



Access Coordinators in Film and TV Productions

Funded by The British Film Commission



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Introduction

TripleC is a Community Interest Company with a mission to drive up the role of disabled people in the arts and media and the role of the arts and media in the lives of disabled people. Through DANC (the Disabled Artists Networking Community), TripleC supports deaf, disabled and/or neurodivergent creatives who work in the arts and screen sectors, providing a comprehensive professional development programme. At the same time, TripleC works with arts organisations, broadcasters and production companies, linking them to talent and providing [a full package of industry training around inclusion and access](#). In addition, in order to inform the company's work, TripleC has seven DANC focus groups, each representing different elements of intersectionality within our community.

The need to create a clear Access Coordinator role has been a theme across all of our DANC focus groups since they began in 2020. TripleC is therefore very supportive of the Underlying Health Condition campaign and its recommendation, below:

“Much like an Intimacy Coordinator, all productions must make a provision to hire an Accessibility Coordinator. The AC will be the main point of contact for all cast and crew wishing to discuss accessibility. They should be brought on in the early stages of production to assess the production base, studios and any locations as and when they are agreed upon and continue to work, as required, throughout the production period.”¹

It is important that our community of 1500 deaf, disabled and/or neurodivergent creatives had a say in what Access Coordinators look like in the UK, as lived experience is imperative to making this role effective. The Underlying Health Condition campaign agreed wholeheartedly, so we ran a series of focus groups, funded by the British Film Commission.

These focus groups involved a range of deaf, disabled and neurodivergent creatives, including people with physical and visual impairments, autistic people, learning disabled people, deaf people, people with a limb difference and people with restricted growth amongst others. Participants included people from a range of ethnically diverse backgrounds. They also came from a mix of difference professions within the screen industry, including actors, screenwriters and producers. We also engaged non-disabled allies and campaigners with an active history and experience of working on productions with deaf, disabled and/or neurodivergent creatives. A draft was then circulated amongst the community and feedback was gathered and incorporated.

Access Coordinators are only part of the solution to the inclusion of deaf, disabled and / or neurodivergent people in the industry. The inclusion we seek will only be achieved if Access Coordinators sit alongside a programme of other work, including

¹ Underlying Health Condition (2021) [Everybody Forgot About the Toilets](#).

the training and education of people working in the industry around access and inclusion. This would ensure that whilst there was a shift in mindset for cast and crew, there would also be someone on the ground to support the implementation of all the changes needed. This is backed up by the recommendations from research by the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity²:

1. Management positions are given regular, up-to-date training regarding their legal responsibilities toward disabled workers.
2. Consideration is given to the wording of job advertisements, interview process and selection criteria to ensure disabled people who've had atypical career routes aren't inadvertently screened out.
3. The industry agrees a consistent approach to supporting disabled people who require funding for adjustments in the workplace or those who would find it helpful.
4. Disabled people are offered access to industry mentors, including other disabled people working at a more senior level.

In order to achieve authentic representations in television and film, it is important to consult with a variety of creatives who have similar conditions, as one individual cannot represent multiple outlooks. Therefore, the Access Coordinator must not be a replacement for wider consultation and collaboration. Deaf, disabled and/or neurodivergent people's lived experiences differ widely, even amongst those with the same condition, therefore it is imperative that wider consultation is sought, rather than solely relying on one individual. In recent years TripleC DANC, alongside other similar organisations, have facilitated focus groups with a wide range of creatives with relevant lived experience for a range of productions.

We hope that eventually Access Coordinators will not be needed at all, as the industry will have been transformed and will take its legal responsibilities around access seriously. However, until then we need this role to provide practical support on the ground and be a link between the employee and the production, helping to remove access barriers.

This report starts with the role description we arrived at collectively for the job of Access Coordinator. It then relates some of the experiences on productions people shared with us where an Access Coordinator, alongside a wider training and consultancy programme, could have made all the difference. Finally, there are two case studies from the recent TV productions Ralph & Katie and Perfect.

² Ansell, K. (2021) [Career Routes and Barriers for Disabled People in the UK TV Industry.](#)

Access Coordinator Job Specification

The role of the Access Coordinator is to oversee access for all cast and crew in the production. The job is essentially one of problem solving, working with people to find solutions to removing barriers so they can do their best work whilst maintaining good physical and mental health.

Access means not stopping a person from doing something or participating on an equal basis because their requirements haven't been taken into account. This is far wider than just providing physical access e.g., ramps, lifts etc. Access means that people can do what they need to do in a similar amount of time and effort to other people. It means that people are empowered, can be independent, and will not be frustrated by something that is poorly designed or implemented. Access requirements can encompass mental health, physical health, caring responsibilities, the physical environment, communication, attitudes and the way things are done.

Every single person on a production will have access requirements and will benefit from having adjustments made for them. This may be people who don't necessarily identify as deaf, disabled, autistic or neurodivergent. Therefore, it is important that everyone is asked for their access requirements at the start.

