Festival of the Five Senses

Advancing Neurodiversity-Inclusive Practice in the Live Events Industry

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Event: 24 October 2026 | Brunel Engine Shed, High Wycombe

Project Overview

Festival of the Five Senses was developed as an applied research and industry engagement project exploring how neurodiversity-inclusive practices can be embedded into live event planning and delivery. The festival provided a real-world pilot to test accessibility interventions, evaluate audience experiences and generate practical knowledge to inform future industry guidance.

Event Delivery and Impact

Delivered in collaboration with Autism Bucks, Catch22 and community partners, the festival welcomed 135 attendees and featured live music, contemporary dance, creative workshops, art therapy and sensory-conscious activities.

Accessibility measures included designated quiet/wellbeing spaces, reduced-volume performances, accessible wayfinding and a traffic-light communication system enabling attendees to indicate their preferred level of social interaction.

Audience feedback was highly positive, particularly among families with neurodivergent children who had previously experienced barriers to attending conventional live events. The findings highlighted the value of flexible participation, sensory-conscious environments and informed event personnel in improving audience experiences.

Lived-Experience Leadership and Workforce Development

A distinctive feature of the project was its approach to participatory event design and lived-experience leadership, moving beyond conventional stakeholder consultation to embed neurodivergent perspectives directly into creative direction, accessibility planning and operational decision-making. The festival's Creative Director, Danielle Bentley, a Buckinghamshire New University student with lived experience of neurodivergence, led key aspects of the event's design and accessibility strategy. Working alongside Autism Bucks, she also contributed to operational briefings for Events Management student volunteers, integrating neurodiversity awareness into front-of-house procedures and audience management. This approach demonstrated the value of moving from community consultation to shared ownership and decision-making, positioning people with lived experience as active contributors to event leadership and delivery rather than solely as beneficiaries of accessibility provision.

Industry Legacy and Next Steps

The successful delivery of the festival concludes the live-event pilot phase of the EIF-supported project, establishing a foundation for further knowledge development and industry dissemination. A separate Neurodiversity-Inclusive Events Toolkit will be produced, translating the project's findings into practical recommendations and resources for event organisers. The toolkit will be developed alongside draft guidance for consideration within the Purple Guide, with both to be shared with EIF before June 2027 and subsequently disseminated through industry networks.

Although delivered indoors, the pilot offers valuable learning to inform accessibility planning and operational practices across outdoor festivals and other live events. The project demonstrates how academic research, community collaboration and lived-experience leadership can contribute to more inclusive and accessible event industry practice.