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VOLUNTEERING

Resources





Resources

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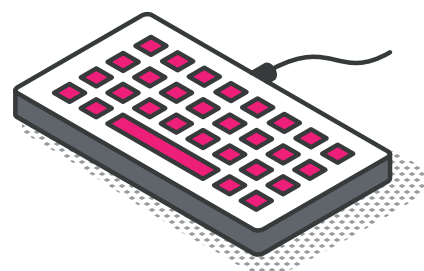
Access to work scheme

Access to Work is an **employment support programme** that provides wide-ranging personalised support to assist disabled people start or stay in work. The aim is to **reduce work-related barriers** that cannot be removed by reasonable adjustments.

Each support package is agreed based on individual identified needs.

Examples of the kind of support that is available via Access to Work are:

- ❖ Support workers, such as a reader for someone who is visually impaired or interpreters for someone who uses British Sign Language.
- ❖ Specialist equipment and assistive software.
- ❖ Help towards the **additional costs** of travelling to work if someone cannot use public transport
- ❖ Physical changes to the workplace
- ❖ Support from Access to Work's dedicated **Mental Health Support Service**.



Find out more about [Access to Work](#) and [Access to Work NI](#)

Accessible communications

Creating an accessible workplace doesn't begin and end with the accessibility of your organisation's physical environment. In today's new normal of increased hybrid working and employees working remotely as well as the increase in flexible home-based volunteering opportunities, it's never been more important to ensure cohesion and connectivity amongst your staff and volunteers. Accessible internal communications are therefore crucial for inclusivity, and for boosting employee/volunteer engagement and productivity.

There are also now more ways to communicate with your audience than ever before. This however comes with a responsibility to ensure that all the different types of communication you use are as accessible as possible. By not doing this, not only are you breaking the law, but you are also excluding disabled people who could be a huge part of your audience.

While it can feel overwhelming to get started, this resource can help you introduce simple changes that will benefit everyone.



Accessibility vs Inclusion

Accessible communication and inclusive communication are often used interchangeably but there are differences. Accessibility focuses on ensuring everyone including disabled people can use services and products. The focus is on measurable standards such as font size or whether alternative text is present. If someone cannot access your standard offer, you can provide alternative formats.

Inclusive communication is designed to reach as broad and diverse audience as possible with accessibility built in as part of the core communication. It involves creating a sense of belonging so that not only can people access your communication, but they also want to and feel welcomed doing so.

Messaging

The language that we use and how we frame disability with it, is important if we want our communications to be inclusive. You will commonly see articles with terms such as 'suffering from cerebral palsy' or 'wheelchair bound' in them. These convey the idea that a disabled person is helpless and someone to be pitied.

Also be careful not to imply that someone is 'inspirational' simply because they are disabled. This can be seen in 'uplifting' stories about disabled people completing everyday tasks. It implies that living with an impairment is such a negative thing that everyone who does must be exceptional in some way. These shallow narratives have detrimental effects on the perception of disabled people in society. If you want to refer to, or imply a disabled person is inspirational, ask yourself whether it would be inspiring if a non-disabled person was doing the same thing.

You can find more about language in the chapter [How to appropriately speak about disability and access requirements](#).

Start with an inclusive communications policy

The best way to embed inclusive communications across your organisation is to have an inclusive communications policy. It should clearly set your commitment to inclusive communications. For small organisations this could be something as simple as an accessibility and inclusion statement on your website. For larger organisations a more comprehensive policy would be expected.

To create a fit for purpose policy, it's important to **audit your existing communications**. Involve people from different backgrounds and with different impairments and communication needs. The insights they can provide are invaluable. You should also **review and align** any existing guidelines and policies that you may already have, such as brand guidelines. The next step is to work out what **communication requirements** your audience have. Staff and customer surveys can be a useful strategy to find this information. Once you have all this information you can **write** your policy.

It should include:

- ❖ Your Brand identity and values
- ❖ Guidance on inclusive language
- ❖ Use of imagery
- ❖ Video and audio content
- ❖ Social media channels
- ❖ Marketing communications
- ❖ Website and digital apps
- ❖ Use of email
- ❖ Intranet and internal communications
- ❖ Producing documents such as reports and presentations
- ❖ Providing alternative formats

Can you share your policy with external stakeholders or with staff networks for feedback? Once you are satisfied with the policy, it's important that you think about how you **launch** it. A policy no one knows about is pointless! Finally make sure that you **review and evaluate** the policy. Are there any indicators it is having a positive impact? Do you need to make any changes?

Use of imagery

Images can be powerful methods of communication. A well-chosen image can reinforce and support the main message. Choose your images carefully. Consider if it is the best possible choice to help communicate what you are trying to say. It needs to make sense to everyone and not just be decorative. Other factors to consider are:

Inclusive imagery where disabled people are represented is important. Remember disabled people are not a monolith! When using images of disabled people be sure to represent a range of impairments and disabled people of different ethnicities, genders, religions, and ages.

Avoid stereotypes in your imagery. A common cliché is portraying disabled people as inspirational and/or with little agency, rather than representing them in a genuine and empowered way. Show disabled people in everyday situations such as at work, home or in social situations - just like real life!

The placement of an image on a page needs to be carefully examined. An image placed in the wrong place can interrupt the flow of information and make a document seem confusing or hard to read. Avoid the temptation to make text fit around the image for this reason. Placing an image at the end of a paragraph makes it easier to understand.

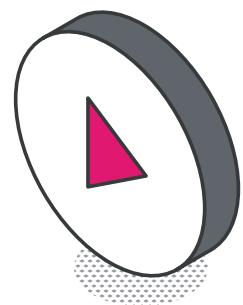
In digital communications, it is crucial that **Alternative text (Alt text)** is provided so that those using a screen-reader can also get a sense of the image used even if they cannot see it. The alt text is descriptive text which conveys the meaning and context of the image.

Alt text should:

- ❖ Be concise and to the point. Think about which details are most important for the user to know and avoid excessively long superfluous detail that might affect the engagement of anyone using a screen reader.
- ❖ Be In keeping with the tone of the rest of your content. It is equally valuable for your alt text to convey your brand tone of voice.
- ❖ Incorporate any text included within the image. Screen readers cannot read text in images.

Videos

The last few years have seen a huge increase in the use of video content. Videos can be more personable and often provide valuable context that text alone doesn't. They are also more accessible than written information for some. Videos can easily be embedded into other communication channels such as your website or e-newsletters. It's important that we remember that not everyone will be able to hear or see what is happening. To make sure your video is inclusive consider the following:

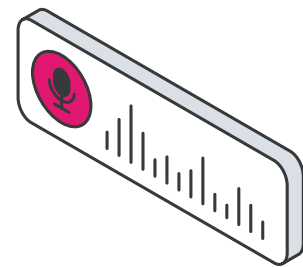


- ❖ Make **closed captions** (or subtitles) standard practice. This is something, if necessary, you can do in house. There are many free and easy to use captioning tools available. Just double check any automatic captioning as there are often mistakes!

- ❖ **Leave space** for closed captions when filming or creating your own video content. This will ensure your closed captions don't obscure any of the video graphics and vice versa.
- ❖ If audio description is required, these should be clear and describe any **solely visual elements** of the video such as actions not clear from the dialogue.
- ❖ If you are unable to provide captions and/or audio descriptions, could you have a transcript available? A regular **transcript** is a text version of the speech and non-speech audio information needed to understand a video. Descriptive transcripts include this information in addition to a text description of any visual content
- ❖ Are you able to provide a **BSL translation** of the video? Ideally you would have one video for everyone that has a BSL translation at the bottom right of the screen.
- ❖ Use media players that support accessibility

Audio only content

Podcasts and audio only content can stimulate creativity as they encourage the listener to build their own mental pictures. They are a convenient way for many to engage with your content. It is important that you make them accessible for deaf and hard of hearing people. You can do this by providing an accurate transcript. This is also helpful for others who may find audio only content challenging, such as people with sensory processing difficulties.



Fonts and layout

While there are many lovely fonts out there that look great, some of them just aren't accessible. A serif is a little decorative projection that is found on letters in some fonts like Times New Roman. Serif fonts can be difficult for many to read because they distract from the overall shape of the letter. Sans-serif fonts, without these little projections such as Ariel, are much more accessible.



