

Equal Access



A significant proportion of the population have some form of disability such as poor eyesight, poor hearing, learning difficulties or impaired mobility.

Providing equal access is a basic principle of good interpretation. Where practicable it is also a legal requirement.

These notes provide some basic guidelines about how to make your interpretation more accessible to everyone, but especially those with disabilities.



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The Disability Discrimination Act

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) makes it a legal requirement to provide physical and intellectual access to people with disabilities.

The Act states that all 'service providers' must:

- 'Make reasonable adjustments to policies, procedures and practice so as not to discriminate against those with disabilities.'
- 'Provide auxiliary aids and services to make a service more accessible.'
- 'Provide an alternative way of making goods, facilities and services available to disabled people where a physical feature makes the service inaccessible.'

These 'service providers' include all indoor and outdoor heritage sites, visitor attractions, museums, galleries and other interpretive facilities open to the public.

What this means is that:

- When you provide interpretation, you must take on board the needs of people with disabilities and take **reasonable steps** to provide for them.
- You need to consider both physical and intellectual access. Physical access is about how people move around your site or building. Intellectual access is how people understand your interpretation.

Access for everyone

Regardless of any legal issues, it is good practice to provide equal access for all users.

For example:

- Large point size text in graphics helps both the one million partially sighted people in the UK, and makes reading more comfortable for everyone.
- Pictures with simple captions instead of lengthy text tell a story to everyone, especially those with learning difficulties.
- Audio facilities can be used in parallel with text, bringing the story more alive for everyone.
- A CD-ROM in a visitor centre can provide a 'virtual tour' to parts of a historic property where universal access is impossible.
- Providing plenty of opportunities to sit down helps not only those with walking difficulties but everyone with 'museum feet'.

(Source: Sarah Oswald, Interpret Scotland no. 1, 2000)

Some basic equal access guidelines

Here are some guidelines for your interpretation:

- Body text on graphic panels should be at least 18 pt with the main introductory text at least 48 pt. The minimum text size on publications should be 12 pt.
- Ensure there is a good colour and brightness contrast between your text and the background. Red and green should be avoided for people who are colour blind.

- Panels and labels should be fixed at a height, distance and angle that enables them to be read by people in wheelchairs or using bi-focal glasses. Don't put labels at the back of a display case.
- Avoid reflective surfaces for text and labels and ensure that internal displays are adequately lit without shadows.
- Avoid *fancy typefaces*, **extra-bold** type and UPPERCASE WHICH ARE ALL HARDER TO READ.
- Use a text hierarchy, boxes and bullet points.
- Use symbols and images instead of words.
- Staffed information points should have an induction loop fitted for people with poor hearing.
- Information counters should have a drop-level counter for people in wheelchairs.
- Engage all the senses, for example by using objects and tactile surfaces for people to touch.
- Use Braille or 'talking labels' that read text out loud.
- Web sites should contain clear text of at least 12 pt. Blind people use audio browsers that translate text into sound, and your web site should work with these as well as the usual Internet Explorer and Netscape browsers. The website of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles has been commended as an 'exemplary' example of accessible website design – see www.nhm.org
- For the best results, consult with and involve people with disabilities in developing your interpretation.

Further advice

To take our initial guidance further, we suggest you contact the following organisations for advice:

DDA Unit Helpline 0345 622633
www.disability.gov.uk

- a government information point about the DDA.

Disability Rights Commission
www.drc-gb.org

- an organisation promoting the rights of disabled people.

Joint Mobility Unit Access Partnership
Dunedin House
25 Ravelston terrace
Edinburgh EH4 3TP
0131 311 8526
www.jmuaccess.org.uk

- access consultants supported by the Royal National Institute for the Blind and The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association offering advice, training and consultancy on disabled people's design needs.

Fieldfare Trust
29 Hogarth Street
Cupar
Fife KY15 5YU
www.fieldfare.org.uk

- advice and grants on equal access to the countryside.

INTACT – The Intellectual Access Trust
INTACT
1/8 Dun-Ard Garden
Edinburgh
EH9 2HZ
0131 667 1461

- a body promoting intellectual access for people with learning and communication difficulties

Web design

These web sites provide advice on accessible web site design:

www.rnib.org.uk/digital

(the RNIB also offer a free 15-minute video titled 'Websites That work!' on request)

www.ed-resources.net/universalaccess

www.w3.org/WAI

www.cast.org/bobby

www.webaim.org

www.bbc.co.uk/education/betsie

Further Reading

Barker, P. et al

Building Sight: A handbook of building and interior design solutions to include the needs of visually impaired people

Joint Mobility Unit, London (c/o Royal National Institute for the Blind), 1995

BT Countryside for All

Standards and Guidelines: A good practice guide to disabled people's access in the countryside

BT Countryside for All

Dept for Education and Employment

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 an introduction for small and medium sized businesses

HMSO, 1999

ISBN 1841850861

Holmes-Siedle, J.

Barrier-free design: A manual for building designers and managers

Butterworth, 1996

ICI Paints

A design guide for the use of colour and contrast to improve the built environment for visually impaired people

ICI Paints, 1997

Joint Mobility Unit

Design Insight journal

Joint Mobility Unit, London (c/o Royal National Institute for the Blind)

Nolan, G.

Designing exhibitions to include people with disabilities

1997

Rayner, A.

Access in Mind: towards the inclusive museum

INTACT, 1998

ISBN 1901663183