# Accessible Communications Guide for Professionals

This accessible communications guide is designed to inform you or your organisation of aspects of communication that are important considerations when you are in contact with people who have communication difficulties, whether that is face to face or through other means of contact.

# Contents

Social Care and Wellbeing Act Wales 2014

Local authorities are required to:
Provide a bi-lingual Information, Advice and Assistance service.
This will make it easy for everyone to access relevant, clear information and advice about all of the services available in the area. This will help people make decisions about the support they need to live the life they want. This service will be welcoming and supportive to help people find solutions early on. This service will be a preventative service in itself.
Information and Learning Hub – www.ccwales.org.uk/getting-in-on-the-act-hub/

# 1. Why is inclusive communication important?

Successful communication with those we are in contact with is a two way process and though you may be sending out information in a variety of ways the message that you want to deliver may not always be received by all of your intended target groups.

Increasing the accessibility and inclusive nature of all of your communications, such as posters, newsletters, promotional videos, websites and the use of social media, will ensure that your message reaches as many people as possible. It is important to consider that one size doesn't fit all and that different impairment groups have different requirements.

As an individual or organisation you do not need to be an expert on different impairments and medical conditions. However you should be aware of how to increase the effectiveness of your communications for everybody, and not just your non-disabled contacts.

**Impairment Groups that may face additional communication barriers:**

Sensory Impairment: For example; people who are severely sight impaired or partially sighted, have a hearing impairment or speech and language impairment.

Physical Impairment: For example; full time wheelchair users, those who are ambulant, and amputees.

Intellectual Impairment: For example; learning disability or difficulty.

Health/chronic conditions: For example; neurological, Parkinson's, muscular-skeletal, rheumatoid arthritis, cardiac, respiratory, diabetes and stroke.
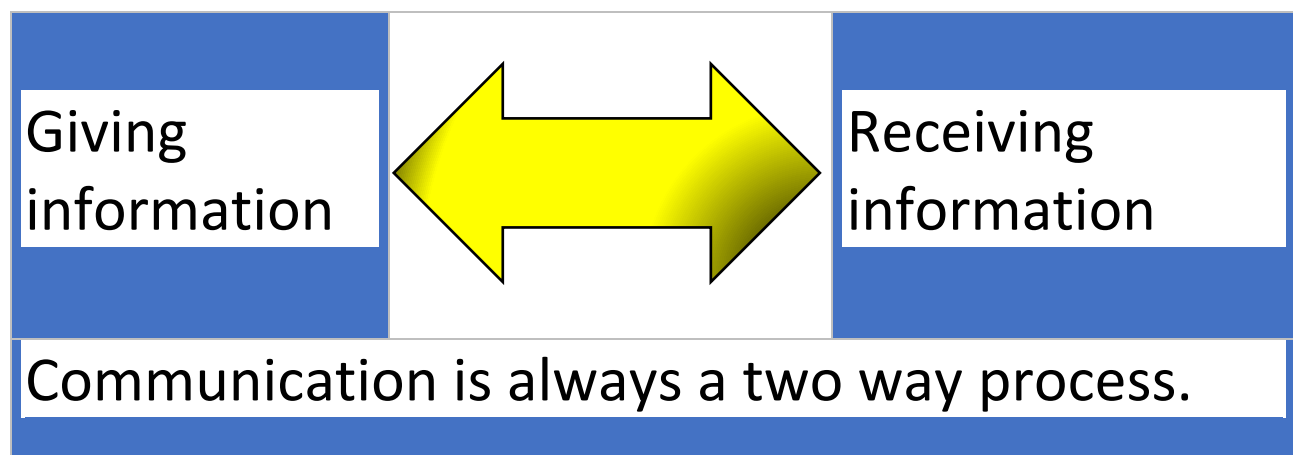
Mental Health Issues: For example; anxiety, depression, bi-polar and dementia.

In addition to considering impairment groups other factors need to be taken into account which may be a potential barrier to effective communication. This may be for example; dyslexia, an individual's reading age, language of choice.