The role broadly splits into logistical and creative tasks around access in a production. During our consultation, it was felt that the creative tasks could either become part of the Access Coordinator role or be given to a separate Creative Access Advisor. Therefore, we have listed the creative tasks separately in this job description.

Appropriate training around access (such as the training TripleC provides) needs to take place alongside the employment of an Access Coordinator, otherwise they will be going into the very same inaccessible environment that their job is supposed to eliminate.

Tasks

The role of the Access Coordinator will vary based on the demands of the production. It is acknowledged that lack of time will forever be cited as an issue on any production, therefore on the ground, an Access Coordinator may not practically have time to complete all of the necessary tasks. However, we would always advocate they should always be brought in as early as possible – ideally during development or certainly from Greenlight.

Depending on the production, the role may include any of the following tasks.

Throughout

- Co-ordinating the completion of access riders for everyone working on the production if they don't have one already.

- Having a detailed discussion with the person as early as possible around what their access requirements are on the production and potential solutions.
- Arranging workplace assessments where needed, e.g. an ergonomic assessment for someone working at a desk in the production office.
- Signpost people to make applications to Access to Work and other relevant funders to pay for support and adjustments where there is enough time (applications can take up to a few months to be processed).
- Supporting production and the 1st and 2nd ADs to work with relevant departments to ensure that necessary adjustments are in place for on-screen and off-screen talent to do their best work.
- Being the first port of call for cast and crew throughout, streamlining accountability and being a confidential advocate.
- Working with each department to advise them on booking equipment and access support where needed. For example, ramps, wheelchairs, professional sign language interpreters, captioners, creative coaches, support workers...
- Working with production to support the booking of accessible travel and accommodation, which may involve sourcing accessible cars / cabs, booking passenger assistance on trains / planes, checking accommodation has grab rails, a track for a hoist, a roll-in shower etc.
- Filtering information and being the point of contact for everyone with access requirements, making sure they are not bombarded with information from different departments.
- Attending tech recces, production meetings and health and safety meetings to advise on access.
- Arranging mental capacity assessments where capacity may be a barrier to a person giving their consent, e.g. this may be an issue when working with a person with a learning disability to tell their story.
- Busting myths and asking questions.

Development

If there isn't already a coordinator or access champion within the production company, a freelance Access Coordinator could be hired for a short amount of time during the development process. Even if this doesn't happen, there should be a named employee responsible for coordinating access. They will be responsible for:

- Ensuring any adjustments needed are in place for general meetings.
- Co-ordinating the completion of access passports / riders.
- Ensuring that adjustments are in place.

- Ensuring that meetings are held in accessible spaces.
- Working with the production company to advise on booking of equipment, accessible travel, accessible accommodation, dietary requirements and access support workers (e.g., sign language interpreters, captioners...) where needed.
- Advise on hiring deaf, disabled, autistic or neurodivergent writers with lived experience.
- Ensuring that, where writers' rooms or story conferences are used, they meet the requirements of the TripleC DANC inclusive writers' room guidelines.
- Bringing in a consultant to support the development of authentic characters and situations which incorporate lived experience. For example, if there is a storyline involving Deaf people or people with a specific condition, sourcing a consultant with lived experience from this stage onwards to advise throughout the production.

Pre-Production

- Ensuring cast and crew complete training around access, adjustments, equality and rights (such as the training TripleC provides).
- Attending the Heads of Department briefing to communicate the production's commitment to diversity, inclusion and access.
- Liaising with the broadcasters' / streamers' diversity & HR teams
- Advising on access, language and best practice around hiring crew, auditioning and casting.
- Viewing and assessing production offices, studios, locations and unit bases, bearing in mind the specific access requirements of cast and crew.
- Working with facilities companies to ensure accessible trailers, honey wagons, signage, quiet spaces, catering facilities etc are in place where needed.
- Ensuring all communal spaces are accessible to everyone
- Ensuring scripts and any other paperwork is sent out in alternative, accessible formats where needed.
- Reviewing the preliminary shooting schedule to ensure access requirements around fatigue are taken into consideration.
- Reviewing scripts, storyboards and shot lists and talking to the actors to determine their access requirements for specific shoots and sets, bearing in mind where stunt coordinators or body doubles may be needed.

- Working with the person responsible for health and well-being on the production to identify any triggering material or storylines which may require additional psych support for any actor (disabled or not).
- Working with ADs and HoDs to ensure costume fitting and make up testing is accessible.

