

Broadcasters back Jack Thorne and ‘Underlying Health Condition’ campaign to address disabled access across TV industry in the UK

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Nine of the UK’s main broadcasters and streamers have joined forces to help improve access for disabled talent across the TV industry. The TV Access Project (TAP) has been created by the BBC, Channel 4, Britbox International, Disney+ UK, ITV, Paramount, Prime Video, Sky and UKTV, with support from industry body CDN (the Creative Diversity Network) and PACT, representing the indie sector.

TAP has been formed in response to the campaign by Underlying Health Condition (UHC), which was set up by disabled creatives Genevieve Barr, Katie Player and Holly Lubran along with screenwriter Jack Thorne, following his impassioned MacTaggart Lecture at Edinburgh TV Festival in 2021. TAP is supported by TripleC DANC (Disabled Artists Networking Community) and DDPTV (Deaf & Disabled

People in TV).

Together all these organisations want to ensure an inclusive television production sector for disabled talent. TAP aims to improve access provision substantively and permanently across the UK TV industry, looking at solutions that are pan-genre, considering both scripted and unscripted.

The project started in April, when Charlotte Moore, Chief Content Officer at the BBC, convened a pan-industry roundtable between disabled creatives and content creators. Since then, led by the BBC and Channel 4, broadcasters, streamers, industry bodies and disabled creatives have met regularly, focusing on two main areas: access on productions and access in studios and facilities. Today TAP announced:

The publication of new production guidelines for Disability Inclusion, the 5 As. All those who adopt the guidelines will commit to Anticipating, Asking, Assessing, Adjusting and Advocating when it comes to working with disabled talent and providing their access requirements.

A group of TAP members have published an open letter to Studios and Facilities to encourage the development of new industry standards for inclusivity in their workspaces as well. Those studios, post production houses and facilities that show they can meet these new guidelines will be given priority by TAP members when considering new UK commissions.

And finally a clear commitment to continue TAP until Edinburgh 2023, with an ambition to work pan-industry to consider issues including funding models for access and reasonable adjustments, the roll out of Access Co-ordinators and the retention and progression of disabled talent into senior roles.

TAP is setting an ambitious timeframe of just one-year to roll out the two sets of cross-industry accessibility guidelines and will update delegates at next year's Edinburgh TV Festival on its achievements.

Jack Thorne said: "Collectively, we have been working hard to raise the representation of disabled people on screen and off, but over the past year we have come to realise that our progress has been stymied by a significant, yet resolvable, problem - physical accessibility. How can the 1 in 5 of the population who are disabled hope to work on our productions, if the spaces in which they are made are not accessible to them?

"So our vision is to come together as an industry and create a set of accessibility standards for ourselves and our third party partners who provide studios and facilities. A commitment that together we can create better and more flexible

workplaces that include everybody who wants to work in this industry.”

Channel 4’s Chief Content Officer Ian Katz said: "The obstacles to disabled talent in our industry exposed by Underlying Health Condition should shame us all. It is the collective responsibility of the entire industry to raise our game and make productions end-to-end accessible - as broadcasters and indies hiring and casting talent, as well studios, facilities houses and locations providing spaces and equipment. We are all at different stages on a journey, but the ultimate destination is clear: no disabled talent excluded or held back from giving their creative best due to a lack of access provision from us, their employers and suppliers. There are no more excuses.”

Charlotte Moore, Chief Content Officer at the BBC, added: “We set up the TV Access Project in response to Jack Thorne’s powerful call to arms at last year’s festival. Over the last six months we’ve been working across the sector and in partnership with disabled-led and pan industry bodies and interest groups, to encourage as much participation and activity as possible. Today feels like a watershed moment for disabled talent and inclusion in our industry and it’s exciting to be in a position where we can agree sensible measure and implement collective action for change.”

Kevin Lygo, Managing Director of Media and Entertainment, ITV said: “Our industry should be accessible to anyone who wants to work in it. There is so much work to do but physical accessibility on productions, as well as in studios and facilities, is an important targeted focus.

We know that the underrepresentation of disabled people in our industry is an urgent issue and something we’re working on at ITV. We look forward to working collaboratively with the other broadcasters, streamers and stakeholders on the TV Access Project to address this and create the change that is needed.”

Ben Frow, Chief Content Officer, UK, Paramount, said: “We’re proud to support the TV Access Project. Disabled talent should never be excluded from working in the industry so we must make every effort to ensure access is addressed as a priority. Paramount looks forward to working with our fellow broadcasters to find solutions and agree cross-industry standards for accessibility, as a matter of urgency.”

