

We asked 3 organisations of disabled people who provide information in accessible formats for their advice to employers on producing information for disabled people. Many thanks go to them for the information they gave.

To provide accessible information, employers should do the following:

- Send a positive message out that says that accessible formats are available. Don't make assumptions about someone's requirements but instead simply ask people what format they require information in.
- Use a Clear Type font (such as Arial or Helvetica) for electronic documents and set the font size to 14pt as standard.
- Think about where you store and display information and put it somewhere that can be easily accessed by all.

What accessible formats should information be available in?

The main formats that disabled people are likely to require are standard print (14pt, clear type font), Rich Text Format (RTF) – this is a computer file format used on most word processing programs; Large Print (18pt and above), Braille, Easy Read, Plain English and Audio (Tape or CD). When creating alternative formats, take note of the following:

- Written information should be saved in RTF and left unformatted. Doing so will provide the 'raw material' for converting into other formats and also makes it easier for people who are using non-Microsoft packages to access.
- Employers should have either the facility to print, or the knowledge to prepare, Braille copies. Provide Braille on request instead of stockpiling it.
- Documents can be placed on your website, providing that it is accessible and complies with the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative Guidelines. Keep formatting of online documents to a minimum.
- When providing Large Print formats, make sure that it is spiral-bound. This will make it easier to read. Large Print is usually font size 18pt or higher.
- Prepare a list of organisations for producing Braille, audio description, videos (with subtitles & British Sign Language (BSL)) and tactile maps. Find out how they want you to present the raw information to them - for example some Braille users need the information to be converted to be provided in plain text, some in an unformatted Word document.

The importance of accessible information

The demand for accessible information is greater than many employers may expect. If some people cannot make use of it, important or vital information will not reach all of your intended audience. Information (whether it is written, pictorial or verbal) should be made accessible to ensure that everyone (both disabled and non-disabled

people) can receive the information you want them to. Also think about other groups who may benefit from jargon free literature or audio information. These factors all build up your business case for developing an accessible information strategy.

Employers additionally have a duty to consider making reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act when it comes to potential and existing employees. Creating an alternative format of an application pack for a disabled job applicant, for example, could be an example of an adjustment. Importantly, you could also miss the opportunity to recruit a highly skilled disabled person if this is not done.

Accessible, accurate information is also very important to disabled people when making informed choices about how to live their lives – information is the number one point of the seven requirements of Independent Living, as identified by disabled people. With the correct information and in an appropriate format, disabled people feel empowered with the knowledge they have acquired and can use it to start to tackle any barriers they may have.

Disabled people have several key barriers around accessing information. The main ones are:

- Organisations only having information available in a format that is not accessible (such as small print).
- Organisations placing the information in a location that cannot be easily seen or reached (such as information in a high place that's inaccessible to wheelchair users).
- Information that is too complicated or full of jargon to understand.
- Not knowing what information is available, what formats it is in or how to get it.

Further information on providing accessible formats can be found in the 'Guidelines for Accessible Meetings and Events' produced by the Disabled People's Network Manchester. You can obtain a copy by contacting Manchester Disabled People's Access Group on **0161 273 5033** (voice and text) or e-mail: admin@mdpag.org.uk

If you're in doubt, you can contact various organisations of disabled people (such as our Centre). They can help you with advice and information on becoming more accessible to disabled people.

For more information, contact the Independent Employment Advocacy Centre on:
Tel: **0161 273 5412**
Answerphone minicom: **0161 273 5727**
Email: advocacy@breakthrough-uk.co.uk.

Please tell us about any access requirements when you get in touch.

Further good practice information is available online at
www.breakthrough-uk.co.uk.