



Foundation Inclusive Communication Toolkit



Inclusive communication good practice standards and indicators

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Requesting alternative formats

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Purpose of standards and indicators

These standards and indicators offer a working definition of inclusive communication good practice. They update the “Principles of Inclusive Communication” published in 2011. Scottish Government encourages all public bodies to implement these standards throughout their organisations.

The standards and indicators aim to –

- a) Provide a common, working definition of good practice for public bodies.
- b) Promote a consistent quality of practice across public bodies.
- c) Support leaders’, managers ’and staff training.
- d) Help organisations to -
 - Identify current good practice and specific areas for improvement.
 - Estimate costs of good practice and realistic budget allocations.
 - Compare and share good practice with other organisations.

Key points and definition of inclusive communication

Effective communication is a two-way process. It involves -

- Understanding others and what is happening around us.
- Expressing ourselves in ways other people understand.

People need or prefer to [communicate in different ways](#). An individual’s needs and preferences can vary in different situations.

Inclusive communication allows more people to understand and express themselves easily in the [ways](#) they need or prefer to, on [channels](#) of their choice, in [situations](#) that work for them, at every step of a [communication journey](#).

All these terms are explained in [Appendix 3](#).

Inclusive communication ensures more people are included in a communication. Everyone gets the same opportunity to communicate. It is helpful to everyone. It is not only for people with special communication support needs.

Inclusive communication matters at different levels including -

- Organisation level communications aimed at broad audiences such as the public or specific community groups. Examples include building signs, public consultation materials, job advertisements, leaflets, posters, print and broadcast media, and website content.
- Individual level communications with colleagues and service users. Examples include spoken communication at meetings and on the phone, and written communication such as emails, letters, guidelines and advice.

Inclusive communication is relevant to all communication activity including -

- Marketing including service advertising and information.
- Consultations, service evaluations, and policy announcements.
- Events, workshops, and meetings.
- Registration and appointment booking systems.
- Assessment, care, education, guidance, advice, prescriptions, and reports.
- Staff recruitment, training, and guidance.

Standards and indicators structure

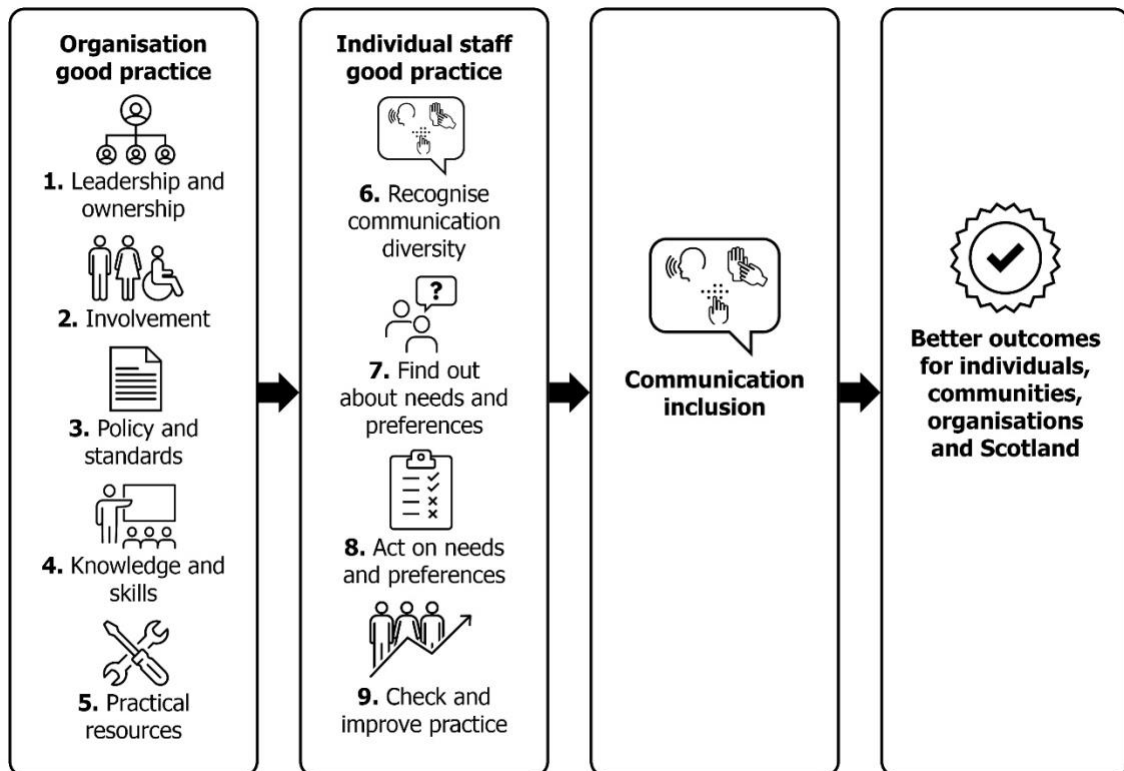
These standards and indicators focus on “how” organisations communicate rather than “what” organisations communicate. [See Appendix 3](#) for more detail.

