

Developing accessible services

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Introduction

This resource aims to help you develop and deliver accessible services (remotely and face to face). We address the issues of who accesses services and who is excluded from them, set them within the legislative framework and government strategies, before highlighting organisations and resources that can help you bridge the gaps. It is intended that this resource is used as a guide and a toolkit in the development of inclusive clinic provision.

LawWorks will regularly review this resource with the aim of keeping it updated. Our recent [Clinics Information Exchange on developing accessible services](#) complements this guidance.

Legislation

This section gives you an overview of the legislative framework that applies to clinics.

The [Equality Act 2010](#) brought together over 116 pieces of legislation into one Act. It provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. LawWorks has provided some [introductory training on the Act](#) including its relevance for social welfare law and advice work.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has produced a number of guides to the Act, including those for [service users and providers](#).

The Equality Act applies to all organisations which provide goods, facilities or services to members of the public. It does not matter if the organisation is large or small, a charity or a business, nor does it matter whether the service provided is free or paid for. The law affects everyone responsible for running the organisation, or anyone who does something on its behalf, including staff or volunteers.

The Act contains a duty to make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers for people with disabilities. Before looking at the particular issues surrounding access and exclusion it is worth noting what organisations must do in anticipation of a person with a disability trying to use their services: the EHRC's [guidance on goods and services](#) can help with this.

If services are provided from a website, the EHCR provides [specific guidance](#) with information on the 'reasonable adjustments' a provider (ISSP) should make.

[The Accessible Information Standard \(AIS\)](#) was introduced by the Government in 2016 to make sure that people with a disability or sensory loss are given information in a way they can understand. It is now the law for the NHS and adult social care services to comply with AIS. The standard aims to make sure that people who have a disability, impairment or sensory loss are provided with information that they can easily read or understand, and with support, so they can communicate easily with health and social care services.

Developing accessible digital services

For clinics that deliver services remotely, this section highlights resources from UK and Wales digital strategies, explores the issue of digital exclusion and provides a list of organisations that can help you deliver an accessible digitally service. However, a digital service might not be appropriate for everyone and other types of services should also be made available.

UK and Wales digital strategies

In March 2017 the UK Government published '[Our plan for Britain](#)' a digital strategy for a digital economy. Included in the 'seven strands' of the strategy are:

- Giving everyone access to the digital skills they need
- Making the UK the safest place in the world to live and work online

In 2018 the Welsh Government published their review '[Improving people's lives through digital technologies](#)'. Examples of good practice contained in the report include:

- Digital Heroes – young people volunteering to support older people to access technology
- Community ICT Pilot – Redistributing refurbished government laptops for community organisations to use

What is digital exclusion and who is excluded

The key factors contributing to digital exclusion centre around four main themes:

- Access – both physical and financial
- Motivation – including understanding or appreciation of the benefits
- Skills – whether individuals have the ability or opportunity to learn basic digital skills
- Confidence – including fear of fraud and concerns over lack of online security

Some key statistics¹

- 2.9 million young people (21%) do not have access to either a laptop or desktop computer
- A third (32%) of young people do not have access to home broadband
- Combined, this leaves six million (42%) young people without home broadband or a laptop/desktop
- It equates to 30% of those aged 18 and above who are more likely to be living alone and reliant on work, colleges or universities for their IT needs.

Age UK evidence review on digital inclusion

In November 2018 Age UK published its report, the [Digital Inclusion Evidence Review](#). Key findings include:

- 80% of people age 65-74 and 44% of those aged 75+ have accessed the internet recently²
- 56% of people aged 75+ have not used the internet recently³
- 36% (4.2 million) people aged 65+ are offline, lapsed or never users⁴

Summary of the report

The trend over the last decade has been for increasing internet use among the older population. However, a substantial group – including the majority of those aged 75 and over – are not online.

Over 79% of all digital exclusion is among those aged 65 and over. Also worrying is that there is a group of lapsed users who have used the internet in the past but no longer do, and it is not known why.

Factors that most strongly explain the likelihood of an individual aged 65+ not using the internet are:

- Lower income
- Older age
- Living alone
- Mobility challenges
- Problems with memory or ability to concentrate (self-rated)

¹ BCS Chartered Institute for Technology – Digital Divide growing or shrinking?

² ONS definition of 'within the last three months' before being surveyed.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

Older people are not only less likely than younger people to go online, but those who use the internet are more likely to be 'narrower' users, carrying out fewer activities. The most popular online activities among people aged 65+ are emails and finding information about goods and services. However, only around a quarter (27%) of this age group use social networking, compared to nearly all (96%) internet users aged 16 – 24.

