

Equipment and adaptations –

Providing **information** for **service users**.

**Guide for local authorities**



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## Background

New guidance on the provision of equipment and adaptations was issued to NHS and local authority partnerships in December 2009. The guidance placed the following commitments on the Scottish Government and local partnerships:

*The Scottish Government will develop a template webpage for equipment and adaptation information to assist local authorities in developing their local information websites.*

*Local Partnerships will jointly produce and publish information on equipment and adaptations provision.*

Following some research it was felt that the development of a guide to producing information on the provision of equipment and adaptations in a range of formats would be of more value to partnerships.

Further research uncovered a piece of work carried out by Ricability in England. Ricability is the trading name of the Research Institute for Consumer Affairs (RICA). They are a national research charity dedicated to providing independent information of value to disabled and older people.

With Department of Health funding, Ricability investigated what information was needed, and how it could be provided. The report on this research, along with their guide “The retail model of equipment supply – providing information for consumers: Guide for local authorities” is available at [http://www.ricability.org.uk/articles\\_and\\_surveys/](http://www.ricability.org.uk/articles_and_surveys/).

Although solely concerned with equipment provision it was felt that this guide could easily be developed to cover the provision of information on equipment and adaptations in Scotland.

## Introduction

The provision of good quality information and advice is central to any service. Everyone should have access to this information so that they can access services and exercise their rights. Information and advice play a key role in any strategy which promotes inclusion<sup>1</sup>.

Equipment and adaptations are provided and funded in a variety of ways by Health and social care partnerships, the retail and voluntary sectors. Following an assessment, service users can be provided with equipment and/or adaptations by their local authority or the NHS. Some service users may also choose to purchase equipment, or arrange for an adaptation to the home, directly from the retail sector, using their own funds, and/or with the use of a Direct Payment.

On the following pages we summarise some of Ricability's principle findings, and we illustrate them with reference to work carried out by a joint equipment store in Scotland to provide information for its service users about accessing equipment. This example is provided as a template for local areas to develop to fit their own local circumstances.

Part one of this guide gives general guidance on providing information. In parts two and three we provide an example of an equipment guide developed utilising the Ricability guide. Using these examples, and the key principles contained in this guide local partnerships will be able to develop local information on the provision of equipment and adaptations.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Accessible Information Forum: Standards for Information and Advice Provision in Scotland - <http://www.saifscotland.org.uk/publications/publicat.htm#Standards>

## Part one – general guidance on providing information

### What do people need to know about equipment and adaptations?

There are many misconceptions among service users about what equipment and adaptations are available; what they will be eligible for; how they are obtained, and about the organisations that provide them. Many remain unaware of how equipment and adaptations can help them achieve the outcomes they desire. A lack of information means that some people end up with inappropriate equipment and adaptations. A recent Help the Aged report<sup>2</sup> underlined the importance of information by the simple statement that:

If no one knows about them, services might just as well not exist

Research carried out by Ricability confirmed the common sense view that people need information that is:

- easy to understand and clear
- in an appropriate format
- provided in places where it will be found
- in as much or as little detail as the individual needs at that time

Information needs to be delivered to people who don't know that it exists and possibly don't know that they need it. It needs to be provided in different formats to suit the diversity of its audiences. It needs to overcome any misconceptions people have, and be provided in a way that maximises the chances that the recipients will act on it. It will need to tell people what to expect in a realistic way.

For equipment and adaptations, the specific information needed includes<sup>3</sup>:

#### Basic information

- different approaches and strategies for solving a problem.
- the range of equipment and adaptations available – some people may be overwhelmed or intimidated by this choice and may feel insufficiently briefed to cope effectively. Clear guidance is needed about equipment and adaptations, and sources of information about them.
- how to get equipment and adaptations from private and statutory sources – a clear description of different routes, with a summary of the advantages and downsides of each. It would include health and social care systems, as well as private purchase. Information on using a Direct Payment to purchase equipment privately should also be supplied.