Production

- As a minimum, being on set on day one of production and also when anyone with access requirements is on-boarding (i.e. their first day), introducing them to key production members and making sure they feel safe and comfortable to do their jobs.
- Being present at every new location to advise all HoDs and oversee and support any necessary changes straight away. For example, advising moving ramps, making sure the route to the set is clear once everyone moves in with all of their equipment, and then keeping an eye on the floor as everyone moves around for different setups.
- Being visible and part of the process
- Regularly checking in with people and resolving individual concerns as they arise. This allows for access edits and finessing once the person has started work and they can see how the land lies. Also, this accounts for access requirements changing and evolving over the course of the production.
- Being available to help answer questions that may arise from any department in production.
- Working with production and ADs to ensure that actors, sign language interpreters and other support workers get proper breaks.
- Working with production and ADs to ensure daily call sheets and sides are in alternative formats where required.
- Working with production to ensure the wrap party and associated social activities are accessible and include everyone.
- Supporting social interaction across the production to ensure that no-one feels left out. For example, when members of the production are required to use separate dressing room facilities because of access.

Post-Production

- Working with post production to ensure accessible editing facilities for the edit, grade, Additional Dialogue Recording and sound mix.

- Working with the producer and/or publicist to prepare talent for the media and PR, connecting them with the digital team to advise around issues such as dealing with trolls and backlash on social media. Also advising that it's OK not to disclose personal information around their condition.
- Working with the producer and/or publicist to provide media and PR with information regarding access requirements for interviews, as well as advice around language and photographing bodies that are different.
- Working with the broadcaster to support the recording of an audio description track and a BSL signed version.

Creative Access

There are a number of creative tasks around access in a production. These could either become part of the Access Coordinator role or be given to a separate Creative Access Advisor. E.g. this could include a Deaf or BSL advisor to advise on how BSL is used in the production. These creative tasks are:

- Reading and advising on scripts.
- Supporting the casting of a wide, diverse range of actors in speaking parts and as supporting artists.
- Supporting the hiring of a diverse crew.
- Advising on aspects of the portrayal, ensuring detail and nuance is present.
- Advising on how adjustments for access for specific actors can be incorporated into scripts and storylines. For example, on a continuing drama, the acquisition of a shop's ramp could add to the drama, rather than just appearing. Similarly, if an actor suddenly requires a hearing aid, this could be written into their character's storyline too. Or adapting lines in a script for a learning disabled actor.
- Working with 1st AD, director and DOP around the shots they are looking for and how that creatively impacts on access. For example, if one actor is at a different level to the rest of the cast; or making them aware of sight lines when working with Deaf actors.
- Advising on portrayal and ensuring access isn't compromised by being on set watching the monitors at the time, e.g. a Deaf or BSL advisor advising on Deaf characters signing on screen. They must be sent the schedules as well as the advance schedules to make sure they can be present. They must then also get the rushes and edits to view and give notes on.

Person Specification

Essential:

- Deaf, disabled, autistic and / or neurodivergent person
- Experience working with deaf, disabled and neurodivergent creatives
- A passion for television series and a desire to enable the people who make them
- Understanding of access and disability in a rights-based context and the social model of disability
- Understanding of access provision to a wide range of deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people
- Knowledge of networks within the access provision sector, which may include organisations that provide captioners, BSL interpreters, lip speakers, support workers, ramps, accessible honey wagons etc.
- Knowledge of the correct conduct and ethics of sign language interpreters and be ready to step in if interpreters break the code of conduct.
- Managing conflicting priorities and delivering to deadlines
- Excellent planning and organisation skills with the proven ability to multi-task
- Good verbal and written communication skills
- Scheduling or project management
- Ability to problem solve and negotiate in time sensitive and pressured environments.
- Ability to work as part of a team and on own initiative
- Awareness and understanding of disability culture and Deaf culture

Desirable:

- Experience of creating an inclusive, accessible environment.
- Understanding of schemes such as Access to Work and Employment Support Allowance, especially for freelance / self-employed workers.
- Understanding of different written communication formats and how to produce them.
- A knowledge of British Sign Language to Level 3 or above (where Deaf creatives have on-screen / off-screen roles in the production.)
- Understanding of the production company's legal obligations to its deaf, disabled and neurodivergent workforce under the Equality Act

- Experience of working in a media or arts setting
- Experience of working with TV and film producers and talent
- Understanding of the technical aspects of TV production

The Case for Access Coordinators

The people in the focus groups related a numerous of experiences on productions when their access requirements hadn't been met:

“While... meals are always taken care of by the catering staff who always beat everyone else in offering help, there is always an issue when filming goes over and sandwiches are brought onto set. Usually, people are very hungry when this happens so cast, crew and supporting artists are like ravenous locusts devouring everything in their path and taking stuff to eat later. Being unable to beat the rush, there is often little to nothing left. As a type 1 diabetic this is a little more serious than just going hungry for a while. Unless I am among the leading members of the cast, I don't get fed and can be forgotten if on set at the time.”

“I need to know where toilets are as I must drink a lot of water and I need to know if there will be somewhere that I can get water or if I have to bring a lot myself. On one shoot, the toilets were not in the same space as the set, so I didn't drink much water as it would've made going to the toilet too difficult. This made me become dehydrated and I got a UTI which in turn gave me sepsis. So, within the space of 4 days, not having that access led to me almost dying.”

