EDI Toolkit: Accessibility Guide

Accessibility is about making information or environments usable for as many people as possible. This section explains why accessibility is important and what you can do to create accessible content and spaces.

Accessibility

What is accessibility and why is it important?

Accessibility is making information or environments usable for as many people as possible. It is important so that everyone can access information, resources and facilities. This means individuals are not disadvantaged by not being aware of something or unable to access something that may otherwise have a positive impact for them, such as being able to explore career development opportunities. 'Accessibility' can have different meanings depending on what you are talking about.

Physical spaces and accessibility

This involves thinking about how a variety of users can access campus, laboratory, and fieldwork locations, individual buildings and the rooms/spaces within these buildings. Here are some examples of ways in which physical spaces can be made accessible for someone who has a disability:

- a ramp is also available if stairs are required to enter the building,
- a lift available in a building with multiple floors,
- doors have a 'push button' to open, or are automatic,
- availability of accessible toilets,
- in the case of a fire evacuation, there should be evacuation chairs and evacuation meeting points on each floor to support individuals to safely evacuate.

Accessibility should also be considered at the design phase and during any building updates, to ensure that all individuals can access and continue to access spaces inside buildings. There are many aspects to consider when creating accessible spaces. It's important to remember that careful consideration and consultation will allow spaces to be accessible to a variety of users, including those who have a disability.

Accessible content

Accessible content covers the **language and message, the structure, and the format** of all written content such as documents or websites. Accessible content is content which has been created in a way that ensures all users can access the material in the same way or same amount of time. For example, if a person is deaf and you share a video which does not contain any text alternatives, this would mean that they cannot access the information in the same way. If you were able to provide closed captions on the video or a written transcript, this would mean that a person who is deaf can access the content.

Creating accessible content

We have summarised some ways that you can ensure that the outputs from research that you produce and share with colleagues or students is accessible. The guidance below can be applied to a variety of content types, whether it's an email, web page or a document. This is a summary to get you started, with links to further resources to help

you create accessible content in various forms and ensure that you maximise the reach of what you do.

Imagery

All images with meaning should have alternative text (alt-text) description explaining what's in it. This is so that people accessing a document or website or tweet using a screen reader will be informed that there is an image, and the alt-text description would be read out to let them know the content (for example, 'a group of students sat around a desk.') Any complex images, such as an infographic, should have a text summary to complement the image. However, if an image is just for decorative purposes, i.e., it does not add further content, it's OK to leave the alt text blank.

Hyperlinks

Always embed links into the text and don't put the raw URL link in the text (like www.ncl.ac.uk). Instead, you should embed the hyperlink within the text with a descriptive name. For example, instead of writing 'Click here to access find out more about the project' you should write 'To find out more about the project, see our About Us page' where the link is hyperlinked when referring to the page where the information can be found. This is important for someone using a screen reader. If you put the raw URL link in the text, the screen reader would read out the URL instead. By embedding URL links within the text this allows someone with a screen reader to access the link whilst also knowing what it is for.

You can also add 'aria-labels' to any links to pages or content. Aria-labels will label any link for assistive technologies, such as screen readers, to read out loud.

Use of colour

Do not rely on colour as a navigational tool or as the sole way to differentiate items. If you are using colour, ensure that you use combinations with good contrast. Always use a readable font (such as Arial, Helvetica, Verdana) with a sufficient colour contrast from the background.

Language

To create accessible content, clear and short sentences should be used. Any acronyms (such as EDI) should be expanded on the first time they are used (EDI = Equality, Diversity and Inclusion).

Videos

If you are creating or sharing video content, you can enable 'closed captions' and provide transcripts where possible. If you are embedding a video within some content, ensure that settings are configured so that the video does not automatically play – the user must start the video by using their mouse or keyboard.

Bullet points

Avoid using round bullet points where possible as a screen reader can mistake these for a full stop. Instead, use square bullet points.

Headings and Structure

Write headings using sentence case (starting the first word with a capital letter). You should also use the 'heading styles' available in Microsoft applications. It's also recommended that you break any blocks of text into shorter paragraphs, ensuring individual sentences are not too long.

Documents

Downloadable documents (e.g. on a website) should be available as an accessible Portable Document Format (PDF). This also avoids the issue of loss of formatting which can occur when sharing a word document for instance.

Microsoft Accessibility Checker

You can run the **Microsoft Accessibility Checker** to make sure your Microsoft 365 content is accessible for others to read and edit. This is available within Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint. This will flag any accessibility issues within your documents and suggest how you can fix these. You can find out more about the Accessibility Checker and where this is available via the Microsoft website.

Creating accessible spaces

If you are hosting an event like a conference, or organising a fieldtrip or lab workshop, it's important that you consider about how the physical spaces will be accessible to a range of users. Think about how you can create inclusive spaces where everyone feels welcome and can enjoy activities on offer. Here are some examples of what you can think about to ensure physical spaces are accessible:

- Are the buildings and rooms accessible to an individual who, for example, uses a wheelchair or someone who has a mobility impairment?
- Is there any accessible parking available near to the location?
- When inviting a speaker or asking participants to sign up, you can ask if they have any access needs. For example, someone might require larger print on any documentation or require closed captioning to be enabled. The best thing to do is ask in advance so arrangements can be made accordingly.
- You may also need to consider access needs around catering, if applicable. In advance of sessions, ask individuals if there are any dietary requirements to consider.
- Ensure that any signs directing visitors to specific rooms are clear and that the lighting is sufficient.
- Familiarise yourself with the location of accessible toilets, along with other facilities such as a break room or water dispenser.

For Newcastle colleagues and students

We have listed some additional resources to help you create and write content that can be used by individuals with a range of accessibility needs.

Newcastle University IT Services

The NUIT team has provided guidance on designing accessible content. This includes some **Good Practice Guidelines** for particular types of content such as PDFs or web sites.

Learning and Teaching at Newcastle – Digital Accessibility

The Learning and Teaching team at Newcastle have collated information around Digital Accessibility.

Business Disability Support

The Business Disability Forum has its own Inclusive Communication Toolkit. Newcastle University colleagues can access these resources.

Diversity and Ability

The Diversity and Ability website has lots of resources that explain the different software available (including the built-in features in, for example, Microsoft Word) as well as apps.