



How to Organise Inclusive and Accessible Events

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Background

When organising meetings, training sessions, conferences and other events it is important to ensure that they are accessible to people with a range of different circumstances and needs. Anybody who is involved in organising events should be aware of this and ensure that the event is accessible to all potential participants.

Events involving people that are known to the organiser should present less problems than open events, which are likely to require more forward planning to allow for asking potential attendees about any access needs they may have. The checklists below should act as a reminder of the things that should be taken into account at the different stages of organising and delivering an event and help to ensure that events are accessible to as many people as possible. These can be tailored to the individual event and should include:

Pre-event administration – inviting people to indicate any specific requirements

When inviting delegates or speakers to an event, particularly where this includes people who are not known to the organiser, you should include an accessibility statement with the invitation and/or confirmation. For example:

We will do our best to fulfil your requirements to allow you to fully participate in this event. Please let us know if you have any special requirements such as dietary needs based on religious or medical grounds, the need for a private room during the day, handouts in advance and/or in alternative formats such as Braille or large print, hearing loops, British Sign Language interpreter, wheelchair access, high backed chair etc.

Make sure that the person who receives such requests is confident in how best to respond.

Considerations relating to the timing of the event

When organising an event you need to be aware of a range of factors that could influence people's availability. For example:

- For events within the working day it is advisable that the start and end times are within the period 10.00 am – 4.00 pm. Meetings with an earlier start or later finish may cause difficulties for people with caring responsibilities.
- It is important that meetings longer than about 2 hours allow for one or more short breaks. In timing the breaks thought should be given to scheduling them around meal times (e.g. for people who may need regular food intake relating to a health condition) or prayer times. Such breaks will also benefit all those present and will assist concentration.

- If the event involves a number of sessions in different venues, allow sufficient changeover time for people with mobility impairments to move between them.
- Consideration should be given to the time of the week. If you are aware of the work pattern of those who should attend (e.g. for an internal team meeting), you should take account of anybody who works part time, or has non-standard hours. There may also be times in the week relating to religious observance that should be avoided.
- There may also be an annual cycle to take into account e.g. avoiding important meetings during school holidays if parents are more likely to be on holiday, or significant religious festivals when people from that faith may wish to take leave.
- When planning events such as research seminar programmes, it is advisable to vary the days and the times at which the seminars are held over the course of the programme, to support maximum participation and inclusion of diverse groups of staff, such as those working part-time, with caring responsibilities or other such commitments.

Considerations relating to the venue

The venue needs to be accessible to people who may have a range of access needs. Things to consider include:

- Is there disabled parking near to the venue?
- Is the route from and nearest entrance to the car park easily accessible?
- Is the building accessible for people with a mobility impairment. This may include wheelchair users, but may also include people who tire easily, or may find stairs difficult etc. Things to consider include
 - Is the level entrance to the building near to the meeting room?
 - If the entrance has a ramp, would this allow a wheelchair user to enter the building independently?
 - Are there handrails next to stairs and ramps?
 - If the event is on an upper or lower floor, is there a lift that is wide enough to accommodate a motorised wheelchair and/or a wheelchair user with a personal assistant?
- Is the speaker area accessible e.g. if s/he will be using a lectern or microphone are they of adjustable height?

- Are there toilets within easy reach of the meeting room?
- Is there a fully accessible toilet near to the venue i.e. one that will accommodate a wheelchair user, possibly accompanied by a personal assistant?
- Does the room incorporate a hearing loop and are those who will be running the event aware of how it works?
- Is there private space near to the venue for people who may need to use them for a short period e.g. for religious observance, to administer medication etc.
- What are the emergency evacuation arrangements and places of safety for people who may not be able to use stairs in the event of a fire or other emergency?

Considerations relating to refreshments

- If buffet refreshments are to be provided where people may not all be able to take a seat it helps if the food can be eaten without the need for cutlery.
- If you have asked in advance about special dietary requirements, ensure that any special foods are clearly identified and kept separate from other food or are delivered directly to the person who has requested them.
- Even if you have not received any special requests, it can help to include a relatively high proportion of vegetarian options as this is likely to meet most requirements.
- Provide a range of beverages, including plain water.

Considerations relating to course materials

- When preparing material for events, take account of the guidelines on making your written and printed information accessible available on the Equality Service web site at: <http://www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/for-staff/good-practice-guidance/making-your-written-and-printed-information-accessible/>
- The Communications Team has also produced a Style Guide aimed at making our publications more inclusive: http://comms.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/style_guide.pdf
- Where possible, obtain electronic copies of any presentations, preferably in advance of the event so that they can be sent to delegates on request.

- Be prepared to have presentation materials converted to alternative formats on request.

Consider having at least one large print copy of all handouts available on the day, even if not requested.

Social events

Social interaction at work is also important. This can be in the work environment, but also encompasses social events such as leaving parties, Christmas outings, or just a general social get together. In order to ensure that all members of the team can get to at least some events it can be helpful to vary the timing and venue. For example:

- A lunchtime event may be easier than an evening event for people with caring responsibilities
- Not everybody is comfortable in a pub environment
- Not everybody has a partner, or would wish to bring their partner to a work event
- Consider people's dietary requirements – if going to a restaurant, does it cater for a range of requirements?
- Is the venue accessible to all who are likely to attend – and is the accessible entrance the same as the entrance for everyone else?