This person said they were still very wary of disclosing their condition before signing contracts as they have lost work in the past in this way. It is important that production companies nurture a safe environment where people feel comfortable to disclose and are reassured that their access requirements will be wholly catered for, as sometimes these are only partially met:

“The schedule was changed and I had to get up very early in the morning, which affected my vertigo. But they didn't let me know in advance, they just went ahead and changed it. So, although they met my needs around BSL interpreters, they didn't in this respect.”

Lack of advance notice was also highlighted as a factor:

“My personal experiences when I'm sent a script beforehand is sometimes there's been some changes. And I said, if you're making any changes to the

script, I need to have time to think it through in BSL because it's not a simple English translation, I sometimes need to ask the writer what exactly do they mean by this? I just need them to unpack it for me. I think that an Access Coordinator wouldn't be able to do this, but they could support me to do it."

"I had a job up in *[name of a place]* where I didn't know where I was going or where I'd be staying until the day of the shoot. This was stressful for me as a wheelchair user as I didn't know things like whether there would be a bath or shower in the hotel. Planning is also important for making sure I have the right energy levels, as if I don't have all the information then it's hard to plan ahead."

There is work needed to transform the culture of the industry so that people are given more notice, as this is a huge barrier to inclusion. Inflexibility around making adjustments can also cause problems:

"On a recent shoot, I was not allowed to drive my own car for insurance reasons, but *[my car is adapted for my wheelchair]* so I needed it. I had to deal with the pressure of being the person holding everyone else up because they didn't have a wheelchair accessible car for me so that caused me a lot of stress and panic."

The lack of wheelchair accessible trailers was a huge issue for a number of people:

"Trailers are a huge deal. For a disabled person they have a massive impact on your job. On a recent shoot, the production actually bought an accessible caravan which was great. But as disabled people we are used to lowering our expectations to get jobs. So, my agent was arguing against this, saying I could make do with an accessible hotel room because we're used to making do. The other issue is, if they don't have an accessible trailer, that can lead to you being cut from scenes on location."

"Trailers are also massive for socialising. You can't knock on people's doors and say hello. If you haven't got a trailer with the rest of the cast then you're being segregated and isolated."

Similarly, there are issues with the availability of accessible toilets:

"I've been in situations where there have been no accessible toilets and the nearest one is 2 towns away. And people have made excuses and said 'do you mind making do as we're on a tight schedule and it would take a long time to take you all the way there and back'. It made me feel like I had to go along with it and empty my catheter into a stream by the roadside. It was made out that I would be affecting everyone else if I asked for my access requirements

to be met. They hadn't thought about my access at all. I've been filming in a house before where I couldn't even get into the bathroom or the front door. There is always a disconnect between what I tell production and that feeding through to what happens on set."

There are issues with not effectively communicating with deaf and/or disabled people:

"A lot of the time people haven't realised there's even a deaf person on set and they haven't realised that I need sign language. I can feel a bit left out. I think it's acknowledging who we've got in the room on the day so, by the second day, everybody's had a bit of time to adjust. But that should happen in advance. People are always nervous about meeting people who are deaf and it's about making people feel comfortable that they can approach me or the other actors. Everybody's access needs need to be discussed right at the start and then you can move on."

"What I think definitely needs to happen is that the Deaf actors are aware of where they're positioned and where they're going to react to certain things so that they know where to look. They need to know if they're going to do another take. Deaf people need sight lines of where to look, because they rely on visual cues rather than audio cues. People are shouting out instructions and saying run that again and a deaf person just sees the set moving. It's like, what's going on? So, I think it's about having specific areas on set that that's where they need to look when things are happening."

"I was asked to play a character with [*a severe form of a type of condition*] which is not what I have. I queried it but they said they'd looked around and they couldn't find anyone else in my age range to do it. So, it was either me or a non-disabled actor. Then on set I had the most arsey, arrogant director who kept speaking to my PA instead of me. Then, when we pulled me up, he spoke to me like I was five. At my request, they'd hired a specific type of wheelchair with a headrest that this character would have used. But the director tried to stop me using it, saying I was holding up the production. When I insisted that I had to use it for authenticity, no-one would help me transfer into it."

Deaf actors sometimes have difficulties getting professional sign language interpreters:

"I remember arriving once and it was chaotic on set, I didn't have a clue who to approach. I wasn't following any of it. They actually brought an interpreter, but he was an actor as well. They had a dual role. So, it was a little bit

confusing, let's just say. They should have booked an interpreter who was not an actor, or who was acting on that scene.”

“An actor may have a preferred sign language interpreter, working to a specific standard. And there's a budget there so that they can cover it, so there might be some money from the production budget and also Access to Work, if that comes online in time. It's all about timing, isn't it? I remember, on one job I had one interpreter because it was only an hour or two. But if it was one or two full days then I would need two interpreters to co-work it. It all depends on the production.”