**If information is not accessible, a person may:**

- Not have their voice heard or feel in control of certain communications.
- Not be aware of your opportunity or service.
- Avoid opportunities, offers and services.
- Lack confidence in the inclusivity of the organisation.
- Not turn up to an event, appointment, or assessment.
- Feel they need to ask a lot of questions – before, during and/or after the event, appointment or assessment because they haven't fully understood.
- Not get the best out of the interaction and potentially disengage with services.

The Equality Act 2010 protects people, including disabled people and other equality strands, from discrimination in employment and provision of goods and services. The emphasis is placed on organisations to be proactive rather than reactive with reasonable adjustments being made. A best practice approach is the best way to ensure as an individual or organisation that you are not open to challenge.

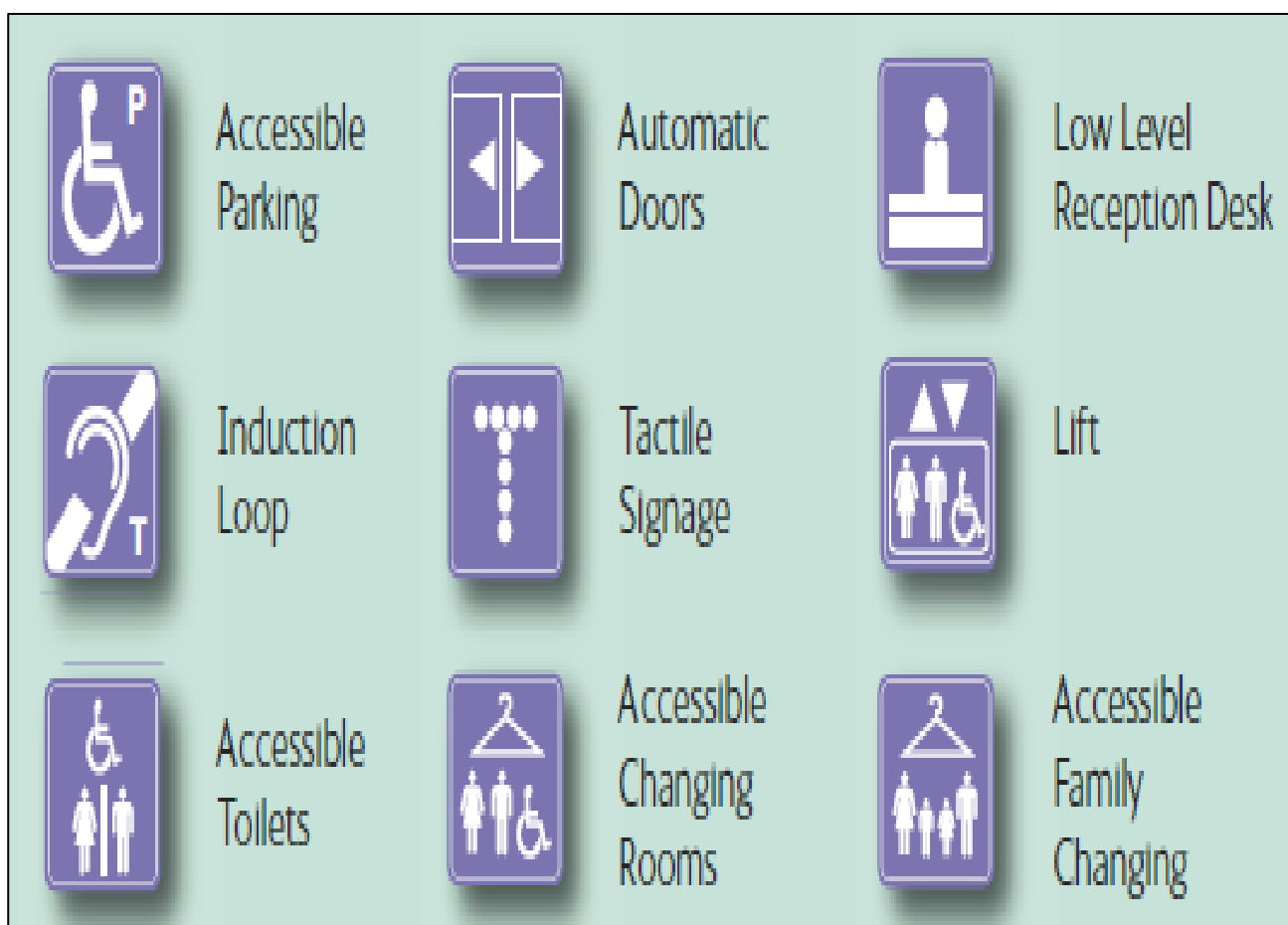| Giving information | Receiving information |
|---|---|
| Communication is always a two way process. | |