4.5 million adults in the UK have never used the internet, of whom 3.7 million are aged 65+.

Including those who have not used the internet in the last 3 months, there are 5.3 million adults in the UK who are not regular users, of whom 4.2 million are aged 65+. By this measure, over 79% of all digital exclusion is among those aged 65+. Use decreases with age. While 80% of the 65-74 age group are internet users, this falls to 44% in those aged 75+.

Internet use is similar for men and women in younger and middle age groups. Among those aged 65 – 74, men are a little more likely to use the internet than women, but there is a marked difference in the oldest age group as 51% of men aged 75+ have recently used it compared to 38% of women.

Lloyds Bank UK Digital Consumer Index 2020

In 2022 Lloyds Bank published its [UK Digital Consumer Index](#). Some key findings included:

- 99% of the UK are now online
- 14 million (27%) have the lowest level of digital capability
- One third of those offline struggle to interact with healthcare services.
- 2.4 million (4%) cannot do any of the digital basics

Although the main sticking points as expected differ by age, income and circumstance there are three common factors:

- 1) **Affordability:** By May of 2022, 18% (c.9.4 million) anticipated needing to look for alternative solutions to connect to the Internet and 6% (c.3.0 million) were worried about having to give up the Internet and their mobile data altogether.
- 2) **Capability and confidence:** c.10.2 million (20%) lack the digital foundations – c.5.0 million (10%) cannot use an app and c.4.5 million (8%) cannot turn on a device and enter login information by themselves. Overall, c.5.3 million (10%) of the UK, lack both the digital basics and the essential digital skills for everyday life.

- 3) Trust in digital services: The 27% who remain digitally disadvantaged and under-confident, are more likely to have been scammed multiple times and are more likely to have been victim to impersonation scams, compared to those with the highest digital skills as fraudsters exploit their lack of confidence online.

What is digital poverty?

[The Digital Poverty Alliance](#), (DPA) defines digital poverty as ‘The inability to interact with the online world fully, when where and how an individual needs to.’ The DPA was established in 2021 by the Learning Foundation, Currys plc and the Institute of Engineering and Technology. It pulls existing activity, avoiding duplication and working across industry, government and the third sector to align approaches to tackling digital poverty based on the five determinants of it. The DPA gives 5 determinants of digital poverty:

- Access
- Devices and connectivity
- Capability
- Motivation
- Support

According to the DPA:

- 53% of people can't afford the average monthly broadband bill and;
- 2.5 million people are behind on their bills.

The DPA have recently published '[An introduction to broadband social tariffs](#)' giving details of which providers have social tariffs and the eligibility criteria. Further details of the DPA and it's work can be found [here](#).

Office for National Statistics: Exploring the UK's digital divide

The Office for National Statistics report '[Exploring the UK's digital divide](#)' highlights trends in ability to access digital services relating to ethnicity. Gaps identified between different ethnic groups have narrowed over time as the proportion of non internet users has declined. Across the ethnic groups for which breakdowns were available, the proportion of people who have either never used the internet, or have not used it in the last three months came down between 2011 and 2018. This is particularly the case for adults of Bangladeshi ethnicity in 2011, 31.4% of adults of Bangladeshi ethnicity were internet non-users, higher than the figure for UK adults overall (20.3%). In 2018, the figure for Bangladeshi internet non-users had dropped to 8%, a figure that is now lower than for the UK overall (10%).

Administrative Justice Council Digitisation report

Whilst the reports previously mentioned look at the broad digital picture, the Administrative Justice Council's (AJC) 2020 report, [Digitalisation and accessing justice in the community](#), focused on its effects on access to justice. The report details findings based on data collected from an online survey sent to approximately 2,500 organisations across the UK, representing a sample of stakeholders that have direct contact with people who approached them for assistance with a social welfare problem.

Summary of the report

The research findings show that many of the respondent organisations have service users who are vulnerable and the most needy in society. A large number of people approaching for help with a legal problem would need support and legal advice, together with ongoing digital assistance to navigate on online justice system.

Although many of the respondent organisations do currently provide some digital assistance at varying levels across many areas of social welfare law, the provision of digital assistance with welfare benefits is the most prevalent. However, based on the findings, the potential to do more and offer support and legal advice together with digital assistance is seriously compromised. The existing advice sector infrastructure is already under immense pressure due to a paucity of funding and resources coupled with a high level of demand for assistance. Barriers such as lack of staff, time constraints, lack of IT equipment, lack of space, lack of specialist knowledge and other priorities mean that organisations are having to make difficult choices between offering face to face advice or provide digital assistance.