<sup>2</sup> *Future Communities, Re-shaping our society for older people*, Help the Aged 2009, p7 - [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/search1/?keyword=Future+Communities%2c+Re-shaping+our+society+for+older+people%2c+Help+the+&nation=AgeUK\\_en-GB](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/search1/?keyword=Future+Communities%2c+Re-shaping+our+society+for+older+people%2c+Help+the+&nation=AgeUK_en-GB)

<sup>3</sup> For full details see *The revolution in equipment supply and what it means for information*, Ricability, 2009 [http://www.ricability.org.uk/articles\\_and\\_surveys/](http://www.ricability.org.uk/articles_and_surveys/)

- local authority social care systems can be confusing for those who have not used them before. Different stages in the process need to be outlined in detail so that individuals know what to expect and what to do at each stage.
- details of the different funding arrangement for adaptations in the different housing tenures should also be provided. The Scottish Government has published a range of funding guides for both practitioners and service users, which can be referred to. These guides are available at :  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/care/EandA/UsefulPublications>

### **Assessments**

- what is involved
- preparation for assessment
- eligibility criteria

### **Choosing equipment and adaptations**

- comparative information on suitability, performance and cost
- consumer feedback on the quality of equipment and adaptations, services and support
- signposting to lists of suitable contractors for those wishing to fund their own adaptations
- information on local Care and Repair projects and their involvement in providing or facilitating adaptations

### **In use**

- delivery and fitting
- instructions for use. These are clearly important and local authorities need to have some way of ensuring that equipment users know how to use it safely and effectively

### **Follow up**

- maintenance and after sales service. The need for maintenance instructions and, where appropriate, details of how to get the equipment or adaptation serviced and repaired is also necessary.
- for those wishing to purchase equipment privately, or self fund an adaptation, advice on service and maintenance costs should be provided. Advice on any assistance the local authority may provide to meet these costs should also be provided.
- information and advice about changing needs. Equipment and adaptation users need to be able to monitor their use of equipment or adaptations and recognise when some alternative solution is likely to be better.
- refurbishment and recycling – good information about local facilities for recycling equipment is needed. Many older people are deeply concerned about waste and consciousness of ecological issues is rising rapidly.

## **General**

- sources of information and advice
- information about an individual's responsibilities within the scheme. Equipment and adaptations purchased privately belongs to the individual, and there may be little further intervention from other agencies.

Providing all this is a tall order. It implies cooperation from a number of agencies who have different responsibilities for the collection and provision of information. A strategy is needed to ensure that the information needed is provided by someone and that the different sources of information are linked in a way that service users are given all the facts and guidance they need.

## **Information strategy**

Ricability's research confirmed the obvious point that information needs to be an integral part of service delivery, rather than an optional add on. Good information needs adequate resources of both staff time and outreach expenses. Some features of successful strategies are:

- meaningful consultation with the range of people who may need the information
- responsibility for the strategy assigned to a senior member of staff, who also acts as a 'champion' of this area of work
- objectives and procedures fully understood and supported at all levels. Internal communication and consultation is important.
- awareness of other information produced or planned elsewhere in the service, to allow for some coordination.
- if it has worked, copy what others have done. Checks on what other organisations (particularly in the voluntary sector) have done can pay off – there may be no need to reinvent the wheel.
- exploit existing distribution networks that can help disseminate the information.
- build in realistic budgets for production and distribution.

## How much detail?

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The basic rule of thumb is to provide the detail needed to enable consumers to make practical decisions. While it is possible to 'swamp' people with information, it is much more likely that they don't have enough. Many people don't know how systems work, don't understand the jargon, and are confused about the various professionals involved. Consider what information would help them find their way through this system:

- it needs to tell the person trying to get the equipment or adaptation what they must do and how they must do it
- a realistic account of what to expect is necessary to avoid unrealistic hopes
- specific internal contact points are useful – you need to know who to speak to and avoid being passed from pillar to post
- telephone numbers of local and national organisations who may be able to answer questions are also useful. These could include local organisations such as Care and Repair organisations, the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), Age Concern or Independent Living Centres (ILC). National organisations such as the Care Information Scotland website and helpline ([www.careinfoscotland.co.uk](http://www.careinfoscotland.co.uk), 08456 001 001) or the Disabled Living Foundations self assessment website Ask Sara ([www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk); [www.asksara.org.uk](http://www.asksara.org.uk)). All these have a wealth of experience, and may employ people who have been in similar situations who can offer help and guidance from a personal perspective.
- test the information out with local organisations of disabled people.



