

Our policy on providing accessible communications

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developing people, improving young lives

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Introduction

This guide to our policy is designed to help you make sure our communications are accessible to as wide an audience as possible, including disabled people and people from minority ethnic communities. It is aimed at staff as well as contractors who provide communications services for us.

There are many reasons why a communication may not be accessible to its audience, such as poor vision, language or learning difficulties. We need to make sure that no one is excluded from our services as a result.

The guide doesn't cover everything, but it does contain the key areas that must be considered:

- how to plan and develop accessible communications
- the minimum standards for making our communications accessible, and
- where you can find other useful information.

Our Race and Disability Equality Scheme

We have obligations under the Race Relations Act, and a duty to promote race equality. Our Race and Disability Equality Scheme (RDES) explains how we aim to promote race, disability and gender equality.

This accessibility guide gives you clear advice on how to meet the requirements of the scheme. It sets out the best ways of putting the policies behind the RDES into practice. However, the guide is not definitive, and does not guarantee that communications will comply with the various equality laws. You can get more details on the policies themselves from our diversity manager.

'We live in a changing society in which:

- over 300 languages are spoken in the UK
- there are now more people aged over 60 than there are children
- 11.6 million people have problems reading and writing, and
- 10 million people have a disability.'

COI, Introducing Inclusivity, 2003

Planning your communication

When developing any policy, service or communication, policy teams need to think about who will use it, and consider a diverse range of needs, right from the start. It is important to involve relevant people early on, maybe by including them on a working group and in focus groups. Where appropriate, involve your communications manager or web commissioning editor at this early stage.

Policy teams and service providers should also carry out an equality impact assessment (EIA) when planning a project. This will help to ensure your product or service provides race, disability and gender equality.

There are two stages to an EIA:

Stage 1: An initial assessment of how the project will affect different members of society. This gives an indication as to whether you need to carry out stage 2.

Stage 2: A fuller, evidenced-based assessment, involving research.

As these assessments may take some time, you must consider them when developing your project plan. If the evidence you need is not available, you may have to commission research to gather it. The assessments explain how we consider people from disability and minority ethnic groups when developing new products or services.

Staff can find out more about equality impact assessments on the intranet.

The policy team should:

- involve the communications manager or web commissioning editor early on – they can give advice and arrange access to specialist services if needed.

The communications manager should:

- make sure they are familiar with the information in this guide, and that all communications materials are designed and produced in ways that are accessible and follow the minimum standards set out in this guide
- check the further information section
- contact the creative services manager or diversity manager with queries
- access other resources on the rare occasions when they need to use more specialist services – for example, use the DCSF roster to find a supplier if a Welsh translation, other translation, audio or Braille are needed, or contact the Informability Team at the COI for advice on other specialist services, such as interpreters.

Suppliers should:

- make sure they are familiar with, and follow, the policy where relevant to their areas of work.

Written communication

Much of our communication is produced in writing. It may be professionally printed, presented online or produced on PCs in Word, but it is always necessary to make documents as clear and easy to use as possible.

Communicating effectively is a mixture of good writing and design – both need to be considered together to create documents that are clear and easy to follow.

Writing style

Clear, plain language is necessary for all our writing, for all readers. This is especially important when considering that some readers do not have good reading skills, do not have English as their first language, or may have learning difficulties.

In fact, clear information is crucial to reducing the need for producing communications in alternative formats.

Clear text involves thinking about all sorts of options that will help readers understand your message. There is more on writing clearly in our guide, *Writing for the TDA*, on the intranet and at www.tda.gov.uk/brand

Here, we have picked out a few important points that affect easy understanding.

Writing style:

Do

Use language your readers will understand.

Start with the most important information.

Keep sentences short – around 15 to 20 words on average.

Only use simple punctuation.

Use a direct, straightforward style.

Break up the text with clear, meaningful headings.

Use features like contents lists, headings and running headers to help people find their way around.

Don't

Avoid bureaucratic, technical or flowery language, and keep a lookout for jargon.

Don't go into too much detail where it isn't needed.