Serifs



Sans Serif

It's not just about the font type but the size too. Using a font size 12 or 14 at a minimum can make content easier to read. Other ways to be more accessible include:

- ❖ Avoid using all capitals as this is harder to read. Only use capital letters at the start of sentences or at the start of proper nouns (specific names). This is known as sentence case.
- ❖ Aligning your text to the left makes it is easier to find the start and follow the sentence. Avoid justifying your text as it can make it harder to read.
- ❖ Provide plenty of white space. Avoid overcrowding the space as much as possible. Consider adding paragraphs or increasing the space between sentences to make text easier to read.
- ❖ Use bold font and font size to add emphasis. Italics and underlining can be problematic for some.

Descriptive Headings

These can break up the content making it easier to read and allow the user to scan the information to find what they are looking for. This is especially useful for some people who are neurodivergent. You need to make sure that not only do headings visually look like headings but that they are tagged as headings too. This allows someone who uses a screen reader to navigate your document quickly by accessing a list of the headings and clicking on the section they want.

Reading Order

If you are using columns in a document or tables with lots of columns for example, it is important that the underlying structure and the reading order corresponds with how you would naturally view the information. This is important to ensure compatibility with various assistive technology.

Accessible Links

Link text should be clear and concise. Avoid link text like “Click Here”, “More” and “Read More” without context. This is because someone using a screen reader may listen to a list of links. They will not then be accessible because there is no information about where the link is to. It is also best practice to use unique link text where possible for seamless use of speech recognition software which may cause confusion when link text is duplicated.

Use of Colour

Use of colour can add interest and a sense of brand identity to your communications. Don't overuse it though! Too much can be distracting and can create challenges for some people with learning impairments. Avoid indicating information by colour alone. This is especially important for people with colour vision deficiency. Colour contrast between the text and background is also important. There are lots of free colour contrast checkers online such as the [WebAIM colour contrast tool](#).

Contrast Checker

[Home](#) > [Resources](#) > Contrast Checker

The screenshot shows the WebAIM Contrast Checker tool interface. It has two main sections for 'Foreground' and 'Background'. Each section includes a 'Hex Value' input field (showing #0000FF and #FFFFFF respectively), a 'Color Picker' with a color bar, and a 'Lightness' slider. Below these, a 'Contrast Ratio' box displays '8.59:1'. Underneath, there are three sections: 'Normal Text' (WCAG AA: Pass, WCAG AAA: Pass), 'Large Text' (WCAG AA: Pass, WCAG AAA: Pass), and 'Graphical Objects and User Interface Components' (WCAG AA: Pass). Each section shows a sample of the text or element being checked, such as 'The five boxing wizards jump quickly.' and a 'Text Input' field.

The tool allows you to add the **hex code** values of the foreground (text) and the background.

All communications should pass **WCAG AA** as a minimum.

Websites and Apps

We know that most people nowadays find out information about organisations and the services they provide on their websites. The way in which websites are designed can create barriers for disabled people, especially those using assistive technology. The **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)** have produced [Web Content accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG 2.2) There are 13 guidelines all with testable success criteria which are at 3 levels of conformance A, AA and AAA. **Websites should at least conform to level AA.**

The [W3C Easy check](#) overview provides a quick and easy starting point. Accessibility issues included are:



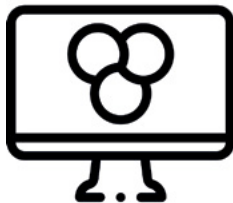
Page titles



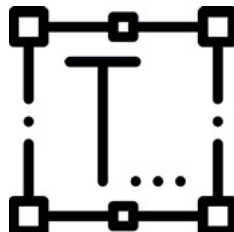
Image alternative text



Headings



Colour contrast



Resizing text



Keyboard access



Visual focus



Forms, labels and errors



Moving, flashing or blinking content



Multimedia alternatives



Basic structure check

Web content changes often and can be added by lots of different people. It's important that everyone understands the accessibility requirements. It's interesting to note that accessible websites tend to be more robust and rank well on search engines.

Whilst there isn't a requirement for apps to adhere to the WCAG guidelines it is important that they follow the same principles. Both websites and apps should be tested by users who have different access requirements including people who use assistive technology. Both should have an accessibility statement on them.

Emails

The use of font and layout as well as colour also applies to emails. People need to be able to read and interact with your content. Some further points to think about are:



Relevant subject matter - Keep the subject lines as relevant to the email content as possible. This is usually the first part of the email that someone interacts with so it can tell them if an email is worth opening or not.

Clear call to action - Readers who have learning impairments or are neurodivergent may need clear instructions on what to do. This could mean having simple, easy to use buttons in your marketing emails that show where someone needs to click and where they will go if they do. It could also be simple forms to fill in that have clear, short and precise instructions. For longer instructions on things like tasks or projects, numbering the instructions and also highlighting the important points could make is simpler.

Plain text versions - This is a great idea for marketing emails which are usually much more colourful and image-heavy than regular emails. Plain text versions will not have any images or links in them but simply show the text contained in the email. Assistive technology may work better with plain text versions. Readers can have the option to select which version they prefer to access. Many marketing tools now allow you to make a plain text version or generate one for you. Just check, if you are using AI, that the text is correct before you send.

Social media

Social media has become a huge part of the way that brands communicate with their audience. There are different challenges in terms of access for each platform, so it's good practice to use a few different ones so people can find your content on the one that is most accessible to them. There are a few ways you can make your posts more accessible. These include:

Alt text - It's easy to add alt text manually to posts and content management systems (CMS). Most offer a way to do this relatively easily although some CMS struggle with Instagram. This may mean that you have to log in manually to the app to add the alt text and include an image description either in the comments or the main text. It may be beneficial to have both so that those with and without a screen reader can see what the image means and why you have chosen it.



Hashtags - A lot of people struggle to read hashtags when they are all in lowercase, especially longer ones. Capitalising the letter at the start of each word (known as Camel Case) makes a big difference. Keep hashtags simple and avoid special characters and symbols within the hashtag text. This is because screen readers may not interpret these characters correctly. Whilst it's tempting to use lots of hashtags, avoid this. They can make your content confusing, harder to read and cluttered.

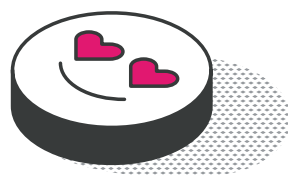
Captions - Don't forget to provide captions when needed. 69% of viewers watch videos on social media with the sound off! Consider the style of your captions. Captions with a background rather than the text straight over your video are much easier to read.

Infographics - These are usually shared as a flat image so a screen reader will not be able to read the words or information contained within it. Adding this information in alt text or in an additional comment is a great way of making it accessible to everyone. If the information is complex, you could link to a data table or a blog that can be easily read by a screen reader.

GIFs - GIFs are one of the easiest ways to post content, start interactions and reply to comments. There are plenty to choose from too! However, sometimes these are not accessible as they may have colour contrast issues and there may be no way of adding in alt text other than to manually add it into the comments. GIFs can also contain flashing lights. If you are creating or using a GIF, make sure you consider accessibility.

Acronyms - Shorter forms of certain words are frequently used online. They can change constantly, and some become part of off-line speech too. This could include words like IRL (in real life) or Yolo (you only live once). Many people find them hard to understand. Avoid them where possible.

Decorative fonts - You may see accounts with italic or different lettering that someone has had to specially download to use on social media. Dyslexic or visually impaired people may struggle to read them.



Emojis - Emojis can be fun to add to a text, but they may also add a bit of confusion for people using screen readers and others. Also, be aware that sometimes the meaning of the emoji you choose may differ from what you are trying to say. Case in point: the peach emoji can sometimes mean bum! Sometimes, using an emoji dictionary can help you to decipher what they mean and how they will be read out to screen readers.

Simplify text - Keep any text used both on the image and in the main body of the text as simple as possible so that is not confusing for neurodivergent readers. If you need to use text in the images, keep it short and simple and spread it across a carousel if you can. A carousel is more than one image on a post that readers need to scroll through. Keep in mind that you need to check the colour contrast and be careful placing text directly over images.

Trigger Warnings - Consider using trigger warnings sometimes known as content warnings. These warnings let people know if your post contains sensitive content and allow them to decide if they want to engage with your content.