A couple of people spoke of the need to be clear about downtime:

“As a neurodivergent person, if you haven't got clear designations between work and rest time then that can really make you on edge and cannot produce your best work. I did a show... which was very demanding. Afterwards we went to a bar for a drink, where the director gave us notes for two and a half hours during our supposed off time. If you're neurodivergent, this can make you more anxious. It may not be generally thought of as an access issue but it is.”

“I was on a job where we ended up having 3 days off which was great, but we only got notified the night before. It would be great to have a better idea of when we are needed on set. But you tend to only get the call sheet the night before. A quiet room on set would also be amazing so people have a place to just relax and get a break from the craziness of the set.”

“Fatigue is a big thing for me so having a coordinator to make sure that I can get breaks without fighting for them myself would be great.”

“A big part of the role should be knowing when people need to take breaks and enforcing that within a production so it doesn't fall on the artist to do that. I really want to think about how an Access Coordinator can impact on implicit/unconscious ableism as that isn't a quick fix to change people's thought processes.”

Experiences such as the ones detailed here highlight that further training is needed for the industry, as a whole, to fundamentally change how it operates and make it accessible and inclusive. One person suggest that creatives and other workers would also benefit from training around access:

“What will be useful is to offer training to deaf and disabled workers and artists themselves in how to ask for access, how to write an email flagging something that isn't working, or something that happened, and offering

feedback or solutions. We all know this communication involves emotional labour, but it is useful to get generic leadership training in how to have "difficult conversations" and how to use non-violent communication. I've had this type of training and it has been a game changer."

Whilst the introduction of Access Coordinators will undoubtedly lead to improvements for deaf, disabled and neurodivergent creatives on an individual level, it needs to be alongside a wider, holistic transformation. We need engagement and accountability at production company and commissioning levels, so the bulk of this work does not fall on the shoulders of an Access Coordinator on a project-by-project basis.

The Role

People then spoke about how they thought an Access Coordinator could support them in their particular roles:

"An Access Coordinator should be a remover of barriers. We deal with [barriers] every day of our lives and it would just be good to have someone to help us get through the bad situations we have to deal with every day and make our working day a bit easier."

A couple of people thought that the Access Coordinator should start work on a production from the development stage onwards:

"The decisions made in development have a massive impact on hiring disabled talent. So, without having someone working on access from the earliest point, you still are risking productions picking and choosing talent based on ease of use. Maybe Access Coordinators could be brought in on a freelance basis very early on to have conversations and make sure the plans for a show are inclusive from the beginning."

"The Access Coordinator must start during development and pre-production as you need to create an accessible environment. Then you can employ anyone in any role without having to make adjustments later on. The further through the job, the less you should need an Access Coordinator.

An advantage of Access Coordinators working during the development of a production is that they would be able to support disabled writers:

"As a writer, time constraints and deadlines are hard. It isn't often possible for me to stick to them as rigidly due to my access requirements and all of the additional things I have to arrange around my support. I work to crip time, not

capitalist non-disabled time. I think a lot of people forget this and it becomes a barrier. More education or an Access Coordinator advocating for me would definitely help this so I can focus on writing without stressing.”

One person offered a potential solution for gauging the demand for an Access Coordinator on a production:

“Might be a chicken and egg thing. You need the Access Coordinator to be able to attract and cater for disabled crew, but you may not know at that early stage exactly what the demands are. It makes me wonder whether there might be a two-stage approach. In the pre-production/planning phase, a consultant/adviser could be involved in making sure auditions and recruitment is accessible and attracts disabled crew/cast. Then once it’s known what the needs are, bringing in the Access Coordinator for the production itself. At that point, the amount of work required would be known. It could of course be the same person but perhaps they’d need flexibility about their involvement during the second stage.”

Some liked the idea of the Access Coordinator being a single point of contact to streamline communication:

“Because of dyspraxia, it takes my brain a few days to process a script before I can mentally start to create a character. So, it’s really difficult when scripts change last minute. Sometimes they even give me new lines on set! Maybe an Access Coordinator can try to ensure that we have as much info as possible about a shoot as early as possible? This could be about streamlining communication to make sure that as soon as things are changed or decided, they are immediately fed back to the person rather than them reading about them on the call sheet or script for the next day.”

“Once on a set, everyone laughed at me because I did a side step which must have looked weird as they didn’t know I was visually impaired and I needed to feel the table against my leg. The Access Coordinator should be making sure that everyone understands the access that needs to be put in place without it being put on the artist to describe their needs and ending up being made to feel that they are a problem. And obviously, respecting confidentiality would have to be a massive part of the job.”

“When the covid coordinators were introduced, there was an identified person to go and talk to about covid. I think this could do the same thing with access. They’re like a middle person who is a point of contact and makes sure conversations about access are taking place.”

