



social care
institute for excellence

MARCH 2012

Making events accessible



www.scie.org.uk

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) improves the lives of people who use care services by sharing knowledge about what works.

We are a leading improvement support agency and an independent charity working with adults', families' and children's care and support services across the UK. We also work closely with related services such as health care and housing.

We improve the quality of care and support services for adults and children by:

- identifying and sharing knowledge about what works and what's new
- supporting people who plan, commission, deliver and use services to put that knowledge into practice
- informing, influencing and inspiring the direction of future practice and policy.

First published in Great Britain in March 2012
by the Social Care Institute for Excellence

© SCIE

All rights reserved

This report is available online
www.scie.org.uk

Social Care Institute for Excellence

54 Baker Street
London W1U 7EX
tel 020 7766 7400

www.scie.org.uk



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Summary | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 2 |
| How this resource came about | 2 |
| Choosing a venue | 3 |
| Public transport..... | 4 |
| Flat/level access | 4 |
| Parking, drop-off points and cycle racks | 5 |
| Entrances and entry systems..... | 6 |
| Accessible toilets and other accessible facilities..... | 7 |
| Equipment for people with hearing impairments | 8 |
| Background and noise | 8 |
| Space and distance to facilities..... | 9 |
| Familiarity for target audiences..... | 10 |
| Food and refreshments..... | 10 |
| Alarms and evacuation process..... | 11 |
| Reception and other venue staff | 11 |
| Moving around within the venue | 12 |
| Quiet or ‘chill out’ room and a prayer or faith room | 13 |
| Making events accessible: Planning the event..... | 13 |
| Advertise the event appropriately | 14 |
| Booking forms and access information | 14 |
| Telephone contact | 14 |
| Support staff | 15 |
| Accessible information | 16 |
| Developing the agenda | 17 |
| Accommodation | 17 |
| Choosing a date..... | 18 |
| Expenses | 18 |
| Directions..... | 19 |
| The event | 20 |
| Housekeeping, ground rules, introductions and greetings | 20 |
| Timing..... | 23 |

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Refreshments and food | 23 |
| After the event | 24 |

Summary

This resource is for anyone who is organising an event and wants to make it accessible. It is a practical handbook to make any event – whatever the size, whoever the participants – inclusive, so that everyone can take part in the way that best suits them.

‘Access is the same for non-disabled people as disabled people. You wouldn’t hold a meeting on the 10th floor with no lifts, or where there was nowhere to sit, or in pitch blackness or even where all documents were given out in Braille.’

Access is about giving people the equal opportunity to participate fully in whatever is being offered in the way that best suits them.

This resource sets out best practice for organising accessible events. It is important to work to achieve best practice when organising meetings and events, but there might be times when factors such as resources, availability of suitable venues and lack of time can mean it is not possible. Whilst people who use services are all too aware of such issues and will understand that they are sometimes beyond the control of organisers, it is important to include finances and adequate lead-in times at the planning stage wherever possible.

This resource has been compiled from the comments left on a ‘wiki’ website by people who use services about their own experiences. The result is a web resource that includes suggestions from a diverse range of disabled people from a broad range of backgrounds.

A ‘wiki’ website is one where the content can easily be edited and altered by a person using their own web browser. SCIE, working with an advisory group for people who use services, created an access-wiki website for people who use services, which allowed people who use services and other stakeholders to design, contribute and update the content as they saw fit.

This resource is split into three main sections:

- Choosing a venue
- Planning the event
- The event

The resource also gives checklists for organisers to work through to ensure they are making their event as inclusive and accessible as they can. Good communication with everyone – participants, the venues and anyone else taking part – is essential to achieving this.

The resource starts with an introductory section that explains how it came about and the approach that was taken to writing it. Instead of identifying different impairment groups, the resource concentrates on the different stages of organising and running an accessible event. This avoids repetition and the idea that everyone manages their impairment in the same way. As well as highlighting the importance of asking people what their access needs are, the resource looks at the importance of moving beyond the room that the event takes place in, and suggests a more holistic approach that

considers the wider issues which will impact on the participants' experience of inclusion, equality and parity.

Introduction

'I am not sure if you can make an event accessible to absolutely everyone. But there are a lot of things that can be done and can be seen to have been done, that show us that people have really tried to get it right.'

The aim of this resource is to help you plan events and meetings in the social care field that are accessible to people who use services.

The Disabled People's Movement's philosophy of 'nothing about us without us' is now widely accepted by service providers and policy makers. It advocates active involvement of disabled people in the planning of strategies and policies that affect their lives. Using this approach to planning events should mean that all events are accessible to people who use services. The provision of access is also covered by the Equality Act's requirements for reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

While the focus of this resource is on events in the social care field, many of the issues addressed are relevant to all meetings and events, so it can also be used more widely.

Access is about providing people with equal opportunity to participate fully - in the way that best suits them - whatever the activity. This equalities approach to access is fundamental and underlies the approach of this resource.