# 2. Inclusion and accessibility

Inclusion is the process of engaging with a diverse audience that includes everybody regardless of ability or impairment. Accessibility ensures that disabled people can access services without barriers that may or may not be associated with impairment.

Inclusive communications are designed to reach a broad range of people with an accessible message embedded throughout. Creating an accessible communication may require providing alternative formats or options to access the original message if the 'standard' offer is not accessible.

For example there are a range of symbols and signs that can graphically illustrate facilities many of which are internationally recognised.

| Accessible Parking | Automatic Doors | Low Level Reception Desk |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Induction Loop | Tactile Signage | Lift |
| Accessible Toilets | Accessible Changing Rooms | Accessible Family Changing |

# 3. Language and terminology

Language and terminology can be a significant barrier if used incorrectly and can create a negative perception towards disabled people.

**Examples of acceptable and preferred alternatives**

| Unacceptable ❌ | Preferred Alternative ✔ |
|---|---|
| Handicapped / cripple / invalid / special needs | Disabled person / participant |
| Wheelchair bound / confined to a wheelchair | Wheelchair user |
| Mentally handicapped / retarded / retard | Person / participant with a learning disability |
| Able-bodied / Normal | Non-disabled |
| Suffers from … (an impairment) | (The person) has … (an impairment) |
| **Mental** | **Person with mental health difficulties** |
| The Deaf | Deaf / hard of hearing |
| The Blind | Blind / partially sighted |
| Midget | Dwarf / person of short stature or restricted growth |
| Spastic | Person with cerebral palsy |

It is always useful to check what current language and terminology is being promoted via https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability

# 4. Accessible formats

Having inclusive communications will increase the amount of people that your message reaches, however at times, the type of communication produced will not always be accessible to certain groups. For example a person with a visual impairment may not always be able to read small print on a poster, a person who is deaf may not be able to hear a voice on a video and a person with learning disabilities may not be able to understand a document without the format of Easy Read.

**Potential / Probable communication barriers for different impairment groups:**

**Visual impairment:** small print on documents, poor colour contrast, blurred or unclear font, inaccessible websites, poor use of imagery, and videos without audio commentary.

**Hearing impairment:** videos without any captioning, face to meetings or events without British Sign Language Interpreter present, the lack of visual aids or demonstrations utilised within meetings, and people exaggerating lip movement or covering their mouths when speaking to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing.

**Physical impairment:** positioning of posters and signage, weight of printed documents, and website layout (too many clicks).

**Intellectual impairment:** complex use of language, presentation style of information, layout of websites and documents, colour contrast, lengthy communications, and lack of appropriate imagery.

**Health conditions:** language and terminology, style and tone of message, and layout.

When the above potential/probable barriers can and have been identified it means communications can be adapted, thus removing the possibility of isolating your message. The above examples do not mean that you should never produce videos, posters or websites, rather that you are aware of the barriers they pose for certain groups.

**Types of accessible formats:**
- Accessible Word and PDF documents
- Audio versions
- Braille and Moon
- British Sign Language
- Easy Read and Makaton
- Hearing / Induction loops
- Large print
- Mobile SMS Text Messaging
- Subtitles (captioning)
- Telephone
- Textphone
- Text to speech / speech to text
- Translation Services (CCBC uses Language Line)

You do not need to be able to produce all accessible formats internally and as previously stated organisations are available to help with requests. However the use of readily available technology can allow you to increase the accessibility of the documents you currently produce.

