

Access to Literature

This is the **Executive Summary** of the *Access to Literature* Report by Jamie Hale (CRIPTic Arts) and Ruth Harrison (Spread the Word). The Report was published in October 2022.

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The *Access to Literature* Report, Executive Summary and Case study are available in the following formats:

Executive Summary: text (.doc and .pdf), audio, BSL video, Easy Read

Full Report: text (.doc and .pdf), audio, BSL video

Case Study: text (.doc and .pdf), audio, BSL video, Easy Read

These formats can be accessed at: <https://www.spreadtheword.org.uk/projects/criptic-writes-x-spread-the-word/>

Executive Summary

“Don’t expect people to come to you without demonstrating seriousness of wish to engage with our community / communities.” Writers’ survey respondent

The *Access to Literature* Report presents the first national picture of the barriers deaf and disabled people experience in accessing the literature and publishing sectors as writers, creative producers and audience members.

It reports on research carried out by CRIPTic Arts and Spread the Word between June and October 2021, using surveys and focus groups with both deaf and disabled people and literature organisations. The research topics were scoped during an online deaf and disabled writers’ retreat run by CRIPTic Arts and Spread the Word.

For deaf and disabled writers and audiences, the research identified barriers to accessing literature and a demand and need for more accessible opportunities. For literature organisations, there was a need and demand for more knowledge, support and training. Both deaf and disabled people and literature organisations identified barriers associated with costs and available funding for access provision and we found limited evidence on emerging best practice.

It is to be noted that there was low engagement by the literature/publishing sectors with the online survey despite extensive promotion.

The **research themes** to come out of the data were:

- Barriers to accessing literature
- Funding and earning a living
- Creative opportunities
- Co-production

The **research findings** show that deaf and disabled people feel a fundamental sense of exclusion from the literature sector as writers, creative producers and audience members.

70% of deaf writers and creative producers said that lack of paid opportunities and 63% events taking place in inaccessible spaces were the main barriers to accessing literature and progressing their creative careers, with 56% the cost of participating in literature activity.

“Development opportunities for disabled writers are sometimes offered by organisations who you know have a mostly tokenistic interest in it.” Writers’ survey respondent

Both deaf and disabled writers and audiences said that there was a lack of understanding from organisations that they have a duty in law to make reasonable adjustments.

There was a demonstrable need from deaf and disabled writers for more: publication opportunities (69%); bookings by festivals and venues (61%) and opportunities to enter prizes (56%).

There was also a demonstrable demand from deaf and disabled audiences for more literature activity from and featuring deaf and disabled writers: events run by festivals and venues (73%); books being published (69%) and more prizes showcasing and promoting their work (67%).

89% of literature organisations rated their understanding of making work accessible to deaf and disabled writers and audiences as low or average, and the main barriers to making work accessible were cost and awareness of access issues.

56% of literature organisations have never worked in partnership with disability organisations; 33% never having consulted deaf and disabled people and only 11% of organisations have provided staff and board training on inclusion and access.

Deaf and disabled people were clear that co-creation and co-production were the solutions to addressing a diversity of access needs and building greater understanding and engagement across the sector.

“If people could see access as liberating and creative. We need an attitudinal change. There are conflicting access needs so we need to continually be having conversations.” Writers’ focus group participant

Both organisational and sector level actions are needed which recognise the systemic access and disablist barriers faced by deaf and disabled people to bring about change.

At an organisational level these include auditing current practice, engaging deaf and disabled people and taking action to be compliant with the law to ‘make reasonable adjustments’ and ensure that literature events, career development opportunities and content do not exclude deaf and disabled people.

At a sector level, we are calling for a deaf and disabled-led charter for change which includes investments into collaborative conversations, further research, and a campaign with associated resources and training to embed access into literature organisations’ policies and practices and work. Setting a target of 20% published writers and literature sector employees being deaf or disabled by 2030 supported by a programme of sustained development opportunities for deaf and disabled writers and creative producers.



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