People who use services, including disabled people, know best about their own individual access needs, so it is key that organisers ask them. Whilst it is important to stress that what suits one person may act as a barrier to another - even if they have exactly the same impairment - it would be useful to know about some common points. This is discussed in the section on [Housekeeping, ground rules and introductions](#).

How this resource came about

When SCIE set out to update its previous resource to making events accessible, it wanted to ensure that people who use services had the opportunity to contribute. To achieve this, SCIE set up a wiki website that people could write their views on, and experiences of, access at events and meetings. This resource uses the information from the previous resource, together with the information written by people who use services on the wiki website.

The traditional approach to guidance on access is to organise information around the access requirements associated with specific impairments. Whilst there may be some advantages in doing this – for example if you are holding an impairment specific event – we have decided to look at different access issues at each stage of planning, organising and running an event. We have chosen this approach as it:

- avoids repetition
- challenges the idea that people with one form of impairment all experience and manage it the same way

- avoids assumptions that people neatly fit into one box rather than recognising that everyone is unique
- provides an action plan approach for event organisers.

This resource is designed to provide information about how you can make events accessible for everyone. Events can include one-to-one meetings, larger meetings, conferences and so on. The resource covers the different stages, from planning and support to evaluating the event once it has taken place.

The Equality Act requires anyone providing a service to make 'reasonable adjustments' to make the service accessible for disabled people. Running an event is covered by the definition of a service in the Act. This might mean having information available in alternative formats - for example in Braille, electronically or in 'Easy Read'. It does not mean you have to make an adjustment such as having information available in alternative formats if no one who needs such an adjustment is attending. You should ask people before the event (e.g. on the booking form) whether they need information in an alternative format or whether they have any other needs. As far as possible, you should try and meet these needs.

If you are holding an event outside your office, some access issues will be the responsibility of the venue as they are providing you with a service. Although it is not always clear who is responsible, a good guide may be that you are responsible for the meeting content and all related issues and that the venue is responsible for physical access. In practice, it is always best to check all access facilities as many venues claim they are accessible, but may actually not meet all the requirements of your guests. For example, some venues that are wheelchair accessible inside have steps at the entrance.

It is good to think about accessibility and have a budget for this from the beginning.

This resource is intended to help you think through access issues. Sometimes it is not possible to locate a venue that covers all the needs of a diverse group of people who use services. Whilst your aim is to make the event as accessible as possible so that everyone can take part, occasionally it is necessary to book somewhere that you know is not ideal. In such cases you should prioritise access - that is the most basic requirements must be flat access and accessible toilets.

Acknowledgement

This resource was written by Fran Branfield from the suggestions and comments made by people who use services on SCIE's access-wiki website.

Choosing a venue

Selecting a suitable venue for an event might seem straightforward but it is, in reality, much more complicated than it first appears. You should always visit the venue before booking it and take a checklist with you to look out for certain key access points. It is important to recognise that a checklist is not - and never will be - definitive. It should always be backed up by information from the people that use services who are participating in the event.

Use this checklist as a starting point when selecting a venue:

Public transport

Remember that it is not only the venue that needs to be accessible. It is equally important to check out local public transport - for example, train stations, accessible bus routes, accessible taxis and services like Dial-a-Ride, etc.

Where people are travelling by train it can be helpful for someone to meet them at the station if that is possible.

The following are comments made by people who use services:

'Wheelchair accessible vehicles with drivers who understand the needs of the wheelchair user are needed at the station. We need to know that we can pre-book these.'

'I can't travel on my own, so make sure someone can travel with me.'

Flat/level access

Checklist

You should – at the very least – make sure there is flat/level access from and to the:

- drop-off point
- local train station
- nearest bus stop
- entrance
- facilities
- restaurant or canteen
- main room
- break-out rooms.

Ensuring level access might seem obvious, but it is surprising how many venues do not have flat access. There are many access issues to look out for – from having no dropped curbs on the pavement outside the venue to having no visible alternative to a revolving door. One small step can be as much of a barrier for some people who use services as a flight of stairs can be for others.

Service users commented:

'Electric wheelchairs have a lower clearance for doors etc. A one-inch lip is too hard for me. A manual wheelchair can bounce over these. I can't.'

Modern buildings are less likely to expect wheelchair users to come in via a separate 'accessible' entrance, round by the bins like some form of social pariah.

Level access in itself can be a barrier to some disabled people. For example, a guide dog is trained to walk along a pavement and stop at a kerb edge. Drop curbs and slopes can be confusing for visually impaired people.

Another person gave this example:

'I can walk but I can't do slopes so steps, with a hand rail, are better for me.'

The solution is usually to have alternative options.

Parking, drop-off points and cycle racks

Checklist

- Can disabled parking bays be reserved?
- How far from the entrance and main room is the parking?
- Is the car park regularly checked to ensure that Blue Badge bays are kept for Blue Badge holders?
- Are the designated parking spaces of sufficient width to allow wheelchair users to get in and out of the vehicle (with sufficient space either side of the car and at the rear)?
- Do you have to reserve parking for Blue Badge holders? And if so do you need to give vehicle details to the venue?
- Are there any vehicle height restrictions?
- What is the entrance/exit process and will it be easily accessed by all?
- Is there on-street parking or are there local car parks available?
- Is the drop-off point safe from fast flowing traffic?
- Is there a time restriction on the drop-off or pick up point?
- Is there a secure place to leave a bicycle?

