

Making Events Accessible

To help ensure events are as inclusive and accessible as possible, this guide contains information to consider when planning events both online and in person.

As event managers, it is your responsibility to make an event accessible by removing barriers that may make attendance difficult, uncomfortable, or stressful. Doing so helps all attendees feel welcome and enhances their engagement and enjoyment, showing that you have taken the time to understand and meet their needs.

Choosing a Date and Time

When selecting your event date, consider your audience and research appropriate dates, avoiding dates that may be inaccessible to attendees due to factors such as religious holidays or caring responsibilities, where possible.

Choose event timings based on your target audience. For example, if the event is for all staff, it should fall within core working hours (10am–3pm) to be accessible to most.

Publicising the Event

- Publish your event in good time, as some attendees may need to make complex arrangements to attend.
- Ensure publicity materials are available in multiple accessible formats. Web pages should comply with the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#).

Event Registration

- Use accessible registration software, such as Microsoft Forms, which is University-approved and compatible with screen readers via the immersive reader function.
- Provide attendees with an opportunity to share any individual requirements (e.g. personal support, access, or dietary needs) and ask if there are additional ways to meet them. Inform attendees promptly if difficulties arise in meeting individual arrangements.
- Offer multiple registration options — online or email.

Joining Instructions

Use joining instructions to give attendees insight into the event. These can enable colleagues to plan and thereby reduce overwhelm or anxiety. You might include:

- Clear and concise information on venue facilities, parking, or for online events — how to join.
- Information for those with specific access requests (e.g. hearing loops, quiet spaces).

For more information on accessible documents, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/publishing-accessible-documents>

Speakers, Hosts, and Moderators

Consider a briefing call or pre-event email outlining best practices for accessible presenting:

- Use microphones when presenting and for Q&A.
- Face the audience and remain unobstructed for those lip reading; seat them near the front.
- Fully describe images, diagrams, and quotes rather than asking attendees to read them.
- Use high-contrast slides with large fonts and minimal text.
- Maintain a steady speaking pace and control animation speeds.
- Ensure all videos are captioned; consider live captioning (Event Exeter can assist).
- Provide alternative question methods for Q&A (e.g. Mentimeter or advance submission).
- Consider recording or transcribing sessions, following consent and GDPR policies.
- Be mindful that presenters may also have accessibility needs — discuss available resources in advance.

Platforms for Online Events

- For screen reader users, chat functions in Microsoft Teams and Zoom can be difficult to follow. Where appropriate, use the Q&A feature, allowing hosts to curate and answer questions. Simple instructions for [Microsoft Teams Q&A](#) are [available online](#). This facility is also available in [Zoom](#).

If showing documents, use Microsoft's Accessibility Checker (available in Office 365). This tool is also useful for everyday accessible communication. Simple to use [guidelines](#) on how to use this function are available. Guidelines for [Zoom Accessibility](#) are available too.

Captioning

- Live captions can assist those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or working in noisy environments. In Microsoft Teams, both hosts and participants can enable them. Include instructions in your joining materials. [Instructions](#) on how to use this feature are available.
- Note that AI captions vary in accuracy, especially for technical content.
- To improve caption quality, minimise background noise and allow one person to speak at a time.
- Captions in Teams cannot currently be recorded and are available only in English.

Post-Event Recording

Providing recordings with captions can be invaluable, especially if there were sound issues during the live event. Ensure GDPR compliance and obtain speaker consent before recording.

- Both [Microsoft Teams](#) and [Zoom](#) allow event recording.
- Upload recordings to [Panopto](#) for automatic captioning, then review and edit captions for accuracy (particularly acronyms and names).
- Share the video link in follow-up emails with attendees, along with a feedback form to gauge event accessibility.

Choosing a Venue – In Person

Venue Accessibility

Conduct a site visit to check accessibility along the full route guests will take. Confirm the status of lifts, accessible toilets, and hearing loops. Where possible, ensure all attendees can use the same entrance independently, via a ramp or lift.

Room Sizes

Choose easily accessible rooms with sufficient space for comfort and movement (including wheelchair access and guiding for visually impaired attendees). Ensure seating choice, fresh air, and rest areas.

Car Parking

University venues rarely provide attendee parking. Include parking details and note any significant obstacles between parking and the venue.

Children at Events

Check with the Health & Safety (H&S) team if children or babies are allowed and if there are any safeguarding concerns. Include child safety in your risk assessment. If children attend, book private rooms for breastfeeding and separate facilities for baby changing (not toilets). If the campus Nurture/Nursing rooms are accessible from your venue, confirm attendees will be able to access these ahead of the event.

Service Animals

Inform venue staff in advance and provide suitable seating space and water. Communicate the presence of service animals in joining instructions, noting they cannot be excluded due to allergies.

Quiet Room

Where possible, reserve an accessible quiet room where attendees can rest, regulate or participate remotely (e.g. via screen link).

Providing Extra Onsite Support

Where possible, include accessibility support in your budget and event promotion:

- Ramps for entrances or stages
- Adjustable lecterns and seating
- Note takers, BSL interpreters (more than one if a long event), or personal assistants as required

Consult the [Wellbeing, Inclusion and Culture team](#) for guidance.

Event Experience

- Provide microphones, BSL interpretation, captioning, and hearing loops to ensure everyone can fully engage.
- Avoid strobe lighting; consult your AV supplier on safe alternatives.
- Ensure clear, high-contrast signage to key areas (toilets, lifts, rooms).
- Ensure the event schedule is readily available and regular rest breaks are included if the event is longer than one hour. Alternatively, make it clear that breaks can be taken as needed.
- Provide stewards to guide attendees and mark reserved seating clearly.
- Position signage and dining tables at heights accessible to wheelchair users.
- Maintain good ventilation and check levels with the venue.
- Keep background music at a comfortable level.
- For exhibitions, consider quieter time slots for those who may find crowds overwhelming.

Food and Drink

As dietary preferences and restrictions are increasingly common, plan accordingly and comply with GDPR by deleting dietary data after the event.

- Collect dietary and access information at registration.
- Ensure caterers know ingredients and allergen details.
- Provide support for guests with mobility or visual impairments at buffets.
- Clearly label allergens.
- Offer a variety of options for dietary needs — not just one alternative.
- Include alcohol-free and caffeine-free options with clear labelling.
- During periods of religious fasting observance (e.g. Ramadan), accommodate attendees by offering earlier or later meal options where possible.

Emergency Evacuation

Consider individual attendee requirements in your emergency planning and risk assessment. Refer to the [Event Management Standard](#) for guidance.