Don't assume that readers already know and understand the subject – think about what they are likely to know.

Don't put too many ideas in one sentence.

Don't use a phrase like 'make an application' when one word, 'apply', will do.

Action

Contact your communications manager if you need help with putting together or editing your text. Communications managers can find a specialist supplier through the DCSF editorial roster.

Design for print

There are many design features that can affect how easy it is for people to read and use documents.

The following principles will help to make sure all our documents are as accessible as possible to most people.

This will not always be enough for everyone's needs, so very occasionally we may need to produce documents in alternative formats, such as audio, large print, or as a translation. To cater for these instances we include an accessibility statement in our printed publications so that other formats can be requested. Alternative formats are covered on page 11. The accessibility statement is on page 8.

There is more on design in our brand book and visual identity guidelines on the intranet and at www.tda.gov.uk/brand

Design:

Type

Do

All type should be at least 11 point, including footnotes, tables and so on.

Although some bodies recommend 12 point as the minimum, we have set ours at 11 point because Bliss and Arial are such clear typefaces.

There is more on producing large print documents on page 11.

Use a clear, legible typeface: Bliss in professionally printed documents, Arial in documents produced on PC.

Don't

Avoid capitals for whole words or continuous text. Also, try not to overuse italics. These letterforms are more difficult to read because they affect the outline shape of words.

Avoid underlining as it can affect legibility. This includes web addresses – it is better to highlight them by using bold or a different colour.

Don't use hyphenation that splits words over two lines.

Colour

Do

Choose colours for text that give a good contrast with the background.

Remember colour-blindness: 1 in 12 men and 1 in 200 women can't see a difference between red and green. There are also less common forms of colour-blindness, such as blue/brown.

Don't

Don't solely rely on colour coding or coloured paper to guide people to different parts of a document or website. Make sure you also include other navigation devices.

Avoid using red on a green background or vice versa.

Also, don't use red and green alongside each other or alongside beiges and greys as part of any colour coding.

Layout

Do

Make sure there is enough space between the lines of type.

Keep all text ranged left, and not justified (not lined up to the right margin). This is easier to read because the spaces between the words are all even.

Have plenty of space between the columns in tables. White space on a page is vital to legibility.

Keep the layout simple and logical.

Make sure there is good contrast between the text and background, especially when text is reversed out.

Use reversed out text sparingly, and increase the size, weight or line space of the type, if possible.

Don't

Don't let lines get too long. There should be up to around 70 characters (letters and spaces) on a line.

Don't indent paragraphs.

Don't cram too much information onto a page.

Avoid fussy designs, with too much going on, text wrapped around pictures, etc.

Generally, avoid reversing text out of photos or patterns. This can make the type very difficult to read.

If you decide to do this, make sure the area of background is fairly solid, or knock back the colour in a photo to give a paler background.

Paper and format

Do

Think about whether the finished document can be placed flat to be scanned.

Don't

Don't use glossy paper, which causes glare and can make it difficult to see the print. We use Revive Silk, but where stock has to be laser guaranteed, we use Revive Uncoated.

Accessibility statement

Do

Add the following statement on all printed publications. It should be in 14 point type and near to our publications imprint. On some occasions this statement need not be added – usually for very small items such as postcards.

The TDA is committed to providing accessible information. To request this item in another language or format, contact TDA corporate communications at the address below or e-mail: corporatecomms@tda.gov.uk

Please tell us what you require and we will consider with you how to meet your needs.

We explain more about alternative formats on page 11.

Action

When designing documents contact your communications manager, who can also find a specialist supplier through the DCSF design roster.

Images of people

The make-up of the UK population is roughly:

- 50/50 for men and women
- eight per cent are from minority ethnic groups
- 17 per cent are disabled – and only some of these disabilities are visible.

The images we use should reflect the population of the UK. We don't currently represent all, but we are commissioning a suitable range of photographs for our image library.

Choosing images

Do

Our publications should include images of people from a range of ethnicities, ages and disabilities, and both men and women – in a positive way and in ordinary roles.

Portray disabled people in company, interacting with non-disabled people and doing everyday things.