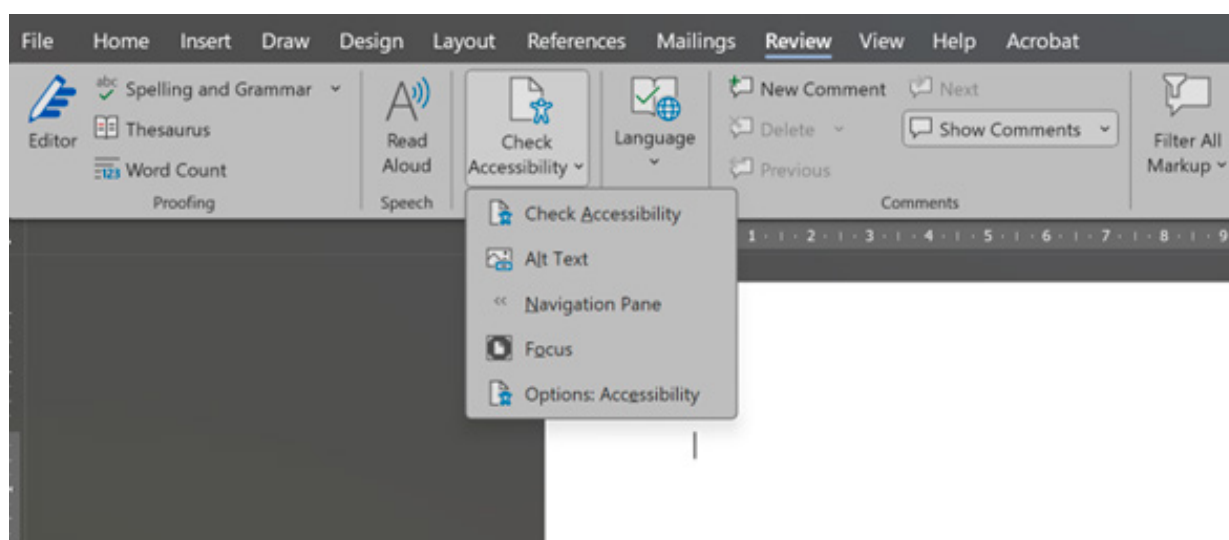
PDFs

PDFs can often be inaccessible to people who use assistive technology. It all depends on how the file is created. If you are using Adobe, you need to use the professional version of Adobe Acrobat. Adobe Acrobat have a good [Creating and Verifying accessible PDFs guide](#). It's good practice to have alternatives to PDFs available when required.

Accessible documents

All of the previously mentioned accessibility points such as headings, colour contrasts, fonts and layout are also important when creating any documents. Microsoft provides many accessibility tools. There is in-depth guidance on how to make Microsoft 365 Word, PowerPoint and Excel

documents accessible on the [accessibility section of the Microsoft website](#).

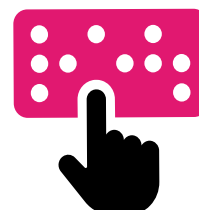


The Microsoft accessibility checker is a great tool. It's worth getting into the habit of using this for every document you create.

Accessible formats

To be inclusive you should reduce the need for alternative accessible formats by ensuring that all your information is as accessible as possible. There will still be times that people will require information in alternative formats. Examples of accessible formats are:

Braille - Braille is a series of raised dots which people read with their fingers. Each number and letter use a different pattern of raised dots. Not everyone who is visually impaired can read braille and it isn't as widely used today as many people prefer other assistive technology. There are some people for example who are deafblind who rely on braille still to be able to access information.



Easy Read - The Easy Read format was created for people with learning impairments to assist with understanding written information more easily. It is useful for many including people who are not fluent in English. It combines short easy to read sentences with clear images. It is not the same as plain English. Each sentence should only have one idea and one verb and font size 14 or above should be used.

Large Print - Large print documents use font size 16 and above. They can be created in house but be careful that the headings and paragraphs match the page breaks. Simply enlarging a standard print document using a photocopier does not work well.

British Sign Language - Providing information in British Sign Language (BSL) will make your communications more accessible to Deaf BSL users. Some people who use BSL as their first language find written English very difficult to understand as the grammar of BSL is totally different.

Audio - Audio options such as digital audio files can be a great alternative format for many. They can be produced in house as long as you are able to produce a recording with good sound quality.

It's likely to be unrealistic for you to have every document in all alternative formats. Plan for your audience and think about what formats you are likely to need. Also encourage people to request alternative formats if they need them. Make sure you have a process in place to be able to quickly respond to these requests.

Keep accessibility on the agenda at the forefront of everyone's mind!

The best way to ensure accessibility is to educate staff and establish an understanding of key accessibility principles so that the above guidelines become second nature. Whether sharing good practice examples of accessible communications your teams have done or circulating a summary of top tips in your company-wide newsletter, you can demonstrate your organisation's commitment to accessibility and inspire your workforce to follow suit.

Accessible events

The checklist below is intended as a tool to use when planning events. It is intended to support anyone who is involved with the planning, organising, publicising and running of events which are open to the public or have external guests attending. Do attend venues yourself and not rely on information provided by the venue alone. If the answer is no, to any of the questions, consider what you could do to mitigate this.