Standards 1 to 5 focus on the infrastructure organisations provide to enable staff at all levels to implement inclusive communication good practice.

Standards 6 to 9 focus on what individual staff do to implement inclusive communication good practice.

Indicators specify the actions which confirm organisations or individuals are meeting the related standard.

The diagram below shows how the different standards relate to each other.



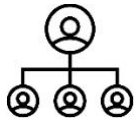
Standards and indicators for organisation infrastructure

Standards 1 to 5 focus on the infrastructure organisations provide to enable staff at all levels to implement inclusive communication good practice.

Indicators specify the actions which confirm organisations are meeting the related standard.

[Foundation Inclusive Communication Toolkit Module 4](#) provides -

- A step-by-step guide on how organisations can achieve inclusive communication good practice.
- Links to practical resources to support implementation.



Standard 1: Leadership and ownership of inclusive communication

Leaders demonstrate a positive commitment to inclusive communication to encourage good practice throughout their organisation. They empower and encourage all staff to take responsibility for the effectiveness of their own communication.

Indicators

1.1 Leaders and managers promote a culture which responds pro-actively to communication diversity.

They -

- Regularly highlight that inclusive communication matters to the organisation.
- Demonstrate good practice in their everyday communication. For example, they give inclusive speeches at events; they use inclusive writing in emails, and they offer staff a variety of channels to communicate with them.
- Proactively challenge discrimination, negative attitudes and assumptions. For example, they regularly highlight -
 - All leaders, managers and staff should implement inclusive communication.
 - People need multi-channel access to services.
 - People are excluded when services do not use inclusive communication.
 - People who have difficulty talking or reading often do understand others.

1.2 Public commitment

- The organisation publishes a statement setting out its commitment to inclusive communication good practice. It is prominently displayed on the organisation's website, in job adverts, letters, posters and leaflets. See for example, the statement on [Social Security Scotland's homepage](#). It says, "We are designing our services so that as many people as possible understand what we do and can communicate with us and access our service in the way they want to."

1.3 Leaders take a system wide approach to inclusive communication development.

They -

- Collect and use data to understand the [communication profile](#) of staff and communities.
- Use these good practice standards and indicators to assess practice and to identify their organisation's strengths and areas for improvement.
- Include inclusive communication improvement objectives in the organisation's strategic plans. For example, they have a clear [equality outcome](#) on inclusive communication as part of their Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Allocate a proportion of annual budgets specifically for inclusive communication improvements.
- Implement annual inclusive communication improvement plans to achieve strategic objectives.
- Publicise, share and spread inclusive communication developments across the organisation, with service users and with other organisations.



Standard 2: Involve people who communicate in different ways

People who [communicate in different ways](#) are best placed to provide lived-experience expertise to organisations seeking to implement inclusive communication good practice.

Indicator

2.1 People who communicate in different ways are involved in service development, design, delivery and evaluation.

That is -

- Engagement activities directly involve people who communicate in different ways. For example, policy development, user research, service design, training, communication resource development and evaluation.

- There is a budget to involve people who communicate in different ways in engagement activities.
- The staff team includes people who communicate in different ways.
- Customer feedback systems demonstrate inclusive communication good practice.



Standard 3: Inclusive communication policy and quality

standards

Organisations have and implement an inclusive communication policy. The policy influences the way services are designed, delivered and experienced. Industry quality standards apply to specific [ways](#) and [channels](#) of communication.

