



Equality Briefing: Inclusive and accessible communications

Summary

This briefing raises awareness of the equality considerations for creating more inclusive and accessible services as well as communicating with service users who face multiple barriers.

- Common barriers to inclusive communications relate to protected characteristics of **age, disability, race (language barriers) and socio-economic disadvantage** (specifically accessing online information and/or devices)
- Key points to consider in designing inclusive services include understanding that:
 - 21% of adults in the UK do not have the basic skills required to use the internet in their day-to-day life.
 - **49%** of working-age adults felt excluded from society due to their disability or condition.
 - In Fife, disability aggravated crime in Fife has been increasing year-on-year with 40 charges in 2022-23
 - The EHRC recommends that that offline services are not neglected and **are able to meet the needs of older people who may be digitally excluded.**
- Several local organisations in Fife can provide assistance with interpretation, training, easy-read translation, awareness raising and peer-to-peer support, what matters is creating a culture of enabling inclusive communications.
- Better **awareness and usage** of the services providing inclusive communications and accessibility support in Fife can help develop **both inclusive workplaces and services** at the same time.

Introduction – key barriers

Disability

Under the [Equality Act 2010](#), Disability is defined “physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities”.

You are also classed as disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you are diagnosed with a progressive condition, such as cancer.



Under the Equality Act, employers and public services must ensure that reasonable adjustments are made available to employees and clients, in order to reduce barriers. The Equality Act 2010 applies across the UK and all its local authorities, including Fife.

There are 4.9 million disabled people in employment in the U.K.

In 2022-23, Fife had 15,100 people who were economically inactive due to long-term illness, this is 32% of the working age population in Fife, in-line with the Scottish averages of 31.9%.

The [Scottish Household survey](#) 2019 shows that Fife has significantly higher percentage of households with members with long-term physical or mental health condition (34%) than the Scottish average (24%) and this tendency has been the case for the last three years.

Disabled people, as well as facing increasing barriers to the workplace are also experiencing worse outcomes in terms of personal safety. On top of this, disability aggravated crime in Fife has been increasing year-on-year with 40 charges in 2022-23, increasing from 27 charges in 2021-22.

Language Barriers

Another major factor to consider in accessibility are language barriers. Fife is a relatively diverse region for Scotland, with people from a range of different places around the globe. The [National Records of Scotland](#) shows that in Fife there are over 13,000 people from the European Union living in Fife, with 9,000 from Asia and 9,000 from other countries around the world.



They also highlighted the most popular non-English languages that are spoken across Scotland:

1. Polish (54,186 people)
2. Urdu (23,394 people)
3. Punjabi languages (23,150 people)
4. Chinese languages (16,830 people)
5. French (14,623 people)



This is reflected to a certain extent in Fife, with other languages such as Romanian being more prevalent in recent years. As such, it is important that the correct translation and interpretation provisions are in place to ensure that speakers of other languages are able to access the same opportunities as English speakers.

British Sign Language (BSL) and Hearing Loss

The [RNID has highlighted](#) that it is difficult to ascertain an exact number of users throughout the UK, however there is an estimated 151,000 BSL users throughout the UK. According to the most recent [Census](#), in Scotland, 13,000 people used BSL in their home environment. There are approximately 200 BSL users in Fife (BSL Plan 2023).

Facing communication barriers as well are people who have hearing loss who might not be BSL users. Action on Hearing ([2015](#)) for instance reported that it was estimated that one in six people in Scotland are deaf or have hearing loss and that this proportion would increase with an ageing population.

Digital Exclusion and Poverty

As services become more digitally active, some people can slip through the cracks due to lack of resources or digital literacy. Poverty is a barrier that has been exacerbated in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and current cost of living crisis. The [Plan4Fife's Tackling Poverty and Preventing Crisis report](#) highlights how many people are impacted by poverty in Fife. The latest data shows that 23.2% of children in Fife are living



in relative poverty, with 18.5% in absolute poverty. This is higher than the national average of 21% and 16.5%.

