# **Inclusive Communications Template**

As government communicators, we must ensure that all communications we produce are accessible and inclusive. This guide provides:

1. [Inclusive Communications: considerations](#bookmark=id.ha7ncraozakd)
2. [GCS Accessibility Standards](#bookmark=id.8tiv3ajmih4c)
3. [Resources and Guidance](#_heading=h.5u9ye5t3qgpk)

We all have a responsibility to create accessible and inclusive communications. In all cases, you should consider with your policy teams how what you are communicating affects different groups - including people who are protected under the [Equality Act 2010](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents) - and plan this into your strategy. Equality Act 2010 requires the government to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people have equal access to information, goods and services. If your communication is about something that will affect disabled people, or they are entitled to know or be included in, you will need to ensure that you have done as much as can be reasonably expected to ensure they can access and respond to the information. This document is aligned with OASIS and will support you to do that.

The nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act are: age; sex; race; disability; religion or belief; sexual orientation; pregnancy and maternity; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership. It is also good practice to consider **socioeconomic** and **geographic factors** as appropriate.

The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) places a legal obligation on the public bodies (and those performing functions on behalf of them) to consider how any policy or decision affects people who are protected under the Equality Act.

There are three aims of the [Public Sector Equality Duty (set out in Section 149 (1)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149):

* eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
* advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
* foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

# **Inclusive Communications: considerations**

## Objectives

When setting objectives, it is important to be aware that not all of your audience will act and receive communications in the same way. Once you have completed your communications plan, review the objectives again in light of the audience considerations suggested in this document. Think about whether it is worth amending your KPIs and targets to account for your diverse audiences.

## Audience Insight

With regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and and [GCS professional assurance process](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/marketing/delivering-government-campaigns/professional-assurance/) (for paid for campaigns with a spend over £100k), ensure you consider the following audiences:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Audience groups | Do you particularly need this audience to hear and act upon messages? | What estimated percentage of your audience has this characteristic? |
| Older people/Retirement (55-75) consider whether you should break this down further | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| Older people/Elderly (76+) consider whether you should break this down further | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| Youth/younger adults (16-24) | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| Families with children | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| Female/Male | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| People from ethnic minority backgrounds | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| Disabled people or individuals with a long-term health condition (or carers/guardians) | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| Neurodivergent audiences (for example, autism, dyslexia) | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| People of different or no faiths | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| LGBT people | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| Pregnant people | Y/N Details of target group: |  |
| Intersectional groups (people with multiple characteristics) | Y/N Details of target group: |  |

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You may also ask the following questions to challenge yourself on your target audience:

* Who currently uses the policy, service or event your communications relate to?
* Who doesn’t currently use the policy, service or event and is this something your communications aim to change?
* What are the motivations and barriers to change [(including behavioural)](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/the-principles-of-behaviour-change-communications/) that your campaign can help to address?
* Does the policy, service or event relate to an area with known inequalities?

## Strategy

When planning your strategy, reflect on your audience insight to ensure no parts of your audience are excluded from receiving or engaging with your communications. This may involve providing communications in a variety of formats and ensuring that your audiences will engage with the language and imagery you use.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Things to consider | Considerations - the needs of different groups | Relevance to your communication and decision about how to address this need |
| **Proposition and messaging** | * Does your messaging appeal to your target audience(s)? * Do you need to create variants of content to better appeal to subgroups of your target audience? |  |
| **Channels and media** | * What channels do your audiences engage with? * Who does your audience listen to and trust (for example, community or faith leaders, or other intermediaries and influencers) * How have you factored audience demographics into allocation of your media spend? * Remember some audiences will have low or no level of digital engagement or access, or may use digital media differently. |  |
| **Testing** | * Can you set up a focus group/s which reflects your target audiences to consult, discuss, test and seek feedback. |  |

## Implementation

Before publication, test your content for impact and accessibility before and during its use. Build in ‘pause points’ to your delivery timeline to review impact and gather feedback on its reception.