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|--|-----|----|---|
| Choosing a venue | | | |
| Getting there | | | |
| Are there accessible parking spaces at the venue (Ideally within 50m)? | | | If not, are there nearby accessible parking spaces you can signpost people to? |
| Is the route from the parking accessible without any major obstructions? | | | Are there dropped kerbs? Is the route mainly flat? are there gravel or uneven paths which can make access difficult for some? Is the route well-lit? |
| Are there suitable drop-off/pick up points available? | | | Are they in accessible locations, without lots of traffic and with room to exit the vehicle safely? |
| Is the venue close to public transport links? | | | Even better if they are accessible! |
| Getting in and around the venue | | | |
| Is there step-free access? | | | <p>If not, are suitable ramps or lifts available? If there is an alternative accessible entrance, is it one you would be happy to use? Is it well signposted?</p> <p>Are corridors and doorways wide enough for someone in a wheelchair to get through?</p> |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|---|-----|----|---|
| Are the entrance doors open or easy to open? | | | If not, can someone be present to assist people inside? Is there anti-slip flooring? If there is an intercom, how will you ensure that people who are unable to use it can easily enter the building? |
| Are turnstiles or access control barriers present? | | | If so, is there a wider one available or an alternative route? Are staff present to assist people through them if needed? |
| Are corridors and doorways wide enough for someone in a wheelchair to get through? | | | The minimum clear width must be 900mm. |
| If you are using a stage, is it accessible? | | | Do you require a ramp to access the stage? Are there handrails available? |
| Signage | | | |
| Is the venue well signposted from outside and easy to find? | | | If not, is there room for additional A-frame boards without blocking footpaths? |
| Are all the facilities well signed including the accessible toilet, lifts and the rooms you will be using? | | | You can always agree with a venue to bring additional signs if necessary. |
| Do signs have clear fonts and a good colour contrast between the letters and background? Symbols should be used as well as text when possible and tactile signage within easy reach is helpful. | | | If not, could you bring your own or make staff on day aware and more available to direct people and show them to locations. |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|--|-----|----|---|
| Reception | | | |
| Does the reception desk have a lowered counter? | | | If not, can you set up a separate table? |
| Is there a loop system available? | | | This is useful to aid communication with some people who are hearing aid users. |
| Is there a seating area available | | | If people may need to wait when they arrive is there a comfortable area with seating available? |
| Accessible toilets | | | |
| Are unisex accessible toilets available? | | | It's important that accessible toilets are available. |
| Is the room clear of items and not being used as a storage area? | | | |
| Is there area in front of and beside the toilet clear to allow someone to be able to position a wheelchair and transfer to the toilet from both the side and in front of the toilet? | | | Make sure that objects such as bins are not placed in the transfer area. |
| Is there an assistance alarm and is the red cord hanging freely? | | | If the cord is tied up – release it. |
| Are accessible toilets left unlocked? | | | If they are locked using a RADAR key are spare keys easily available? |
| Is there a changing places toilet available? | | | If not, is there one available nearby that you can signpost people to? |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|---|-----|----|--|
| In single-sex toilets is there a cubicle suitable for ambulant disabled people? | | | Is there a larger cubicle with grab rails and a lowered clothing hook available? |
| The room itself | | | |
| Is the room well-lit? | | | Is the lighting adjustable if needed? Are there blinds available which can be closed to reduce glare? |
| Is there lots of background noise? | | | Is the event being held in a room with low background noise? Are there any items such as air-con, radiators or appliances making noises? |
| Is there a hearing loop system available? | | | Is there a sign to show it's available and is it switched on? Does the loop system cover the entire room? If not, you may need to seat people in specific seats. |
| Is there a mix of seating? | | | Are seats with and without arm rests available for example? |
| Have you considered the layout of the room? | | | Is there room for people who use mobility aids to navigate freely? Is there room, if needed, for assistance dogs? Are walkways clear of obstructions and trip hazards? |
| Are microphones available? | | | Are microphones height adjustable? Consider if you will need roving microphones too. |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|--|-----|----|--|
| Hybrid events - Technology, cameras and internet speeds | | | |
| Is there the facility to have cameras in all necessary rooms? | | | Ideally you would have multiple camera angles for a higher quality stream. |
| Is good quality sound recording available? | | | Sound needs to be clear and not have an echo. |
| Is there accessible hybrid or virtual platforms available | | | These should be compliant to level AA of the WCAG standard. Ensure that captions are activated within the account. |
| Is the internet speed good enough? | | | There's nothing worse than constant buffering and disconnecting. Good internet speed is also important if you are having remote captioning. |
| Quiet and break areas | | | |
| Are quiet areas available? | | | How will you let people know that they are available and where they are? |
| Is there sufficient seating in areas where people will go at break and lunch times? | | | Avoid only having high seating and tables. |
| Is there a seating area with access to power sockets? | | | Some people may need to charge batteries on mobility aids or assistive technology that they use. |
| Emergencies | | | |
| Check the venues emergency evacuation plan. Does this consider the needs of disabled people? | | | Does the venue require disabled visitors to fill in personal emergency evacuation plans? If so, how do they let disabled visitors know this? Are there both visual and audio alerts in situ? |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|---|-----|----|--|
| Before the day | | | |
| The running order | | | |
| Do you need an early start or a late finish? | | | Some people find these difficult, especially if they have personal assistants or carers and have to travel long distances. Also consider if your event finishes during rush hour? |
| Have you scheduled enough breaks and time between talks? | | | Remember that it can take some disabled people longer to go to the toilet or move between locations. Frequent comfort breaks are essential for many. Allow for this when planning the timings of your event. |
| Maintain scheduled meal times | | | It's important that you have a lunch break if an event is all day. Some people need to be able to eat regularly. |
| Communication professionals | | | |
| Have you thought about BSL interpreters or speech to text reporters | | | Do you have a sufficient budget to provide these? Will you provide either of them as standard, or only if people request them? |
| Do have procedures in place for booking communication professionals? | | | Do you have agreed suppliers? Can you quickly book communication professionals if necessary? |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|--|-----|----|---|
| Have you provided detailed information to communication professionals? | | | Information such as the nature of the event, location, timings, bios of speakers and any other information available such as PowerPoints or scripts are needed. |
| Consider the set up. | | | BSL interpreters and speakers will need to be well lit. It's important that distracting backgrounds are avoided. If your event is hybrid, a separate camera will need to always be on the interpreter. |
| Speakers | | | |
| Have you checked whether any of your speakers have access needs? | | | This is something that is often overlooked. |
| Have speakers been briefed about any accessibility requirements? | | | Have you also asked them to use plain English and avoid jargon? Remind them to describe or read out any information on slides. |
| Are your activities accessible? | | | Remember that some people may find taking part in activities difficult. It may be difficult or impossible for some people to use online polling features, arrange sticky notes on a board, or respond quickly to questions. |
| Visual materials | | | |
| Are you showing any films? | | | Films should be captioned. Consider if there is a need for audio descriptions? |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|--|-----|----|---|
| Are you using slides? | | | What systems are in place to ensure they are accessible? Have specified to all speakers what accessibility requirements are expected as a minimum. Can you share these with attendees in advance? |
| Personal assistants and Carers | | | |
| Have you considered some people will need to bring someone with them? | | | If it's an invitation only event, make sure that you factor in Personal Assistants (PAs) and carers when inviting people. |
| Is there an easy way for people to book an additional ticket for PAs and carers? | | | Are these tickets free? How do people book them? |
| Do people need to prove their need for an additional ticket? | | | Remember there is no register of disabled people. Also, not all disabled people are in receipt of benefits. Can you be flexible about what evidence you require? |
| Refreshments | | | |
| Are refreshments in an accessible location? | | | Make sure the route is level and free of obstructions. |
| Are you providing a buffet? | | | If so, have people there to assist with getting food, carrying plates and cups and describing what's available. |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|--|-----|----|--|
| Have you thought about dietary requirements? | | | If you are unable to collect information about dietary requirements, you should ensure that you have a range of food available. Think about people who are vegetarian, vegan or may be unable to have gluten or lactose for example. |
| Is all food labelled correctly? | | | Label food with common allergens. |
| The event listing | | | |
| Is the event listing as accessible as possible? | | | Are there written image descriptions for all images? Are any videos captioned? Is there a good colour contrast between text and the background? Have you used meaningful link text and avoided phrases such as click here? |
| Have you provided detailed accessibility information? | | | Information about the accessibility of the event is important. What's accessible to one person isn't accessible to everyone, so avoid simply stating your event is accessible. |
| Does your registration form ask about access requirements? | | | Not everyone understands what access requirements are, so it's useful to give some examples. You should also ask about dietary requirements if refreshments are being provided. |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|---|-----|----|---|
| Are contact details provided? | | | Some people may need to discuss their access requirements with you or ask questions in advance. Can they easily contact you? Give a choice of contact methods. |
| Pre-event information. | | | |
| Is information available in alternative formats? | | | Do you have formats such as large prints, Easy Read and braille available if requested? Let people know these are available. |
| Is useful information provided? | | | <p>Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maps and information about how to get to the venue. ▪ Information about whether there are areas toileting areas for assistance dogs nearby. ▪ A timetable and running order of the day. ▪ Accessibility information such as whether loop systems, captions or interpreters are available. ▪ Simple joining instructions if people are joining remotely. |
| Have you given everyone another chance to let you know about any access requirements? | | | Include contact details if more information is needed. |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|--|-----|----|--|
| Have you reminded people about the event? | | | Some people find reminders about the event helpful. This could be via text or email. They could include additional links to any tickets information. |
| Provide a contact for on the day | | | This is especially useful if someone is having difficulties finding a venue. |
| Staffing requirements | | | |
| Are enough staff available to assist at key points of the day? | | | Do you have someone available to assist people booking into an event? Are there staff available to assist during break times and show people around? Have you people available to meet any access requirements you are aware of? |
| Have staff had disability awareness training? | | | Staff should be confident to appropriately communicate with and assist disabled people as required. |
| On the day | | | |
| Have you walked through the venue and checked walkways for obstructions? | | | Sometimes people move plants, bins etc. Make sure these are not obstructing any walkways. Tuck in leads of plugs which may cause people to trip. |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|---|-----|----|---|
| Have you checked the toilet facilities? | | | It's always worth checking that there is soap and paper towels (if needed) available. Also double check the emergency pull cord is hanging free in the accessible toilet. |
| Are you happy with the positioning of furniture? | | | Can everyone see the stage or front if necessary? Is there room for wheelchair users to move around the room? |
| Have you reserved any seating or left suitable spaces for wheelchair users if needed? | | | If someone has requested reserved seating (or car parking spaces), ensure that staff on the day are aware and can show them to their seats. |
| Have you put into place any adjustments that you have been asked for? | | | A checklist to double check can be handy. |
| Are all necessary signs in place? | | | You may have decided you need additional signs. Position these carefully. |
| Have you reduced any distractions as much as possible? | | | Avoid setting up refreshments during a meeting or session. Consider not having background music. If you do, keep the volume low. |
| Do staff know where they need to be, what they need to do and when? | | | The presence and availability of staff is an important accessibility consideration. |
| Have you checked all the equipment? | | | Tech is great, until it isn't! Check everything is working properly before the event starts. |

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|--|-----|----|---|
| Do you have any bowls available for assistance dogs? | | | It's handy to bring along water bowls in case anyone needs one. |
| After the event | | | |
| Have you thanked people for coming and asked for feedback? | | | We can use what we learn and make future events even better and more accessible. |
| Have you thought about how you think the event went? | | | Be kind to yourselves. Make sure you highlight all the positives. Sometimes things go wrong or not as planned. It's important to learn from this. |

Assistance dogs and emotional support dogs

What is an assistance dog?

An assistance dog is not a pet. They are trained to support disabled people and carry out practical tasks enabling them to live more independently and safely. They can be owner trained or trained by a charity. Common assistance dogs include:

- ❖ Guide dogs for visually impaired people
- ❖ Hearing dogs for deaf and hard of hearing people
- ❖ Canine Partners for people with physical impairments
- ❖ Medical alert assistance dogs for people with complex health conditions who have a limited awareness of impending life-threatening events.
- ❖ Autism assistance dogs for autistic people

Assistance dogs are usually recognisable by a harness or jacket. Some owners may carry an ID book with information about the dog. It is not a legal requirement for assistance dogs to be identified by either.

