

Consultation on arts disability access card by Richie Turner on behalf of UK Arts Councils and the BFI

Pre-webinar briefing document for 6 Feb

Key points:

1. Brief:

The 4 UK Arts Councils and the BFI have commissioned this feasibility study to test 4 main questions:

- Do the 4 UK arts councils and the BFI want to establish a joint UK wide disability arts access card scheme? Or should nation specific schemes be established? [Wales already runs Hynt - a companion ticket scheme]
- Do venues across the UK want a UK wide scheme established? If so how might it operate and what might it cost venues to join?
- Do disabled people in the UK want a UK wide scheme compared to venue/company specific schemes? If so what are the basic requirements of a scheme: eligibility; cost; benefits; booking procedure; data capture and audience development?
- What are the likely operational costs of running a UK wide scheme? Is it likely to be affordable for: the arts councils; venues; disabled people; producers? What type of funding model is appropriate? Should producing companies also contribute?

2. Quick explanation about Hynt in Wales

- Started in May 2015
- Hynt now has 18,500 members including some in England (mainly border counties such as Cheshire, Shropshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire). In comparison, Nimbus Access Card, established around the same time has 22,500 members across the whole of the UK.
- Definition and eligibility of any scheme must be based on the social model of disability. This means eligibility for a companion ticket is only based on whether a person needs support to attend an arts event or not? (being a disabled person does not necessarily qualify a person for a Hynt Card).
- Currently applications are assessed by the Card Network (who also run the CEA Cinema Card scheme). They hold the personal data not Creu Cymru (Wales venue network) who operate the scheme for Arts Council of Wales (ACW). It costs ACW £5 per person with a 3 year renewal fee to process each application.
- There is no charge to join the scheme but currently that means a c.£30K a year cost to ACW. Equivalent membership for England would be c.325K disabled people creating a cost an annual cost of £0.5M imply to process and issue cards. In comparison, Nimbus Access card costs each disabled person £15 for 3 years or the CEA Cinema Card which costs £6 annually (neither scheme is publicly funded).
- Assessment appeals are dealt with by a separate disability led arbitration organisation in Wales, which again adds cost to the scheme.

- There is no online booking capability in Wales currently: due to box office systems not integrating with individual venue website systems. This is a major weakness and needs addressing for any UK wide scheme
- Data reporting is limited: most venues don't track Hynt card member spending or attendance sufficiently to provide useful overall info and reporting. Again this a weakness that needs overcoming.
- Free training for all member venues annually - though take up has dropped off in recent years.

Hynt Membership scheme costs based on turnover:

Annual Turnover of Arts Centre / Theatre	Cost to join Hynt per annum
Less than £500,000	£250
Between £500,001 and £800,000	£500
Between £800,001 and £2,000,000	£1000
Between £2,000,001 and £5,000,000	£2000
Over £5,000,000	On discussion with Creu Cymru

What data does Hynt hold?:

Hynt Membership data and systems only records if a member is either:

- Wheelchair user
- Has a disabled parking requirement
- Deaf or hearing impairment

This currently limits venues from fully knowing a person's disability access info and requirements.

Take up

- After 1 year c.85% of venues in Wales had joined - ACW made it compulsory if an annually funded venue in 2017.

Benefits to venues

- Being an all Wales scheme has reduced operational costs to venues who ran their own companion schemes and has also taken away the issue of venture staff making

assessments (many felt unqualified to do this) and taken away arguments at box offices for anyone refused membership.

Key principles and issues

- All Arts Councils agree any scheme has to be free to join; this is different to the way Nimbus Access card or the CEA Cinema Card operates?
- Feedback so far from UK venues, is that just simply extending Hynt across the whole of UK is not sufficient. Any initiative needs to tackle all disability access issues and requirements at the same time - not just ensuring a UK wide companion scheme.
- Therefore the feasibility is now looking at a wider initiative which:
 - Captures all the users disability access requirements as a profile and communicate these to the venue being booked, so they can appropriately prepare, e.g. wheelchair user
 - Enable online wheelchair bookings across all box office formats and offer the cheapest tickets available to those whose seating options are limited by the inaccessibility of the venues
 - Enable detailed data analysis by UK Arts Councils and participating venues through integration with all box office and website booking systems
 - Even if the front-end branding is different in each UK nation, ensure that a single operating system is created ensuring disabled people will benefit from essentially the same scheme UK wide without duplication or additional memberships.

The webinar will be looking to hear feedback from UK Theatre members around these questions and topics:

1. Do you agree that a UK wide scheme is better than running individuals schemes in your own venues?
2. If the membership fees shown for Hynt are roughly replicated in a UK scheme would you join? Are these affordable for you?
3. Do you agree that if you are an arts council funded venue you should be compelled to join the scheme?
4. Do you agree that the social model of disability is used for assessing eligibility?
5. Which of you are already accepting the Nimbus Access card? And how are you dealing with the fee Nimbus charges for their card? Do you cover the costs yourself or do you expect disabled to pay themselves?
6. Have any of you managed to integrate your own companion memberships schemes or the Nimbus Access card data into your box office/CRM/website booking schemes in order to be able for disabled people to book online or for your venue to know exactly their disability access needed without asking them directly?
7. Do you think producing companies should also financially contribute to a companion scheme by covering the cost of companion tickets themselves rather than getting venues to pick up these costs?

You can of ask your own question if you email UK Theatre this in advance of the webinar.

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