Get away from the stereotypical images of disabled people, such as wheelchair users or people with white sticks.

Don't

There is no need to be rigid about the proportions. You just need to aim for very roughly the right mix of images throughout the document, series of publications or web pages – not in every page or document.

Trying to be too exact could result in over-representing minority groups when looking at our communications as a whole.

Try to avoid making these images look obvious or contrived, and avoid stereotypes.

Avoid images that show disabled people as passive consumers.

Although we apply the guidelines above, in some communications we do target particular groups (for instance, for the 'men into primary' or 'minority ethnic teachers' campaigns). In these, we would use more images of those groups.

Action

For more information and ideas on images of disability, look on www.imagesofdisability.gov.uk

Before commissioning new photography or video contact the creative services manager, who can also provide advice and find a specialist supplier through the DCSF photography and video rosters.

Advertising

The general advice on writing, design and online media applies to advertising. However there are some exceptions and additional advice.

Classified advertising

Although we say all type should be at least 11 point, in classified adverts (for recruiting staff and announcing tenders), the type size may be smaller. This is conventional for this type of advertising as space is limited. However, these adverts will also appear on our website, where they can be resized by people with visual impairments.

TV advertising

General advice

It should be possible to follow the action without being able to see the screen or, alternatively, without being able to hear the sound track. It is not necessary to voice over every minor piece of action, but it should be possible for someone who is deaf or blind to follow the plot.

Clearly, how information is imparted will depend to a large degree on the intended audience, but as a general rule, the message should be clear and unambiguous and the action should move at a pace that everyone can follow.

Subtitles

All TV ads and fillers should be subtitled through teletext.

- Subtitles should be a minimum of 24 lines (this is an RNIB recommendation).
- A sans serif font should be used.
- The clear print guidelines apply. For instance, good contrast between text and background is essential. A plain background or shaded area is always needed behind the subtitles for good legibility.
- Subtitles should be on screen long enough to read.
- Subtitles should always appear in the same part of the screen.
- As far as possible, all audible information (spoken word and sound effects) should be subtitled.

End-frame/call to action

- Wherever possible, include as many ways of responding as possible (eg. only supplying a phone number would exclude deaf people from responding).

Media

Discuss with your media planner whether specialist media, such as ethnic press, is appropriate and offers the most cost-efficient way to reach this audience.

Action

Discuss your advertising requirements with your communications manager, who will liaise with our contracted advertising and media suppliers.

Alternative formats

Printed documents can be inaccessible for people with visual impairments, and there are over one million blind and visually impaired people in the UK. People with other disabilities may also need alternative versions of some of our communications.

In recent years, we have received five to ten requests a year for communications in alternative formats and translations. Rather than automatically producing lots of copies in alternative formats, which may never be used, our policy is based on individual need. We consider each request for a document in an alternative format on an individual basis. This means we can be flexible and discuss the requirement with an individual, and provide the formats that are actually needed.

Producing alternative formats

Blind and partially sighted people

There are four main alternative formats, in addition to the telephone and face-to-face contact:

- *Web-based speech recognition software*: this is a cheap, fast and easy way of producing accessible information. You can send them the text in a Word file, which can be read by their software.
- *Audio tapes, CDs and digital audio files* are useful for blind or partially sighted people. However, they require the text to be recorded by a reader. It is always important to consider the listener and try to use different voices to add interest and meaning. In most cases it is advisable to use a professional transcription company.
- *Braille* is only read by four per cent of people with a visual impairment. However, for those who read Braille, it is particularly useful for lengthy documents or complex information.
- *Large print*:
 - If you are producing a document on PC, you can simply increase the font size. We recommend a minimum of 16 point. Check the formatting, as it will have been changed by the size increase. You can also send them the text in a Word file so they can adjust the text size according to their needs.
 - For printed documents, it does not work to simply make the standard print larger, particularly if headings were relatively large in the standard print. Organisations producing information in large print will often ask a customer for their font size preference.
 - Simply photocopying printed leaflets up onto an A3 sheet of paper is not providing a suitable service – you should use a transcription company.