If there isn't parking available, identify parking nearby.

Some people who use services travel by car because of lack of access or other difficulties using public transport. It is essential to use venues that have access/Blue Badge parking. Spaces for Blue Badge holders should be wider than standard spaces to allow people to get wheelchairs and other equipment in and out of their cars and ease of access.

Other people who use services said that for some people who were unable to hold a driving license, or who faced financial restrictions as a direct result of their impairment, use cycling as their primary form of transport. They were keen to point out that not only should there be secure parking for bicycles but that it should be available for non-standard cycles such as tricycles and tandems.

Service users made the following comments:

‘Some locations i.e. hotels/motels say they are disabled friendly but then don’t have parking.’

‘Disabled parking bays need to be reserved and the venue needs to ensure they are kept clear... This also means that the extra space at the side of the car is kept clear and that bikes don’t park there. I have had to wait for bikers to return before I can get into my own car.’

‘I have been to many car parks where you have to lean out of the window and get a ticket before you can proceed. This is impossible for me to do.’

Entrances and entry systems

Checklist

- Is the entrance level?
- Are the doors clearly marked?
- Is alternative access clearly signposted?
- Is the button for assistance clearly signed and at appropriate height?
- Is there an alternative to the entry phone/key pad system?
- Is the alternative to the revolving door clearly marked and unlocked?

The entrance should be level or ramped, and if there are steps as well these need to have a handrail and clearly marked step edges. Portable ramps can be acceptable for a few steps, but ensuring they are out when needed and not dangerous makes them undesirable. Some people with walking difficulties prefer steps to a ramp. Revolving doors are not suitable for wheelchair users, guide dog owners and many with walking difficulties. The position of the entry door needs to be clear for people with a visual impairment and glass doors should be well identified. Glass doors can be difficult to see and should have coloured markings on the glass (tape, paint etc.) to be safe.

Entrances should be well signposted to avoid confusion or unnecessary effort, as should any alternative entrance for wheelchair users.

Any bell system for people to summon assistance must be accessible to wheelchair users and short people. It is important to consider how someone with a hearing impairment will get in if there is an entry-phone system and whether a visually impaired person would know it is there and be able to use it.

People said:

‘(With) video or bell entry I cannot hear what is being said so I can’t reply.’

‘Even if you find the front door you can’t always get in. There might be a doorman or porter at a desk but you can’t tell if you have their attention or not. It can be very frustrating.’

In this situation people will increasingly use a mobile phone to ring or text for help. Prior to the meeting, you should give out the phone number of someone who will be there on the day.

Checklist

- Is there good natural day light?
- Are there blinds if the light is too strong?
- Are there controls for lighting and additional lights if needed?
- Are there changing light levels within the building or rooms that might cause problems, particularly for people with visual impairments?

Different light levels suit different people. Most people prefer natural light but direct sunlight, particularly on a bright day, is generally uncomfortable.

For many people, moving from one area of light to a different one can be problematic. The venue should be well lit with no changes in light levels in different areas.

Service users commented:

‘One venue wasn’t sure whether they had appropriate lighting installed and emailed me snapshots to check.’

Occasionally, organisers are willing to bring in lighting from home.

Accessible toilets and other accessible facilities

Checklist

You should ensure that:

- A key is not required to use accessible toilets
- They are accessible for a wide range of people
- There is a paddle flush handle (the mechanism to flush the pan is a lever rather than a push button or pull chain system)
- There is a D bar on the door to enable disabled people to open and close it with ease
- There is plenty of room to manoeuvre
- They are not used as a general store cupboard
- They are close to the main event room
- There is a sufficient number for the size of the event.

Some venues keep accessible toilets locked to ensure that they are only available to disabled people (many are part of a national scheme run by the organisation Radar which provides a standard key that can be used all over the UK). If a key is required, ask for the door to be left unlocked on the day of the event, or at least that a key is easily available from staff on the day.

Wheelchair users are not the only people who need to use accessible facilities. People with different impairments need to access them for varying reasons, so avoid making assumptions.

People said:

'Are the accessible toilets actually accessible? Do they have a D bar on the door so that I can pull the door closed if it opens outwards to let me in?'

'Are the toilet rolls, soap and hand towels (hand drier) easily accessible, so that water does not run down your sleeves or drip onto a toilet roll which has a hand towel dispenser above?'

'All too often the accessible toilet is all white on white which makes it very difficult, especially locking the door!'

'Transgendered people like myself sometimes like to use the accessible toilet. If we use the men's we are likely to be abused and if we use the women's they don't like it either.'

It is worth noting that more people commented on accessible facilities than on any other area of the access-wiki website.