## Cultural and other groups

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Local authorities know their local populations very well. Most can call on the experience of staff, feedback from service users, census statistics and the findings of research carried out in the area.

- does accessing statutory service provision mean different things to people from different cultural backgrounds?
- does needing equipment and adaptations mean different things to people from different cultural backgrounds? Is this true for all equipment and adaptations, or only for some items?

This is a complex area, and one in which there are no hard and fast rules. A first step is to talk to people in each group to discover appropriate ways to consult with them. Get examples of the information that your local population like and respect, and use them. This type of consultation can help make good community links and may in itself lead to a greater take up of services amongst those who previously felt excluded.

However it is more difficult to include groups of people who have traditionally been excluded from local services. It may be, for example, that certain groups of people do not use, or do not try to use, services for reasons because of the limitations of information traditionally provided.

## Plain language

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You need to produce information in different formats for some people, but your starting point should be a clear, easy to understand document. Nearly a fifth of adults in the UK – over seven million people - have some difficulty with reading, writing or basic arithmetic. So it makes sense to write as simply and clearly as possible.

- use simple words and short sentences
- write in a language your readers will understand – avoid jargon, technical or bureaucratic language. If you have to use a technical term, explain it
- only give one message at a time in each sentence
- use active rather than passive voice. For example 'we consider' rather than 'it is considered'
- address people directly - 'you' rather than 'the recipient'
- information needs to be concise. Imagine you are writing for a tabloid newspaper.

## Design

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Make sure designers are properly briefed about your target audience. They need to pay particular attention to type shapes and sizes, colour and contrast and navigational aids (such as contents lists, headings and overall organisation of the document). Some general rules:

- avoid cramped layouts
- keep lines short. Narrow columns are easier to read than long lines
- leave enough space between columns
- use a ragged right hand margin
- divide text into short chunks
- avoid over elaborate or unusual type faces
- avoid design features which may lead to confusion, such as printing text on top of images.

## Navigation

- use pictures, signs and symbols, where appropriate to help with navigation. Use pictures to make the page look interesting and something you would want to read
- don't clutter up the page unnecessarily, or make it hard to follow where the text is going or what it is trying to say. Large stretches of unbroken text can be difficult to negotiate and hard to make sense of
- use clear headings and navigation aids such as a content list, bullet points and rules to separate unrelated sections
- make sure there is enough contrast between text and its background.

## Alternative formats

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Formats need to be appropriate for the information being presented, and to the audience it is intended for. Include details of alternative formats in general publicity and in your mainstream publications. All formats should be available at the same time. People who need information in braille should not have to wait longer for it than those who get it in print, for example. Apart from conventional print, the formats most commonly used are:

- large print
- braille
- audio
- computer disc
- websites

### **Large print**

For many blind and partially sighted people, larger print is essential.

- large print publications are often produced in 14pt type. However some organisations recommend 16pt and some recommend 18pt. The RNIB say most people prefer large print in the range of 16 to 22 point. It is not usually worth going bigger than this, except for headings
- bold type is clearer at larger font sizes
- type faces need to be clear - avoid light faces, leave enough space between lines and between characters (they should not touch). Keep the length of lines short. Avoid italics and text in capital letters which are more difficult to read
- use matt paper as gloss can glare
- avoid making the publication look as if it is aimed at children
- do not enlarge small print materials on a photocopier. These can become cumbersome and the quality is usually poor
- computers can print text in any size, so it is easy to produce a large text version of a text file. This is particularly useful where information changes frequently. However check that the document complies with the guidelines above
- Many large print editions of standard documents just contain text, and are often poorly produced and badly laid out. Large print documents should be designed and produced so that they are as good as the standard version.

### **Braille**

The cost of producing braille versions of your documents varies with their length and complexity and also between different transcribers. These costs can be high.