Deaf and hearing impaired people

- DVDs and videos may need to be produced with audio description, subtitles or British Sign Language.

People with learning disabilities

- The text can be simplified to create an 'easy read' – a short, illustrated, easy-to-understand text.
- Audio formats may be appropriate for some audiences with limited reading ability.

Action

All requests for alternative formats must be passed to corporatecomms@tda.gov.uk

The corporate communications manager will discuss it with you and your communications manager, so together you can agree on the best course of action.

If you need to produce any of these formats contact your communications manager, who can find a specialist supplier on the DCSF roster or can get the names of suitable suppliers from the COI Informability Team. The COI Informability Team is also a good source of specialist advice.

The cost of producing alternative formats is met by the policy team.

Translation

There are over 300 languages spoken in the UK and many cultural differences. In recent years we have received five to ten requests a year for communications in translations and alternative formats. Rather than automatically producing our publications in several languages, which may never be used, our policy is based on individual need. For example, in the past some documents have been translated, and in other cases we have arranged for discussion through an interpreter.

Welsh language translations

We have a commitment to produce many of our communications in Welsh. Under this agreement we have to:

- provide some bilingual promotional material relating to teaching as a career
- update our recruitment website, keeping information relating to Wales on an equal footing with England, and
- produce a full Welsh language version of the TDA recruitment website.

Other translations

We consider each request for translations on an individual basis and discuss the requirement with an individual. This means we can be flexible, and provide what is actually needed.

Translating text

If your document is aimed at a specific ethnic group, it may be worth doing more, for instance:

- You could provide one-to-one access to a person who can speak the same language.
- The whole document could be translated and produced either as a separate booklet or together with the English. This would only be justified for documents where there is a known audience.
- You could produce a summary rather than the full text of a lengthy or complex document, perhaps in the key community languages.
- When commissioning translations from external suppliers, give as much notice as possible (to avoid extra costs). Include a deadline and a word count.

Action

If you have any queries about our Welsh language policy, please contact our Welsh language policy adviser.

All requests for other translations must be passed to corporatecomms@tda.gov.uk

The corporate communications manager will discuss it with you and your communications manager, so together you can agree on the best course of action.

If you need any translation services contact your communications manager, who can contract translation services from a specialist supplier on the DCSF roster or can get the names of suitable suppliers from the COI Informability Team. The COI Informability Team is also a good source of specialist advice.

The cost of providing translations is met by the policy team.

Online and multimedia materials

Legally, we have to make sure all our websites, extranets and multimedia materials are usable by and accessible to all users. (There is more about this on www.govtalk.gov.uk/)

Accessible content is material that can be used by anyone who wants to access it, including people with a mental or physical impairment or disability.

Our website must conform to W3C web content accessibility guidelines 1.0, level AA (W3C AA), which are explained on www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG1AA-Conformance

They provide an internationally recognised set of standards for accessibility and usability. All new developments must be built to meet these standards.

Web development

Web pages must be developed so they can be used by:

- people with visual impairments
- people with limited computer skills or who only have access to basic equipment
- people with mobility disabilities
- people with learning difficulties and dyslexia
- people for whom English is not their first language, and
- people with a hearing impairment or who don't have sound facilities on their equipment.

The TDA's Internet Services team is fully versed in developing accessible websites, and all proposals for any type of web development must go through your commissioning editor. The Internet Services team will provide technical assurance support on all web-related projects.

Multimedia development

Multimedia can range from video and game content on a DVD through to a collection of documents on a memory stick. This content must be accessible. For example, a textual transcript must be available when showing video content. Or if providing document files, provide them in PDF format, as this is the most accessible document file.

These guidelines will help you plan your content. The Internet Services team follow these guidelines and more, and can advise on accessibility issues and provide technical assurance support during all stages of a project. When commissioning other multimedia content, bear these points in mind.

