



Foundation Inclusive Communication Toolkit



Fact sheet - Why inclusive communication matters



Elliott

“Good communication makes me feel included. It makes me feel like I matter, that I have something to give, and I am valued.”

This fact sheet explains why inclusive communication is important to service users, individual staff, and public sector bodies. It provides evidence of the benefits of inclusive communication good practice. It includes quotes from people who experience communication exclusion, experts, public body representatives, and research publications. Questions to support reflection appear throughout the fact sheet. The [Foundation Inclusive Communication Toolkit Module 2 presentation](#) provides similar information.

All public bodies provide services and employ people with diverse communication needs and preferences. Therefore, inclusive communication matters to all public bodies. In brief it helps them to -

- Engage better with more people from diverse communities.
- Achieve better outcomes.
- Improve public trust and engagement.
- Save time and reduce the costs of communication breakdown.
- Be kinder, fairer, and more person-centred.



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Quick definition of inclusive communication

People need or prefer to communicate in diverse ways. Communication is better when organisations recognise and respond to this diversity. Inclusive communication allows more people to understand others and express themselves easily. It is about:

- All ways of communicating, including writing, speaking, and signing.
- All channels of communication - online, on the phone, on paper and in person.
- Situational factors like the time and place of a communication.
- Every stage of communication with service users.

A more detailed definition of inclusive communication is set out in Toolkit Module 3 – Inclusive communication good practice standards and indicators.



It is the right thing to do

Including people in our communication is the ethical, polite, and kind thing to do. Professional codes of practice and employment contracts require staff to behave ethically and to protect people's dignity. Enabling people to understand others and express themselves easily is an essential element of person-centred and trauma informed services.



Many people need inclusive communication



Sarah

“Not everyone communicates the same way. Individuals who, like me, are autistic, might need other ways of communicating that people, who are not autistic, might not think of.”

This section covers the range and numbers of people who experience communication exclusion. They all need services to implement inclusive communication good practice.

1. **All communities include people who need or prefer to communicate in diverse ways.** Inclusive communication good practice is an effective response to this diversity of needs and preferences.
2. **Everyone experiences communication disadvantage or exclusion at some time.** People who are distracted, ill, anxious, upset, or doing something for the first time can benefit from inclusive communication.

Some people, sometimes described as "hard to reach" or "seldom heard," are more likely to experience communication disadvantage or exclusion. They include -

3. **People with communication disability or difficulties.** For example -
- 1 in 5 people experience communication difficulties in their lifetime.¹
 - More people each year acquire or find out they have conditions linked to communication disability. For example, stroke, cancer, dementia, mental illness, learning disability or neurodivergence². Stroke, cancer, and dementia, are more common among older people. People from ethnic minorities are at higher risk of these conditions³. Men tend to have strokes at an earlier age than women⁴. Men are at higher risk of many types of cancer⁵. Women are more likely to develop dementia⁶.
 - 1 in 4 adults has literacy difficulties⁷.
 - Most people over seventy have some degree of hearing loss⁸.
 - 1 in 5 people experience sight loss in their life. Numbers are going up⁹. 4 out of 5 people with sight loss are over 65 years old. Most are women¹⁰.
4. **People who speak English as an additional language**¹¹. For example -
- Around 1 in 13 people use a language other than English at home.
 - Up to 1 in 4 people born outside Scotland, who live in Scotland, may have difficulty reading or writing in English¹².
5. **People who do not have or who cannot use a phone, smartphone, or computer.** Research shows -
- 1 in 8 people lack digital skills¹³.
 - 1 in 33 older people have no mobile phone¹⁴.
6. **People in these circumstances or with these experiences.**
- Children and young people who are still developing their speech, language, and communication skills. Communication development difficulties are among the most common which children experience¹⁵. More boys than girls have these difficulties¹⁶.
 - Children, young people and adults living in poverty or socially deprived areas¹⁷.
 - 4 out of 5 young people who are not in employment, education, or training¹⁸.
 - Up to 9 out of 10 children and young people in conflict with the law¹⁹.
 - People with care experience²⁰.



How many people using your services might need inclusive communication?



The public want more inclusive communication



Emma

“Being asked to phone at 8:30 in the morning - that is the time that I have got to get my children out for school. So having that as the only way to be able to access an appointment makes my life so much more difficult as a carer.”

The following research shows the public want more inclusive communication.

A Scottish Health Council study²¹ found most people want -

- To communicate with staff in person, with time to understand and ask questions.
- Professionals to use clear, day-to-day language.
- Symbols on signs, printed documents, and websites.