Digital literacy is a barrier that will become more prevalent as services become more digitally focused. Disability and economic deprivation are not the only barriers when it comes to accessing online services and resources, age can also be an additional barrier. The [Office for National Statistics](#) highlights that Fife currently has an ageing population, the median age has raised from 43.7 years to 44.5 years, with the old age dependency ratio also increasing.



Commentary – FCE perspective

Accessible communications has the potential to impact positively all protected characteristics. Under the Equality Act 2010, services have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for those with additional barriers, whether that be providing interpretation for service users or implementing software to assist members of staff with their work.

There are a wide range of different barriers that people face when it comes to communications. At FCE, we receive requests for advice and guidance on the following barriers most often:

1. **Language Barriers**
2. **Visual Impairment and Learning Difficulties**
3. **Inclusive Workplaces**
4. **Digital exclusion and poverty**

One of [Fife Centre for Equalities'](#) (FCE) objectives is not only improving their own accessibility practices but assisting local groups and organisations to make their services more accessible. Our ongoing surveys, enabling reporting on [Community Concerns](#) and [Hate Crime 3rd Party Reporting](#), our [Equality Testers](#) initiative (and upcoming app) are all easy ways for individuals and groups to feedback any barriers they have faced when trying to take part in public participation opportunities or access support and advice from Fife Council.

Working Examples – addressing Language Barriers, Visual Impairment

At FCE we try our best to ensure our online services are as inclusive as possible. One tool that we use for this is our **accessibility plugins**, which provide a range of different useful tools to assist in reading, listening and watching our content:



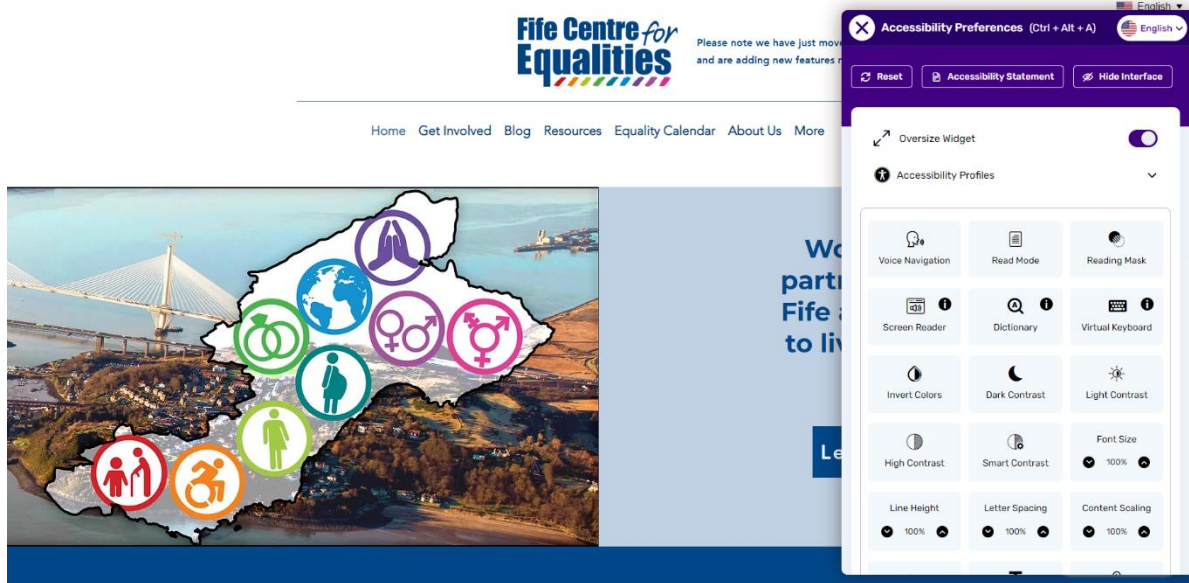


Figure 1 - An example of the accessibility widget on FCE's website

The plugin allows for small, quality of life improving features such as a **reading mask for people with conditions like ADHD**, to screen reading capabilities for the visually impaired. There are also **pre-set profiles** that users can pick in order to quickly achieve their desired pre-set.