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| Topic | Considerations - the needs of different groups | Relevance to communication and decision about how to address need |
| **Language** | **Should be considered upfront:**   * Does the language inadvertently promote unhelpful stereotypes or inadvertently exclude people? * Is the language used easy to understand? [Most users prefer simple language](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/style-guide/a-to-z-of-gov-uk-style), including specialist audiences. * Have you followed [gov.uk’s style guide on how to write about ethnicity](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity), which explains why we do not use the terms BAME and BME? |  |
| **Diverse Imagery** | **Should be considered upfront:**   * Is your target audience represented in your materials visually, orally and in the contexts and scenarios featured? * Is there a wide variety of people with protected characteristics represented in your materials? * Have you co-created/tested your concepts with people representing your audience? * Do your images inadvertently reinforce stereotypes? |  |
| **Format** | **Please see the** [**GCS accessibility standards below**](#_heading=h.u14x5znipqib) |  |

## Scoring

You should consider how you will monitor and evaluate the impact of your communications. Where possible, you should demonstrate how planning with the inclusive principles above has affected the impact of your communications, especially where you have engaged audiences you have struggled to in the past.

* How have you ensured your data collection methods are inclusive?
* Are you collecting your data in a way that will allow you to assess how well you have reached and influenced key target audiences and, where appropriate, subgroups of your audience?
* How have you adapted your strategy if you have seen a lower level of engagement from particular audiences? For example, re-allocating campaign spend to specific community channels/radio stations to increase potential reach.

# **GCS Accessibility Standards**

The following sets out the updated GCS Accessibility Standards. Where it says ‘Should be available upfront’ you should ensure your communications meets this requirement by default. Where it says ‘Should be considered upfront’, you should consider as part of your campaign planning.

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| Format (guidance linked) | Considerations - the needs of different groups | Relevance to communication and decision about how to address need |
| [**Clear print**](https://printdisability.org/guidelines/guidelines-for-producing-clear-print-2022/) | **Should be followed upfront:**  Clear print is a set of principles which give guidance on producing printed documents in a way which makes them accessible. Departments should adhere to the guidelines such as:   * Font size: minimum 12 point, but consider 14 point if audience comprises those with sight impairments * Style: sans serif is generally more accessible; avoid italics and underline * Font thickness: avoid the light options * Text alignment: left aligned * Text direction: horizontally * Line spacing: recommended line spacing is 1.2 pt for a standard document; for font sizes greater than 14 pt, 1.5 line spacing would be recommended. * Document structure: include headings for screen readers and ensure page numbers are positioned consistently |  |
| **Hyperlinks** | **Should be considered upfront:**  Hyperlinks provide links to another source of information such as a website page.   * Hyperlinks should be descriptive ( for example, In July, the government published a [consultation on helping savers understand their pension choices](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/helping-savers-understand-their-pension-choices-supporting-individuals-at-the-point-of-access)) * Generic links do not make sense out of context or tell users where a link will take them. They also do not work for people using screen readers, who often scan through a list of links to navigate a page. It’s important the links are descriptive so they make sense in isolation. * Don’t use full website addresses * Don’t use shortened URLs such as tinyurl * Don’t use phrases such as ‘(click) here’ or ‘find out more’ |  |
| [**Alt text for images, graphs, tables**](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/everything-you-need-to-know-to-write-effective-alt-text-df98f884-ca3d-456c-807b-1a1fa82f5dc2) | **Should be available upfront:**  Alt text provides a textual explanation for the image or graph used, which can be picked up by screen readers and help visually impaired audiences feel included.   * All images, graphics, tables on websites or social media should include alt text. |  |
| [**Use of colour**](https://accessibility.blog.gov.uk/2016/06/17/colour-contrast-why-does-it-matter/) | **Should be available upfront:**   * Using accessible colours to convey messaging (blue, green, yellow) * Follow relevant guidelines on colour combinations and contrasts * Make sure that colour is not the only visual method for conveying information * Check that colours you are using don’t reinforce gender stereotypes |  |
| **Imagery and Movement** | **Should be available upfront:**   * Guidance on imagery should be followed. * If producing videos, make sure to avoid flashing lights and photography to which some people are sensitive * Avoid moving images behind text: this can be hard for screen reader users and disabled people * Keep Italics and moving fonts to a minimum |  |
| [**Captioning on audio-visual content including TV, cinema and online.**](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mediacentral/captions/captions-or-subtitles-whats-difference#:~:text=Closed%20captions%20can%20be%20turned,and%20cannot%20be%20turned%20off) | **Should be available upfront:**   * All audio-visual content, including TV and cinema advertising, social and digital content, should be captioned/subtitled. * where possible closed (viewer-controlled) captioning is preferred. Open captioning may present difficulties for those with cognitive impairments. Where closed captioning is not possible, open (embedded) captioning is acceptable * In all cases, follow relevant guidelines on how to caption AV. * Transcripts should also be available.   **Should be considered upfront**   * Captioning cinema advertising where possible. |  |
| [**British Sign Language**](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/british-sign-language-act/) **(GCS members only)** | **Should be considered upfront:**   * There is no statutory requirement for all government communications to be translated into BSL. But, all government departments are expected to consider where the use of BSL will be of most interest and importance to Deaf BSL users. * The BSL Act states that BSL should be actively considered for any public announcement on policy or changes to the law, including:   + publication of plans, strategies, policy and other consultations and consultation responses   + press conferences   + social media   + websites * Although agencies are not in scope of the BSL Act 2022, there is an expectation they will align their communications with the Act. |  |
| **Video relay** | **Should be considered upfront:**   * Think about how deaf, hearing and speech impaired individuals can respond to your communications. * Use Video Relay Services for communicating with people whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language. VRS is available on different platforms so check with your communications teams on which platform is best for you. |  |
| [**Textphone / Text Relay**](https://www.relayuk.bt.com/) | **Should be considered upfront:**   * Think about how deaf, hearing and speech impaired individuals can respond to your communications. Use text relay for hearing and/or speech impaired individuals. |  |
| [**Alternative Formats**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/accessible-communication-formats) | **Should be available on demand:**   * **Audio** such as audio tapes or digital files (MP3). * **Braille** * **Easy Read** * **Large Print** * **Makaton** |  |