The reality based on the evidence found in this report is that many organisations are struggling to meet demand for requests for digital assistance as they are not equipped to do so and do not have the finances to scale up. Investment is urgently needed to remove existing barriers preventing an integrated service to enable front line advice providers to adapt to meet demand and to ensure access to justice in a digital justice system.

Key findings from the AJC report:

1. There is a high level of need for digital assistance. The findings from 346 respondent organisations are that between 35%-50% of their service users would require digital assistance and support to access a digital justice system.
2. Barriers are preventing front line advice providers from meeting demand for digital assistance. Data was provided by 322 respondent organisations about their capacity to meet demand for digital assistance and barriers they face preventing them from doing so. Barriers such as: lack of staff, lack of IT equipment, time constraints, lack of space, other priorities and lack of specialist knowledge. The findings are that 34.4% of respondent organisations are unable to meet demand. Of these, 29% of organisations are completely

unable to offer any digital assistance at all due to existing barriers. A further 33% respondent organisations are struggling to meet demand for digital assistance. Only 5% of respondent organisations reported being able to meet demand. As digitisation increases, these barriers must be removed to ensure access to justice.

Recommendation:

HMCTS is called upon to carry out coordinated research working together with front line advice providers to understand the extent of existing barriers and work towards removing these barriers preventing the delivery of digital assistance, with an aim to develop a long-term funding strategy informed by users' needs and to supplement existing programmes to ensure access to advice and digital assistance is made available to all.

3. Respondent organisations reported that lack of funding was preventing them from being able to scale up not only in terms of offering digital assistance but being able to offer essential face to face advice. Although some of the barriers preventing the delivery of digital assistance have been identified and removing these barriers would require investment, it is clear from the findings that more funding is also needed to enable front line advice services to retain existing levels of specialist expertise and to train new specialist advisors to ensure a quality service.

Recommendation:

The MOJ should develop a National strategy to set a sustainable framework with increased investment for the delivery of basic social welfare advice and legal support across all sectors providing front line advice services to the members of the public.

4. Respondent organisations reported that they were unable to meet demand for services across all levels of social welfare law. The requests for advice and assistance in social welfare law outstrips capacity to meet demand and many services are having to turn people away. This leads to an escalation of problems and often forces crisis situations. One of the aims of court modernisation is to strip away complexity and confusion and to streamline the justice system. However, there is already a high demand for assistance so it will be important that digitisation does not have an unintended consequence of increasing the workload and demand on front line services.

Digital exclusion and the justice system

JUSTICE have published important reports on issues of digital exclusion in the justice system and the operation of the court system (i.e. remote hearings and virtual trials) as new platforms and technologies are introduced.

- [Preventing digital exclusion from online justice](#)
- [What is a court?](#)
- [JUSTICE COVID-19 response](#)

Working HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), the Legal Education Foundation produced [Digital Justice](#), which looks at the £1bn court reform programme.

This report was based on extensive stakeholder consultation with the judiciary, policy makers, national and international experts in evaluation, public justice system digitisation, public law and equality and diversity monitoring. It recommends an approach to data collection for service design, iteration, and ongoing evaluation. Key conclusions included:

- the need for an irreducible minimum standard of ‘access to justice’
- the need to evaluate the impact of reform on access to the formal legal system
- the need for an overarching HMCTS data strategy including a solution for data sharing and coping with increased demands for data

The report makes 30 detailed recommendations.

How to design a digitally assisted service

Although intended for government departments the UK Government’s [Service Manual](#) provides a framework for any organisation to:

- Design a digital service that works for as many users as possible
- Provide the best support to all users who need help using the digital service (this is called assisted digital support)

A key consideration when designing digital services is the need to research user’s assisted digital needs to help you understand what people need to use the service online.

Organisations that can help

If you identify people who need help to get online, develop their skills, or require additional support, the organisations listed below provide a range of services, including supporting people to get online by loaning equipment, or providing access to equipment, training and support at physical centres.

There are also organisations that inform and influence policy and run training and consultancy services for provider organisations who want to improve their digital accessibility.

See also the resources listed in [later in this document](#).

AbilityNet

[AbilityNet](#) supports people of any age, living with any disability or impairment to use technology to achieve their goals at home, at work and in education. They do this by providing specialist advice services, free information resources and by helping to build a more accessible digital world. They also provide training packages.

Age UK

Age UK, at a local level, provide [computer training by volunteers for older people](#). They also run [The One Digital project](#). This collaborative project aims to support

older people, in areas of high digital exclusion, to get online or develop basic digital skills. The project runs in the following areas:

- AGE UK Lakeland in partnership with Age UK Carlisle and Eden
- Age UK Blackburn with Darwen working with Age UK Lancashire
- Age UK Hereford and Worcestershire working with Age UK Gloucestershire
- Age UK Leeds working with Age UK Calderdale and Kirklees

Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA)

The [Digital Poverty Alliance](#) was established in 2021 by the Learning Foundation, Currys plc and the Institute of Engineering and Technology.

They pull together existing activity, avoiding duplication and working across industry, government and the third sector to align approaches to tackling digital poverty based on the five determinants of it. The main focus is policy and advocacy, gaining the evidence that we need, and bringing the community together to create the social change needed to end digital poverty by 2030.

Their aim is to convene, compel and inspire collaboration for the UK community to lead sustainable action against digital poverty. We will do this through four key pillars of work:

- **Unifying** the community of organisations working in this space to build solutions
- Being **evidence-based** and using behavioural science and research to create impact
- **Advocating** for action to tackle digital poverty at all levels – government to public
- Running **proof of concept projects** to innovate where there are gaps.

The Carnegie UK Trust

[The Carnegie UK Trust](#), seeks to improve the lives and wellbeing of people throughout the UK, particularly those who are disadvantaged. Their goal is to change minds by influencing public policy and change lives through innovative practice and partnerships. One of their strands of work is 'Digital futures'. Their Understanding Digital Exclusion project developed a digital inclusion outcomes framework for the UK.

Good Things Foundation

[The Good Things Foundation](#) have a range of resources to help organisations run their services online and an interactive map of online centres where people can access IT safely. They also design and deliver a range of social and digital inclusion programmes, provide a customised digital learning resources and have a UK network of community organisations that run training programmes.

What is an accessible service and how can you develop one?

Your service must be as accessible as possible to everyone who needs it (see the [Legislation](#) section for more information) which requires you to consider in detail how users might access and use your services.

In the UK, 1 in 5 people have a disability⁵ - this could be visual, hearing, motor (affecting fine movement) or cognitive (affecting memory and thinking). The concept of accessibility does not just apply to people with disabilities - all users will have different needs at different times and in different circumstances.

Accessibility is about making sure your service can be used by as many people as possible. By researching and understanding the needs of users with visual, hearing, motor and cognitive impairments, and how they might use your services, you will:

- Develop a clear understanding of what accessibility means as you explore the problem you are trying to solve.
- Develop an understanding of the range of abilities users can have.

Organisations and resources that can help

There are organisations and services that provide direct support to users to help them access services. There are also organisations that provide policy frameworks, training and consultancy services to improve overall accessibility. (see also [Section above](#)).

Action on Hearing Loss

[Action on Hearing Loss](#) (formerly RNID) is one of the largest charities in the UK supporting people living with deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus. They provide practical advice and support and have a communication aid guide.

Equally Ours

[Equally Ours](#) (previously the Equality and Diversity Forum) is a UK charity that brings together people and organisations working across equality, human rights and social justice to make a reality of these in everyone's lives. Through members and networks, they use research, policy and communications to shift public opinion and policy in positive and powerful ways. They have developed a framework to use equalities and human rights to deliver and improve services.

InterpreterNow

[InterpreterNow](#) is a service that enables deaf and hearing people to communicate with each-other. They deliver immediate access to online interpreting for deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users. The service can be accessed through any laptop,

⁵ See DWP Family resources survey 2018-19

PC/Mac or, Android or Apple tablet and smartphone via the InterpreterNow App. InterpreterNow can be used in the workplace for face-to-face meetings, appointments, in shops or businesses and for telephone conversations – where deaf people can call a business or service and they can call them back. All you need is a good internet connection.

MENCAP

On [their website](#) you will find definitions of learning disabilities and a communication guide. Mencap also funds research, runs projects and programmes to promote inclusion, and provides direct services for people with learning disabilities.

People First

[People First](#) is run by people with learning disabilities, they provide training packages and resources on how to make services accessible to people with learning disabilities and an easy read one stop shop.

RNIB

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), is one of the UK's leading sight loss charities and the largest community of blind and partially sighted people. RNIB provides [expert advice on how to make your website or app accessible](#) for people with sight loss. Their usability lab and panel of people with disabilities act as test participants and the results help ensure that the target audience can access the service.

Signly

This [browser extension](#) gives users a BSL translation of webpages. It allows people who are hearing impaired to self-serve making access to sign language easy.

UK Government – Guidance on accessible communication formats

The UK Government's [Guidance on accessible communications formats](#) provides helpful guidance on how to make effective use of accessible communication formats and covering:

- Audio
- Braille and moon
- BSL
- Easy Read and Makaton

Feedback

If you have any suggestions, or feedback about this document please email clinics@lawworks.org.uk.