On top of this, the webpage's content can also be **translated to multiple languages** using the Google Translate function. Although it is not 100% accurate, it can make a huge different for our clients who may not usually access our content due to barriers like language. The example below showcases the visually impaired profile, as well as the translation feature:



Figure 2 - An example of the translation and visually impaired preset on the FCE website.

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Plugins like the example above are a great help for improving the accessibility of the website.

That is just one aspect of how we can communicate with clients and service users inclusively, as mentioned previously, digitally excluded individuals would struggle to access our website. To help address this, we always ask our clients what their **preferred method of contact is**, whether it be text messages, letters or emails / websites.

We are incredibly lucky to have an extremely talented team of **multilingual staff** that can assist when communicating with clients and promoting our work, as shown in the Minority Ethnic 60+ Project poster (right).

Last year, FCE also recently moved to a ground floor office, to make it easier for clients with additional requirements and mobility issues to visit us for in-person support.

Fife Centre for Equalities
60+
Minority Ethnic
60+ Project

Health 健康 صحت		Sănătate Здоровье Zdrowie
1-1 Support 一對一協助 سیپورٹ		Support Поддержка Wsparcie
Information 資訊 معلومات		Informație Информация Informacja
Advice 建議 مشورہ		Sfaturi Советы Porady
Befriending 交友 دوست مددگارہ		Împrietenire Услуги дружбы Przyjazni

Minority Ethnic older people in Fife can now use our support to access public services.

Fife 的少數民族長者現在可以使用我們的協助來獲得公共服務。

فائف کے اقلیتی بزرگ اب ہماری مدد سے پبلک سروسز کی رسائی حاصل کرسکتے ہیں

Vârșnicii etnici minoritari din Fife au acum acces la asistență pentru a accesa serviciile publice.

Пожилые люди из национальных меньшинств в Файф сейчас могут воспользоваться нашей поддержкой для доступа к государственным услугам.

Starsi ludzie w Fife należący do mniejszości narodowej mogą teraz korzystać z naszego wsparcia uzyskując dostęp do świadczeń publicznych.

Cantonese (Yi Mei): 07881 925301
 Romanian (Otilia): 07826 753539

Urdu (Mamoona): 07827 405915
Punjabi

For other languages, we will find you the right interpreter.

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Understanding inclusive workspaces and reasonable adjustments

The U.K. Government has produced a list of [potential reasonable adjustments that employers must be aware](#) of in order to assist disabled employees and applicants. These include:

1. **application forms**, for example providing forms in Braille or audio formats
2. **aptitude tests**, for example giving extra time to complete the tests
3. **dismissal or redundancy**
4. **discipline and grievances**
5. **interview arrangements**, such as providing wheelchair access, communicator support
6. making sure the workplace has the **right facilities and equipment** for disabled workers or someone offered a job
7. **promotion, transfer and training** opportunities
8. terms of employment, including pay
9. work-related benefits like access to **recreation or refreshment facilities**

In 2018 the United Nations (UN) performed a [review of the U.K.](#) in order to gain an insight on how well disabled people were treated. They found that legal standards need to be improved to make:

- the **physical environment**,
- **housing**,
- **transport**,
- **information** and other services more **accessible to disabled people**.

Disability Passports

Disability (or reasonable adjustment) passports were created in order to support people with disabilities in getting the correct support within the workplace. In 2019, [TUC](#) had found that 1 in 10 disabled people had dropped out of work in the UK.

Disability passports aim to not only remind employers of their duties to staff but to make it easier for disabled employees to explain what they

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need to support them in their day-to-day activities. Follow the FCE website for our upcoming briefing on this topic.

Understanding Digital Exclusion and experiences of older age groups

Each year, the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) (EHRC) publish their findings on equalities and human rights in Scotland and the UK. One of the key points they raised was digital literacy:

“Older adults (aged 60 years and over) are still less likely to use the internet and online security measures than other age groups. In 2019, 43% of people aged 75 and over used the internet, compared with 99% of 16–24-year-olds.”