A word or text document can be used to create a transcript of a video or conversation. Most word processers allow you to increase the size and select the style of a range of fonts and most electronic documents allow you to change the colour, style and contrast of the communications they produce.

Screen readers can be easily acquired or even downloaded free of charge allowing people who are visually impaired or intellectually impaired people to access information via speech. Screen readers can access a range of digital communications so it is useful to add information via the 'Alt Text' function. This can be done by formatting pictures, charts, tables or other objects and then inserting a title and a description within the format function.

Some alternative formats such as Braille will more than likely need to be sourced from specialist organisations. There are approximately 12,000 Braille users within the UK and Braille is now commonly embossed on signage. The Royal Mail will also deliver Braille items free of charge under the 'Articles for the Blind' scheme. This service also extends to audio and electronic media as well as mobility aids.

There are approximately 125,000 adults who are deaf in the UK with an additional estimated 20,000 children. British Sign Language (BSL) is the first or preferred communication method of some of these people. Many individuals who are not deaf also use BSL either as interpreters or to communicate with friends and family.

Easy Read is an alternative format intended to assist people with an intellectual impairment to understand complex information by shortening and simplifying text and language and accompanying these with images or icons. If you cannot have a document translated into Easy Read or there are additional costs then using plain, simple language with clear headings accompanied by appropriate images will help.
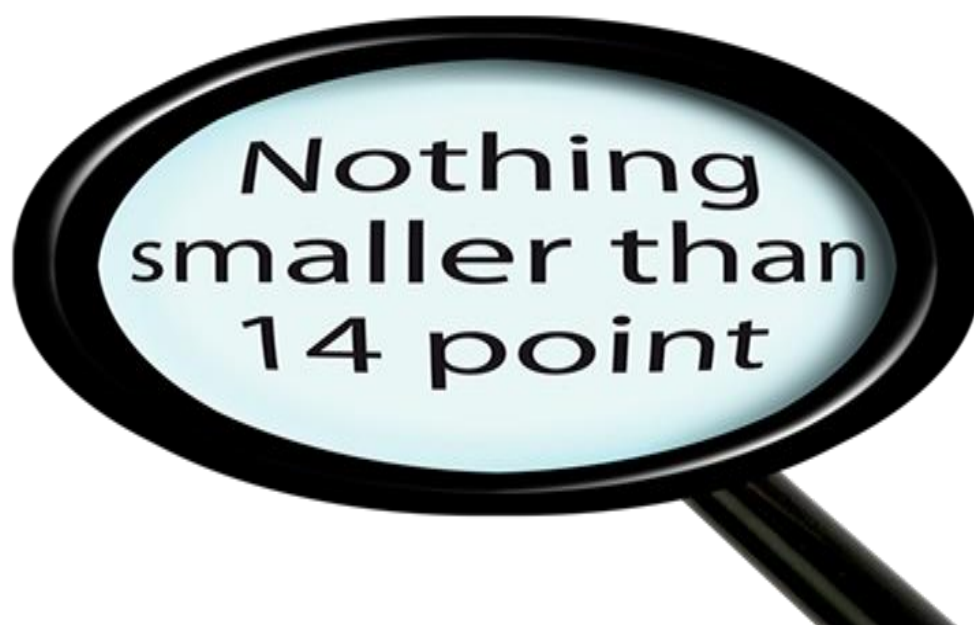
# 5. Good practice for different accessible formats

This section highlights some top tips that you can use when producing different communications. It is important to remember that not every document needs to be produced more than once.  Using the following information when planning and creating communications will increase its inclusiveness.

In the UK most people read from left to right which means your eyes automatically look to the left of the page initially and can often find it harder to see text when it is centralised. Therefore it is recommended that your text is left-aligned or 'ranged left'.