The Health and Social Care Alliance²² found that people want -

- More accessible information.
- To be able to contact services on a variety of channels.
- Staff to know more about different communication needs.

Research from expert organisations shows -

- People with sight loss miss crucial service information^{23, 24}.
- 1 in 4 people with hearing loss need more accessible ways to contact services²⁵.
- Demand for British Sign Language (BSL) and other community language translation and interpretation has grown in recent years²⁶.



What have your service users told you about their communication needs and preferences?



Communication inclusion and exclusion - impacts on service users

This section describes the difference communication inclusion makes to service users.

Communication Inclusion – impacts



Alan

“Good communication makes me feel happy and less isolated. I forget how not being able to talk makes me feel.”

People who often experience communication exclusion report inclusive communication good practice can provide these benefits²⁷.

- Feeling relaxed, happier, valued, respected, treated fairly – like everyone else.
- Greater trust and confidence in services; better relationships with professionals.
- Greater independence, autonomy, empowerment, and social connection.
- More opportunities to engage and contribute their skills.

Communication exclusion – impacts



Emma

“Honestly, it is exhausting. Not having good communication really impacts everything. It is the difference between a good day and a bad day for us.”

People who experience communication exclusion, and researchers, report communication exclusion has these impacts²⁸ -

- Feeling upset, confused, embarrassed, angry, and debilitated.
- Not engaging with or withdrawing from services.
- Loss of trust in services.
- Social isolation, loneliness, poor mental health, and wellbeing.
- Missing benefits, screening, and health treatments.
- Fewer qualifications and limited employment opportunities.
- More likely to experience harassment and less likely to report positive interactions with services or other people in their community.



What behaviours and outcomes, if any, do you recognise among the people using your service?



Communication inclusion - impacts on organisations



Lisa

“If services were more inclusive - whatever it is would then be more noticeable and more accessible to whoever is wanting to reach whatever you are doing.”

Effective communication between service providers and users is the foundation of service success. This section details the benefits of inclusive communication for organisations.

Public bodies that already implement inclusive communication see, or expect to see, the following benefits. See, for example, the [case studies](#) at the end of this fact sheet.

Research publications back up these views²⁹. The opposite consequences arise when organisations exclude people from communications.

- Improved reputation, public trust, and legal compliance. Public support is greater when individuals from varied backgrounds have their voices heard³⁰.
- Better outcomes for more people. Early identification of communication needs leads to better assessment, care, and outcomes³¹.
- More involvement of people who experience exclusion. Public engagement studies describe inclusion as integral to effective public engagement³².
- More inclusive workforce recruitment, retention, and workplaces.
- Staff are more able to communicate with service users and contribute their skills.
- Increased efficiency and reduced costs of litigation, complaints, or errors. Staff who use inclusive communication receive fewer complaints³³. Inclusive communication could reduce demand for services and so lead to savings³⁴.
- Benefits across generations. Children whose parents are communication excluded are more likely to experience the same exclusion. Inclusive communication can break the intergenerational cycle of exclusion. It can reduce health inequalities, improve access to education and employment, and reduce child poverty³⁵.



What impacts listed above are important to your organisation?



Law, policy, and strategy

This section lists some of the laws which encourage all public bodies to communicate in inclusive ways. Many policies and strategies also encourage public bodies to implement inclusive communication. Inclusive communication good practice helps public bodies to follow the law and national policy and strategy.

The Equality Act 2010³⁶ says –

- Direct discrimination is when a person is treated less favourably than others because of a protected characteristic. An example might be not allowing someone to access a service because they have a communication disability.
- Indirect discrimination occurs when a policy or practice applies to everybody in the same way but places a group of people with a relevant protected characteristic at a disadvantage compared with others. An example might be having an “online only” service policy which may disadvantage people who cannot use a computer because of a disability.
- Organisations must take steps to make adjustments for disabled persons. This might include providing information in accessible formats. These include Braille, large print, audio, or Easy-Read versions.

The General Public Sector Equality Duty³⁷

This duty arises under the Equality Act. It requires some public authorities and those working on behalf of public authorities to consider the need -

- to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other prohibited conduct.
- to advance equality of opportunity between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic.
- to foster good relations between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic.

The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 require public service websites and mobile apps to meet accessibility standards^{38,39}.