- if you are putting a document into braille for an individual, check how much of it they want. Not all of it might be useful and cutting down on the bulk is helpful and cheaper

- if you publish a lot of documents it might be worth considering producing them yourself with a printer (called an embosser) linked to a computer which converts the text. See below for sources of more information
- braille documents can be sent post free if they are marked as 'articles for the blind' and packed so that they can be opened by the Post Office. Details from the Royal Mail
- bind braille documents so they lie flat. Store them in a way that does not reduce legibility by flattening the dots. Use matt paper so there is no glare. Generally A4 size is easiest to use. Thick heavy books are cumbersome so split your information into a series of volumes if necessary
- get a braille reader to check the quality of your document and that the correct conventions are being used.

### ***Transcription services***

The RNIB will transcribe information into any form used by visually impaired people, including braille, tape and computer disc. Contact:

RNIB Disability Access Services

Phone 01733 37 53 70

Email [businesslink@rnib.org.uk](mailto:businesslink@rnib.org.uk)

Contact: [businesslink@rnib.org.uk](mailto:businesslink@rnib.org.uk)

The Confederation of Transcription Information Services have information on producing information tape and lists of agencies who carry out this work.

67 High Street

Tarporley

Cheshire CW6 ODP

Tel: 01829 733351

[www.cotis.org.uk](http://www.cotis.org.uk)

### ***Audio***

Good recordings need thought. Consider how you might change the visual features of a publication so that it works in sound. Contents lists, headings and indexing are very important. Give an overview, so listeners know what's coming and can decide whether to skip it or not. Use tones which can be heard during fast forward or rewind. Put information into a sensible order, which may not be the same as it is for print.

- professionally-trained voices make for easier listening and are worth paying for
- use high quality tapes
- spell complicated words or names. Put key information at the beginning of each section so that it can be found easily
- tapes can also be sent free of postage charges under the articles for the Blind scheme.

### ***Computer disc***

Copying information onto computer discs is easy and cheap. It allows people with a computer to format text in whatever form suits them. Information can be displayed in any

size on a computer screen, it can be printed, read out by a screenreader (which reads whatever is on the screen) or transcribed into braille by a gadget that can be attached to the computer.

Check that it is in the right format. Many visually impaired people use systems that are not compatible with Windows. You may have to use rtf (rich text format) or txt (text) files which can be read by any computer.

### **Websites**

Producing information online has several advantages over printed hard copy. It is easier to monitor, revise, and keep up to date, avoiding expensive reprinting costs. It can be cheaper to produce. And users can easily find the information they need, without the distraction of information that they don't need.

Although web browsers allow users to display type in different sizes, the design of the site should make this easy. Aim for software that allows site visitors to choose from a selection of font sizes and colours.

- avoid patterned backgrounds, and text which is superimposed onto pictures or patterns
- avoid busy, confusing, flashing or moving graphics
- make sure text contrasts strongly with the background
- avoid underlining (apart from links) and italics
- all images need to have a text alternative ('alt tag') which explains what the image is and why it is there
- separate hyperlinks from text by putting them on separate lines. it should be clear where they will take you
- provide alternatives if using software (such as frames or javascript) which some people may not have or be able to use
- invite comments by e-mail on how easy your site is to use.

### **More information on accessible websites**

Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It is also available in print from the Stationery Office ([www.tsoshop.org.uk](http://www.tsoshop.org.uk)) £9.55. ISBN 0 10 545095 2.

There are several checklists of good practice and programs which will check text for accessibility:

- the Web accessibility initiative ([www.w3.org/WAI/](http://www.w3.org/WAI/)) homepage has lots of useful information. They have an index of programs which check for accessibility
- the BBC's program Betsie ([www.bbc.co.uk/education/betsie/index.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/betsie/index.html)) makes web pages more accessible by removing images and unnecessary formatting, so that only the text is left
- the Royal National Institute for the Blind has guidelines on making websites accessible to people with visual impairment ([www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/solutionsforbusiness/trainingandconferences/webaccessibility/demystifyingaccessibility/Pages/demystifying\\_accessibility.aspx](http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/solutionsforbusiness/trainingandconferences/webaccessibility/demystifyingaccessibility/Pages/demystifying_accessibility.aspx))

- the Employers' Forum on Disability ([www.efd.org.uk](http://www.efd.org.uk)) publish Accessible Website Design, a practical and strategic guide. This printed guide includes a strategic action plan to improve accessibility with the business case for accessibility. It discusses navigation to multimedia, explaining what is good practice and what isn't. It includes a checklist for accessibility and explains how to test your site for accessibility before you launch it.