It was recommended by EHRC, that **offline services are not neglected and are able to meet the needs** of older people who may be digitally excluded. Following from this, it also highlighted the barriers faced by people with disabilities, with only 71% of adults reporting a disability or condition regularly using the internet, in comparison to 90% for those without a disability.

Again, EHRC’s recommendations focused on ensuring offline services are of the same quality and availability for those who are digitally excluded. [Research by Scope](#) found that 60% of people feel that they underestimate how many disabled people there are, with 49% of working-age adults felt excluded from society due to their disability or condition.

The importance of accessibility cannot be understated. It assists people in navigating both the virtual and physical world. Accessibility can be categorised into different sections that each come with their own set of recommendations:

- **Visual** – audio, audio descriptions, braille documentation, telephone calls
- **Mobility** – ramp access, clear sign-posting, changing facilities, disabled bathrooms
- **Auditory** – subtitling, British Sign Language (BSL) translation, SMS contact
- **Cognitive** – easy-read documents, plain english

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Understanding Digital Exclusion and Poverty

As mentioned previously, poverty in Fife continues to rise and is above the national averages. Last year, the [Scottish Government](#) updated their poverty insights. It was found that **57% of working age adults** were in relative poverty after housing costs.

[Inspiring Scotland](#) published a report on digital exclusion in Scotland, and how it impacts individuals and groups. They found that some of the primary reasons for not accessing the internet is cost, as well as having no interest in using online services.

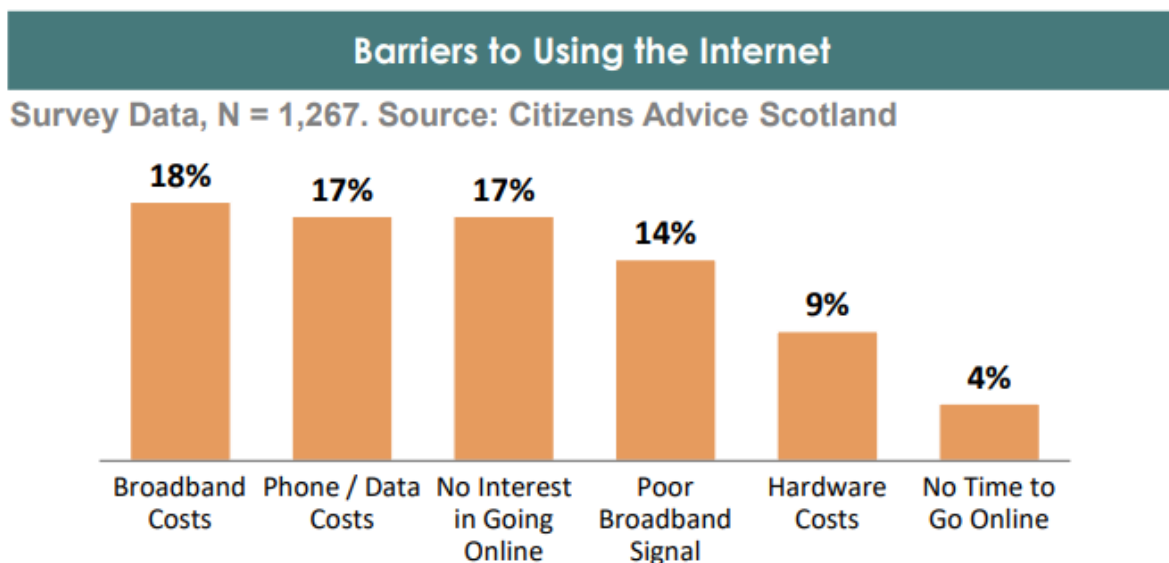


Figure 3 - Barriers to using the internet, Inspiring Scotland

Their recommendations include **not only prioritizing providing hardware and classes on digital skills** to those most at risk, but **creating a culture of mentoring, confidence and support** across public services.