Other laws to do with specific groups or services also require, or encourage, relevant public bodies to communicate in inclusive ways. For example:

- British Sign Language (Scotland) Act (2015)⁴⁰.
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) law (The Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Act (2016)⁴¹.
- The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and National Standards for Community Engagement^{42, 43}.
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014⁴⁴.
- Getting it Right for Every Child Statutory Guidance on Assessment of Wellbeing⁴⁵.
- The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 Statutory Guidance⁴⁶.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 13⁴⁷.
- The Education (Scotland) Act 2025⁴⁸.
- The Adult Support and Protection Act 2007 statutory Code of Practice⁴⁹.
- The Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000⁵⁰.
- The Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013⁵¹.
- The Patients 'Rights (Scotland) Act 2011⁵².
- The Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities⁵³.
- The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 guiding principles⁵⁴.
- The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016⁵⁵.
- Criminal Proceedings Regulations (2014)⁵⁶.
- The Human Rights Act 1998, Article 6⁵⁷.

Law, policy, and strategy is always evolving. Individuals can use the following search terms to check if law, policy, and strategy relevant to their work encourages, or requires, them to communicate in inclusive ways.

- Communicate and communication.

- Inclusive and inclusion.
- Access and accessible information.
- Alternative formats.
- Involvement, engagement, and participation.
- Translation and interpreting, community languages.



Do the laws, policies, and strategies relevant to your work encourage, or require, you and your organisation to communicate in inclusive ways?

Case studies - public body practice and experience (February 2026)

Public bodies in Scotland already implement inclusive communication good practice. Some of these organisations responded to an invitation to provide case studies for this factsheet. Each case study sets out the actions the organisation is taking and the impacts they already see or expect to see as a result.



The City of Edinburgh Council

Actions

- Implemented the Council British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan, the Equality and Diversity Framework 2021-2025 and interim equality outcomes 25-26, including actions such as -
- BSL accessibility.
- Developing Inclusive Communication guidance for staff.
- Utilising an Accessibility Commission to improve communication accessibility about the design of the city's public streets and spaces.
- Auditing the internal estate and development of an inclusive design guide to assess and inform future improvements to buildings and spaces.
- Improving inclusive communication in recruitment practices.
- Engaging with staff networks.



Disability
Equality
Scotland



Communication
Inclusion
People

Impacts or expected impacts

- Lived experience increasingly informing council work.
- More inclusive workforce.
- Increase likelihood of improved inclusive communications to staff and customers.
- Guidance should support consistency in approach and improvement.
- Development of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2026-2030 has built upon this work.



Midlothian Council

Actions

- Midlothian Council communications team support services to provide accessible communication online that is trauma informed, clear and conforms to Website Communication Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards.

Impacts or expected impacts

- Improved online and printed text communication.

Midlothian Justice Team

Actions

- Reviewed their written information to ensure it was trauma informed, easy to understand and inclusive.
- Created a short life working group that included Justice Social Workers, Justice practitioners, Team Leaders, a Speech and Language specialist, a Public Engagement Officer and service users.
- Rewrote letters and leaflets associated with every aspect of a person's journey with Justice Social Work services including Justice Social Work Reports, supervision agreements, and Community Payback Order warning letters.

Impacts or expected impacts

- More inclusive justice social work services.

Scottish Government Communications Team

Actions

- Collaborate with internal and external Scottish Government partners to amplify and deliver messaging in an inclusive way to effectively reach the population of Scotland. This includes providing key information in additional languages based on partner feedback, and providing key messaging in accessible formats such as BSL, Audio, Easy Read, Large Print and Braille.
- Work closely with public and voluntary sector partners to understand cultural considerations, accessibility requirements, and language preferences.
- Communication resources, including digital and print resources, are shared directly with partners to allow messages to be delivered to communities by trusted voices.
- Lead Inclusive Communication workshops for communications professions to help inform inclusive messaging. These workshops have been informed by stakeholder feedback and case study examples of inclusive messaging are shared to provide practical guidance for teams.

Impacts or expected impacts

- Communications teams are empowered to create inclusive communications for their target audiences, and inclusion is considered at early stages of message development.
- More inclusive communication of Scottish Government messaging for Scotland.

¹ [Communication Support Needs: A Review of the Literature](#)

² [Scotland's Census 2022 - Health, disability and unpaid care](#)

³ See for example [Trends in Ethnic Disparities in Stroke Care and Long-Term Outcomes | Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network](#)

⁴ See for example [gender-differences-in-stroke-prevalence-and-outcomes.pdf](#)

⁵ See for example [Sex and gender differences in cancer pathogenesis and pharmacology | Clinical and Translational Oncology](#)

⁶ See for example [Mielke Commissioned Paper.pdf](#)

⁷ [Adult Literacy Rates in the UK | National Literacy Trust](#)

⁸ [Population estimates of the number of adults in the UK with a hearing loss \(May 2024\)](#)