Equipment for people with hearing impairments

Checklist

- Are there hearing loops in all the rooms being used, including break-out rooms?
- Who is responsible for it?
- Can it be checked on the day?
- What are the microphones like and will they be accessible to all the speakers?
- Do people need to sit in a particular place if they want to use the loop?

Hearing loops (which boost sound for people who use hearing aids) that are installed at the venue are generally better than taking portable loops to a venue that does not have them. Check with the venue if someone is responsible for its working and whether they will be available on the day of the event. If the venue does not have a system, you will need to hire a portable one.

Hearing loops are notoriously unreliable and they need to be checked on the day. One of the main problems with hearing loops can be the level of background noise that can be picked up and magnified by the user.

It is important to understand that hearing loops do not work for all people with hearing impairments.

Background and noise

Checklist

When inspecting the venue be aware of background noise such as:

- central heating/air-conditioning
- heavy traffic and sirens,
- railways running nearby
- canteen and kitchen noises
- other delegates using different rooms

A barrier is created wherever other sounds compete with those you are meant to be tuned in to. Background noise can be a barrier to inclusion during the event for many different people who use services. For example, background noise makes it difficult for people who have a speech impairment as it makes it more difficult for others to hear them; it might cause distress for people who hear voices; some hearing aids will tune into the background noise, and for people with a visual impairment who cannot pick up on non-verbal communication, background noise can be a disabling distraction.

One service user suggested:

'Don't have different workshops going on in one room – it gets noisy and hard to make yourself heard. Probably not good for people with hearing impairments either.'

It is also worth noting that this is not just an issue about noise production but also about the venue's acoustics. This is particularly likely to be a problem in food areas which are often full of hard surfaces that are designed for cleanliness and cause maximum reverberations. The problem can be reduced by introducing textiles such as wall coverings, tablecloths, etc. where possible.

Space and distance to facilities

Checklist

- Are the corridors wide enough:
 - for two wheelchair users to pass by each other?
 - to turn a wheelchair around in?
- Is the main room large enough for people to manoeuvre easily whatever their impairment?
- Are the lifts operational for people:
 - using wheelchairs?
 - with visual impairments?
- What is the distance between the meeting room and the:
 - break-out rooms?
 - toilets/facilities?
 - canteen/restaurant?
- What is the distance between the front door and the:
 - meeting room?

- break-out rooms?
- toilets/facilities?
- canteen/restaurant?

Try to arrange to use rooms that are as close together as possible.

Key points from people who use services were:

‘Are corridors wide enough for wheelchairs? There should be enough space in the corridor for me to turn around and pass other people in wheelchairs.’

‘I use a wheelchair and need enough room to be able to move around canteens or restaurants.’

‘Because of my leg [projecting at right angles to the chair] I often find that so-called accessible buildings are not. Lifts are the worst.’

Familiarity for target audiences

In striving to make your event as accessible as possible, it is worth giving serious consideration to how familiar the venue might be to your target audience. So, for example, if you are thinking of using a university campus, consider if this is a setting the people who use services you are inviting are likely to be comfortable in? Would they be more relaxed in a community centre in their local area? Or, indeed, vice versa!

A service user commented:

‘Hold events in safe places and at safe times. Remember that I won’t always feel safe in the same places as straight people.’

Food and refreshments

Checklist

When reviewing the venue you should check the following:

- Are the caterers able to meet a range of dietary requirements?
- Where will the food be served?
- How far it is from the main room?
- Can refreshments be made available throughout the event?
- Is there enough seating and tables for all participants, including their personal assistants, support workers and/or translators?
- Will the venue provide staff to assist people?

Many people commented on this topic. It is covered in more detail in [The event](#) section.

Alarms and evacuation process

Checklist

- Will the alarms be tested on the day of the event?
- Are there visual alarms as well as audible ones?
- What is the evacuation procedure for people with mobility impairments and/or wheelchair users?
- Is there a level access fire exit?
- Are the lifts fireproof?
- Where is the refuge area for people who are not able to use stairs in the event of a fire and lifts being turned off?

When choosing a venue, it is important to consider the fire regulations and drills for that building. Many people who use services will not be happy for various reasons if you are not on the ground floor and the lifts cannot be used in case of an emergency. Details of such arrangements should be read out to participants at the start of the meeting/event and everyone providing support at the event.

People commented:

'Do evacuation procedures meet the needs of people with mobility and/or sensory impairments? Can, for example, the lifts be used in case of fire? When an alarm sounds are there accompanying lights?'

'I would not be comfortable if the lifts were out of action and I had to wait upstairs for the fire brigade to arrive.'

Reception and other venue staff

Checklist

- Give people a role as 'meeters and greeters'
- Brief venue staff:
 - on access issues, including letting them know not to alter any 'reasonable adjustments'
 - on disability etiquette

The first people you tend to see on entering a venue are the reception staff. The response you receive from these people is an important indication of how inclusive the event will be. To this end, it is always good to have your own 'meeters and greeters' on hand.