“Live TV moves very fast and people don’t know the answer to questions so having someone that can be a mediator between you and the team and work out the answers to your questions would be valuable. Good communication can solve issues before they even arise and allow us to just get on with our jobs.”

“Having an Access Coordinator means you only have to give your access information to one person and you don’t have to be always answering the same questions like the dimensions of your wheelchair to everyone you work with.”

“There should be someone to collect your access needs and triggers to make sure people are not put in uncomfortable situations in rehearsals or on set.”

A visually impaired person wanted the Access Coordinator to help them initially find their way around the set:

“When I show up to a set it would be incredibly helpful to have an Access Coordinator who can show me where everything is. Simple things like where the catering is, where the bathroom is. Sometimes I am just wandering round sets for ages before people even realise that I’m looking for something. Someone that knows my access and can help me with a tour of the space and can check to make sure I am where I need to be etc. would take a lot of worry from me. If I had an Access Coordinator on set to help, I wouldn’t ever delay the start of shooting by being lost.”

One person thought that an Access Coordinator could be an advocate for younger people who may not have the confidence to say what they need:

“When I was younger, I let a lot of things happen that shouldn’t have happened. Once you are more senior in the production, people care more about your access. But an Access Coordinator could be an advocate you can trust, especially for people at earlier stages of their careers who may not have the confidence to say what they need.”

Another thought that an Access Coordinator could coordinate access requests to different departments, such as wardrobe:

“Often people forget that I need help and stop seeing me as disabled. So, when things get busy, sometimes my wardrobe requests around support to get ready are treated like I’m being a demanding actor, when in reality they are important for my access. The other thing people do is second guess me and do things to help me without asking me what I need. For example, on one production, they knew I couldn’t do laces so they gave me motorcycle boots

which ruined my mornings as they took 20 minutes to put on. So, an Access Coordinator could have conversations with wardrobe to ensure that you are ready to just do your job.”

Another thought an Access Coordinator could play a role in supporting people’s mental well-being:

“Could part of their role be about the mental well-being of everyone on set, for example making sure there is a drama therapist present? I’m aware of a production about the slave trade where they actually had a psychologist on set the whole time. It should not be their job to facilitate that, but rather make sure there is someone present on set who can.”

Booking access support for deaf people is not without its challenges:

“It’s important for an Access Coordinator to be very experienced in booking the different sorts of Deaf access, swiftly without fuss... The work involved in booking speech to text operators and sign language interpreters is labour intensive. It takes up a lot of time. There are shortages. It is expensive if done through agencies. You don’t want someone to come on without knowing what the pitfalls are, the urgency of the timeline of booking deaf access, or about the importance of gathering prep and what a challenge that can be.”

One deaf person thought that an Access Coordinator could play a role in making sure sign language interpreters got appropriate breaks:

“Availability of interpreters is also a sticking point. Having one interpreter all day would mean the Access Coordinator would need to probably take on responsibility for health and safety and making sure that they’re getting breaks. Those adjustments need to be made on set and that would be down to the Access Coordinator. Often actors or directors say ‘we’ll just work through’. I think the whole production crew would need to be made aware that breaks need to be built in.”

It was thought important that the Access Coordinator is across the whole production:

“An Access Coordinator will need to be fully embedded in the production, knowing how and who to ask questions in a way that gets answers. They have to know how to escalate questions and who to.”

However, some warned that an Access Coordinator could prevent the different departments seeing it as their responsibility to make adjustments:

“There is a real danger here that anything to do with access is seen as solely the responsibility of the Access Coordinator, when what is needed is for every single department within the production to take responsibility for making reasonable adjustments... I think we do it slowly and make production companies, producers and directors responsible for this instead of everything falling on one person. Because from experience I know they’ll just become the person that everyone in the crew moans about.”

Therefore, it is vital that Access Coordinators are not seen as a complete solution to widening inclusion within the industry. The role needs to be one of coordination, ensuring all of the different departments across a production discharge their legal responsibility to make “reasonable adjustments”. This is the start of the journey towards everyone on a production knowing that access is their responsibility.

Who Should Be an Access Coordinator?

Some very strong views were expressed in the focus groups about who should do the job of Access Coordinator. It was thought that the person needs to recognise that everyone is their own expert of what they themselves need:

“Everyone is an expert on their own access requirements. The worst thing would be if we created yet another expert who thought they knew better than we do what we require. Instead, we need a person willing to respect our expertise and work with us to put the things we need in place.”