Producing accessible online and multimedia content

- Provide a text alternative for any non-text content, including images, charts or interactive features.
- Provide synchronised alternatives for multimedia. For example, a transcript must be provided for video content.
- Create content that is presented simply, using a clear layout with useful headings and sub-headings. Web visitors tend to scan over a web page to see if they want to read it, and they use headings to help them decide – so headings must be descriptive and concise.
- Make it easier for people with disabilities to see and hear the content. For instance any colours used must have good contrast, eg. black text on a white background. It is important not to use colour to signify anything – some users won't be able to see the colours, so the content must make sense as pure text.
- Make all navigation, links and other functions work from keyboard commands. TDA's web developers will do this as standard but it's something to bear in mind when commissioning multimedia content.
- All link text should be descriptive enough for users to decide whether or not to click on them, eg. 'click here' or 'find out more' give no information. Any links to PDF documents must include the file size and format. Displaying the full URL should be avoided.
- Give disabled users enough time to read and use your content.
- Don't create content that is known to cause seizures, such as animated or flashing content. Certain types of flashing images may trigger seizures in some viewers. This content should not be commissioned unless there is a good business reason as it does not conform to accessibility requirements. The Internet Services team will provide technical assurance on any project that requires this technology.
- Provide ways to help disabled and other users navigate, find content and work out where they are on the website.
- Make all text readable and easy to understand. (See writing style on page 5.)
- Make your web pages appear and operate in familiar, predictable ways.
- As far as possible, make the content compatible with a range of browsers and assistive technologies, such as speech and screen readers.
- Tables should only be used when absolutely necessary, ie. to display data. They should have a simple layout, avoiding nested headings or titles.
- Plan all your content so that it is short and to the point – we suggest around 250 words per page. The page structure should be clear, simple and intuitive for the user. Your commissioning editor can help with this.

Action

Contact your web commissioning editor for help before commissioning any online or multimedia content that is intended for the web.

Face-to-face communication

Communicating with disabled people

People are often nervous of offending, or unaware that they are giving offence when trying to help.

The following guidelines cover what you should and should not do in many situations, when working with disabled colleagues or clients.

Communication with disabled people:

General

Do

Treat disabled people as you would anyone else.

Ask what would help them and by all means offer appropriate assistance. Wait until your offer is accepted.

Remember that different people with similar disabilities will have different needs and expectations, depending on how they have overcome barriers in the past.

Make sure reception staff and others are briefed to provide appropriate assistance when necessary.

Give the person the time they need to communicate or do things.

Use everyday expressions such as 'Nice to see you', 'Must be running along' normally – they rarely offend, even when they seem to relate to a specific disability. And use terminology preferred by disabled people, such as 'disabled person', 'someone with epilepsy', 'wheelchair user'.

Don't

Don't assume someone doesn't have an impairment just because it is not visible.

Don't assume offers of help will be welcome or needed.

Don't make assumptions about what someone can do or what they need based on their disability.

Don't make a big deal of meeting someone's needs.

Don't insult a disabled person by talking through a companion.

Avoid language that may give offence, such as 'blind as a bat', 'deaf and dumb', 'cripple', 'spastic', 'handicapped', 'the blind', 'an epileptic', 'suffering from epilepsy', 'confined to a wheelchair', etc.

Never use behaviour more appropriate for children.

People with visual impairments

Do

Identify yourself clearly and introduce anyone else present. Say where they are in the room.

Ask the person if they would like any help. Offer them your arm as a guide, and tell them about slopes, stairs, kerbs, etc.

When offering them a seat, talk through the process – eg. 'the chair is just in front of you'.

When meeting someone away from their home environment, make it somewhere they know, and arrive on time.

In a noisy place, speak louder and directly to the person.

Make arrangements for a guide dog – such as providing a water bowl.

If you need CD, tapes, Braille etc. versions of something, ask your communications manager.

Don't

Don't make them play 'guess the voice'.

Don't propel someone by pushing them or trying to steer them.

Don't shake hands without telling them you would like to do so.

At the end of a conversation, don't just leave – tell them you are going.

Don't shout.

Don't talk to or pat a guide dog while it is working.

People with learning difficulties

Do

Break down information into a logical order with simple stages. Keep it brief and to the point.