Dealing with lots of people can be difficult. Make sure registering is simple and you have a few people on hand to point participants in the right direction – feeling confused can cause panic.

A lot of the comments made by people who use services refer to the need for event organisers to inform and/or train the venue staff:

‘Event organisers should tell venue staff how they want the furniture laid out, and whether they want them to serve food or carry trays.’

‘Make sure venue staff are prepared to deal with any problems and able to make further changes on the day.’

‘Ask if staff have had training in equality and diversity or if workers have spent time working with different groups of people.’

‘Check that venue staff are ‘equality friendly’ and used to working with a diverse range of people so they are not homophobic, ageist, sizeist etc. Ideally they should have had training in cultural equality.’

Others saw the need to have people at the entrance to the venue to ‘meet and greet’ the people who use services on arrival:

‘People to meet you when you arrive is really good. It puts you at ease and sets the scene for the day.’

‘People wearing clear and easily identifiable tabards or t-shirts who can help you find your way round is helpful.’

As a minimum, staff should wear name badges so that participants can easily identify them.

Moving around within the venue

Checklist

- Clutter-free corridors
- Signage should be clear and easy to follow
- Door widths should be at least 80cm for ease of access for wheelchair users
- Lifts should have:
 - buttons at a height accessible for wheelchair users and short people
 - audio description/announcements
 - large, clearly labelled buttons with Braille markings
 - large floor numbers marked clearly outside the lifts
 - someone to offer assistance
 - wide-enough doors for wheelchair access

Just because there are lifts in a building it does not mean they are accessible for wheelchair users. Make sure that that lift doors are wide enough for wheelchair users (the minimum recommended width is 80cm) but be aware that some powered wheelchairs may be particularly wide).

Finding your way inside a building can be problematic for some people who use services.

Service users identified the following ways of making this easier:

'Simple, clear and colourful signs help me find meeting rooms.'

'I find it useful if handrails or texture show when there is going to be a change in what is around me (for example if there are stairs coming up).'

Quiet or 'chill out' room and a prayer or faith room

Checklist

- Tell participants in advance what is available
- Tell participants on the day where the rooms are and what each is for
- Clearly sign each room
- Signpost East
- Prayer rooms should have facilities nearby where people can wash.

Offering a quiet or 'chill out' room and a faith or prayer room is important for making an event accessible. These rooms provide a space to 'take a break' from the event and allow people from different faith groups to attend events and still practice the requirements of their religion. You should try to have two rooms available as they can fulfil very different functions. However, it may be difficult to offer both.

People commented:

'I need to have a prayer room. It is helpful if the room has an arrow pointing east.'

'Would be great to have a 'multi faith' room so all people who are practicing of different faith and go somewhere to take time out and pray.'

'Just knowing there is a space where I can just go and chill helps me to remain focused.'

In general, try to use modern buildings that have been built to be accessible – they are generally better than buildings where attempts have been made to put accessibility in later.

Making events accessible: Planning the event

This section deals with several key issues that you should plan for when organising any event that involves disabled people/people who use services.

Use this checklist as a starting point for other issues to address when planning an event:

Advertise the event appropriately

Checklist

Advertising for your event should:

- be clear and simple and in plain English
- be displayed where your target audience will see it
- be available in different formats
- be available in different community languages if possible
- display clear contact details
- include details of any fees and expenses that are payable

While the most effective way to attract people who use services to an event is through 'word of mouth', it is important that you advertise all events you organise. The extent of advertising and the ability to make it available in different formats will obviously be limited by the budget for an event.

Service users said it is particularly important to be clear about access arrangements when advertising an event. People also offered the following advice:

'Make it easy to read, so that people with dyslexia can read short sentences, with one subject per sentence.'

'Do not assume everyone has access to a computer. Include as a minimum address and telephone number for contact – be sure to keep this consistent in all information.'

'If you advertise on any websites, make sure they are accessible.'

'Let people know about the event as early as possible – this gives people time to arrange transports, PAs/carers etc.'

'Mention accessibility arrangements in all publicity.'

Booking forms and access information

The best way to meet the access requirements of participants is to give people the opportunity to tell you about their needs at the earliest opportunity.

This is the [booking form that SCIE uses](#).

Service users said:

'Booking forms can be useful for saying what adjustments have been made, and so that I can say what my access needs are.'

Telephone contact

Many people who use services, for different reasons, will prefer to phone and speak to someone to get answers to their questions about the event. It is important that whoever answers the phone is polite, helpful and professional.

Checklist

- If you have difficulty understanding a person on the telephone, ask if they would prefer to use email. Clarify what people want using questions that need simple answers. Repeat back what they say and wait for them to confirm. Never agree to something when you are not certain what the caller has said.
- Avoid taped telephone information if possible, as people find it easier to use a personal service.
- Some people prefer to text. If you receive a text, reply by text if possible.
- Some people use Minicomms or textphones. These allow the person to have a conversation with another person or organisation using text rather than speech.
- If you cannot access a textphone you can use the [Typetalk service](#)) to hold text conversations. When you have someone's contact details it can be useful to confirm details from a telephone call in writing.