Zai Bennett, Managing Director of Content, Sky UK and Ireland: “We’re proud to support the TV Access Project and play our role in improving the access and inclusion of disabled talent both on and off-screen. The renewed discussion

sparked by Jack Thorne and the Underlying Health Condition campaign over the past two years is incredibly welcome, but now we must see action. Sky and the other members are committed to creating a television industry where no disabled talent is ever excluded.”

Diederick Santer, Chief Creative Officer of BritBox International, said: “It’s about access – opening doors, removing barriers, stopping TV from missing out on the best talent through a lack of accessibility. We’re proud to be part of this project, and proud to ensure that our productions, co pros and workplaces will follow the 5As.”

Liam Keelan, SVP Original Productions, The Walt Disney Company EMEA, said: “As we increase our Disney+ originals slate in the UK, we enthusiastically support this initiative, which will make our incredible industry more accessible to all who want to be a part of it.”

Marcus Arthur, CEO, UKTV said: “Disabled talent are being let down by our industry and it’s time for that to stop. TAP has been created and designed to support fundamental change and I’m pleased that we are joining fellow broadcasters and industry friends to support and champion this incredibly important work.”

Deborah Williams, Executive Director, Creative Diversity Network, said: “We were very pleased that Jack used CDN's Diamond Data and Doubling Disability statistics in his MacTaggart lecture last year. As the UHC momentum continues and TAP is born, it is great to know that Diamond Data is a core part of not just highlighting the problem but being part of the solution, and that disability is now an established part of the diversity conversation in our industry. As a data-driven, evidence-based organisation, we are looking forward to the data we collect and publish continuing to be used as a force for change.”

DDPTV said: “Members of Deaf & Disabled People in TV (DDPTV) are at the forefront of this appalling lack of access, representation and provisions within the industry; every day Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent people fight for equal opportunities in this field.

“Jack Thorne's MacTaggart lecture shone a light on an area of the industry which has been ignored for too long. His words galvanised action and DDPTV are proud to work with him towards the creation of an inclusive industry. This is a collective responsibility so we are thrilled that the broadcasters, streamers and organisations involved in The Access Project are agreeing to collective action and

signing up to cross-industry accessibility standards. This is an exciting first step in creating a positive change for future generations of DDN creatives and we can't wait to help usher it into action."

TAP complements the work individual broadcasters and streamers are already doing to address access for disabled talent in the TV industry, and intends to be a forum for best practice. TAP is looking to expand its membership, and in the Autumn will be approaching other broadcasters and streamers.

[ENDS]

Notes to Editors:

The 5 As

GUIDELINES FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION IN U.K. TELEVISION PRODUCTION

In order to ensure the full and equal inclusion of Deaf, Disabled and/or Neurodivergent talent, both behind and in front of the camera, the organisations which adopt these guidelines will:

ANTICIPATE

We fully expect to work and continue to work with Disabled people on a regular basis. So, we will keep ahead of the game and ensure our structures, processes and environments are - and remain - inclusive. We will engender confidence among Disabled talent, by actively communicating and demonstrating how we are inclusive. In doing this, we will always seek expert advice and stay up to date with best practice.

ASK

We avoid assuming anything, of anybody. So, sensitively and as standard, we will regularly approach every team member- whether they have a condition or impairment that is immediately apparent or not - to invite them to discuss any adjustment needs or access requirements they have in order to fulfil their role. In doing so, we will focus on access and adjustments, not conditions or impairments and we will let Disabled people own those conversations.

ASSESS

We value self-reflection. So we will be clear and transparent about how accessible we are, ensuring that Disabled talent can easily find out about our access provision and support without having to ask. We will consistently sense-

check that we have created a working culture where everyone feels open, confident and safe to communicate their access needs, bringing in specialist expertise when needed. We will also regularly evaluate and improve our inclusion policies and practices.

ADJUST

We deliver what is needed. So, we will consistently and well ahead of time, put in place any reasonable adjustments to ensure the full inclusion as well as the physical and emotional wellbeing of Disabled talent during their involvement with us. This includes during recruitment and the onboarding process. We will do so with the support of relevant experts and ensuring we have sufficient funding in place.

ADVOCATE

We set high standards for everyone. So, we will celebrate what Disabled talent bring and actively champion them. We will not tolerate any inappropriate behaviour, language or attitudes and we will think long-term to consistently support the progression of Disabled talent into senior roles.

These guidelines are deliberately not detailed tips or technical instructions, as these can change over time and it would be impossible to provide a definitive list of every access requirement, reasonable adjustment or best practice approach in every circumstance for every individual or production. It is also for each organisation to agree and own how they intend to implement these guidelines.

Everybody Forgot About the Toilets : UK Facilities & Studios survey, 2021

Underlying Health Condition

campaign: <https://www.screenskills.com/media/5074/2nd-december-underlying-health-condition-report-tv.pdf>

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