People are taught to read using lower case letters with capitals only employed at the start of sentences or for nouns. Full sentences in capital letters, as well as headings, titles or individual words can also make it more difficult for some people to read which is why 'sentence case' writing is deemed the most accessible style of writing.

Font size 12 is considered to be the minimum size which people can read comfortably.  When producing Easy Read communications size 14 is recommended as minimum and this will also be the recommended preference for many people with a visual impairment.



Nothing smaller than 14 point

| | |
|---|---|
| Text should not be centred. | Text should be left-aligned or ranged left. |
| Justified text is harder to read because of the additional spaces. | Unjustified text with even spaces is easier to read. |
| Avoid *italics* or <u>underlining</u> for emphasis. | Use **bold,** scale or a different style font for emphasis. |
| ALL CAPITAL LETTERS ARE HARDER TO READ. | Use 'sentence case' for text which includes upper and lower case letters. |
| Serif fonts like Times New Roman can distract people making them difficult to read. | San serif fonts like Calibri, Arial or Verdana are clearer to read. |
| Do not use font smaller than 12 point. | 12 point font should be used as minimum.<br>14 point font for Easy Read. |

**Images**

Good, clear imagery can give a more precise understanding to the communication you are producing as well as helping to convey a mood, expression or even highlight the accessibility of an opportunity of service.
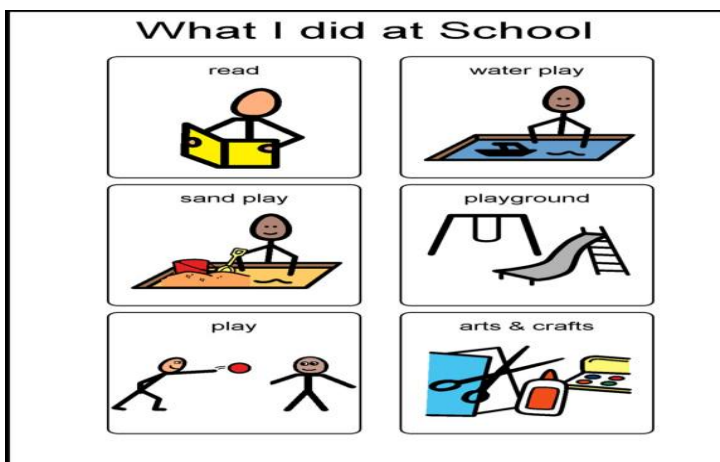
Imagery is also important even for those impairment groups that may not be able to necessarily see or understand the image initially but who can, with the use of a screen reader or a tagged description, still gain a clear message.

Where possible you should include images of people from different impairment groups, ethnicities and other equality strands.  However you should ensure that these images are positive ones. Images should relate directly and clearly to the opportunity or service that you are advertising in order to reach the widest audience of people with disabilities.
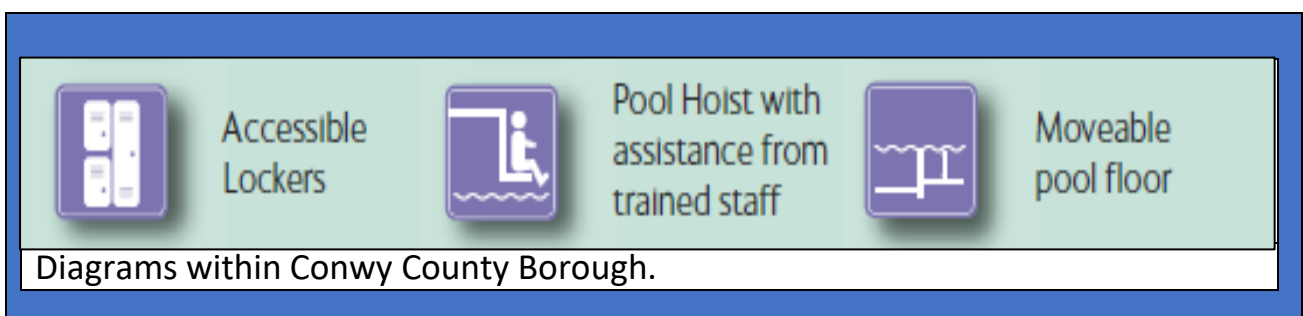
Text can be placed over an image, but this could become difficult to read if the colour contrast or shading is similar to the text. Should this occur the text will become less defined and become illegible to readers. Using textboxes will also help to clearly define text and help highlight fonts.