Indicators

3.1 Inclusive communication policy

- The organisation has an inclusive communication policy. It helps to ensure these inclusive communication good practice standards are implemented effectively throughout the organisation.
- Leaders regularly share the inclusive communication policy with managers and staff. For example, in newsletters, executive letters and at team events.
- Job descriptions and codes of conduct require all staff to implement [individual level inclusive communication good practice standards 6 to 9](#).
- Other policy and guidelines refer to the inclusive communication policy and / or these inclusive communication good practice standards. For example, documents related to -
 - corporate communications including marketing.
 - in-house communication style guide.
 - accessibility statements.
 - organisation development and business planning.
 - staff recruitment, retention and development.
 - equality, diversity and inclusion.

- service and systems design.
- service provision.
- customer relations management.
- confidential client record keeping.

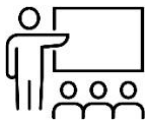
3.2 Multi-channel access, channel standards and opening times

- Service users can access all services and information on multiple channels. For example, booking information is provided on paper, online, in-person and on the phone.
- Phone communication is inclusive. That is -
 - Spoken messages are inclusive with no jargon or acronyms.
 - Call routing options and layers of options are minimised.
 - Option selection can be key and voice activated.
 - Callers are always offered an option to speak to a person.
- Websites and Apps match at least the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#) AA standard.
- Public documents are made available in multiple formats simultaneously. For example, Easy Read, large print and Braille.
- Easy Read publications meet the UK Easy Read Standards (due to be published in 2026 – [see UK Easy Read Standards information](#)).
- Translating and interpreting services, including BSL services, meet relevant standards.
- Service locations and workplaces used for in-person communication are communication accessible. For example, there is a working hearing loop and good light throughout, quiet spaces and clear, inclusive signs.
- Opening times are flexible to allow people to access services over the widest possible range of days and times of the day.

3.3 Quality assurance

- Inclusive communication practice is assessed using these good practice standards and indicators. Inclusive communication measures may be incorporated into corporate quality assurance procedures.

- Managers and leaders collect data to measure the impact of good practice. For example -
 - [Communication diversity](#) among staff and service users.
 - Demand for and use of communication support services such as Easy Read, BSL and other community language interpreting and translation.
 - Feedback from staff and service users on inclusive communication practices.



Standard 4: Knowledge, skills, and confidence

Leaders, staff and managers have specific knowledge, skills and confidence to implement inclusive communication good practice.

Indicators

4.1 Inclusive communication training

- Staff objectives include inclusive communication knowledge and skills development.
- All staff are required to and are given time to access basic inclusive communication training. For example, the modules in this toolkit.
- All staff can and are given time to access further learning in, for example,
 - inclusive writing and speaking
 - when and how to book communication support services
 - basic sign language and finger spelling
 - communicating with people who use communication aids
 - inclusive events management

4.2 Inclusive communication guidance, advice and support

- All staff can access guidance from external expert organisations. For example, the guidance available on the [Inclusive Communication Hub](#).
- The organisation stores inclusive communication related guidance and policy in a single online location. For example, the local learning platform or intranet.

- All staff are aware of and can access a network of in-house champions to support good practice day to day.
- All staff have access to external expert organisations and professionals.

4.3 Knowledge, skills and confidence monitoring

- All staff report on their inclusive communication knowledge, skills and confidence as part of their annual appraisal or in staff surveys.
- Managers collect and review data to ensure the organisation maintains and improves skill levels.



Standard 5: Practical resources available to everyone, all the time

Leaders, managers and staff have easy access to information, practical tools, communication support services and inclusive places to enable them to implement good practice.

Indicators

5.1. Specific practical resources

The organisation provides staff with -

- Up to date information on the communication needs and preferences (a communication profile) of actual and potential service user populations.
- Paper and online questionnaires (communication profiling tools) to record an individual's communication needs and preferences. Tools include guidelines on how to record, update and use the information gathered.
- Adaptable templates to help staff produce communication inclusive emails, forms, leaflets, posters, letter, presentations etc.
- A comprehensive icon and photo bank with guidance on using visual materials.
- Paper and online questionnaire to gather service users' views about their communication experience. Guidance explains how to report the data collected to the organisation.

