asked what their organisations might do to improve the experience of visually impaired audiences, the participants identified four main areas where improvements might be made – preparation and awareness, staff training and knowledge sharing, increased opportunities, and physical improvements.

“Expect the unexpected. No obstructions. Ask all staff to be mindful and maybe inform staff if we are expecting visually impaired customers”

“Greater awareness of how we communicate with audiences in the building – not reliant on any one form.”

“Having the BO [sic] staff do touch tours when they happen, so they can communicate effectively about what it entails. All FOH staff should be encouraged to go to an audio described screening to try out / familiarise with the headsets”

“Provide more audio description, one show a month is ridiculous”

“Improve visibility of toilets etc. around the building”

**What did the journey look like?**

**Staff training participant case study**

The staff training participants were encouraged to complete a learning journal to document their thoughts and feelings before, during and after the workshop. The following case study is based on the learning journal completed by a volunteer at the Lowry.

Since undertaking the training, the volunteer felt that his levels of confidence about engaging with visually impaired audiences were good.

The area he felt most confident about was *“that this was a normal audience living well with visual impairment”.*

He felt least confident about *“not wanting to offer unwanted help”* as a result of the large number of helpers present.

The production of The Chairs was his most recent experience of engaging with visually impaired audiences and afterwards he said the felt “*Bemused by the play but overwhelmed by the performances and the audience reaction”*. The reason he gave was that this was his *“First experience of a performance by visually impaired actors”*

In addition to the Extant training he had also undertaken in-house development activities relating to visually impaired audiences and felt that these had *“definitely had an impact on the way I feel about engaging with visually impaired people”.*

His parting thought about the production of The Chairs was:

*“I understand why the particular play was chosen but it was a difficult play. The voice over for movement worked well since it was integrated into the play.”*

Have you ever experienced any art (eg. at a theatre, museum, gallery etc) involving visually impaired artists before?

Base: all respondents: 65  
Margin of error: ±12%

## Impact of the workshops

How confident do you feel when engaging with the following groups of people?

Base: all respondents: Visually impaired audience members, Pre-workshop: 65, Post-workshop: 59. Visually impaired artists and professionals, Pre-workshop: 64, Post-workshop: 58. Margin of error: ±12%, ±11% / ±12%, ±11%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

The training has improved my …

Base (top to bottom): all respondents: 58, 58, 57, 58, 58, 57, 53  
Margin of error: ±13%, ±12%, ±13%,±13%, ±13%, ±13%, ±13%

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