Support staff

Checklist

- Book support staff as early as possible.
- Let people who use services know you will pay for support staff.
- Check you have the right support staff for the person requiring support.
- Ensure language support staff have adequate breaks.
- Ensure all support staff are given refreshments and food.

People with disabilities need support staff at events for a range of reasons. Personal assistants can help people with physical or sensory impairments with getting from place to place; with drinks and food; going to the toilet; taking notes or minutes; turning pages and holding things. People with learning difficulties often need support to understand reports and papers before and during the meeting – people doing this type of work are usually referred to as support workers.

Some people will bring their own personal assistants or support workers. For events with large numbers of disabled people/people who use services, it can be useful to have support workers available to provide assistance to anyone who needs it.

Language support professionals can support deaf people and people with hearing impairments. Language support professionals can include:

- translators
- BSL interpreters
- relay interpreters
- speech-to-text reporters/palantypists
- note takers

- lip speakers.

Support staff attend events solely to provide support to the participant with disabilities/who uses services. They are not there to contribute to the event. You should clarify this at the start of the event.

Accessible information

Checklist

Ask people what format they would prefer to receive information in before the event. This could be:

- Braille
- electronically
- audio tape
- larger font sizes:14 16 18 20
- high colour contrast
- plain English
- easy read
- different languages.

Send out papers two weeks before the event whenever possible. If it is going to be later than this, let participants know when the papers are due to arrive. Only table papers at a meeting if it cannot be avoided. If this does happen, let participants know that papers will be tabled and check how to make this process accessible.

Where there are lots of papers for a meeting, it can be helpful to use different coloured paper for each document so they can be easily identified during the meeting.

Brief speakers/facilitators on accessible presentations/workshops – be particularly careful when people use PowerPoint for their presentations. Try to get copies in advance so you can put them into formats that are accessible for people with visual impairments and people with learning difficulties.

Give handouts to people who may not be able to see the screen.

If any videos are being used during the event, use audio-described, subtitled and signed versions if they are available. If you are using audio material, try to provide transcripts for people with hearing impairments.

People suggested:

‘Think about how people are going to access the information including any presentations on the day – so take technology in consideration.’

‘Put up a graffiti board so people who aren't able to say what they think can write it up instead.’

'Ask speakers to send presentations at least four weeks before the event so they can be prepared and sent out in different formats.'

Translating information into other languages can be expensive but should be done wherever possible and particularly where an event is relevant to a specific community.

Developing the agenda

Checklist

The agenda should build in:

- time:
 - for each item
 - for discussion
 - to move between rooms
 - for breaks – ideally – every 45 minutes.
- short presentations and feedback sessions
- a draft set of ground rules for everyone to agree on
- introductions.

People said:

'Try not to have a difficult session straight after a break. I take medication during breaks and it can take up to half an hour for the medication to settle down.'

'Do not plan too many things in one meeting and put the most important things at the top of the agenda.'

Accommodation

Checklist

- Offer local accessible accommodation
- Offer to pre-book and pay in advance
- Check that the evening meal and breakfast is included
- Check the accommodation will meet the participant's access and dietary requirements
- Offer to pre-book and pay in advance for a taxi from the accommodation to the venue if required.

Overnight accommodation is likely to be necessary for many people who use services attending national events such as major conferences. It is important not to make assumptions about who might and who might not require this. Some people might need accommodation for a local event. If the venue offers suitable accommodation then this is usually the best choice.

Service users made some important points about this which should be addressed wherever possible:

'I find it easier if people find out whether the hotel has what I need and then let me know.'

The local tourist board and local disability groups are good sources of information on accessible hotels.

Tracking hoist availability makes a lot of difference to some people who use services, and it's a lot easier for them if the accommodation is in the same place as the event. Check for hotels with tracking hoists at the [Ceiling Hoist Users Club](#).

If the meeting is in the morning, ensure you offer accommodation the previous night – people with some impairments find travelling very tiring.

Choosing a date

Checklist

- Avoid significant dates that might affect whether people can attend the event. This could be for religious reasons, major sporting events, cultural anniversaries, etc.
- Avoid assumptions around when people are and are not available to attend the event
- Be aware of the different prayer times of different faiths

Service users gave useful advice on this issue:

'Use a faith calendar to plan events and avoid religious festivals. You can find a list of religious holidays and definitions at: www.interfaithcalendar.org.'

'Think about the day of the week you hold events on. For example, Jewish people are unlikely to attend an event on a Friday evening or Saturday.'

'Remember Muslim prayer times – these change slightly each day and in winter and summer. See www.islamicfinder.org for more information.'

'Make sure the event does not clash with important religious dates. Some leaflets in different languages may be useful as some faith groups do not speak English.'

Expenses

Checklist

Give participants clear guidance on your expenses policy before the event. Tell them:

- what you will pay for
- when you will pay it

- what proof you will require for expenses incurred.