5.2. Specialist communication support

- All staff can easily access and/or book specialist communication support including BSL Contact Scotland, Text Relay UK, community language interpreting and translation, Easy Read, large print, Braille, and speech to text translation. Specialist services provide guidance on how staff can make best use the communication support available.
- The organisation ensures an adequate budget is available to pay for specialist communication support services. Budgets reflect the [communication profile](#) of staff and the communities served.

5.3. Inclusive places and facilities

- Staff can access a database listing locally available communication inclusive buildings and rooms, with information on how to book them.
- Staff have access to the facilities required to provide online remote meetings. They are provided with guidelines on how to make online meetings inclusive.

5.4 Storage and awareness of available practical resources and services

- Practical resources are stored in or can be accessed via a single online location.
- All staff are aware of the practical resources and services available within the organisation and can easily find these as needed.

Standards and indicators for individual leaders, managers and staff

Standards 6 to 9 focus on what individual leaders, managers and staff do to implement inclusive communication good practice.

Indicators specify the actions which confirm individuals are meeting the related standard. Indicators are written in the first person to support individual reflection and learning. Some indicators are only relevant to staff working one to one with service users.

Foundation Inclusive Communication Toolkit Module 5 provides

- A step-by-step guide on how individual staff can implement inclusive communication good practice
- Links to practical resources to support implementation.



Standard 6: Recognise every group and community includes people with diverse communication needs and preferences

To implement good practice, every member of staff recognises that people need or prefer to communicate in different ways.

Indicator

6.1. Demonstrate a positive attitude to [communication diversity](#)

- I know my organisation's inclusive communication policy.
- I have completed basic inclusive communication training. For example, relevant modules in the Foundation Inclusive Communication Toolkit.
- I access and use the inclusive communication guidance, advice, support and practical resources my organisation provides.
- I recognise -
 - People have different communication needs and preferences. They may have more than one communication support need.

- People need multi-channel access to services.
- People are excluded when services do not use inclusive communication.
- People who have difficulty talking or reading often do understand others.
- I implement inclusive communication good practice in my everyday practice.
- I challenge discrimination, negative attitudes and assumptions relating to people who communicate in different ways.



Standard 7: Find out about communication needs and preferences

To implement good practice, staff find out how people need or prefer to communicate.

Indicator

7.1. Communication profiles

- I read the information my organisation provides about the communication needs and preferences (communication profile) of the community I work with and for.
- I tell people about the different [ways](#), [communication supports](#), [channels](#), [times](#), [and places](#) they can use to communicate with my service.
- I use the communication profiling tools my organisation provides to -
 - ask all individual clients about the ways, channels, and situations they need or prefer to use to communicate. People may provide this information in a “communication passport.”
 - record needs and preferences in client files, records, or care plans.
 - check information about clients’ communication needs and preferences, before I interact with them.



Standard 8: Act on needs and preferences

To implement good practice, staff actively adapt their communication in response to people's communication needs and preferences.

Indicators

8.1. Inclusive writing and speaking

- [I speak in a communication inclusive way](#) whenever I talk to people.
- [I write in a communication inclusive way](#) whenever I write to people.

8.2. Enable people to communicate in the [ways](#) they prefer

- I use different ways to communicate to enable people to understand me.
- I enable people to express themselves in ways they prefer.
- I organise or help people to access and use the specialist communication supports they need.
- I actively listen to what people communicate, regardless of how they express themselves.

8.3. Enable people to communicate on the [channels](#) they prefer at every step of their [communication journey](#)

- I provide information in person, on paper, on the phone and by email.
- I enable people to communicate with me on the channels they prefer. For example, in person, on the phone, by text or by email.

8.4. Enable people to communicate at times they prefer

- I enable people to communicate with me at times they prefer and at their own pace.
- I provide inclusive information before, during and after meetings.

8.5. Enable people to communicate in places that meet their needs.

- I enable people to communicate in places that meet their communication and physical access needs.

8.6 Resolve communication breakdown

- I look out for anything that may indicate communication barriers in my service. For example, low take up by some groups of people.
- I adapt my communication to resolve communication breakdowns.



Standard 9: Check and improve your communication

As in other areas of professional practice, staff work to continuously improve their inclusive communication good practice.