Research from the [Lloyds Consumer Index](#) in 2021 found that **21% of adults in the UK do not have the basic skills required** to use the internet in their day-to-day life.

There are concerns and challenges, particularly for the third sector. The most prominent one being the **cost of digital inclusion and infrastructure** to small, local organisations.



Implications and recommendations - For Organisations and Services

- The key recommendation is to provide a balance between online and in person service provision.
- When designing for online, use contemporary guides and frameworks that are tipped towards the end user experience, an not functioning mainly for the service provider
- In-person points of contact can assist and navigate online services as well as understanding specific needs of clients, and still use the same data infrastructure

Useful guides for online accessibility

There are a number of different guidelines that organisations and employers are recommended to follow in order to meet accessibility requirements. One of the most prominent being the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG).

The WCAG guidelines emphasise what is required to ensure that websites are following best practice. It takes into consideration aspects such as:

Visual Aspects:

- Alternative Text
- Clear, Simple Text
- Consistency Style
- Contrasting Colours
- Closed Captioning on Videos
- Not using images of text
- Functional Aspects:
 - Descriptive Links
 - Keyboard-Only Navigation
 - Form fields are correctly labelled



- Responsive, mobile-friendly layouts
- Audio Aspects:
 - Transcripts of any audio or video
 - Ensure any webpages are screen reader-ready
 - Let users pause any auto-playing content
- Cognitive Aspects:
 - Easy-read options available
 - Logical website layout
 - Easy-to-understand headings and labels
 - Highlight any changes in language

On top of these guidelines, the [U.K. Government published their own recommendations](#) that assist in reducing the need for additional accessible format versions of documents, such as:

- Keeping consistent, plain, and simple language
- Ensuring paragraph is concise and evenly spaced
- Using minimum 14-point font sizing

ONLINE Accessibility – Pros and Cons:

The purpose of accessibility is to ensure that as many people as possible can access the information, services or activities that they need. As such, there are a number of pros and cons to improving accessibility for your organisation.

[Granicus](#) and the [ADA](#) have published interesting articles that highlight some of the benefits to online engagement, including points such as:

- Reaching groups and individuals who may not normally engage or be aware of your work.
- Improved access to content for people with additional barriers.
- Increased website traffic, due to more people being able to view your content.
- Improved website search engine optimisation (SEO), guiding more traffic to your pages.



For the “cons”, there are very few when it comes to improving online accessibility, the biggest barrier that organisations often face when trying to improve their practices is cost, both in terms of both staff time and monetary costs. Improving accessibility for websites, forms, social media content and more can be a huge learning curve for teams, resulting in increased time spent on development. On top of this, organisations pose the risk of inadvertently digitally excluding those who may not have the skills or resources to access the internet and digital devices.

The [Digital Heritage Hub](#) highlights a number of ways to improve digital inclusion for service users, some examples include:

- Examining your current audiences, what groups are you not reaching currently? How can you use your current resources to reach them?
 - This could be anything from posters in local noticeboards and community hubs to a physical presence at community events and local fayres.
- Do you have alternatives for information that relies on service users using smartphones e.g. QR codes?
- Providing paper copies of online forms and surveys for individuals to use.
- When possible, encourage service users to visit in person to access online resources, with support, to improve confidence and skills.



IN-PERSON Accessibility

Best practice for organisations – a basic overview:

Event / Venue-Specific:

Fife Centre for Equalities created their own [accessible events toolkit](#), which aimed to act as a step-by-step guide for anyone organising meetings, training sessions, conferences and other events whilst looking to create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, where all people can feel welcomed and included.