Service users who attend meetings should be paid all reasonable expenses associated with their participation. SCIE's policy on this is that people who use services should never be left out of pocket because they have taken part in a meeting or event. Organisations should consider developing a policy on this issue (if they do not already have one) and ensure this is followed by all staff.

Expenses that are likely to be incurred include travel (which may include the cost of a personal assistant or another person to travel with them), food/refreshments/subsistence, costs of personal assistants or support workers and childcare. Be aware that some people may not be able to use the cheapest options for things like travel and accommodation. For example, public transport may not be accessible for them and cheaper hotels/bed and breakfast houses are also less likely to be accessible to wheelchair users or people with some mobility impairments. Be flexible about reimbursement of expenses and assumptions about what people might need to claim for.

Where possible, try to pay for things like train tickets and hotel bills directly to save people having to use their own money. Alternatively, try to pay people from petty cash on the day of the event.

People said:

'I always bring my own personal assistant, but need to know whether this is paid for.'

'I prefer support to be arranged for me. Tell me whether you can do this and whether you can pay for it.'

- Make it clear to participants from the start that you will pay for any travel, accommodation and sustenance related to them attending the event.

Directions

Ensure that the information you send out before the event includes full details of how to get to the venue by public transport or by car. Directions for people using public transport should include details of stations and bus routes with information about accessibility where available. Information for drivers should include any specific details about where to park – for example, if a car park is accessed from a road that is not part of the venue address.

It is useful to provide a link to a map and details of the venue on the internet and a hard copy that people can use on the day. Increasing numbers of drivers and pedestrians use satellite navigation when travelling so try to check whether the post code is one that will be recognised.

You may also need to provide directions in accessible formats.

'It's always useful to have details of exactly where I'm rather than just looking up an address that may not have all the information.'

The event

If you have asked me about my access requirements, I expect them to be met.

Creating a friendly and relaxed atmosphere for the meeting is about making it inclusive and accessible.

Good planning is the key to making an event inclusive, accessible and open to all participants. It does cost money to be fully inclusive and the budget should be in place from the start. It is not good practice to include access as an afterthought and it generally costs more.

Checklist for the day of the event.

Housekeeping, ground rules, introductions and greetings

It is important for participants to feel welcome and to know they can ask for assistance at any point during the day. Housekeeping, introductions and ground rules should be given at the start of the event and go towards creating a positive atmosphere. Ground rules should clearly set out behaviour that is not acceptable such as discriminatory behaviour.

Service users said:

'It would be useful at the start of events on each day for the chair to talk a little about how things will be managed... When you don't attend events regularly these things are a mystery. I've seen many people who use services feel frustrated they did not get to ask their question or were cut short.'

'Make sure staff/people working at the event are easily identifiable.'

'Event organisers may have to work to gain people's trust.'

For meetings with more than one impairment group and/or a diverse range of people who use services, it is particularly important to develop ground rules that everyone agrees with and can work to. This is because what enables some groups of people disables others. It is equally important to tell participants if the event is going to be recorded in any manner. Not only is it crucial to receive advance notice of this, but it can have a negative effect on some people with certain conditions.

Where a meeting is dealing with sensitive issues and information that should be treated as confidential, it is important to let people know at the start of the meeting that everything they say during the event will be anonymous. This means that any report or write-up of the event will not use people's names nor will anything anyone says be traced back to them.

Many people made comments about how staff at events can help make disabled people and other people who use services feel welcome. General comments included:

'Be respectful.'

'You should never assume that you know what a person needs, you should always ask the person what help they may need.'

'Remember that some people may have a disability that is not visible.'

People also made comments which were impairment specific. While it is best to approach access issues in a general way that addresses all the needs of disabled people, it is important to acknowledge that there are some impairment specific barriers to inclusion relating to people with particular access requirements. People who use services identified and commented upon many such barriers and many apply to more than one impairment 'type'.

People who have not knowingly met disabled people can be particularly concerned about such issues and be worried about saying or doing the wrong thing. Getting this wrong can lead to confusion and misunderstandings and can cause offence.

Wheelchair users said:

- 'Sit down and talk to me at my height.'
- 'Never lean on my wheelchair – it is my personal space.'
- 'Never move the wheelchair without the person's consent.'
- 'Don't make all wheelchair users sit in the same area.'
- 'Events with people sitting on the floor are a massive barrier – wheelchair users can't move as a result, and are also isolated by being on a completely different physical level.'
- 'People stand at lunch in circles, it is impossible to get included in these groups, you feel very isolated, get people into teams in the morning then it is easier to talk to them during lunch (seminars included!). I am extremely outgoing and I find I have to push my way in to get talking to people, and I always end up with neck ache looking up!!!'

People with personal assistants said:

- 'Speak to me, not my assistant.'
- 'I don't expect my P.A. to be introduced. They are there for me and not the meeting. They are at work for me. They are not there to have their opinions listened to.'

People with speech impairments said:

- 'If you don't understand what I say, ask me to repeat it.'
- 'Maintain eye contact with me.'
- 'Give me the time to say what I need to.'
- 'Listen to disabled people with speech impairments carefully and if you do not understand ask them to repeat it. Do not attempt to finish sentences or assume what they are going to say.'

