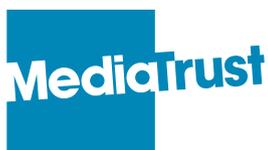




# Supporting disabled spokespeople in media interviews

a guide for your  
organisation

October 2020





# Introduction

Media Trust is a charity that works in partnership with the media and creative industry to give charities, under-represented communities and young people a stronger voice, through training and access to free resources and matching them with communications volunteers. Find out more at [www.mediatrust.org](http://www.mediatrust.org).

We are currently working on a project to increase the representation of disabled people in the media. Disabled people make up 20% of the population, however it's rare to see disabled people featured in media interviews. And when you do, they're almost always only talking about disability issues.

As part of our 'Reframing Disability' initiatives, Media Trust is looking at ways to support experts across a range of different fields, who also happen to be disabled, to take part in media interviews on TV or radio.

**SCOPE**  
= Equality for disabled people

## About Scope

Scope is the disability equality charity in England and Wales. We provide practical information and emotional support when it's most needed, and campaign relentlessly to create a fairer society.



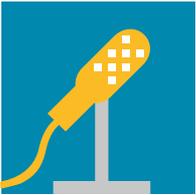


# Disability in the media



There are 14 million disabled people in the UK, and yet disabled people remain poorly represented in the media.

In news and current affairs programming, most of the time, disabled people only appear talking about disability.



While the issues affecting disabled people do need to be highlighted, in order for the media to reflect our society, we want to see many, many more opportunities for disabled spokespeople to share their expertise on the wide variety of topics covered in the news – from politics to sport, science and technology.



Many media outlets have made commitments to improve diversity both on-screen and off-screen, and that includes making sure their news programming is representative.

One in five of us is disabled, and yet disabled people very rarely see themselves represented in the media. The latest [Diamond Report](#), published by the Creative Diversity Network, found that in current affairs programming, just 9.2 per cent of people on-screen were disabled.

## 9.2%

**The latest Diamond Report, published by the Creative Diversity Network, found that in current affairs programming, just 9.2 per cent of people on-screen were disabled.**

The lack of diversity in the media industry is a systemic issue, and simply boosting the percentage of disabled people on screen won't solve the problem. We all need to work together to recognise and tackle these systemic barriers to ensure that the media industry is genuinely inclusive and representative of our society.



# Increasing representation

## What you can do as a communications professional

Communications agencies and in-house PR teams are a vital part of the media industry, and can play a huge role in helping to make the industry more inclusive from the inside.

Working closely with the media every day, PR and comms professionals are in a great position to influence the processes and practices which too often exclude disabled people.

As public relations professionals, you can make a difference by helping to challenge negative attitudes to disability within your own organisation or your clients' organisations, and create opportunities for disabled colleagues to share their expertise and develop their skills and confidence.

More and more organisations are finally waking up to the benefits of having a diverse workforce and inclusive employment practices, but progress is still slow.



# How Scope's press office works

As a leading voice on disability, Scope is often contacted by journalists and media outlets who want to interview disabled people about their experiences.

We support many disabled people to share their experiences in the media as part of our campaigning work. This could be through writing blogs, being interviewed for magazine articles, as well as live and pre-recorded interviews on TV and radio.

As a media team, making sure that our storytellers feel comfortable and confident about sharing their story in the media is always our number one priority. Many of the people we work with have never dealt with the media before, so we play a really important role liaising with journalists to set up media opportunities, briefing our storytellers on what to expect and ensuring they can get the reasonable adjustments they need.

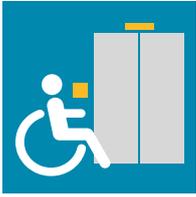


*Attributed to Scope*



## Supporting your disabled spokespeople: our top tips

**Here are our tips for press teams and communications professionals to better support disabled spokespeople:**



- ▶ Ask spokespeople if they have any access needs and communicate these to the media outlet. An access need could be someone requiring an accessible taxi to take them to and from a studio. It could also be someone requiring a sign language interpreter, which may need booking in advance.



- ▶ Ask spokespeople if they need any reasonable adjustments to enable them to undertake a media interview. Reasonable adjustments could include if somebody needs to do an interview later in the day, or pre-recorded.



- ▶ Find out what you can about the interview location and environment in advance. Make sure that it's accessible and comfortable. Consider issues such as space and noise levels.
- ▶ Ask whether the spokesperson may need, or want, to be accompanied by an assistant or carer.
- ▶ Some disabled people may require questions be shared in advance of an interview. It can be daunting to undertake media interviews, especially if you are speaking about a personal experience, so it can help for them to have time in advance to consider how they might approach their answers.



*Photo by Sigmund on Unsplash*



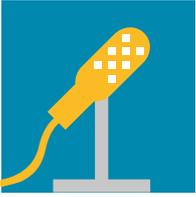


- ▶ Find out their preference. Some disabled people may prefer to answer questions over email rather than over the phone or video call.
- ▶ For video calls, know what software is accessible. [Scope's Big Hack has a useful guide](#). For example, if your spokesperson requires a sign language interpreter, some software offers this feature.
- ▶ [Scope research](#) found that half of disabled people have worried about sharing information about their impairment or condition at work. Don't make assumptions about what support or adjustments someone may or may not need – ask them.
- ▶ Use your role to remind journalists of the benefits of being more flexible. They will be able to reach people whose stories have never – or rarely – been told and create content which better reflects their audiences. The coronavirus pandemic has forced the media to be more flexible about how they work, for example, by embracing remote interviews.