Some key items to look out for include:

- Public Transport Links
- Disabled Parking Spaces
- Entryways / Corridors wide enough for a wheelchair
- Accessible toilet / Changing places
- Is there lift or ramp access?
- Does the building have its own hearing loop support?
- Accessible seating arrangements
- Interpretation options for attendees (e.g. BSL, alternative languages)

The [Social Care Institute for Excellence](#) have also created guidance that assists individuals and organisations in choosing suitable venues. [Inclusive Communication Scotland](#) have a comprehensive guide to inclusive events preparation, covering items such as the time of the event to how refreshments should be organised and provided:

Timing:

- For events within the working day it is advisable that the start and end times are within the period **10.00 – 15.00**. Meetings with an earlier start or later finish may cause difficulties for people with caring responsibilities.
- It is important that meetings longer than about **2 hours allow for one or more short breaks**. In timing the breaks thought should be given to scheduling them around meal times (e.g. for people who may need regular food intake relating to a health condition) or prayer times. Such breaks will also benefit all those present and will assist concentration.

Venue:

- Is there disabled parking near to the venue?



- Is the route from and nearest entrance to the car park **easily accessible**?
- Is there a fully **accessible toilet near to the meeting room** i.e. one that will accommodate a wheelchair user, possibly accompanied by a personal assistant?
- Does the room incorporate a **hearing loop** and are those who will be running the event aware of how it works?
- Is there **private space** near to the venue for people who may need to use them for a short period e.g. for religious observance, to administer medication etc.

The full guidance can be found on [their website here](#).

IN-PERSON Accessibility – Pros and Cons

Similarly to online practices, there are pros and cons to improving methods of in-person accessibility as well. The not-for-profit organisation, [Dimensions](#) has shared a useful guide to in-person assistive technology and the benefits that it has on both the organisation and clients. Some of these benefits are:

- Improves confidence and independence of those who utilise the necessary equipment or technology.
- Inclusive planning allows for more people to engage and use the service or take part in activities.
- Clients are more likely to use your service again if they are able to access it without facing any barriers.
- Your organisation will have a good reputation by supporting others.

The main negative aspect of inperson engagement is the cost of time, as well as being limited in reach – however at FCE we consider that this is usually counterbalanced by the value of directly communicating with clients and understanding theirs needs better and quicker.



Communities and equality groups

Useful resources in Fife

[A wee guide to accessing support in Fife:](#)

As part of the Minority Ethnic 60+ Project, FCE developed a short booklet with useful numbers for those struggling to access the services they need. It includes interpretation options as well as other general services.

[Contact Scotland BSL:](#)

Contact Scotland BSL focuses on 24/7, video interpretation for organisations and individuals from across Scotland. It is a useful resource for anyone looking for interpretation with meetings, online events etc. They also have an app that users can download if they do not have access to a computer.

[People 1st – Easy Read guides and services:](#)

People 1st (Fife) support adults with learning disabilities and difficulties from across Fife. They host regular groups for members to discuss the challenges they face and opportunities for them to contribute in public consultations and decisions. All of their resources are available in an easy-read format.

[Fife BSL Plan:](#)

The BSL plan for Fife is a roadmap for how the support and services will evolve and contribute to public services. It works across the Fife Council, the Health & Social Care Partnership, NHS Fife and Fife College.

[NHS Fife BSL:](#)

NHS Fife's BSL services are available to anyone looking for interpretation support when accessing NHS resources, mental health support and calling the emergency services. They are also a key component of the BSL plan for Fife.

[Hard of Hearing Groups:](#)

Across Fife there are a few hard of hearing groups that support individuals with social events, regular meetings and useful information on interpretation, BSL lessons and hearing aids.



Fife Community Interpreting Service:

The Fife Community Interpreting Service (FCIS) supports groups and individuals with interpretation at events, one-on-one sessions, meetings and more.

Disability Equality Scotland – Easy Read Services:

Disability Equality Scotland can provide easy read translation and formatting for a range of different documents and fliers. On top of this, they also provide easy read training for those looking to learn more about it.



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Fife Centre for Equalities (FCE) is a local charity, funded by Fife Council, with the charitable aims of raising awareness and understanding amongst all communities and community groups in Fife of equality and diversity.

FCE provides access to appropriate information, assistance and training to communities and community groups in support of fair and inclusive community development.

Our values are to work with honesty, integrity, respect, and transparency, and strive to demonstrate a fully inclusive approach in everything we do. We work with communities and with partners to help make Fife a fairer and more equal place to live, work and study.



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