It is important to consider formats early in the planning process to ensure you have budgeted, and built in time, for necessary procurement or translation services. As producing alternative formats has cost implications, producing large quantities of alternative formats may be unnecessary and wasteful. Identify, segment and prioritise your audiences, and consider how best to reach them using a mix of formats and channels and factor in costs at the beginning. Conduct research and stakeholder engagement to ensure your approach meets the needs of your intended audience.

Note that where the information is critical to public health, for example COVID-19 or other emergencies, departments should endeavour to make commonly-requested alternative formats available at the same time as other communications. It may be challenging to produce alternative versions of materials at the same time. Departments should continue to engage key stakeholders regularly and ensure initial communications are as accessible as possible. Where alternative formats are required upfront, you should consider committing to producing appropriate formats when circumstances allow, and within a feasible time frame.

# **Resources and Guidance**

### Use of language

* [Writing about ethnicity](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity)
* You can use [Hemingway Editor](http://www.hemingwayapp.com/) to help you simplify language

### Diverse Imagery

* [Four tips to make your campaign imagery more diverse](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/blog/4-tips-to-make-your-campaign-imagery-more-diverse/)

### Government accessible content and publishing

* [GCS Accessible Communications webpage](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/digital-communication/accessible-communications/)
* [Publishing accessible documents](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/publishing-accessible-documents)
* [Making a positive change: PDF to HTML](https://accessibility.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/12/making-a-positive-change-pdf-to-html/)
* [How to publish on gov.uk: images and AV](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-publish-on-gov-uk/images-and-videos)
* [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag)
* [Accessible Communication Formats](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/accessible-communication-formats#providing-accessible-formats)
* [Specific guidance on images and videos](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-publish-on-gov-uk/images-and-videos)
* GDS Service Manuals: [Learning about users and their needs,](https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/user-research/start-by-learning-user-needs) [Researching emotionally sensitive subjects](https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/user-research/researching-emotionally-sensitive-subjects) and [Running research sessions with disabled people](https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/user-research/running-research-sessions-with-people-with-disabilities)
* [Colour contrast guidance](https://accessibility.blog.gov.uk/2016/06/17/colour-contrast-why-does-it-matter/)

### British Sign Language

* [British Sign Language Act guidance British Sign Language Act guidance for communicators (GCS members only)](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/british-sign-language-act/)

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