Indicators

9.1. Client feedback

- I gather service users' views about their communication experience while using my service. I enable people to feedback in the way and on the channel they prefer. For example, in person, on paper, on the phone, by text or by email.
- I act on feedback. I improve my own communication if clients ask me to. I report client feedback to my organisation. I tell clients what I have done.

9.2 Personal development

- I use these good practice standards and indicators to assess my own inclusive communication practice and to identify strengths and areas for development.
- My personal development plan includes an inclusive communication objective.

9.3 Organisational development

- I involve people who communicate in different ways in my service evaluations.
- I support improvements at an organisation level. For example,
 - I report barriers to inclusion and service users' feedback to my organisation.
 - I create and test innovative solutions to support inclusive communication.
 - I share my learning with colleagues.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Children and young people’s services

Inclusive communication good practice standards apply equally to all children and young people’s services.

Children, young people, parents, carers and staff are [communication diverse](#), like any other group. They include people with different communication needs and preferences.

Children and young people develop speech, language and communication skills as they get older. While these skills are developing, public services can match their communication to the child or young person’s age-related communication skill level.

The children of parents who are [communication excluded](#) are more likely to experience the same exclusion in their own lifetime. Inclusive communication good practice in public services can help to break this intergenerational cycle of [communication exclusion](#). It can reduce health inequalities, improve access to education and employment, and reduce child poverty.

Some services have a special role in supporting children and young people’s speech, language and communication skills development. For example, nursery, primary and secondary schools; residential care, social care, speech and language therapy and some other health care services.

Numerous publications set out standards and indicators relevant to children and young peoples’ services. Many are the same or like the inclusive communication standards 1 to 9 set out in this document. For example, see [How can we create a Language and Communication Supportive Environment in Early Learning and Childcare settings? | Resources | Education Scotland](#).

Appendix 2 – Process used to develop these standards

The following sources informed the development of these standards and indicators.

1. Service users, experts and providers views

- People who experience communication exclusion.
- Expert organisations.
- Public body representatives.

2. Learning from -

- Local and national inclusive communication projects in different sectors.
- Change management and organisational development good practice.

3. Publications

Scottish Government inclusive communication related publications

- [The Joe Report \(2011\)](#)
- [Principles of Inclusive Communication: an information and self assessment tool for public authorities \(2011\)](#)

Scottish Government accessibility publications

- [Understanding accessibility - Service Manual](#)
- [The 14 criteria of the Digital Scotland Service Standard](#)
- [Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers: a quality assurance framework - gov.scot](#)
- [What we mean when we talk about accessibility – Accessibility in government](#)
- [Equality, diversity and inclusion in your workforce - mygov.scot](#)

UK Government publications

- [Understanding accessibility requirements for public sector bodies - GOV.UK](#)
- [Guidance and tools for digital accessibility - GOV.UK](#)
- [Inclusive communication - GOV.UK](#)
- [Guidance for your job role - DWP Accessibility Manual](#)

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) - Service Manual](#)
- [Making Content Usable for People with Cognitive and Learning Disabilities](#)

Research

- [Moving From Exclusion to Inclusion in Digital Health and Care | The King's Fund](#)
- Health and Social Care Alliance - Scottish Sensory Hub -
 - [See Hear Strategy Lived Experience Consultation with Ethnic Minority People report](#)
 - [See Hear Strategy Refresh Lived Experience Consultation report](#)

Expert organisation and experts 'publications

- Communication Inclusion People - [Essentials for sustained good practice - Communication Inclusion People](#) and [Practical Resources - Communication Inclusion People](#)
- Communication Access UK - [Home - Communication Access UK](#)
- Deafblind Scotland - [Create A More Inclusive Environment | Deafblind Scotland](#)
- [Home Page - Welcome to the Inclusive Communication Hub](#)
- Migration Policy Scotland - [Resources for Accessible Intercultural Communication](#)
- Access all areas: Inclusive Tourism in Practice. Book by accessibility expert, Paul Ralph. ISBN-13: 978-1836886419

Appendix 3 – Notes on terminology and glossary of terms

“What “versus “how” we communicate

The term “inclusive communication” can refer to either

- “what” you communicate – the meaning and content of a communication, the beliefs and values that your words and tone communicate

or

- “how” you communicate – the ways, channels and situations used to communicate

These standards and indicators focus on “how” you communicate.

