Accessible Communications

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Key Factors

What Communications

Accessible Communications

What to Do

Steps to Take

What are the key factors when considering accessibility?

Often people consider accessibility according to the nature of an individual’s disability or impairment. But this can produce long lists of impairments without recognizing that within each there can be a very broad spectrum of needs, and that often different disabilities/impairments can result in similar needs.

For example, a person may be one of the over 2 million people who need others to have more patience in listening to their speech which is less fluent due to a speech impairment, a stroke, Alzheimer’s disease, head injuries, hearing impairment and other causes. So it is far simpler to focus on the need rather than underlying conditions which may mean little to many.

Accessibility need not add significant cost, especially when it is considered at the outset and built in to the design. For example, being able to provide a Word document can enable production of the material in any type of print, can be used with screen reader software, or production of Braille documents. Communications and involvement mean a two-way exchange. Hence we will need to be able to receive and use material that is provided to us in a range of ways.

*“Disability Dynamics, helping you to achieve practical outcomes in managing diversity in your business”*

Some people will need accessibility to be considered from two perspectives. For example, someone from an ethnic background may need large print documents in their first language. For people who are born deaf, or lose their hearing before learning to speak, their first language may be British Sign Language (BSL) which has its own grammar, tenses and word order. Written English is no more useful than a second language.

Deaf-blindness is defined by the Department of Health as a combined seeing and hearing impairment causing difficulties with communication, access to information and mobility.

What communications need to be considered?

We are likely to use our existing communications methods e.g. letters, e-mail, intranet and internet, publications, press releases, other media outlets (TV and radio), advertising, meetings, one-to-one exchanges, workshops and seminars, briefings, conferences and presentations, surveys/questionnaires etc.

What do we need to do?

Firstly, we have a legal duty to anticipate the needs of our service users and to make adjustments when we know the needs of our employees. Hence, we should be building adjustments to our communications in to our routine practices. We need to prominently promote adjustments, alternative formats and other types of support. Asking disabled people what help they need means that we can best target resources. When requests are made, we need to meet those needs quickly – delays can mean that some people are effectively excluded from the communications. If material is requested in Braille, audio tape or in translation, we should aim to provide such within 5-10 days, otherwise other formats should be provided immediately. Disabled people are experts in their own communication methods so we should draw upon their knowledge. Finally, we should monitor our effectiveness in communicating to improve the quality of our service, anticipate and plan for needs better and make best use of our resources.

What specific steps should we take?

Most of the actions in the following table are common sense, common courtesy and best practice for any communications. Hence, we will be improving our communications for everyone, not just disabled people.