Get Involved. Get Active.

Get Involved. Get Active.
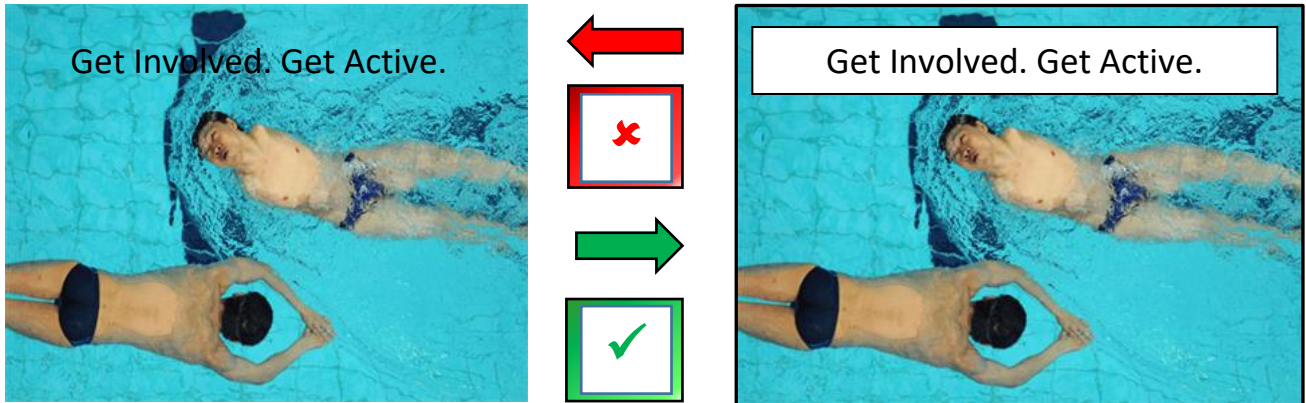
Diagrams are different to images. Diagrams use symbols rather than words or images. The use of diagrams can be particularly useful when communicating with people with a learning disability. The diagrams used should be simple and be clearly distinguishable, especially compared to diagrams from a similar document that may be in a similar format.

What I did at School

read
water play
sand play
playground
play
arts & crafts

PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

Accessible Lockers

Pool Hoist with assistance from trained staff

Moveable pool floor

Diagrams within Conwy County Borough.

**Colour**

The use of colour is often an integral part of communications. Some organisations or facilities will have official colours or a palette to choose from. These colours often match a specific logo and make communications easily recognisable to a targeted and sometimes wider audience.

Using too many colours or colours that do not contrast well can have a negative effect. Certain colour combinations may disorientate an individual making images and text blurred or very difficult to even see at all. Many colours in a certain area of a document may also grab the attention of the reader and distract from the intended message. This may well be the case for somebody with a learning disability, or who has a different first language or has a lower than average reading age.



An example of marketing with a strong colour contrast.

**General layout**

To ensure that the information can be accessed readily the document should be laid out in a clear, simple way. The information within the document should have clear, distinct sections that are spaced out appropriately.

Headings and titles are vitally important and allow people to search for and understand exactly what they need from the information provided. Assistive technology such as screen readers will pick up headings so it is imperative that they are correctly inserted.

Images within documents should have a clearly defined area and should avoid overlapping any text. Where possible images should be displayed within a consistent layout in larger documents as this will help some readers process the information and become more familiar with the document.

Assistive technology will help readers scan images as well as text so they should always have information inserted into the 'alternative text' function whether it is just a title or a more in depth description of what the image contains. Visually impaired people can become confused or frustrated with documents that contain images without 'alternative text' as their screen readers will produce 'blank' messages.