As assistance dogs are considered an auxiliary aid, it is unlawful to refuse access to someone with an assistance dog except in a very few exceptional circumstances.



What is the difference between an assistance dog and an emotional support dog?

Emotional support dogs provide comfort and companionship to people who need it. They can be especially helpful for people with mental health impairments. Unlike assistance dogs, emotional support dogs are not trained to carry out practical tasks and support the person simply by being there.

Emotional support dogs do not have the same legal status as assistance dogs. However, it may be a reasonable adjustment for someone to have an emotional support dog with them. Each case should be considered individually.

How to welcome people with assistance dogs

Train staff - Make sure that staff are aware of and familiar with assistance dogs. Explain assistance dogs can be any breed of dog. And remind them that before they try and refuse entry to a dog, they must check whether the dog is an assistance dog.

Ignore the dog - Whilst it can be tempting to want to stroke, talk to or give an assistance dog treats this can be dangerous. Distracting a dog whilst it is working can lead to the dog not picking up on clues that are necessary to keep its owner safe. If you really can't resist, at the very least ask the owner first.

Provide adjustments - There are simple things you can do to make it easier for someone who has an assistance dog. These include:

- ❖ Making space for an assistance dog to be able to sit by its owner.
- ❖ Having spare water bowls, in case the owner has forgotten theirs.
- ❖ Letting the owner know where the nearest suitable outdoor space for the dog to go to the toilet is.

FAQs

We serve food, can I refuse access?

No, customers with assistance dogs should be allowed into cafés and restaurants just like everyone else. The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health has determined that assistance dogs are unlikely to present a risk to hygiene.

Can I charge extra for accommodating an assistance dog?

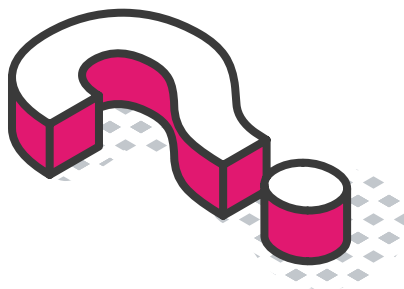
No, allowing a guest to bring an assistance dog is a reasonable adjustment. It is unlawful to charge someone this.

What if someone could be allergic to dogs?

It's estimated that less than 8% of the population have an allergy to dogs and yet this is often given as a reason for refusing access. Refusing access because someone 'may be allergic' is likely to be unlawful. If you have an identified person with an allergy, then you must do all you can reasonably do to reduce this risk, simply refusing access is unlawful.

Can I refuse access due to cultural or religious reasons?

No, a belief does not stop responsibilities under the Equality Act to allow access for assistance dogs. This should be handled sensitively.



Inclusive customer service

Disabled customers should feel welcomed and be able to experience your service as close as reasonably possible to someone who isn't disabled. It isn't about not seeing the disability and treating everyone the same. It's focusing on individual needs and being willing to adapt and change things when needed without making customers feel like a nuisance. It's important not to place the burden of accessibility onto the customer. There are multiple ways organisations do this, for example by not having clear information on your website about your venue access. Or not having a choice of convenient and timely contact methods, if someone needs to speak to someone to find out a little more information.



Our guide will show you some of the things you can do to help disabled customers feel more included. The more welcome and supported your customers feel, the more they are likely to become regulars!

Here are some simple points to get you started:

- ❖ Be friendly and open. good body language goes a long way. It can help people to feel more comfortable, welcome and included.
- ❖ Remember to introduce yourself. Not everyone will know or can see that you are working, especially if they are visually impaired.
- ❖ Avoid making assumptions. Everyone is different and will have different needs and preferences.
- ❖ Offer choice. Having options available will automatically make things more accessible for some. This could be for example, a choice of seating, a choice in ways people can contact you or a choice of whether someone has a straw.

Inclusive communication etiquette

Inclusive language can help you build long term customer relationships, avoid offending customers and be more welcoming. Some key things to remember are:

- ❖ It isn't appropriate to ask a customer what their disability is. Instead, if needed, ask if they have any access requirements or whether there is anything you can do to help.
- ❖ Everyday sayings are fine. Don't panic if you say something like, "Would you like to see the menu?" to someone who is visually impaired. Just relax, don't draw attention to it and move on from it.
- ❖ Try not to be defensive if someone complains about the language that you use. Apologise and commit to doing better next time.



You can find out more in the [How to appropriately speak about disability and access requirements](#) chapter.

Accessible facilities

Ideally your venue would be accessible, but this isn't always possible. Be transparent about the accessible facilities available in your building such as ramps, lifts, toilets, lowered counters, accessible changing rooms and hearing loops. Regularly check they are in good working order. If they aren't and you can't fix them straight away, it's important that you let customers know and consider what you could offer instead.

Think about the challenges that customers may have and what you can put in place to overcome them. There is often a simple solution such as:

- ❖ If your entry door is heavy, could you install a doorbell someone could press for assistance? Or could a member of staff keep an eye out and open the door when needed?
- ❖ Is merchandise located in an accessible place? If you can't make everything easy for everyone to reach, could you make sure you have staff available to help?

- ❖ Are mirrors in positions where everyone can use them? If not, do you have some that are lower or portable options available?
- ❖ Are lighting levels low? Whilst this can create a nice ambiance, it will be inaccessible to many. Are there any areas which are, or could be made brighter?
- ❖ Are walkways clear and free from items such as bins or A boards? Think about how people will move around your space and position items where they won't be in the way.
- ❖ Is your lowered counter clear? If you don't have one, could you move around the counter when serving if needed? Can you hand your card machine to the customer?
- ❖ Is your space loud? If you have background music, could you turn this down if needed? Think about whether there are any quieter areas, or could you organise 'quiet hours' where there is no music and less customers?



Offer assistance

It's important to remember that everyone has a different journey and are at different stages in their life when it comes to their health. Some people may feel comfortable disclosing that they are disabled, neurodivergent or D/deaf, but others might not. Not everyone will be comfortable asking for help. This is down to the individual person.

If you can see someone struggling with something, or you think there is likely to be an access barrier, it's okay to approach them to offer help. Remember to respect their answer by helping if you can or leaving them alone if they say no.

Allow someone extra time

It's easy to feel frustrated when a queue is forming, and a customer is taking their time. However, it's vital to remember that some disabled people may need extra time to process, read, hear or interact with people or information. People with communication impairments may also need extra time to finish a sentence or place an order.

Being patient goes a long way. Allowing extra time can help someone feel less stressed and avoid making snap decisions or feeling overwhelmed.

For example: lots of people who are neurodivergent find making decisions quickly really difficult. This could affect how quickly they are able to process menus or decide on what drink to order. If you can, avoid pressuring them to make an order quickly, allow them time to go through the menu and offer them help in choosing an item.



Assistance dogs

Remind staff that people have a right to have assistance dogs with them. Points to remember are:

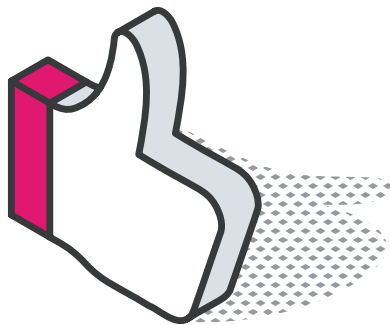
- ❖ Water: Can you pop a dish down for the dog so that it can have access to clean drinking water?
- ❖ Don't pet the dog: These are working dogs that shouldn't be distracted. People have different comfort levels when it comes to strangers asking to pet their dogs. Don't assume, ask and if the answer is no, respect it.
- ❖ Don't feed the dog: Working dogs should not be distracted and food can do just that. Also, the dog may be on a special diet which means the food you give it may cause an upset stomach.
- ❖ Leave space for the dog: If someone will be sitting down, ask them where they would like to be seated and make sure there is enough room for the dog. You may just need to move another chair out of the way.

Accessible information

Think about the information your customers need access to and whether they are accessible. Some examples are:

- ❖ Is your website accessible?
- ❖ Is there clear access information on your website which is easily found?
- ❖ Do your menus or other printed documents, have a good colour contrast between the text and the background? Do you have them available in larger print?
- ❖ Do customers need to fill out any forms? Are these available in alternative formats or can someone be available to help if needed?

Research shows that disabled customers will recommend a business if it's accessible and are much more likely to be returning customers. With 1 in 5 of the population disabled this can only be a good thing!