*Attributed to Scope*





- ▶ Think about the language you use when talking about disability and disabled people. Language is powerful and can reinforce stereotypes. Don't use simplistic words that paint disabled people as either vulnerable or inspirational. Don't suggest disabled people should be pitied and never use terms such as 'victim', 'sufferer' or 'crippled'. And don't define people by their disability by using terms like 'the blind' or 'the deaf'. [Scope's End the Awkward campaign has some helpful tips on language.](#)
- ▶ Ask disabled spokespeople how they would like to be addressed or introduced on air. For example, some people prefer to be described as "disabled" rather than "with a disability", to reflect the fact they are disabled by society. [This is called the social model of disability.](#)
- ▶ Sometimes an interview will lead to follow-up media requests, so it's important to make sure your spokesperson knows that you can support them in managing follow-up interviews. For example, they may like you to liaise with media on their behalf, carry out briefings and practice interviews with them or accompany them to media interviews.
- ▶ Giving feedback after interviews is also really important to help someone develop their skills and boost their confidence.



*Attributed to Scope*





- ▶ Another aspect to be aware of is social media attention following an interview and your duty of care to your spokesperson. If the interview is likely to receive a lot of attention, you may want to advise them to make sure their social media profiles are private. On the whole, our spokespeople receive very positive and supportive responses on social media. However, it's important to make sure that your spokesperson knows that they can come to you for support and advice if they were to receive any negative reaction.
- ▶ If relevant to the opportunity, it's important to make sure disabled spokespeople are remunerated for their expertise like anyone else. Disabled people can face extra costs – for example needing to use a taxi to travel to an interview rather than public transport – and these expenses should be covered either by the media outlet or the company organising the media opportunity.
- ▶ Make sure that your spokespeople understand the volatile nature of the media and that their interview may be dropped at the last minute. If there is a change, keep people informed and handle this sensitively.



*Attributed to Scope*



# Working with the media: Hannah's perspective

Hannah Deakin, 29, is a writer and disability campaigner who regularly appears in the media to share her experiences. Hannah has a rare illness called Complex Regional Pain Syndrome and uses a wheelchair. Most recently, Hannah shared her experiences of life in lockdown, including being interviewed by several television news crews and sharing her story in print. She shares her experiences through her blog [Hannah's Hope](#) and on Twitter [@HannahEDeakin](#).



*Attributed to Hannah Deakin*



Hannah Deakin



I really enjoyed working with journalists on Channel 5 News and Sky News. Initially, I felt quite nervous, but I was proud of my achievement seeing myself on television and felt I had spoken out for the disabled community. I think it made others aware that I feel passionate about raising awareness, changing perceptions and promoting equality. The opportunities of being interviewed by Channel 5 News and Sky News in my garden via social distancing were set up by Scope. Having the interview with Sky News then led to them asking me to write an article for their website. It was helpful that Scope liaised with the journalists and arranged the interviews. The journalists were very nice and treated me with respect.

I think it is important to have disabled people in the media, as otherwise the media is not representing the public accurately. There are 14 million disabled people in the UK. Furthermore, if the general public saw more disabled people in the media they would be helping to break down barriers and lead the way to an inclusive society. It shouldn't be an unusual event to see a disabled person in the media. Moreover, disabled children and adults would be given extra confidence seeing others like themselves, which could lead to the feeling of less isolation and more belonging.

Disability doesn't discriminate and can strike at any time. We should all be inclusive. I think sometimes disabled people feel as though they can be 'free' labour or not appreciated for their skills and time. I think there needs to be an understanding from the media that if disabled people are not working and on benefits, it is for a reason. Disabled people's time is normally more valuable as they have less of it due to things taking longer.

I think media outlets should make sure they offer expenses or payment if this is possible. Alternatively, if this is not possible maybe exposure of social media handles, by tagging them in the post or the individual's blog. In one article I wrote, I included my blog address and social media handles at the bottom of the article but these were removed.

One thing I would add, whilst I appreciate that news is very much in the moment, I think it would be worth journalists considering when planning in advance, giving as much notice as possible to disabled people on requiring articles written and that sometimes the turnaround can be slower."



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## In summary

PR and comms professionals can play a vital role in helping the media industry become more inclusive and representative, by putting forward disabled employees and spokespeople to appear as media interviewees, spreading the word about their company, charity, or mission and not just to talk about disability issues. There are disabled people with expertise in every sector, but we so rarely see them featured as experts in news stories and current affairs. It's time to change that. And it starts with you.

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## Contact us

We hope you've found this guide helpful and informative. We're keen to encourage as many people as possible to get involved in our work and increase the visibility of disabled people in the media.

If you want to know more about the 'Reframing Disability' project, or would like to talk to us about media interview training, please email [trainingandevents@mediatrust.org](mailto:trainingandevents@mediatrust.org) or get in touch via our [online form](#).



**REFRAMING  
DISABILITY**

**MediaTrust**

In partnership with

**50:50**  
THE EQUALITY PROJECT

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