Organisations may have brand guidelines that recommend or restrict the author to a certain lay out. If you do not feel that the layout is clear and simple enough then this should be reviewed internally.

**Good practice**

Organisations will use a variety of software packages to produce a wide range of documents that are intended to engage with their target audience. More often than not fonts, text layout, images, colour and general layout can be changed relatively easily and by considering the above information you will be able to increase the accessibility of your document, and therefore its reach and effectiveness.

# 6. Best practice

The development of an inclusive communications policy by your organisation will ensure that you are best placed to engage with as many people as possible. As well as ensuring that all your colleagues are aware of this policy, especially those responsible for producing any documentation or media, it will allow you to increase the reach and effectiveness of any information that is produced.

Where possible your accessible communications guide should encourage feedback from people outside your own organisation as well as those within it. Suggestions should be welcomed and used to continually update and adjust the policy in the document.

Accessibility should be identified as an integral part of any documentation or media produced at the start of the process. The inclusive nature of information should be consistent where possible and time and budget should be identified prior to documents being finalised.

Accessibility should not just be viewed as an afterthought. Ensuring documentation and inclusivity does not mean that your brand or design must be compromised. If you are sourcing external designers for the production of media then they should be made aware of the importance of accessibility at the design phase.

Inclusive design can actually save time, budget and resources as it will make it less likely that you have to redesign documents or produce different 'accessible' versions of the same document.

Opening lines of communication with internal and external parties can be extremely useful, not only to attract new people but to improve the service you offer currently. Any barriers that are identified should be seen as constructive criticism and if addressed properly will allow your club, facility or organisation to improve levels of inclusion and access.

Just because your organisation has always communicated in the same way, potentially with relative success, does not mean it is the most effective way of engaging with your target audience. Being proactive is an important consideration at all times in your communication practices.

# 7. Resources, further information & references

**Sensory Impairment**

- Action on Hearing Loss; www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

- Articles for the Blind; www.blindness.org

- British Sign; www.british-sign.co.uk

- Centre of Sign-Sight-Sound (formerly North Wales Deaf Association); www.info@signsightsound.org.uk

- National Deaf Children's Society; www.ndcs.org.uk

- Remark translation; a specialist language and communication consultancy; www.remark.uk.com

- RNIB; www.rnib.uk

- Sense Cymru; www.sense.org

**Easy Read**

- Easy Read Online; **www.easy-readonline.co.uk**

- Mencap; **www.mencap.org.uk/easyread-video**

- Afasic Cymru; **www.afasiccymru.org.uk**

- Makaton; Diagrams, images; **https://www.makaton.org/**

**Screen Readers: Examples**

- JAWS

- Microsoft

- Apple SIRI

**Other Resources**

- Pre Hospital Communication Guide App – Anyone can download and use the App for Free.  It is available on iOS, Blackberry and Android:-

- iOS – search for 'PreHospApp'
- Blackberry – search for 'pre hospital app'
- Android – search for 'Pre-Hospital Communication App'

- Keep Safe Cymru Card; www.north-wales.police.uk/news-and-appeals/keep-safe-cymru-card-introduced

  Those carrying the card are provided with information on how to keep safe and how to access help if required through the scheme.  It also allows carers, family and friends to provide and put together information which can be vital to the police in the event of a vulnerable person needing assistance.

- ASD Info Wales; www.asdinfowales.co.uk/home/

- Conwy County Borough Council Respect Booklet; http://intranet.corp.conwy.gov.uk/en/Main/Equality-and-Diversity/Respect-Booklet/Respect-Booklet.aspx

**Reference**

This document has been adapted from 'Access for all: inclusive communications' produced by English Federation of Disability Sport.

www.efds.co.uk

http://www.efds.co.uk/resources/case_studies/2697_access_for_all_efds_inclusive_communications_guide

**Language and Terminology**

Office for Disability Issues: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability