

Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium (SUPC)

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Accessibility Tools and Guidance

in partnership with the



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01. Introduction

Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium (SUPC) recognises its members have a legal requirement (under the Equality Act 2010) to make systems and services accessible to all users. We are committed to working with industry, our members and the wider public sector to improve the accessibility of digital products and services relevant to the Higher Education (HE) sector and Further Education (FE) sector.

An accessible/inclusive product or service is one that can be used by all its intended users. Products that are designed inclusively will be readily adaptable to the different requirements of a wide range of users and the technologies they will be using.

Digital products and services include but are not limited to:

- Systems
- Websites
- Applications
- Digital Resources (e.g. eBooks, eJournals, databases)

02. Background

The concept of accessibility does not just apply to people with disabilities it applies to all users of a digital product or service. In the UK, 1 in 5 people have a disability but this could be visual, hearing, motor or cognitive (affecting memory and thinking). Each user will have a different requirement at a different time.

Accessibility is about making sure the product or service can be used by as many people as possible and ensuring that nobody is excluded. Failing to meet this could mean you are in breach of the Equality Act 2010.

The Government Digital Service (GDS) accessibility requirements are to:

- Meet level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) as a minimum
- Work on the most commonly used assistive technologies - including screen magnifiers, screen readers and speech recognition tools
- Include people with disabilities in user research

In addition we recognise that [BS8878:2010](#) and [EN 301 549](#) (EU public sector accessibility directive) are relevant to ICT procurement activity.

03. Aim of this Tool Set and Guidance

The aim of this document is to provide our employees, members, contractors and suppliers, as well as our sister consortia and their members with a toolkit to enable accessibility to be included in future procurements for digital products and services. It is also to improve knowledge of this key aspect across the sector.

This document is associated with the SUPC Accessibility Statement.

04. Questions about the supplier

The following provides a suggested set of questions for inclusion in ICT procurement exercises as a minimum and should be included in supplier questionnaires to enable organisations to gauge a full understanding of suppliers' commitments in this area.

- i. Considering our strategic plan *[insert link to institution's strategic plan]* outline the key principles, which demonstrate your own organisational approach to equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI), providing evidence to support your comments.
- ii. Tell us about the EDI training your staff are required to complete and any additional activities you undertake to raise awareness.

05. Questions to ask the supplier

Standards

- i. Please tell us about any standards that the product or service has been designed to meet e.g. WCAG 2.0 AA, BS8878, EN 301 549 providing evidence to support.
- ii. What are the key accessibility features of the product or service?

(A useful introduction to WCAG is available on the [Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\)](#). The BS8878 code of practice applies to all products delivered via a web browser, including websites, web services and web-based applications such as email. BS 8878:2010 is designed as an introduction to digital accessibility for non-technical professionals).

User Testing and Guidance

- i. Have the resources been tested with users that have a range of accessibility needs using a range of assistive technologies (AT)?
- ii. What assistive technology was used and who did the testing? What were the key outcomes?

- iii. Describe how accessible your product would be to [example persona e.g. visual, auditory, cognitive or motor]. (See [University of Kent example personas](#)).
- iv. When you release upgrades, how can you assure us they will not have a negative impact on accessibility?
- v. Is there an easily discovered help page where guidance on accessibility features is available?

06. Inclusive Design Principles

The following section provides information on [inclusive design principles](#)¹, which suppliers should consider supporting in their products and services. Institutions can use these as a guide and include questions relating to how these principles are supported.

Comparable experience

Ensure the interface provides a comparable experience for all so people can accomplish tasks in a way that suits their needs without undermining the quality of the content.

Full description

As people use different approaches and tools to read and operate interfaces, what the interface offers each user should be comparable in value, quality, and efficiency.

Examples:

- Content for alternatives: Having a basic alternative, whether it's alt text, a transcript, audio description, or sign language, makes the content accessible but to be equivalent it needs to capture the essence of the original.
- Ergonomic features: Providing synchronized closed captions makes your video accessible; making them customizable, colour coded, and repositionable provides a more comparable experience.
- Notifications that appear in an interface are visually obvious but require proactive discovery by screen reader users. A comparable experience for blind users can be achieved by using a live region. The notification then requires no explicit action on the part of the user.

Consider situation

People use the interface in different situations. Make sure the interface delivers a valuable experience to people regardless of their circumstances.

Full description

People are first time users, established users, users at work, users at home, users on the move, and users under pressure. All of these situations can have an impact. For

¹ <https://inclusivedesignprinciples.org/>

those who already find interaction challenging, such as those with disabilities, this impact may make usage particularly difficult.

Examples

- Colour contrast: When using an interface outdoors, good contrast lessens the impact of bright sunshine.
- Context sensitive help: Users may need help when they first encounter a complex form or interaction. This help may become redundant, even distracting, as a user becomes more familiar with the form or interaction.
- Context sensitive help provides the user with choice as to when they access help and better control over the page.
- Captions on the go: You are aware that the video content you are providing will be consumed on mobile devices, which may be in public spaces where people might prefer to consume the content without being antisocial. For smaller viewports, sound is switched off and captions activated by default.

Be consistent

Use familiar conventions and apply them consistently.

Full description

Familiar interfaces borrow from well-established patterns. These should be used consistently within the interface to reinforce their meaning and purpose. This should be applied to functionality, behaviour, editorial, and presentation. You should say the same things in the same way and users should be able to do the same things in the same way.

Examples

- Consistent design patterns: Use consistent web and platform design patterns to help build familiarity and understanding.
- Consistent editorial: Use plain language consistently across platforms including editorial that is relied on by screen reader users such as text alternatives, headings, labels for buttons and so on. Keeping editorial style consistent is also important, such as making sure the top of articles always have a clearly marked summary paragraph, or making sure bullets always start with a bolded definition.
- Consistent page architecture: Use consistent page architecture across templates to help people scan and navigate key content.

Give control

Ensure people are in control. People should be able to access and interact with content in their preferred way.

Full description

Do not suppress or disable the ability to change standard browser and platform settings such as orientation, font size, zoom, and contrast. In addition, avoid content changes that have not been initiated by the user unless there is a way to control it.

Examples

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- Scrolling control: 'Infinite scrolling' can be problematic, especially for users navigating by keyboard because they cannot get past the stream of refreshing content. Give the option to turn off this feature and replace it with a 'load more' button.
- Make it stop: Some users find that animations or parallax scrolling cause nausea, and others find them plain distracting. Where they play automatically, they should at least be easy to stop, by providing prominent playback controls.
- Allow zoom: There are many reasons why a user may want to operate the pinch-to-zoom gesture on their touch device. Make sure it is not suppressed, and that the content is not obscured when it is put to use.

Offer choice

Consider providing different ways for people to complete tasks, especially those that are complex or non-standard.

Full description

There is often more than one way to complete a task. You cannot assume what someone's preferred way might be. By providing alternatives for layout and task completion, you offer people choices that suit them and their circumstances at the time.

Examples

- Multiple ways to complete an action: Where appropriate, provide multiple ways to complete an action. On mobile swipe to delete an item can be supported together with an edit button that allows you to select items then delete. An example of this is in iOS mail.
- Layout: Where there are long lists of content consider offering a grid or list layout option. This supports people who may want larger images on screen or smaller rows.
- Accessible alternatives: Alternative ways of presenting data, such as data tables for info graphics, should be available to all users as an option rather than a hidden link just for screen reader users. Accessible alternatives can benefit not just a specific target group but all users as long as the choice is offered.

Prioritise content

Help users focus on core tasks, features, and information by prioritising them within the content and layout.

Full description

Interfaces can be difficult to understand when core features are not clearly exposed and prioritised. A site or application may provide lots of information and functionality, but people should be able to focus on one thing at a time. Identify the core purpose of the interface, and then the content and features needed to fulfil that purpose.

Examples

- Keep task focused: Progressively reveal features and content when needed, not all in one go.
- Prioritising tasks: An email application is principally for writing and reading email. The "compose" button is, therefore, present on all screens, and early in the focus order. The inbox is prioritised over other lists of email, such as "sent" and "spam" messages. Less used features, such as tagging or organizing email into folders appear later in the focus order, as they will generally only be used when the primary task of reading the email is complete.
- Prioritising content: The primary content on a news article page is the story; therefore, it should come before other content, both visually and in the source order. Related content, such as similar articles, should follow it and unrelated content after that.
- Prioritising editorial: Editorial for links, headings and buttons should use plain language and put the primary text first. This applies to both visible and hidden text. This makes the text easy to scan both visually and audibly for screen reader users. Plain language also benefits non-native speakers and is easier to translate.

Add value

Consider the value of features, and how they improve the experience for different users.

Full description

Features should add value to the user experience by providing efficient and diverse ways to find and interact with content. Consider device features such as voice, geolocation, camera and vibration API's, and how integration with connected devices or a second screen could provide choice.

Examples

- Integration with connected devices or second screen: Using voice interfaces to control multimedia, search for content, output from music or TV adds value for people who struggle to use other interfaces.
- Integration with platform APIs: Enhance functionality using platform features. The vibration API makes notifications more usable by deaf and hard of hearing people while the geolocation API makes it easier for people with mobility impairments to use location-based services.
- Make task completion easier: Add a 'Show password' button to input fields so users can verify they have correctly inputted text, or add touch identification for password protected areas.

07. What Suppliers need to know?

What is Accessibility?

Suppliers who produce and/or sell digital products and services need to know what accessibility is and how they can sell the products and services effectively. Suppliers should consult the following:

- “Accessible design is good design...” ([GDS Design Principle](#))

What the Law says

Suppliers need to ensure they understand what the law says about accessibility and should therefore consult the following:

- Equality Act 2010, equality duty [\[gov.uk\]](#)
- Public Contract Regulations 2015, 42:8 [\[gov.uk\]](#)

Standards applicable to the development of digital products and services

A useful introduction to WCAG is available on the [Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\) Home](#).

The [BS8878](#) code of practice applies to all products delivered via a web browser, including websites, web services and web-based applications such as email. BS8878:2010 is designed as an introduction to digital accessibility for non-technical professionals. [EN 301 549](#) is the European Standard on accessibility requirements for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) products and services.

Design and Development

Suppliers need to learn from good practice covering design, development, user experience testing and ongoing release management. Further information is available in the following:

- Inclusive design principles [\[Barclays\]](#)
- POUR principles [\[w3c\]](#)