Repeat and check that the key issues have been understood.

Be aware that some people do not like being touched, even shaking hands, or may be intimidated by making or receiving eye contact. Ask first.

Use visual aids to communication such as easy-read versions, photographs, illustrations or symbols.

Don't

Don't treat adults with learning difficulties like children.

Don't rush the person – listen carefully.

Don't assume that all people with learning difficulties will find the same aids helpful.

People with mobility impairments

Do

Either sit down when talking to a wheelchair user or stand a little distance away, to avoid talking down to them or causing neck strain.

Think about obstacles such as clutter, rough surfaces, heavy doors or high door handles as well as the more obvious steps, accessible toilet, parking facilities, etc.

Think about extra seating for people with other mobility impairments, such as using crutches.

Don't

Don't hold on to or lean on wheelchairs – respect people's boundaries and personal space.

Don't forget that they may not be able to turn, and check that they can join in a group conversation.

People with speech impairments

Do

Make eye contact, wait patiently and listen.

Some people may prefer you to ask questions that require short answers, a nod or shake of the head.

Be sure you understand the person's meaning before making assumptions. It may help to say what you have understood and ask if it is correct.

Don't

Don't assume that they also have poor intellect or a hearing impairment.

Don't be tempted to speak for the person or finish their sentences.

Don't pretend you've understood something they have said when you haven't.

Don't rush the person.

People with hearing impairments

Do

Ask the person how they would like to communicate.

Arrange for an interpreter if necessary for a sign language user. Remember that for many, sign language is their first language, not English.

Face the person and speak clearly at normal speed, and make eye contact. Use gestures and facial expression to help convey what you're saying.

To attract their attention, use a light touch on the shoulder or wave your hand.

Stand with your face in the light and keep your head still.

Make sure there is the minimum of background.

Don't

Don't assume they can lip read or that they will understand sign language. Lip reading is very tiring, and only three out of ten words can be lip read.

Don't talk to the interpreter – speak to the person themselves.

Don't shout. This doesn't help people to lip read.

Don't cover your mouth.

Signers for people with hearing impairments

There are 7.5 million people who have a hearing loss in the UK today. Many of them lip read or use sign language.

If someone uses British Sign Language (BSL) – which is the first language of most deaf people – you can communicate through a skilled sign language interpreter.

Providing signers

- Check with the person how they prefer to communicate.
- Some deaf people use a different system called Sign Supporting English (SSE).
- If someone is hard of hearing, it may be best to communicate through a trained lip speaker.
- If you need a BSL interpreter, make sure they are registered with the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP) and qualified to Grade 3 or above.
- Always try to send the interpreter information about the subject in advance.
- There is a national shortage of qualified interpreters, so it is important to book well in advance (six to eight weeks).
- At events where there are 'round table' discussion groups a signer will probably not be sufficient to include someone who is deaf. You will need a speech-to-text or palantypist, who can type what each person is saying.
- Signing is physically tiring work, so consider whether you need to book two signers if you need their services for a full day.

Action

Staff or suppliers must agree requests to provide these services with their communications manager.

Your communications manager can contract an interpreter or other services from the DCSF roster or you can get the names of suitable suppliers from the COI Informability Team. The COI Informability Team and the RNID are also good sources of specialist advice.

The cost of providing this service is met by the event's owner.

Communication channels for people with hearing impairments

Textphones and Minicomms

Many people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who have a speech impairment, cannot use the telephone but can use a textphone. (Minicom is a make of textphone.) A textphone has a keyboard and screen, allowing deaf, hearing impaired or speech impaired people to communicate by typing and reading messages over a phone line.