Distinguishing engagement, accessible communication and accessible information from inclusive communication

- **Engagement** involves interaction between service providers and users. Inclusive communication good practice is essential for effective engagement.
- **Accessible communication** or **communication access** tends to refer to communication for people who have a communication disability or with special communication support needs. Inclusive communication is broader than that. It is for everyone.
- **Accessible information** implies that organisations only need to think about access when giving information. Inclusive communication is about two-way communication and all communication activities.

Ways people understand others and express themselves

These include but are not limited to -

- Reading and writing in any language.
- Speaking in any language.
- Signing in any language – British Sign Language (BSL), Tactile BSL, Makaton, Signalong.
- Pictures, symbols, photos, films.
- Gestures, body language, facial expression.
- Use of objects or “object signifiers”.

Types of communication support

These include -

- Pen and paper.
- Communication aids – picture boards, electronic aids or “talking machines”.
- Speech to text and text to speech (screen readers) and other apps.
- Easy Read.
- Braille and Moon.
- Large print.
- Translation and interpreting.
- Transcription, captions, subtitles, audio description.

Channels of communication

These include -

- In person - face to face or by remote video call.
- Online - email, websites, social media, apps.
- On the phone - voice call, text / SMS, WhatsApp, textphone, Text Relay UK.
- On paper - letters, forms, posters, leaflets.
- Print and broadcast media.

Situational factors that affect communication

These include -

- Place - physical accessibility, public transport, parking.
- Time – time of day, day of week, time to communicate before, during and after an interaction.
- People – who is there, how familiar they are, how many people are there.
- Stimulation (Stim) tools. These are devices that help individuals regulate sensory input, manage emotions, or improve focus. Some people who are neurodivergent find them helpful.

Communication journey

When an individual accesses a service, they proceed through a series of steps. Each step is likely to require them to communicate. That is to either understand something and / or express themselves. A series of steps is called a “communication journey”.

For example,

Step 1 - write an email to request information.

Step 2 – read an email.

Step 3 - write to complete an application form.

Step 4 - speak on the phone to book an appointment.

Each step requires to be communication inclusive for an individual to proceed along the journey.

Glossary of terms

Communicate in different ways

Many people use speech and writing to understand others and express themselves. Some people use different ways to communicate. For example, sign language, electronic communication aids, pictures, gestures, body language and / or objects. All ways of communicating are equally valid. This term also refers to people who use a language other than English to communicate.

Communication disability

People who have an illness, injury or a long-term condition may communicate in different ways. Communication excluding practice can act to disable people who communicate in different ways. A communication disability is a communication difficulty arising from communication excluding practice.

Communication disadvantage

People experience communication disadvantage when they cannot easily communicate in the ways, on the channels or in the situations an organisation or a staff member has chosen to use for communication.

Communication discrimination

Unfavourable treatment related to an individual's communication needs or preferences.

- 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 at a disadvantage compared with others. An example might be having an “on phone only” service policy which may disadvantage people who cannot use a phone because of a communication disability.

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits both types of discrimination.

Communication diversity

Term which refers to the wide variety of ways, channels and situations people need or prefer to use to communicate.

Communication equity

Everyone having the same opportunity to understand others and express themselves in the ways they need to and prefer to. This includes providing communication supports. Communication equity provides everyone with equal communication access to opportunities.

Communication exclusion

The impact of not providing ways, channels and situations that allow a person to understand others and express themselves easily.

Communication inclusion

The impact of providing ways, channels and situations that allow a person to understand others and express themselves easily.

Communication profile

A communication profile is a description of an individual's communication needs and preferences. A profile may provide details about -

- The ways the person can understand others – for example through speech, written information, pictures or being shown what to do.
- The ways a person needs or prefers to express themselves – for example by speech, writing or by showing people what they mean.
- The specialist communication supports they need or use – for example an electronic communication aid, or a community language other than English.
- The channels the person needs or prefers to use to communicate – for example in person, on the phone or by email.
- The situational factors which help the person communicate – for example the time of day, the place, information before the interaction.