## Distribution

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Delivery is everything!

- consult disabled people to find out how they like to get information and what they find easy or difficult. Include local disability organisations. They are both knowledgeable and helpful
- consider how to distribute each format. How will the people who need it know it is available? How will you get it to them?
- include the local press. According to the Employers' Forum on Disability one in four people either has a disability or is close to someone who is disabled. Use any local networks to get through to as many people as possible; local papers may reach a wide audience who can pass on information to others
- include any local newsletters and exploit any local networks of information
- information needs to be delivered to where people are. Those who don't know that it exists will not ask for it. Think about where the people you want to communicate with might be. Possible outlets include GP surgeries, medical centres, day centres, libraries and other centres where people congregate. No one source will get through to everyone, so the more varied the outlets the better. Make sure information about the other formats available is given at these places.

Also consider the professional people who need to know about the scheme or who may tell their clients or patients about it. It is worth thinking about the roles of those involved in providing equipment and what they can do to help disseminate information:



## Hard to reach groups

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People who recognise the value of information and know that they need it are likely to seek it out. Whatever you provide, they are likely to find it.

The problem is that those who most need information are often the least likely to get it. This puts the responsibility on the information provider to find successful ways of delivering it to people who are not looking for it. Broadly this means taking it to where people are, using other networks or people and generally finding imaginative ways of communication.

- voluntary sector organisations and agencies
- GPs and medical services
- centres for social and leisure activities
- shops and shopping centres.

## More information

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### **General guidance**

#### *The Disability Communication Guide*

A reference guide that helps staff communicate with disabled people with advice on language and etiquette, preferred modes of assistance and how to avoid attitudes and behaviours which can create misunderstandings and barriers. £4.50 (five copies) From the Employers' Forum on Disability. Order online through [www.efd.org.uk](http://www.efd.org.uk).

#### *See it right*, RNIB

They comprise a book and a companion CD that cover policies and procedures in information giving. They include information on producing information in print, in audio and tactile formats and electronically. Fully revised in 2007. £30. Details from

RNIB Customer Services

PO Box 173

Peterborough PE2 6WS

Tel: 0845 702 3153 / 01733 37 53 50

[www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/accessibleinformation/Pages/see\\_it\\_right.aspx](http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/accessibleinformation/Pages/see_it_right.aspx)

Email: [cservices@rnib.org.uk](mailto:cservices@rnib.org.uk)

#### *Plain language*

The Plain English Campaign and the Plain language Commission will edit text into an easy to understand form. They also have training courses and information on good practice.

Plain English Campaign

PO Box 3

New Mills

High Peak SK22 4QP

Tel: 01663 744409

Fax: 01663 747038

Email: [info@plainenglish.co.uk](mailto:info@plainenglish.co.uk)

[www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk)

Plain Language Commission

The Castle

29 Stoneheads

Whaley Bridge

High Peak

Derbyshire SK23 7BB

Tel: 01663 733177

Fax: 01663 735135

Email: [Email@clearest.co.uk](mailto:Email@clearest.co.uk)

[www.clearest.co.uk](http://www.clearest.co.uk)

*People with learning disabilities*

Specialist organisations such as MENCAP and People First can advise on the best way of communicating with people with learning difficulties and can help produce materials in appropriate formats.

*Make it clear* is a free guide to producing information in easy read format, downloadable from MENCAP's website.

Accessibility Unit

Mencap

123 Golden Lane

London EC1Y 0RT

Tel: 020 7696 5551

Email [accessibility@mencap.org.uk](mailto:accessibility@mencap.org.uk)

[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

People First

Unit 3.46

Canterbury Court

Kennington Park Business Centre

1-3 Brixton Road

London SW9 6DE

Tel: 020 7820 6655

Fax: 020 7820 6621

Email: [general@peoplefirstltd.com](mailto:general@peoplefirstltd.com)

[www.peoplefirstltd.com](http://www.peoplefirstltd.com)