

Disability Confident

make it your
business

A communications guide for
PR and communications professionals

Foreword

The Disability Confident campaign, which was first launched in 2013, works with professional bodies and employers to challenge negative attitudes and improve employment opportunities for disabled people.

This is not a niche campaign. Since there are around 12 million disabled people in the UK, you will be communicating with disabled people whether or not you are aware of it.

The way disabled people access communications may be different, so thought needs to be given to how people might wish, or be able, to engage with you.

That's why we are delighted that the DWP and CIPR are now working closely together to promote the Disability Confident campaign to communications professionals and why we have produced this short inclusive communications guide for CIPR members.

We know that good communication plays a key role in changing attitudes, and we believe that using our collective voice as communications professionals will make a real difference for disabled people in society and the workplace.

Thanks in advance for giving an additional thought to your communications to make them as inclusive as possible.

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Language

Not everyone will agree on everything but there is general agreement on some basic guidelines about terms to use and terms to avoid.

Collective terms and labels

The word 'disabled' is a description not a group of people. Use 'disabled people' not 'the disabled' as the collective term.

However, many deaf people whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL) consider themselves part of 'the deaf community' – they may describe themselves as 'Deaf', with a capital D, to emphasise their deaf identity.

Avoid medical labels. They say little about people as individuals and tend to reinforce stereotypes of disabled people as 'patients' or unwell.

Don't automatically refer to 'disabled people' in all communications – many people who need disability benefits and services don't identify with this term. Consider using 'people with health conditions or impairments' if it seems more appropriate.

Positive not negative

Avoid phrases like 'suffers from' which suggest discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness.

Wheelchair users may not view themselves as 'confined to' a wheelchair – try thinking of it as a mobility aid instead.

Everyday phrases

Most disabled people are comfortable with the words used to describe daily living. People who use wheelchairs 'go for walks' and people with visual impairments may be very pleased – or not – 'to see you'. An impairment may just mean that some things are done in a different way.

However, common phrases that may associate impairments with negative things should be avoided, for example 'deaf to our pleas' or 'blind drunk'.

Words to use and avoid

Avoid passive, victim words. Use language that respects disabled people as active individuals with control over their own lives.

Please see the table overleaf for examples.

Words to use and avoid

Avoid	Use
(the) handicapped, (the) disabled	disabled (people)
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of	has [name of condition or impairment]
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user
mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal	with a learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural)
cripple, invalid	disabled person
spastic	person with cerebral palsy
able-bodied	non-disabled
mental patient, insane, mad	person with a mental health condition
deaf and dumb, deaf mute	deaf or Deaf, user of British Sign Language (BSL), person with a hearing impairment, person who is deaf or has hearing loss
the blind	people with visual impairments, blind people, blind and partially sighted people
an epileptic, diabetic, depressive, and so on	person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression
dwarf, midget	someone with restricted growth or short stature
fits, spells, attacks	seizures

Accessible formats

Where possible your communications should be accessible and inclusive to all, but sometimes the type of communication means that it will not be accessible to certain groups.

To reach all your audience, you need to know about, and make effective use of, accessible communication formats (also known as alternative formats).

The more inclusive the original communication is, the fewer alternative formats you will have to provide and the less time, money and resource will be spent on communicating the same message to different groups.

It is not so much a question of how many different kinds of formats to provide, but ensuring that you have anticipated the needs of different groups when you planned your communication campaign.

Consider involving disabled people from your audience in developing and reviewing a strategy for producing information in accessible formats. They will know their needs and could help you find the most effective ways of meeting them. You can also approach disability organisations for advice.

Some typical communications barriers

Some types of communication are more difficult for people with certain types of impairment – bear this in mind when deciding on which formats and channels to use. Please see table overleaf.