It was also felt strongly across the community that this role should only be undertaken by a deaf, disabled or neurodivergent person:

“When thinking about how this role must be disabled, my thoughts go to how symbolically this is important so they’re confronted with disability in every sense, almost a visual (in some cases) reminder that this is what they’re working towards. Secondly, that this role requires a knowledge you only get from the direct lived experience of discrimination and the problem solving that goes with that and the tenacity to fight this disablism every day. Thirdly, we can’t get into the industry easily so this would provide ready-made opportunities for entry level roles for disabled people only - the jobs should be ring fenced and can be under the Equality Act. This is how to get into the industry for some - be across productions, learn on the job and then move on. But for me one of the main reasons I’d want a disabled person is because an element of what I’d personally want and need is peer support - and I ain’t getting that from a non-disabled person - no matter how lovely / attuned / how great an ally they are. Talking to someone who knows what every microaggression feels like, who can empathise and listen - hopefully helping

me to self-advocate or being an advocate on my behalf. That's what I'd love and wish I'd had."

"It is important for the Access Coordinators to also be disabled people. They need to be rooted in anti-ableism and able to challenge ableism throughout the production process. The presence of an Access Coordinator throughout will highlight, challenge and be a buffer to ablism."

"They need direct experience of being disabled. Having a disabled person on set says a lot. It will have more of an impact and be a symbol that there is nobody better than us to advocate for our community. It's important that our presence is uncomfortable for them and we challenge them. We don't need advocates who mean well but have just taken a short course on disability and think they know what we need (without truly understanding). This is an amazing opportunity to create a role in the industry for just disabled people to get them behind the camera, as the more traditional routes, such as becoming a runner, are not accessible to many disabled people."

However, one person thought that non-disabled people should be allowed to be Access Coordinators too:

"Inclusion means everyone so why not a non-disabled person with relevant lived and professional experience? I'd say ideally it should be a job share on every job! ...The main issue with this role is that it will be entry level people who will be ignored and talked about as not having a clue..."

For the many reasons expressed here, TripleC recommends this role is reserved for deaf, disabled and / or neurodivergent people.

Case Study: Ralph & Katie

Ralph & Katie is a recent production from ITV Studios for the BBC. Its two lead actors are both learning disabled and the production had many deaf, disabled, autistic and neurodiverse creatives working on it, both in front of and behind the camera. Although the production did not have an Access Coordinator, each and every department made adjustments to ensure access and inclusion.

A couple of people from the production attended one of the focus groups. One learning disabled actor related:

"I had a Creative Coach who helped me with my lines and direction. She'd help me understand my lines. We used mirroring, where she'd say the line first and I'd mirror her in my character."

The Creative Coach would also support the crew to communicate effectively with learning disabled actors:

“One of the things that came out of Ralph & Katie was realising that having Jess as the interpreter / creative coach for two actors was too much. In future, we would look at having additional support. I think it was helpful early on that she knew both character storylines and supported both actors in the same scene. But imagine you had one BSL interpreter for the whole day, nobody would do it. It's just a silly idea. But we did that with the creative coach and kind of learned not to do it again.”

All sorts of adjustments were made for cast and crew:

“People in production get very fearful about what reasonable adjustments mean. They forget the word reasonable. So, on Ralph & Katie, we had locations that we knew that our trainee who was a wheelchair user would never be able to get to. But we talked that through with her, gave options and made sure that she got access to equally exciting days because she wasn't full time. You have an open dialogue about it. It's not saying you have to make it work if it's not reasonable. If it really is the only location that will work then you talk it through. It's about doing what you can when you can, not having to do unreasonable adjustments?”

“One thing that we learned on Ralph & Katie is we did fantastic unit base maps for people to understand where all the vehicles were, colour coded etc. What we failed to do was explain to our autistic and learning disabled crew when we were moving out of the studio. Some people found it incredibly disruptive and very distressing that we hadn't talked through the fact that, next week everything gets packed up and we go back to location. So it's actually thinking ahead of about change and make sure that everybody at the pre-production stage is thinking about change and planning, planning, planning, planning and planning.”

A high proportion of the crew had access requirements:

“I said every department has to have somebody in your team who is neurodivergent, autistic or disabled. And a lot of departments panicked, mainly sparks and riggers and grips as usually their sons are working with them. Everybody didn't want to bring somebody in they would have to support. I said to every single department ‘speak to your team, you will probably find at least one person is one of those things.’ It's saying be open to supporting the members of your team who are disabled, neurodivergent, learning disabled or autistic better. It was fascinating how many people

suddenly felt they could say ‘actually, I've been working with you as a designer for five years, but I'm actually autistic and I get really stressed by the way we work. So, it's actually about recognising the diversity within existing teams as well as bringing in other people.’”

“For every person that submitted their access passport to us, basically saying ‘I want you to be aware of my reasonable adjustments’, we gave them each a champion within the crew who would be the person that they would go to for help. And that worked really well. But I think most importantly we gave all the cast and crew two hours of online, interactive training about working with autistic and neurodivergent and learning disabled cast and crew. Later on, I'd stand on set and just remind everybody why we were doing things differently and that they had to be patient because we were all learning. In some ways, it's easy for that to come from the producer or the director but if it comes from an Access Coordinator I think people will just ignore it.”