Inclusive and accessible recruitment

Around **1 in 5 of the working age population in the uk are currently disabled** and we know that this number is rising every year. With disabled people being less likely to be employed than non-disabled people, ensuring our recruitment processes are inclusive and accessible is more important than ever. Some factors to think about are:

The job role and advert

The Job description and requirements - Focus on the essential requirements of the role and list specific competencies and behaviours needed. Do not set criteria that are not vital to the role, for example requesting someone has a driving licence, when it's not essential. Also carefully consider whether qualifications are strictly necessary. It's better to avoid listing personality traits for example "you are a natural leader". Instead think about how the behaviour may be evidenced, for example, "you have managed a team". This will help potential candidates understand the role and what is expected. Evidence shows that people from marginalised groups are less likely to apply for jobs and volunteer roles when they think they don't meet all the requirements. This could mean that you are excluding potential candidates unnecessarily.

Advertise policies and benefits - It's important to state clearly that you have an equal opportunities policy (alongside any other relevant policies) and that you welcome applications from all sections of the community. If you are a Disability Confident employer state this too. Include key benefits in job/volunteer adverts, especially if they are more than the legal minimum. This will give potential candidates a little more information about you as an organisation and your ethos.

Highlight flexible working options - Whilst employees can request flexible working its not so common for volunteering roles, advertising your roles as being open to flexible working/volunteering options will encourage applications from a more diverse talent pool. Be transparent and give examples of the types of flexible working you will consider, for example core hours with flexible start and finish times, home working some or all of the time, job/role shares etc.

Clearly state the salary or range for paid roles and expenses offered for volunteer opportunities – Published salaries increase transparency and equality in pay. Disabled people are routinely earning 12% less than their non-disabled counterparts. Ideally salaries should be non-negotiable. This is because biases against marginalised groups can mean that they are viewed negatively if they try to negotiate. If you allow negotiation, make this clear. You should then monitor starting salaries and pay rises by characteristics to ensure that there are no biases. Be explicit about your expenses policy for volunteers, does it include travel and food whilst on shift for example and how quickly can people expect to be reimbursed? Offer reasonable adjustments – Make it clear that you offer reasonable adjustments during the application process and for the role itself. Provide contact details of someone who can discuss any reasonable adjustments the person may need and provide further information.



Remove unnecessary jargon and acronyms – It can make it harder for people who are less familiar with these terms to decide whether they are qualified for the job, especially younger and neurodivergent people. Clear fonts – Use clear fonts, typically sans-serif fonts are easier to read. Also think about the font size. Ideally the main text should be font size 12 and headings should be between font size 12 and 20. Avoid Italicised text as this is harder to read for many, especially some dyslexic people.

Leave plenty of white space – White space can help prevent people from feeling overwhelmed by too much information. It makes the text easier to scan and read. It can also help people quickly find important elements on a page.

Offer alternative formats – However well written a job advert is, it won't be accessible to everyone. It's important that you offer to provide all the information in alternative formats such as large print.

Attracting disabled candidates

Positive action – The positive action provisions in the Equality Act (2010) allows employers to take action that may mean treating one group that shares a protected characteristic more favourably than others to overcome or minimise a disadvantage. In terms of recruitment, you need to establish if there is a need for positive action.

Are disabled people underrepresented in your workplace/field for example? When considering what actions you take, you must think about whether they are proportionate. It could be for example that you decide to attend job fairs that are specifically aimed at disabled candidates. Your Local Jobcentre Plus will be able to advise if there are any local to you. Positive action is not the same as positive discrimination. You cannot employ someone just because they are disabled, this is unlawful.

Placing Job adverts – It's important that you post job adverts on platforms that are accessible. If the platform isn't accessible why would disabled candidates trust that your organisation is? Check the platform has properly contrasted text, uses alternative text and is compatible with assistive technology such as screen readers. Ideally the provider will have a proven track record of attracting disabled candidates. Consider advertising on job sites which are specifically for disabled people, such as Employability and Evenbreak. Please note this is not a recommendation and there are many others which can be found online. You can also ask community groups if they would be prepared to share your advert.

Consider your website and external communications – Many potential candidates will research an organisation before they decide whether to apply for a job or volunteering opportunity. They will likely have a look at your website and your social media. Ensure both are accessible. Also think about whether disabled people are visibly represented and whether you promote your inclusive ethos.

Making the recruitment process inclusive

Provide clear expectations and timelines – let potential candidates know how the recruitment process will work and what the timelines are. This will allow candidates to prepare themselves for the process and seek any clarification they may need.

Application forms – If application forms are being used ensure they are as accessible as possible. Keep the form simple and provide clear instructions. Offer alternative formats for applications, for example if the application is to be made online, a paper-based form could be an alternative. Automatic time-out settings on websites might be difficult for people using assistive technology or neurodivergent people. It can be frustrating to have a website log you out mid-application only to have to go back in repeatedly. Consider allowing longer lengths of time or could you remove the time-sensitive automatic log-out altogether?

Asking about Employment history – Think about not asking for dates of employment history. You could instead ask about length of time in a role, or even just focus on examples of relevant experience. This can have a positive impact on disabled people who may be more likely to have employment gaps.



Asking about disability and health conditions - It is unlawful, except in certain circumstances, to ask questions about disability and health before any job offer. You can however ask pre-offer health questions to make reasonable adjustments, or to check if candidates can perform tasks necessary for the role (for example, heavy lifting).

Proactively ask about reasonable adjustments – Don't wait for people to contact you and ask for an adjustment. Make sure you that you ask everyone who you invite onto the next stage of the recruitment process whether they require any adjustments. It's always useful to give a list of some examples of adjustments that you can make. For example, allowing someone additional time for any tasks, reserving accessible car parking spaces or providing a sign language interpreter. Remember that not everyone will ask for an adjustment or disclose a disability in advance.

Therefore, it's worth ensuring that:

- ❖ There is level access to your interview room or lifts and ramps available.
- ❖ Accessible toilets are available.
- ❖ Loop systems are in place.
- ❖ Captions are enabled if your interview is online.
- ❖ If you are using any video content they are captioned.
- ❖ The interview room is well lit and there are limited distractions such as background noise.
- ❖ Staff have had disability awareness training and are confident making reasonable adjustments.

Carefully consider tasks – Ensure tasks only assess what is necessary for a role. It's important to keep in mind that these will need to be accessible as well. Writing might be difficult for some so think about how you could present the questions/tasks, so they are easily answered. This could be multiple choice, audio or video options.

Be flexible when scheduling interviews – Provide a variety of times and days that you can interview someone. This allows them to choose a time that best suits them. Also, if you intend to hold interviews in person, remember that this can be a barrier for some people. Could you offer to hold the interview online instead?

Use structured interviews – Asking the same questions, in the same order allows for an easier comparison between candidates and helps to reduce bias. When writing questions, avoid multiple questions in one. For example “Tell me about a time you had to make a difficult management decision; how did you implement this, what was the reaction?” These can be difficult for neurodivergent people who may struggle with knowing which part of the question to answer in what order or forget to answer a part.



Post-offer

Feedback – Share feedback with all candidates. Avoid vague feedback and be as specific as possible. It's also a good idea to ask candidates how they found the hiring process and allow them to be honest. This is an opportunity to gain valuable insight into what worked and what didn't work from personal experience. It also allows you to make improvements next time.

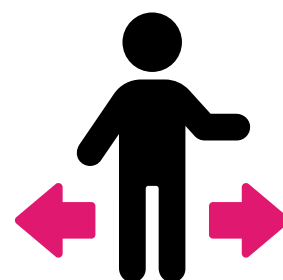
Encourage candidates to reapply – Disabled candidates can be less likely to reapply for roles. If a candidate has narrowly missed out, it's useful to encourage them to reapply, either for a different role or the next time there is a suitable vacancy. This is a simple way you can boost inclusivity.

Ask all new joiners about whether they require reasonable adjustments – Whilst organisations have a legal duty to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled staff, volunteers will also benefit from adjustments to their role. Some organisations use inclusion passports with all new joiners to really understand the needs of their new staff members and volunteers. This can be a way to encourage disclosure too.

Means of escape

Often when we focus on accessibility, we think about getting people into buildings. It's also important that we think about how disabled people can safely evacuate a building when necessary. Fire safety regulations and the Equality Act (2010) require employers and people providing services to take responsibility for ensuring that everyone can leave the building in the event of a fire (or other emergencies). Evacuation plans should not rely on the intervention of fire and rescue services.

This guide is designed to raise awareness of the importance of considering means of escape for disabled people. It is not intended to be used by itself. It is essential that organisations seek advice and support from qualified individuals to create fire risk assessments and evacuation plans.