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Impairment	Barriers	Useful formats
Blind, visual impairment	print publications (magazines, flyers and reports), inaccessible websites, use of images, PowerPoint presentations, PDF documents, colour contrast, posters, displays, banner stands, videos without audio commentary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible PDF • Accessible Word documents • Accessible websites • Audio versions • Braille and Moon • Large print • Telephone • Text to speech
Deaf/hearing loss	Face-to-face communications such as speeches, presentations, awards ceremonies, announcements via loudspeakers and coaching sessions, videos without captioning or BSL interpretation, musical accompaniment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible websites • British Sign Language • Hearing/Induction loops • Subtitling (captions) • Textphone • Speech to text • Translation services
Learning disability	complex use of language, data visualisation, layout of websites and documents, colour contrast, use of images, lengthy communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible websites • Easy Read and Makaton • Face to face • Large print • Telephone
Mobility impairment	website layout/accessibility (e.g. too many clicks), positioning of signage, posters and flyers, weight of printed publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible websites • Telephone
Mental health condition	layout, use of colour, tone and style of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible websites • Audio versions • Telephone

Producing alternative formats need not be difficult or expensive. Some alternative formats can be produced easily at low cost in-house. For example, a transcript of the dialogue in a short video can be simply produced as a Word document and, if you apply the correct use of layout in Word (such as headings or a table of contents) then the document will be accessible to a broad variety of people.

Layout, format and fonts

Most people in the UK read from left to right so it is best to left align your copy. You should also use unjustified text where possible.

Justified or centralised text puts uneven spaces between words and means that the reader has to work harder to find the start of each line. This can be particularly difficult for readers with dyslexia, a learning disability or certain types of visual impairment

When your text is left aligned, the eyes and brain know where to go to at the start of every line; unjustified text is easier to read as the spaces between words are regular and the reader knows what to expect.

Often we underline words or titles to add emphasis, but this can make the word harder to read for some people. Your eyes have to work harder to separate the word from the line to read it. Emphasis to a word or title can be added by using bold font or a larger or different style of font.

Italics are commonly used to denote a real name or a quote or to add emphasis, but they can make the words more difficult to read. The slant of the letters changes the weighting of the font in the reader's eye, making it appear less solid. Your readers need to work harder to identify the letters and words. Use quotation marks to

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signal a quote or a name and use a bold font for added emphasis – but use it sparingly!

We learn to read words that use lower case letters, only using capital letters at the start of sentences. Using capital letters for full words, titles or sentences makes it harder for the reader to identify the words. The most accessible style of writing to read is ‘sentence case’. Again, if you would like to highlight words, use bold, or increase the size of the font.

Your font choice can have a big impact on the accessibility of your communications. The most accessible fonts are “sans serif” fonts, such as Arial. Serif fonts, such as Times New Roman, have a decorative line which can distract the eye, making text difficult for some people to read. Serif fonts can also be problematic in digital publications as the pixilation on screen can distort the serif and cause the word to blur around the edges.

Accessible fonts	Inaccessible fonts
Arial	Times New Roman
Calibri	Georgia
Century Gothic	Century
Trebuchet	Courier
Verdana	Handwriting fonts

This booklet uses an accessible font called FS Me.

Font size 12 is considered to be the minimum size at which people read comfortably. For electronic communications, most readers will be able to customise the size of the font on their computer screen via their internet browser, but it is still considered best practice not to publish anything smaller than the equivalent of Arial 12 pt.

The choice of font and font size may be pre-determined by your organisation's brand guidelines. If the main font is a serif font, it may be good to use a sans serif font for alternative versions of the communication and to get the brand guidelines updated to reflect that.

Diagrams and images

We use images to illustrate a point or to convey a mood. Some people receiving your communications may not be able to view the image in the same way; this could be someone with a visual impairment or a learning disability or difficulty such as dyslexia.

In electronic communications, it is essential that all images and graphics are 'tagged' so that those using a screen-reader (a device which reads out what is on screen) also get an idea of the image being used even if they can't see it.

If using photographs of people to illustrate your communications, it is best practice to ensure that your selection is a diverse range of people and where possible, you should try to ensure images of different groups are positively portrayed.

Shading or pictures behind the text can reduce the colour contrast between the text and the background. A blurring of the colours or a weakening of the definition between text and shading/images will make the communication more difficult for some and impossible for others to access. Highlight words or key facts by placing them into a text box or using a larger font size instead.