| Need | What you need to do |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Straightforward information/presentation | * Use concise sentences and paragraphs.
* Use everyday, plain English.
* Use headings.
* Left hand justify only.
* Divide columns of text with a vertical line or 5 character spaces.
* Use bullet points.
* Use 12 or 14 point font.
* Use simple sans serif font.
* Be prepared to print on coloured paper.
* Maximise contrast between print and paper colours.
* Avoid complex concepts.
* Avoid lengthy documents.
* Avoid jargon, acronyms and abbreviations.
* Avoid underlining.
* Avoid use of capital letters in headings etc.
* Avoid italics – use Bold instead.
* Avoid shading or pictures behind/around text.
* Avoid text at different angles.
* Avoid using glossy paper.
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| 2. Printed material to be available in alternative formats e.g. Large print, Braille, Audio tape/CD, Electronic format, Easi-Read (a website URL link for which can be found in the box at the bottom of this page).WEB LINKSRoyal Mail: Articles for the Blind[www.royalmail.com/portal/rm/content1?catId=400028&mediaId=400181](http://www.royalmail.com/portal/rm/content1?catId=400028&mediaId=400181)Easi-Read Guide[www.mencap.org.uk/download/make\_it\_clear/MakeiItClear\_EasyReadGuide.pdf](http://www.mencap.org.uk/download/make_it_clear/MakeiItClear_EasyReadGuide.pdf)Website Accessibility Standards[www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/code/public\_rnib008789.hcsp](http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/code/public_rnib008789.hcsp)  | * Promote alternative formats on front page in 18 point font. “This information is available in other formats e.g. large print, audio tape, on disk or in Braille. Please contact…”
* Use free post for items for visually impaired people (See websites below). Retain Word originals of documents.
* Identify how alternative formats can be produced.
* Provide electronic documents (via email, on a website, on CD).
* Ensure that websites meet accessibility standards (see websites below).
* Produce documents without tables, graphs or other images but their content/meaning explained.
* Large print is at least 18 point font. Consider summaries of longer documents.
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| Need | What you need to do |
| --- | --- |
| 3. Presentation material in alternative formats. | * Keep slides simple: large clear fonts, high contrast, not too much information on each, avoid moving images/text.
* Word document in place of PowerPoint presentation – suitably punctuated and with any images explained.
* Presenter reads out material e.g. on flip chart.
* Provide copies of presentation before hand so interpreters can familiarise, can be read using screen reader.
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| 4. Amplified sound e.g. hearing loops, mini-com phones. | * Provide portable hearing loop system.
* Microphones that link to loop system.
* Promote availability.
* Check that systems and microphones are working.
* Minimise other sounds e.g. background music.
* Ask people to talk one at a time.
* Ensure that question and answer sessions are covered by microphone.
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| 5. Visual/other cues to replace/assist hearing. E.g. lip reading, use of British Sign Language, Deafblind communicator translating speech using Deafblind manual (finger-spell words onto receiver’s palm), hands-on version of BSL or a speech to Braille translator machine (similar to a speech to text or palantype machine) | * Avoid covering mouth and speak clearly.
* Ask people to talk one at a time.
* Allow time for others to both see interpretation and absorb any written/visual information.
* Use a member of the Register of Sign Language Interpreters (MRSLI).
* Ensure BSL interpreter is well let and visible.
* BSL interpreters need a break after 20 minutes so 2 may be required.
* Remote interpreters can be used via video link.
* May require professional lip speaker: repeats words silently and uses finger spelling (Council of Advancement of Communication with Deaf People lip speaking level 2 or 3).
* Have pen and paper available.
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| 6. Alternative to standard phones e.g. textphone, minicom, video phones. | * Promote a minicom number and willingness to use Typetalk.
* Know how to use Typetalk operator – before dialling the number, dial 11800 then the person’s phone number, 18001 for hearing users and 18002 for text phone users.
* Allow for the extra time for your verbal communications to be typed by the operator and the other party.
* Use videophone and interpreter service via Royal National Institute for the Deaf.
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| Need | What you need to do |
| --- | --- |
| 7. Support when speaking. | * Don’t pretend to understand when you do not.
* Be patient.
* Don’t interrupt or finish sentences.
* Offer alternative means of communication e.g. written input.
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| 8. Support of another person e.g. guide, carer, British Sign language interpreter, other language interpreter, Deafblind communicator. | * Be prepared to provide/fund the costs of support person’s time and expenses.
* Talk to the disabled person, not the support person.
* Adjust catering, seating etc. numbers accordingly.
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| 9. Other forms of support. E.g. Guide/Hearing and other types of working dogs. | * Provide access for working animals.
* Warn other attendees of their presence.
* Focus on the person not the animal.
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WEB LINKS

Royal Mail: Articles for the Blind

[www.royalmail.com/portal/rm/content1?catId=400028&mediaId=400181](http://www.royalmail.com/portal/rm/content1?catId=400028&mediaId=400181)

Easi-Read Guide

[www.mencap.org.uk/download/make\_it\_clear/MakeiItClear\_EasyReadGuide.pdf](http://www.mencap.org.uk/download/make_it_clear/MakeiItClear_EasyReadGuide.pdf)

Website Accessibility Standards

[www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/code/public\_rnib008789.hcsp](http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/code/public_rnib008789.hcsp)

Further information can be found at

[www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicWebsite/public\_seeitright.hcsp](http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicWebsite/public_seeitright.hcsp)

Disclaimer: This guide provides a broad summary of information on accessible communications but it is recognised that the communication needs of an individual person are best identified and met in discussion with them.

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