It can be tempting to overlook disabled people's need for autonomy. It is important that we realise that we should be focusing on exceptional circumstances and considering strategies that allow people their independence. Expecting someone to always have another person with them, for example can be unreasonable and unrealistic. The technical building information and facilities that you have to offer will play a big role here. Do you have flashing beacons or vibrating pagers available to alert someone who is deaf or hard of hearing? Do you have lifts that are safe to use when there is a fire? Are there temporary refuges available which are designated safe spaces where disabled people can wait if necessary for assistance? Staff that will assist disabled people to evacuate in an emergency must be trained and understand these facilities as well as safe routes and fire protection.

It is important that you have Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) in place for employees and regular volunteers. PEEPs should include:

- ❖ The person for whom the PEEP was created, such as their work location and times.
- ❖ The main escape routes the person will take in the event of a fire.
- ❖ Those assigned to provide additional assistance to help the person evacuate.
- ❖ Any special equipment that is required, such as an evacuation chair

It isn't practical to create a personalised bespoke PEEP for every visitor so you should also have standard plans instead which provide options for disabled people to choose from.

Some points to consider are:

- ❖ PEEPs should be created in conjunction with the disabled person themselves.
- ❖ It's important to be sensitive when discussing evacuation plans with disabled people. Avoid making assumptions about whether someone can leave a building independently or what support they may require.
- ❖ Ask people about their preferred methods for escape. If this is something that isn't possible then it's important that you negotiate with them to find a solution that works.
- ❖ People will not respond exactly as expected in an emergency. They will need to be assisted by fully trained staff.
- ❖ PEEPs should be reviewed regularly and changed if necessary.
- ❖ What process will you put in place to check whether any visitors require a PEEP? Remember people have hidden or non-visible impairments so it's important that you ask all visitors.
- ❖ If you have groups attending or booking facilities, what procedures do you have in place to find out about whether anyone requires an escape plan?
- ❖ If someone will need to be carried up or down stairs in the event of an emergency, for example in an evacuation chair or in their own wheelchair, staff must be fully trained.
- ❖ It often isn't safe to involve disabled people in all aspects of drills (for example if they need to be carried down or use an evacuation chair. You should simulate these circumstances.



The government guidance on [Means of escape for disabled people](#) is a useful and in depth resource.

Providing feedback

Giving constructive, potentially negative feedback to someone is never easy, but it is essential and unavoidable. For many neurodivergent people, it can be difficult to hear negative feedback, even when it is delivered constructively. This is especially true for those who have Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD), which means that feedback can sometimes be seen as rejection and can be quite emotionally painful for that person.

A lot of neurodivergent people find things like social cues, facial expressions and understanding the emotions of others difficult. They can also find it challenging to decipher boundaries. It can therefore be hard for them to know how to react or judge the severity of critical feedback.

There are some strategies you can put in place to help deliver feedback.

Ask how they want to receive feedback: Some people will prefer a conversation, others would prefer to have feedback in writing. Giving someone the choice can create a more supportive environment. It can also help reduce anxiety because of RSD.

Prepare them in advance: If you have to tell someone something that may be perceived as negative, prepare them for it. This could mean that you let someone know that you need to schedule a meeting to provide feedback. Make sure that you have the meeting as soon as possible. Many neurodivergent people, especially those with RSD or anxiety, catastrophize and panic and this can increase the chances of a meltdown, overwhelm or shutdown.

Avoid being vague: It's important to provide factual information with examples of things that have occurred and ways improvements can be made. This can reduce confusion and allow the person receiving the feedback to focus on actions and changes needed.

Be gentle: Think about how you phrase something. Don't avoid the issue or be afraid to share what has gone wrong but be mindful to phrase it with kindness in mind. Focus on strengths and ways improvements can be made. Avoid using emotive language and making jokes, if you can and keep the feedback proportional. A small mistake may not need a big discussion.

Remember the positives: Growing up, studies have shown a lot of neurodivergent people have heard more negative feedback than neurotypical people. It's easy to forget to compliment people when they have done something good. For neurodivergent people, critical feedback can often be the only thing they remember instead of the good. Sending someone a positive email, complimenting them on an achievement is important. They can then refer back to it when they need to. This is a great idea for everyone - not just neurodivergent people. It can make someone's day to know they have done a good job.

Identify new strategies and professional development opportunities: If someone makes a repeated mistake, it could be that there is a different way that things can be done, or a strategy that can be put in place to avoid it. Have a conversation about what could be done differently and be flexible where possible. Consider if there's an opportunity for more training and professional development.

Be approachable: If you are friendly, open and create that atmosphere in the office, then people will feel more comfortable approaching you. This can make it easier and more likely that someone will let you know if they are struggling with RSD. Sometimes, RSD isn't just about the actual words that someone says but the perceived rejection that someone can feel. This could be through body language or facial expressions for example. Being approachable means someone can tell you if they are unsure about the signals they're reading.

Allow that person some time: If someone is upset by feedback then give them time to process the information. For a lot of neurodivergent people, it can take longer to process information, no matter if it is positive or negative. If someone is struggling to hear feedback, they may become upset and need time to talk about it or they may prefer not to talk at all. Some may need time by themselves in a quiet environment. If you haven't finished the conversation, it may mean that you will need to circle back to it at a later date.



Follow up feedback in writing: Providing written feedback can be a useful strategy to allow neurodivergent employees to fully understand and process the information. They can revisit the feedback and agreed actions at their own pace, at a time and in a way that suits them.

Accessible hybrid meetings

With more people working from home at least part of the week, hybrid meetings have become a necessity for many organisations. Having people in a meeting both in person and virtually does add another layer of complexity. Below are some tips to improve accessibility.

Before the meeting

Make sure where possible that the meeting room is **physically accessible** to everyone. It may be tempting to think that it doesn't matter as it's a hybrid event, but disabled staff should have the option to attend in person if they wish to.

If it's a meeting room you are unfamiliar with, **check it out** before the meeting and take a look at the size, furniture and technology available so you can plan the best set-up.

Determine what **print or media materials** you will use and ensure they are accessible. [View our accessible communications](#) resource for more information. If different teams are creating content, ensure they are familiar with your expectations in terms of the accessibility.

When sending the meeting invite, make sure you ask whether anyone has any **access requirements**. Let them know of any accessibility facilities you already have planned such as captions or the provision of BSL interpreters. Also include:

- ❖ An agenda – this lets people know what to expect up front and prepare for the meeting. If necessary, you can send a brief agenda initially and then follow up with a more detailed one.
- ❖ Joining instructions for both in-person and online.
- ❖ A physical map and directions if people are unfamiliar with the location
- ❖ Any meeting materials such as PowerPoints and documents if you already have them prepared.

- ❖ An overview of the accessibility features of the platform you are using including keyboard shortcuts.

Respond to any requests regarding access requirements in a **timely manner**.

Share any meeting materials with any communication professionals such as BSL interpreters. This will allow them to prepare in advance.

It can be a good idea to share or remind people in advance of the **meeting** about **etiquette**. People dialling in should be encouraged to have their **cameras** on to create a positive hybrid experience. It's important to remember that some people will feel uncomfortable on camera for various reasons and shouldn't be forced. If a participant's **background** is busy, blurring this can be helpful. Advise people to avoid busy virtual backgrounds. These can be problematic for many, especially people who are neurodivergent.

Assign roles in advance. Most meetings will have a **host**, but bigger hybrid meetings will also require at least one **facilitator**. Their primary role is to ensure that everyone has chance to participate. They keep an eye out for visual clues such as someone raising their hand and can relay comments in the chat. They can also help deal with any technical issues. You may need a **notetaker**.

Setting up the physical space

Set up the furniture to **allow enough room** for people with mobility aids to be able to navigate the room easily and if necessary, leave space for assistance dogs to sit beside their owners.

Make sure that you have a **good audio setup**. Virtual attendees will need to be able to hear everyone. Depending on the equipment already available in the room, you may need additional microphones.

Cameras should be set up so that virtual attendees can **see the faces of everyone**. This is especially important for people who lipread. You may need more than one camera to show multiple angles of the room if you do not have a 360° camera. If you have an in-person BSL interpreter, they will need a camera focused on them at all times.

Ensure those in the room can see each other as well as all the virtual attendees on a large TV or projection screen. It is important that the room is **well-lit** and that no one has bright light behind them. You may need to close the blinds on a bright sunny day.

Setting up the virtual space

Activate the 'mute attendees on entry' facility if your platform offers this. If not plan to **mute** participants unless they are speaking.

Make sure **automatic captions** and/or live transcripts are enabled.