Using textphones

- Remember to think before you speak! It will save time in the long run. Short succinct thoughts are much better than rambling responses.
- The TDA does not have a general textphone number, but the Teacher Information Line one is 0117 915 8161.
- Textphone callers can also contact Orbital, our storage and distribution supplier, on 0845 6060 323.
- RNID Typetalk, managed by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, provides an operator to help with conversations between a textphone user and a hearing person using an ordinary phone. The hearing impaired person may speak or type their side of the conversation. Typetalk operators type exactly what is said, and read out to hearing callers whatever the textphone user types.
- The service is free and confidential, available nationally 24 hours a day. No records are kept of any conversations.
- To call a textphone user using Typetalk, you call from an ordinary phone. Just dial 18002 before the area code and phone number of the person with a hearing or speech impairment. Once a textphone answers, a Typetalk operator will join the line. If an ordinary phone answers, the call is connected as normal, without an operator.
- If you use a textphone, you can call a hearing person through Typetalk by dialling 18001 before the area code and phone number. Again, the operator will join the line when the call is answered.
- For more information on Typetalk, contact their Customer Service team:
 - phone 0800 7311 888
 - textphone 18001 0800 500 888
 - e-mail helpline@rnid-typetalk.org.uk

Fax machines

Some deaf people prefer to use fax machines to send and receive information instead of textphone. Always check what the most convenient method of communication is for your client.

For this reason fax numbers on communications are not redundant.

Induction loops

When booking events it is useful to ask if the room has an induction loop system for people who use certain types of hearing aid. This allows people to switch their hearing aid to 'T' and to pick up enhanced sounds via a magnetic field. The system is only useful for people who have some hearing.

The TDA has a mobile unit which is about the size of a laptop case and can be fairly easily installed. Please contact the IT helpdesk to book it.

Meetings and events

Accessibility involves many different factors. When organising a meeting or event, it is important to make sure the premises are accessible for people with any kind of disability, and that all spoken and written information is accessible to participants.

You need to take into account the needs of people who:

- use wheelchairs
- have other mobility limitations
- are partially sighted or blind
- are deaf or hard of hearing
- have learning disabilities or literacy problems
- do not have English as their first language.

When arranging events, always work with our contracted events management companies (currently Finishing Touch for corporate events and KLP for recruitment events) to make sure a fully accessible venue is booked. Our event management companies should consider the points below.

This list is not exhaustive as every event is unique. There is rarely a perfect venue, but identifying problems in advance means you have a chance to avoid, or at least minimise, them.

Accessibility in meetings and events

General

- Ask everyone coming to the event about their needs well in advance. The invitation letter or booking form should ask people if they have any special mobility, sensory or dietary requirements. This could cover access requirements (such as wheelchair use), a sign language interpreter or a special diet.
- Because many disabilities are invisible (as are many special requirements, eg. dietary needs or phobias), this also applies to meetings with participants who you already know.
- Advertising/pre-meeting publicity: Make sure that any notices announcing the event are in suitable formats or are brought to everyone's attention.

Choosing a venue

- Transport to the venue: Is there adequate public transport, and nearby parking? Are there enough reserved parking spaces for disabled drivers?
- Paths and walkways: Are they level and wide enough for wheelchairs (at least 1200mm)? Are there ramps or just steps? Can delegates get inside and move around the different areas where the event will be held? Is there a level or ramped entrance?
- Are doors automatic? If they are glass, are they clearly visible when closed?
- Inside, are all areas accessible and free of obstacles such as signboards and seats? Are there any mats that are not flush with the floor? Are carpets deep pile, which can be difficult for wheelchair users? Are lift entrances wide enough and the controls at a suitable height? Are there Braille markings or audible announcements?

continued on next page...

...Choosing a venue continued

- Signposting: Are all areas and facilities such as lifts and accessible toilets clearly signposted? Are the signs large and clear enough? Is colour used to differentiate areas (contrasting colours can help people with partial sight)?
- Are there staff available to help or guide disabled people if needed?
- Toilets: Are there enough accessible toilets on the same floor as the meeting room? Are they fitted with alarms?
- Lighting: Well designed lighting can help people with partial sight. Also, be aware of the needs of anyone with photosensitive epilepsy.
- The meeting room: Is there an induction loop, or can one be brought in and used there? Can the seats be spaced to give easy access for people with mobility impairments? Can wheelchair users sit with their colleagues? Can disabled speakers get onto the stage?
- Are assistance dogs allowed in, including to restaurants, etc? Are there suitable facilities for them? Local Guide Dogs associations may be able to help.
- Emergency arrangements: Are fire alarms visible as well as audible? Is the evacuation plan good enough, taking into account all the needs of delegates?
- Food: Can they cater for special diets? Is it self-service?

