

valuable. And once again, this is where documentation is absolutely vital. So when somebody questions the decision that you've made, you can look back and say, "These are the choices that we made, and this is why."

In a new build scheme, the most important aspect is, I believe, the early planning. Especially in auditoria, which are usually multi-levelled, densely packed; to get good access it is absolutely essential that the architect and design team consider the implications right from the beginning. Access doesn't have to be a constraint on the design, but you may need to reduce the number of levels. You need to work these out carefully, for example, your foyer levels need to line up with where you'll need some seating. It all sounds incredibly obvious, but it doesn't always happen. And within the design team, it's also essential to have co-operation and discussion. I always think it's very important to get the access

making provision. However, there are areas backstage which are simply impossible to make accessible, and certain disabilities that are simply incompatible. The classic example is that it would not be appropriate for somebody with no sight to be operating a counterweight set. This sounds obvious, but it's why Health and Safety needs to override the Disability Discrimination Act.

And the other thing to consider is not to make assumptions about people and their ability and disability. It's very difficult for a design team, and even for an access consultant, to be sure what people can and cannot achieve in a theatre space. And this is really the moment to introduce David Griffiths; he's a flyman from Theatr Clwyd.

David Griffiths

As most of you can see, access isn't too much of a problem for me. In fact nothing presents too much of a problem for me. Having one arm is only a disability in the eyes of other people. I've been like this since birth and I've grown up using other parts of my body in place of the extra arm. I can carry, pull or push all manner of things, with back, shoulders, stomach, legs and feet. In fact the thighs have the strongest muscles in the body – you clamp a piece of rope between your knees and it's in a vice.

I've worked as a flyman in many theatres and not had too much difficulty doing the job. Some flying systems use heavy slab counterweights; instead of lifting them with two hands into the cradle I lift them on my thigh and slide them in. It can be embarrassing, you know, if people are watching, because you get in all sorts of strange positions. When it comes to hemp flying, that can be a problem, because when you fly cloths and scenery out they go quite jerkily; but coming in, well, you just put the ropes around the cleat and let them in. Of course I suffer from burns, because I can't let the rope out hand over hand, but over the years my hand has become like leather, fortunately.

I'm also blessed with a good sense of balance, so I can happily climb up a stepladder and then work off the top of it without holding onto anything. And the new generation of carpenters' tools help enormously. I used to wear an artificial arm but I don't any more. I did put a hook on the end of it, carried a flat on it, balanced it with my real arm, but that was

Access consultant, Margaret Hickish, herself in a wheelchair considers practical approaches to public and backstage access with theatre consultant, Emma Savage. To demonstrate the importance of not making assumptions about peoples' abilities, here David Griffiths, who has only one arm, describes his career as a flyman.

has been a National Lottery access consultant. I've involved too much of a problem for me. I've been like this since birth and I've grown up using other parts of my body in place of the extra arm. I can carry, pull or push all manner of things, with back, shoulders, stomach, legs and feet. In fact the thighs have the strongest muscles in the body – you clamp a piece of rope between your knees and it's in a vice. I've worked as a flyman in many theatres and not had too much difficulty doing the job. Some flying systems use heavy slab counterweights; instead of lifting them with two hands into the cradle I lift them on my thigh and slide them in. It can be embarrassing, you know, if people are watching, because you get in all sorts of strange positions. When it comes to hemp flying, that can be a problem, because when you fly cloths and scenery out they go quite jerkily; but coming in, well, you just put the ropes around the cleat and let them in. Of course I suffer from burns, because I can't let the rope out hand over hand, but over the years my hand has become like leather, fortunately. I'm also blessed with a good sense of balance, so I can happily climb up a stepladder and then work off the top of it without holding onto anything. And the new generation of carpenters' tools help enormously. I used to wear an artificial arm but I don't any more. I did put a hook on the end of it, carried a flat on it, balanced it with my real arm, but that was not suitable for another, and, of course, there are the actual functional aspects of the building to consider.

Let's take a first look at the back of house. The really tricky question is: What is *reasonable*? 'Reasonable' is the word that is used constantly throughout the DDA. What I believe is reasonable is to have access to as much of the back of house as possible without distorting the function of the building. In other words it's total access, but it's really also important that your back of house still works. The available budget and the size of the building are also important and have to be taken into account. There's no answer that's right for every single type of performance space. And once again, if you don't have the budget to include every provision that you'd like, you can always leave space, for example, for a lift shaft, so a lift can be put in later.

Health and Safety requirements actually override the Disability Discrimination Act and while this is very important it really cannot be used as an excuse for not