A clear diagram can convey a lot of information, and helps people to understand the message more quickly. Diagrams are useful for your audiences, and particularly for communicating with people with learning disabilities.

Colour contrast

There are a variety of free tools on the internet which allow you to check the colour contrast of text on a certain background. Be mindful that the colour brightness and luminosity are different factors to consider. You will also need to consider the type of communication you are producing. The application of certain colour combinations works well in a digital format with the back-lighting you get on-screen, but you may find on paper that the effect is dulled or that the sheen of the paper makes it harder to distinguish the colours.



Websites

More and more communication is designed for the internet or signposts people to websites for further information. However, the way in which websites are designed and built can create barriers for disabled people. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) have been produced by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C, the web's governing body) and the W3C website contains examples of best practice.

Here are some of the main things you should aim to do when communicating with disabled people through websites:

- make sure your website design and content is accessible
- make sure any publications, for example forms and reports, that are hosted on your website are accessible – read the GOV.UK guidance on creating accessible PDFs

- advertise your campaign on your organisation’s website, or request a temporary page to publicise your information – this can be especially useful for publicising consultations or surveys
- email your audience database to direct them to your campaign web pages
- include the website address on your offline marketing

This web accessibility checklist is a useful reminder of what you need to remember

Web accessibility checklist	Checkpoints
Images have alternative text (so if you can’t see the image you can still read the text)	✓
Colour contrast between foreground and background is sufficiently strong	✓
Text re-sizes according to user preference	✓
Headings are correctly used in the stylesheets (they’re not just ordinary text made to look big and bold)	✓
Links make sense by themselves (e.g. no instances of links that just say “Click here” or “More...”)	✓
Tables are used for laying out tabular information and have proper headings and summaries	✓
Visual presentation is defined in ‘stylesheets’ and is not embedded in the pages	✓

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Video

If you are responsible for commissioning video, make sure you reach all of your target audience by producing versions which are more accessible for disabled people. These have the added benefit that they are often useful for non-disabled people as well.

Subtitles	Research published by the Office for Disability Issues shows that a million people rely on television subtitles, and a further 4 million use them regularly. Many major TV channels already subtitle 80% of their output.
British Sign Language (BSL)	Signed inserts in BSL produced primarily as TV fillers (content that appears between scheduled programmes) could also be used on a website. Planning this early will save you time and cost you less.
Audio-description	Producing audio description for your TV or film content increases the impact of your message on people who are blind or have visual impairments. It can convey facial expressions and significant gestures to the listener, which would otherwise be missed.

General tips

- Always consider who the audience is for each and every piece of work. Is your internal audience different from your external audience, do you actually know who you are trying to reach and by what communication channels?
- Allow time and budget for producing alternative formats as well as for accessibility & usability testing of digital communications
- Inclusive design can save you time and money, the more accessible and inclusive your communications are from the outset, the less time and money will be spent on making adjustments
- Accessibility or inclusiveness doesn't mean you have to compromise on good design and brand integrity; it just needs to be factored into the creative process
- Best practice in web accessibility (WCAG guidelines) should be applied to other digital communications
- Don't assume that your designers or developers understand what accessibility is, even when they say they do! Make sure you actually have digital communications tested for accessibility and usability by different groups

If you include accessibility as an essential requirement from the start of each project, not only will you save time and money, you will also make sure that your messages or campaign reach as broad an audience as possible.

What the law says

The term disability covers a wide range of different conditions and impairments – far too many to name individually. There is a broad legal definition in the UK, which is as follows:

- “A physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities” (Equality Act 2010)

The Equality Act 2010 protects disabled people (and other disadvantaged groups) from discrimination in employment and in the provision of goods and services.

If the way you communicate with disabled people as employees or customers is found to be discriminatory, your organisation could be liable. The best way to avoid legal action is to take a best practice approach to producing inclusive communications.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Find out more about the Disability Confident campaign:
www.gov.uk/dwp/disabilityconfident



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