⁹ [RNIB Sight Loss Data Tool country report for Scotland \(March 2023\)](#)

¹⁰ [RNIB Population and demographics - Insight snapshot](#)

¹¹ [Languages | Scotland's Census](#)

¹² See for example [English language use and proficiency of migrants in the UK - Migration Observatory](#)

¹³ [Tackling digital exclusion](#)

¹⁴ [UK Mobile Phone Statistics 2024 - Stats Report - Uswitch](#)

¹⁵ [Early child development statistics - Scotland 2023 to 2024 - Early child development - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

¹⁶ [Frontiers | Children with Language Impairment: Prevalence, Associated Difficulties, and Ethnic Disproportionality in an English Population](#)

¹⁷ [Communication Support Needs: A Review of the Literature](#)

¹⁸ [An investigation into the communication skills of unemployed young men - University of South Wales](#)

¹⁹ [Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists - Supporting children and young people in the justice system](#)

²⁰ [Identifying speech, language and communication needs among children and young people in residential care - PubMed](#)

²¹ [Scottish Health Council - Our Voice Citizens' Panel](#)

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- ²² [ALLIANCE research on accessible information and self-directed support](#)
- ²³ [Reports and publications from RNIB Scotland | RNIB](#).
- ²⁴ [Read Navigating Motherhood with Sight Loss | Voice of the Customer report 2025 | RNIB](#)
- ²⁵ [Fight for accessible healthcare - RNID](#)
- ²⁶ Statistics reported in [Spending on NHS interpreters up by 20 per cent in five years | The Herald](#)
- ²⁷ [They saw, they heard, they listened. You can see and hear us anytime! - Communication Inclusion People](#)
- ²⁸ [They saw, they heard, they listened. You can see and hear us anytime! - Communication Inclusion People](#) and [Reports and publications from RNIB Scotland | RNIB](#) and <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/news/see-hear-strategy-lived-experience-consultation-with-ethnic-minority-people-report-published/> and <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/news/see-hear-strategy-refresh-lived-experience-consultation-report-published/> and [PolicyBriefing138CourtLanguageLearningOutcomes ONLINE post launch.pdf](#) and [Communication Support Needs: A Review of the Literature](#) and [English language use and proficiency of migrants in the UK - Migration Observatory](#)
- ²⁹ [Impact of diversity and inclusion within organisations](#)
- ³⁰ [Beyond Inclusion - Equity in Public Engagement.pdf](#)
- ³¹ [Dementia assessments for people with Deafness, Deafblindness or Visual Impairment – report](#)
- ³² [Beyond Inclusion - Equity in Public Engagement.pdf](#)
- ³³ [More than Words campaign](#)
- ³⁴ [The-Financial-Case-for-the-Inclusive-Communication Bill-Final-002.pdf](#)
- ³⁵ [Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION CAPACITY A National Asset](#)
- ³⁶ [Equality Act 2010 | EHRC](#)
- ³⁷ [Public Sector Equality Duty: guidance for public authorities - GOV.UK](#)
- ³⁸ [The Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
- ³⁹ [Understanding accessibility requirements for public sector bodies - GOV.UK](#)
- ⁴⁰ [British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)
- ⁴¹ [The Health \(Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care\) \(Scotland\) Act \(2016\)](#)
- ⁴² [National Standards for Community Engagement | SCDC - We believe communities matter](#)
- ⁴³ [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)
- ⁴⁴ [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#)
- ⁴⁵ [Getting it right for every child Statutory Guidance – Assessment of Wellbeing 2022 – Part 18 \(section 96\) of the Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#)
- ⁴⁶ [Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) Scotland Act 2004 \(as amended\): Code of Practice \(Third Edition\) 2017](#)
- ⁴⁷ [UNCRC Full Text - The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland](#)
- ⁴⁸ [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#)
- ⁴⁹ [Adult Support and Protection \(Scotland\) Act 2007: Code of Practice](#)

⁵⁰ [Adults with Incapacity \(Scotland\) Act 2000](#)

⁵¹ [Social Care \(Self-directed Support\) \(Scotland\) Act 2013 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵² [Patient Rights \(Scotland\) Act 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵³ [Charter of patient rights and responsibilities - revised: June 2022](#)

⁵⁴ [Guiding of the Mental Health \(Care & Treatment\) \(Scotland\) Act 2003 – Scottish Acquired Brain Injury Network](#)

⁵⁵ [Criminal Justice \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#)

⁵⁶ [The Right to Interpretation and Translation in Criminal Proceedings \(Scotland\) Regulations 2014](#)

⁵⁷ [Article 6: Right to a fair trial | EHRC](#)