'**Spotlight**' or '**pin**' any interpreters so they can always be seen on the screen.

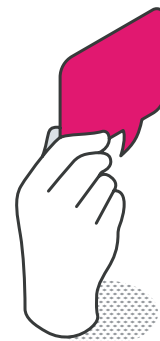
Disable sound notifications for when people join the meeting – this can be **distracting** for many people.

Start the meeting a little **early** to allow any technical issues to be resolved.

During the meeting

At the start of the meeting remind everyone of the **expectations** of the meeting. For example:

- ❖ Turn off mobile phones.
- ❖ Keep themselves on mute unless they are speaking.
- ❖ Raise their hand (physically or using the raise hand facility) and identify themselves before they speak. This helps with taking turns and makes it easier for people to follow.
- ❖ Instructions on the use of chat. Some screen readers will read out everything in the chat which can be difficult if someone is trying to listen to a speaker. If you know that someone is using a screen reader it may be that you disable the chat function.



If you have the chat function available, make sure that the **facilitator reads everything** out.

Slow down your **pace**. It can be hard to keep track of everything in a hybrid meeting which can become frustrating and inaccessible to some. Allow long pauses before moving on to the next agenda points.

At key points during the meeting, it's useful if the host summarises and **paraphrases** what others have said.

Describe images and any **visual content** that is displayed. This is especially important if you have anyone with a visual impairment in the meeting.

Go to remote participants **first** for questions or comments. This will help to ensure that they are included as it can be more difficult when you are online.

If you are using any interactive features such as virtual whiteboards, ensure they are accessible to all. It can be especially tricky to do this during hybrid meetings. It could be easier and more accessible to **allocate one person** to add everyone's contribution to the virtual whiteboard

Frequent **breaks** are essential for hybrid meetings. Every hour you should have a short break of at least 5 minutes. Concentration fatigue can be an issue for many people.

After the Meeting

Follow up meetings by providing next steps, notes and any meeting materials. If resources or links were posted in the chat, make sure you email these too.

Seek feedback. It's important to reflect on what went well, what didn't and what can you improve next time. You can do this in a variety of ways such as **online surveys**. Just make sure they are accessible!

Encouraging employees and volunteers to disclose their impairments

Gathering data and insights about disability and disabled employees and volunteers can be helpful. It can enable you to improve your policies and processes and assist you to build a more inclusive culture. It can also be used to identify whether disabled people are adequately represented in your organisation. And if not, consider whether you need to make any changes to your recruitment practices to encourage applicants from disabled people.



When individuals are happy to openly disclose their disability (rather than anonymously on a survey for example) it allows you to provide reasonable adjustments and better support them if necessary.

We know that a high number of disabled people do not disclose their disability to their employers. Employees and volunteers should never be placed under pressure to disclose. Instead, we should focus on creating an environment where people feel comfortable to. It can be helpful to consider common concerns disabled employees have and barriers to disclosure.

A person may not consider themselves as disabled

It may surprise you to know that many people with impairments and long term health conditions don't consider themselves as disabled. There is often a lack of understanding about what disability is. To overcome this, you can:

- ❖ Rather than simply ask staff and volunteers to disclose if they are disabled, also ask if they have any long-term health conditions.
- ❖ Promote the definition of disability in training sessions or induction materials.

Concern over personal data and privacy

Employees and volunteers often have a mistrust of providing personal data if they are uncertain what it's for (even if a questionnaire is anonymous). Inform staff why you are asking the questions and be clear about how and where it will be used.



If data you have previously collected has helped to shape an initiative or a decision on working practices let them know! As a result, they can then see the value of disclosure and realise the positive impact on their workplace.

A fear of discrimination

A deep-rooted, and understandable fear for many disabled people is that they won't get a job, volunteering position or a promotion because they are disabled. Disappointingly, the statistics in the UK confirm that it's a reasonable concern to have. It's important to actively demonstrate that you are a diverse and inclusive organisation.

To do that:

- ❖ Ensure that your recruitment process is accessible and inclusive
- ❖ Sign up to the disability confident scheme. Research shows that if an employer is actively recruiting disabled people current employees are more likely to disclose.
- ❖ Promote a message of disability inclusiveness by representing disabled people/employees in both your internal and external communications.
- ❖ Clearly address disability inclusiveness within any Equality and Diversity statements and policies.

They are unaware of the benefits of disclosure

It's so common to focus on the pitfalls of disclosing disability, that it's easy to overlook (or not know) the benefits. Research demonstrates that knowing about the Equality Act, understanding what constitutes as discrimination under the act, and being aware of reasonable adjustments gives people more confidence to disclose. Actions to consider taking include:

- ❖ Providing training which covers the Equality Act and reasonable adjustments.
- ❖ Promoting internally the government run Access to Work scheme.
- ❖ Sharing case studies and examples of possible adjustments which can be made.
- ❖ Having a reasonable adjustment statement/ policy and a clear procedure of how to request them.

Negative disability stereotypes

There are so many negative stereotypes and myths about disabled people. These range from 'they are lazy and choose not to work' to 'they are all inspirational people!' These assumptions often hinder disclosure as no-one one likes to be labelled or have these assumptions made about them. It's key that staff have disability awareness training delivered by disabled trainers so that these stereotypes and misconceptions can be addressed.

Not wanting to be the token disabled person

Aside from negative stereotyping an employee may be reluctant to become the 'disability spokesperson' or the token disabled person rolled out when needed. It should be recognised that an accessible environment isn't only beneficial to disabled people but to everyone. As a result, accessibility becomes the norm of the organisation and not something which is considered in relation to a minority. Here are a few tips:

- ❖ Consider getting an accessibility audit – buildings and culture
- ❖ Subscribe to the social model of disability and ensure that staff understand what this means through training and resources
- ❖ Make all meetings accessible. Have a checklist available for what is required, and as standard policy create accessible presentations. Use video calls with subtitle options and offer large print option for handouts.

Talking about Disability

It sounds obvious but establishing a good rapport will make it easier to have conversations which some find challenging to have. So please be aware of the power of words and choose your language and terminology with care. If staff feel that their employer is unlikely to respond well, they won't be disclosing their impairment. Consider these tips:

- ❖ Recognise the importance of scheduled 1:1 meetings between line managers and staff. And ensure that health and wellbeing feature within these conversations.
- ❖ Provide disability awareness training for managers. This equips them with the confidence and knowledge to discuss disability and reasonable adjustments.

Accessibility checklist for community-based services

The checklist below summarises the top tips outlined in the previous disability fact sheets. It can support you in regularly reviewing the accessibility of your environments and building confidence in ensuring our volunteers are aware of the accessibility of your spaces and the awareness of staff and volunteers on disability topics to help ensure your community-based services are accessible and inclusive for everyone.

Physical Accessibility

- ❖ Are all entrances and exits wheelchair accessible?
- ❖ Are there accessible parking spaces close to the entrance?
- ❖ Are ramps and handrails available where needed?
- ❖ Are doorways wide enough for wheelchair access?
- ❖ Does everyone know where the accessible toilets are?

Communication Accessibility

- ❖ Is service information available in multiple formats (e.g. large print, braille, audio)?
- ❖ Does your website meet WCAG 2.2 AA standards?
- ❖ Are sign language interpreters available for events and meetings?
- ❖ Do you use plain language in all communications?
- ❖ Does the charity's promotional videos have captions and transcripts?

Service Delivery

- ❖ Have all your staff completed disability awareness and inclusion training?
- ❖ Can you offer flexible scheduling of volunteering options to accommodate different needs and is this made clear on volunteer role outlines?
- ❖ Are you able to provide quiet spaces for individuals with sensory sensitivities?
- ❖ Have you checked that service materials are accessible and easy to understand?
- ❖ Do your volunteering roles highlight any accessibility barriers you may have?
- ❖ Do you and the team know about the accessibility policies and practices?

Digital Accessibility (check with your communication team)

- ❖ Is your website navigable using a keyboard?
- ❖ Do you use alt text for all images on your website?
- ❖ Does your colour contrast meets accessibility standards?
- ❖ When appropriate, do you have text-to-speech options for digital content?
- ❖ Has your website been tested with screen readers and other assistive technologies?

Feedback and Improvement

- ❖ Do you have accessible feedback mechanisms (e.g. online forms, phone lines)?
- ❖ Do you seek feedback from service users with disabilities?
- ❖ Do you make changes based on feedback to improve accessibility?
- ❖ Do you regularly review this checklist for your services and facilities?
- ❖ Do you and your team stay informed about best practices and legal requirements for accessibility?