People with visual impairments said:

- ‘If you offer a visually impaired person a seat, guide their hand to the back of the chair, telling them that there is a chair to sit on.’
- ‘Let me know you are there by lightly touching me on the arm.’
‘Speak to me, not my guide.’
- ‘If you guide me, describe where we are going. Tell me if there are stairs, and whether they go up or down. Describe any obstacles or features ahead such as ramps, steps and doors.’
- ‘When dimming the lights for a presentation, make sure I can still see my personal assistant.’
- ‘In a discussion it is helpful if participants say their name before speaking.’
- ‘Guide dogs are working dogs and should not be patted.’
‘If people are bringing guide or other assistance dogs to an event, you will need to provide water if requested.’

People with a hearing impairment said:

- ‘If you are in a meeting, make sure that people speak one at a time.’
- ‘If you are speaking to a deaf person, make sure that they are looking at you as they may want to lip read. If they are lip reading, try to make sure that you do not have your back to a light source as they will not be able to see you clearly. Speak clearly but do not exaggerate words. Do not chew gum or cover your mouth.’
- ‘Use portable microphones for questions from the audience.’

People from black and minority ethnic groups commented:

- ‘Don’t assume that I speak the language of the country I am originally from.’
- ‘Ask me what language I prefer to use.’
- ‘Ask me what dialect I speak before you book an interpreter.’
- ‘Consider putting translated versions of written materials onto audio tape or CD.’
- ‘The Language Line Service (0800 169 2879) can be used for one-to-one interpreting. This is a telephone service where you can arrange to talk to an interpreter.’ (are there costs involved? Who is this service run by?)
- ‘The location, as some areas are predominately white and can be a little daunting.’
- ‘Remember there are cultural differences around body language, such as whether or not it’s OK to look people in the eye.’

- ‘Don’t assume that I come from a certain faith, live in a certain way, or eat a certain diet.’

Timing

Checklist

- Timing is an access issue.
- Start and finish on time.
- Keep to the break times as stated on the agenda.
- Avoid starting and finishing when people will have to travel in rush hours.
- Avoid school start and finish times and school holiday dates where possible.
- Be aware that for many people who use services and disabled people things can take a lot longer.

The comments of people who use services around this issue clearly show that timing an important consideration in making events accessible:

Keeping to time is important – here's an example of why:

‘Sitting in travel (small portable) electric wheelchairs for long periods is very tiring as they don’t have good supports... so don't say: "Oh well we are near the end of the day so we will carry on without a break". I have planned for the day as advertised... you should stick to the timings too.’

‘Disabled people need more notice of events – and of cancellation of events – than other people. Don't leave things too late. Personal assistance, assistance on public transport etc. takes a long time to arrange, it can be expensive and often can't be cancelled at the last minute without penalties.’

Other advice on timing included:

‘Don't start meetings too early in the morning. It can take some people who use services a lot longer than other people to get ready.’

‘Travelling in rush hour is not really an option for many people.’

‘Don't hold meetings after dark.’

Refreshments and food

Food and refreshments can make or break an event, and people who use services made many comments about this. As with many issues of access, choice is the key factor. It is important to give people choice:

- in the food they eat/drink
- of implements they use to eat/drink

- when they can eat/drink, where possible (some people may need to drink/eat outside of scheduled breaks).

You should ask people about any particular dietary requirements on the booking form for any event where food and refreshments are served.

At the event, allow people to make choices by making sure:

- food is clearly labelled
- assistance is available
- seating with optional tables is available.

This is what people said:

'I need to eat regularly, so have snacks available in breaks. Not always sweet ones!'

'Offer choices of cutlery and crockery. I find a mug easier than a cup and saucer.'

'It helps me if people put out drinking straws.'

'Have people available to help with carrying food and drinks – it's difficult for most wheelchair users and people with mobility problems.'

'Keep meat and fish away from vegetarian and vegan food.'

'Avoid pork, beef and shellfish. This covers a lot of dietary needs. Be aware of allergies and those who are gluten free, dairy free and have nut allergies also.'

'Always have water available as some medication makes people very thirsty.'

After the event

Evaluation

Evaluation of the event – from the perspective of the people who use services – can be extremely helpful in the planning of future events. Evaluation forms should be simple, straightforward and available in different formats.

Ensure people get home

It is good practice for the hosts of the event to remain behind until the last of the participants has left. Travelling for most people who use services can be stressful, however well your journey has been planned - there is always room for the unexpected.

Follow up and contact after the event

Ensure that you have the contact details of the participants and their preferred format for receiving information. It is important to give people who use services feedback about the issues discussed at an event and the opportunity to comment on any report or article produced as a result of the event. This will help you to maintain good contacts with people who use services who may then be involved in future meetings and events.

Social Care Institute for Excellence

54 Baker Street

London W1U 7EX

tel 020 7766 7400

www.scie.org.uk