Meeting delegates' needs

- You may need to provide British Sign Language interpreters, lip speakers or palantypists.
- Information such as speakers' notes may need to be presented in large print, Braille, easy-read or audio formats.
- Facilities may be needed for assistance dogs.

Minority ethnic groups

With participants from different ethnic groups, language may be an issue. In meetings or events, we must make sure that anyone whose first language is not English is able to understand and take part fully.

We also need to cater for different dietary requirements and other cultural factors.

Interpreters

Two speakers of different languages can speak to each other through another person, who is trained to interpret between both languages. Interpreting is done face to face or over the phone, or some organisations use video-conferencing facilities.

Providing interpreters

- To book an interpreter, you will need to provide the following information:
 - the name of the client
 - where the interview will take place
 - the name of your service
 - the nature of the interview
 - how long it will take – allow yourself enough time without overestimating (an interview with an interpreter will last twice as long as one without) – the interpreter will be paid for the time you have booked, even if the session ends earlier, and more if the session runs over; allow time to brief and debrief the interpreter
 - the language and dialect of the client
 - the ethnicity of the client, and
 - their gender.
- It is also important to be aware of:
 - possible political, religious or cultural differences, and
 - possible tensions between communities that speak the same language.
- When using an interpreter remember that everything you say will be interpreted.
- Use direct speech as though you were speaking to the client without an interpreter.
- Give the interpreter time to interpret.

Action

Staff or suppliers should agree requests to provide these services with their communications manager.

Your communications manager can contract an interpreter or other services from the DCSF roster or you can get the names of suitable suppliers from the COI Informability Team. The COI Informability Team and the RNID are also good sources of specialist advice.

The cost of providing this service is met by the event's owner.

Diet

When arranging face-to-face meetings and other events, you should ask all participants in advance if they have any special dietary requirements.

People may have a range of dietary requirements, depending on whether they are vegetarian, vegan, observe a particular religion, etc. These requirements mean that for some, eating or drinking foods such as eggs, cheese, meat, fish or alcohol are not allowed or tolerated.

A safe option would be to provide vegetarian or vegan food, which should be clearly labelled and kept separate from any meat or fish dishes. This would help most people, but you still need to ask participants in advance about their dietary requirements.

Also, be aware that people may be fasting, and of the need for people to break their fast, and allow them the opportunity to do so.

Dates

Some key cultural dates change from year to year. Up-to-date details of important dates for different religions can be found at: www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/

You should bear these key dates in mind when planning major TDA events.

Other useful sources of information

TDA publications

TDA race, disability and gender equality schemes	on intranet and www.tda.gov.uk/about/planspoliciesreports/policies/rdes
Identity guidelines	on intranet and www.tda.gov.uk/brand
Guide to writing for the TDA	on intranet and www.tda.gov.uk/brand
Editorial style guide	on intranet and www.tda.gov.uk/brand

Other publications

Five Principles for Producing Better Information for Disabled People: Supporting Public Sector Communicators and Practitioners	Published by Office for Disability, Feb 2007
Introducing Inclusivity	Published by COI, 2003

Websites

The knowledge bank section of the Government Communications Network (GCN) site	www.comms.gov.uk
Office for Disability Issues	www.officefordisability.gov.uk/resources/imagesofdisability.asp

Who to contact

TDA equality policies	Diversity manager
TDA accessibility policy	Creative services manager
Information and advice on developing your communications	Communications managers Web commissioning editors
Evaluate requests for alternative formats and translations	Corporate communications manager
Corporate events	Finishing Touch tdainfo@finishingtouchevents.co.uk
Recruitment campaign events	Recruitment events manager
COI Informability Team	Central Office of Communication Hercules House, Hercules Road, London SE1 7DU 020 7928 2345

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TDA corporate communications at the address below or e-mail:
corporatecomms@tda.gov.uk

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