This production demonstrated the value of approaching every production with the assumption that many of the cast and crew will have access requirements:

“We have to approach every single production as if everybody has access requirements. It's about approaching it a bit like ‘build it and they will come’. If you've got the access, whether it be for neurodivergent people, wheelchair users, deaf people, whatever then the people can just be invited at the drop of a hat. You know, so we literally did that. We knew when we had a lot of supporting artists not turn up that we could open it up to absolutely anybody because our unit base and asset were completely accessible. You have people with access requirements full stop on every production. Get over it. Wouldn't it be amazing and actually quite groundbreaking to have a job description that unifies and makes it obvious that it's applicable to every bloody production because it doesn't mention any labels?”

Some of the working practices described here have been incorporated into our role description for Access Coordinators.

Case Study: Perfect

Perfect is a half hour comedy pilot made by Happy Tramp North for UKTV. It has three disabled lead actors, all with physical impairments and a range of access requirements. In addition, various other disabled people worked on the production, including the writer, who describes the hectic schedule:

“Originally, filming was scheduled for January 2023, giving us 7 months prep time. At short notice, the filming week was brought forward to July 2022,

giving us just 6 weeks to prepare. The casting of the three disabled leads was not confirmed until 2 weeks before filming. Whilst these tight schedules are not uncommon in the industry, they could have proved a massive issue when it came to meeting everyone's access requirements. To put it simply, it would not have been possible to make this pilot without our Access Coordinator onboard and on set. There was a whole load of requirements to sort, including travel, accommodation, hoists and other equipment, pain relief, parking, voice software, support workers and a whole load of other issues that I'm not even aware of!"

One of the actors describes her interview with the Access Coordinator before filming started:

"We met over Zoom to discuss my access needs. Instead of me having to provide a document or a list of my access needs and needing to expend energy on that work myself, she asked a series of detailed and well-thought-out questions in order to address every single aspect of working on a shoot. This covered everything from getting in and out of my car, to how I'd transport my bags, to what I'd need on set... She also understood the nuance between access requirements which were essential and other access requirements which were preferred but not essential. She made sure that these preferred access requirements were still fulfilled to the best of her ability, so that as little energy as possible for me was expended on access-related things and as much energy as possible was saved for my creative work."

They go on to talk about the value of having an Access Coordinator on set the entire time:

"Her being on set meant that she could make sure our access requirements were always met during filming. This is especially important with artists with variable conditions such as myself, where access needs and symptoms constantly fluctuate. She checked in with us artists regularly, making sure we had everything we needed, and often anticipated our needs before we got to the point of needing to voice them. For example, on the first day of shooting, because she knew from our prior discussion that bright lights were a migraine trigger for me, she checked in very regularly with me and brought me painkillers, water, and pain management tools a lot earlier than [I would have got them] if she weren't present on set. This meant that my migraine... didn't reach a point of high-level pain before I had a chance to treat and mitigate it. I was, for the first time in my career, able to stay well enough to continue shooting until wrap and focus on my work without being so afflicted by severe pain that I was in distress."

The mother another one of the actors spoke about their anxiety around access before the production:

“Initially the planning prior to travelling to Liverpool for a very intensive week’s filming 4 hours from home seemed somewhat daunting, including hoping the hotel room is adequate for his needs, especially the need for a wet room to accommodate a shower/toilet chair, plus the location from hotel to the set. Parking can also be an issue, as well as the lack of dropped kerbs. We also have to consider hotel accommodation for a night carer in a room near to Wills. From my perspective and experience, there is no overall HR department that can ensure the needs of disabled actors are met.”

However, she went on to say what a difference the Access Coordinator made:

“[The Access Coordinator] spoke to us on a scheduled Zoom call two weeks before leaving to cover every single one of his needs. They made absolutely sure when we arrived that everything was in place to ensure he and his PA’s were adequately catered for, and that we did not have to worry about a single thing. When it is the job of someone to look after an individual with high care needs, it can be extremely stressful making sure everything is in place in the hotel, just outside the hotel, and on set, it doesn’t take much for one thing to go wrong, and Wills’s performance on set would be hugely affected. The work they did... made such a positive difference to the whole experience... I cannot recommend highly enough the need for an Access Coordinator behind all productions with disabled actors, and in terms of safety, it is an absolute necessity.”

The writer also talked about how the role ensured that the production ran on time and on budget:

“We could only afford a 5-day shoot, meaning we were on a very tight schedule. Lack of access could so easily have disrupted production and stopped us from shooting all of the scenes we needed. But by having the Access Coordinator working in the background to problem-solve on set the entire time, we ran pretty much to schedule. In fact, our director observed that we speeded up and became more efficient as the week went on. It was the first time he’d worked on a production with an Access Coordinator too, and he agreed that we wouldn’t have shot everything without having someone perform this role.”