

Bringing our information into the 21st Century - Conference summary

This short report provides a summary of the discussion sessions and post-conference evaluation for the Scottish Accessible Information Forum's "Bringing our information into the 21st century" conference that was held on 27th October 2014 in Glasgow.

Round table discussion sessions

The following is a collation of all the main points that emerged from the two discussion sessions. They have been broadly categorised into main themes.

Discussion session one: Sharing our perspectives of accessible information and what it means for us and our organisations

Resourcing and prioritisation

- Building accessibility in from the beginning. Making sure you know what you need so you can build it into the budget
- We're trying but there's a long way to go! Where will the money come from? Need a dialogue with service users
- Issue with ensuring resources (money) and time is available to create documents in various formats
- Lack of, or limited, resources within organisations i.e. money/staff/time/knowledge.
- Expense, time and effort involved. Organisations budgets need to be considered. Research required on which processes work

- Look at providing accessibility as an investment rather than necessarily a prohibitive cost. Costs time and money by avoiding accessibility
- Budgeting and infrastructure issues. Decreasing budgets = decreasing provision. Resource to meet demand is lacking, even when there is the will

Awareness raising

- Importance of increasing awareness of information so everyone can be an advocate and support someone. Always make simple from start
- “Attitudes” still need to be improved – raising awareness
- Raising awareness and increasing knowledge (training etc.)
Increasing confidence and decreasing fear for front line staff. It’s about changing cultures and corporate ways of doing things
- Important to have continuity throughout an organisation before creating accessible/inclusive information. All employees requiring training (require a balance)

What is accessible?

- Challenge is the complexity of providing such a range of information to a range of target audiences. Difficult to balance standardised/corporate image vs person-centred approach to giving and receiving information
- One size doesn’t fit all. Need to consider a multitude of techniques. Have a range of methods – consultation required on use of resources)
- Know your audience and their information requirements

- Know those who require accessible information are the experts and know how information can best be provided for them – don't take things for granted
- Recognise different methods of information and their limitation – not all always appropriate. Use what works best
- Presume information should be in easy read. Convoluted language should be offered as an alternative
- Basic formatting skills needed in word for everyone

Things to consider in our approach

- Keep an open mind – think broadly. Make the guidelines work for you. Know where to go for information
- How disabled people can help us i.e. if I am disabled doesn't mean I am SAD. Talk to people – I have ways to improve your communication
- Preparation
- Providing choice of access, not just digital/online access. How do we ensure people offline still know about it and can access?
- Individuals being empowered to express rights and organisations to adapt to meet people's needs
- Keep trying, keep learning. Listen to what your audience is saying and respond. Keep trying to improve your services
- If you can't make the points clearly you don't have a point
- Heathers access to hairdressers getting business, think how technology can improve connection
- Example of free access to internet in a tower block – allowed those included to save money online.

- Keeping up with all the new developments in technology. Updating what you already have in place e.g. data storage

SAIF's role

- Wider role for SAIF to work with Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) to share more information on tools and advancements in technology so other organisations know how to provide accessible information
- SAIF to act as a 'hub' – Place where organisations and individuals, who are quite often working on this on their own, can go for information and support

Service provision

- NHS – health information, face to face etc. has to accommodate needs – has a long way to go
- There's a lot of (understandable) frustration in the service user community
- The role of the third sector is crucial!

Discussion session two: Reflecting on the day and thinking about what we need to do next to improve the accessibility of our information in Scotland

Things we should all take responsibility for

- Keep thinking about it and try to influence people to make information accessible
- Better information sharing in third sector and disability organisations. Support/join information network sharing in third sector group (SDEF/Update Scotland)

- Look at who is using your service and what information they need
- For events, provide presentations, handouts etc. in advance. Tell presenters about accessibility needs in advance so they can tailor presentations appropriately
- Being aware of what we mean by 'accessible' – it's not the same for everyone even within one disability
- Ask disabled people what they need – do not assume (e.g. by providing BSL interpretation where not requested). Needs are individual and solutions should be too
- Share information/experience (i.e. peer support) and involve service users (co-production)
- Need to recognise that 'going digital' just isn't a priority for some organisations and their service users
- Making use of what is already out there a) expertise b) good practice
- "It's not all digital!"
- Awareness! Needs to be throughout organisations

Things for SAIF to consider taking forward

- Create online discussion forum - 50 organisations can ask questions about accessibility
- SAIF being a central 'hub' – trusted source for all information and signposting on accessible information in Scotland
- Showcase event/workshops of accessible technology
- Consider developing a 'charter'/ certification of good practice or standard that organisations can sign up to – but this needs to be nationally recognised (by gov't?) for it to be worthwhile
- Raising awareness of SAIF (role and influence)

- Create a standard approach
- Impact assessments – core recommendations/trusted resource/toolkit to improve accessibility for all
- Gather information and signpost (e.g. TSI websites and SAIF links)
- Raise profile through something like a quality standard or 'badging' system?
- Provide resources to allow people the tools to make their websites accessible. Embed accessibility in the teaching of design courses and education in general
- Emphasis on technology. Examine how it can and should be used.
- Further promotion of Scottish Government 6 points communication paper – need to increase information. Ensure public sector organisations are accountable for inclusive communication
- Supporting organisations to be more 'approachable' through their accessibility standards

Things that require the influence of others

- Scottish Government needs to issue timely 'easy read' documents with consultations. All organisations need to think about accessible information from outset
- Improve intergenerational work. Include in all strategies
- Ensure organisations are accountable and accessibility is embedded in their information processes
- Coffee with a copper – meet the police informally and chat – Fire Brigade involved in talking with young people

Feedback about the conference

- User/peer led. Have people with accessibility needs take sessions rather than attend them. Have examples of alternative formats/equipment available
- We all learned something that we didn't know – raised awareness and experiences
- Struggled to see the link between today's content and the digital inclusion agenda

Conference evaluation

Overall, the conference was evaluated very positively. Particularly strong feedback was given for the main plenary speakers, round table discussions and conference organisation and administration.

The post-conference evaluation showed that the majority of delegates found the conference to be useful. Delegates felt they had the opportunity to network with others, made new contacts and increased their knowledge and understanding of accessible information. Delegates felt confident that they could use the information and knowledge they gained in their work.

The main plenary speakers were very well received, with especially positive feedback provided for Heather Fiskin of Independent Living in Scotland (ILiS). Delegates cited Heather's ability to draw on her own personal experiences around accessible information as particularly engaging.

The breakout sessions were less well received. The majority of the sessions went well but were just not rated quite as useful as other

aspects of the conference. A minority of sessions were rated poorly. Reasons cited for this were a mix of apparent technical problems in the delivery of some sessions along with some delegates feeling that the content delivery was poor or not pitched at the right level for the audience. This provided some extremely useful feedback for consideration in developing and delivering future events and support.

From the evaluation it has been recognised that, generally speaking, SAIF has two main audiences. The first, which the evaluations suggest made up the majority of conference delegates, are those who already have a good awareness of accessible information issues, recognised it's importance and are on board with what SAIF is trying to achieve. This audience is particularly looking for practical and solutions focussed support from SAIF, which was reflected in evaluation comments.

The second audience is those whose awareness of accessible information is currently quite low. This audience seeks a more basic, introductory level of awareness raising and understanding around the fundamentals of accessible information, and why it is important.

Reinforcement of this differentiation in audiences was apparent through the conference feedback, and this has been especially useful for SAIF in considering the development of future support.

Most delegates expressed interest in staying involved with SAIF in some way, particularly through receiving a regular newsletter, taking part in the SAIF e-learning modules and by attending future events.