

# Guidance for Accessible Online Public Events University of the West of England

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# Contents

Contents.....	2
Navigating this document.....	3
1. Executive Summary.....	3
1.1 Aims.....	3
1.2 Making online public events accessible.....	3
1.3 Contacts .....	4
2. Introduction .....	5
2.1 What do we need to change?.....	5
2.2 Aims.....	5
3. Case Study – ‘A Social Science in the City Event - Disability Rights and Robotics: Co-producing futures’.....	7
3.1 Introduction .....	7
3.2 Which platform for live captioning and BSL interpretation?.....	7
3.3 Advance Communication.....	9
3.4 Making the online tour accessible .....	9
3.5 What happened - how did it go? .....	10
3.6 Evaluation of the online café .....	10
3.7 Lessons learned - time to rethink! .....	11
4. Top tips for planning your event.....	12
4.1 The Team.....	12
4.2 Resources.....	13
4.3 Publicity.....	13
4.4 Designing the event .....	14
4.5 Designing a video .....	14
4.6 Planning a live online tour .....	15
4.7 Planning a presentation .....	15
4.8 Evaluation .....	16
5. Contacts .....	16
Glossary.....	17
Additional Resources .....	17

## Navigating this document

All links in this guidance document will open in a new window.

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Aims

The aim of this guidance is to assist members of The University of the West of England (UWE) to make the online public events they hold accessible to all. This aim is informed by the Equality Act 2010 and the UWE Equality Policy which promotes a culture of inclusion. An overloaded online event is exhausting, excluding and discriminatory.

This guidance has been produced in consultation with The Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People, The UWE Hub Group members who bring their lived experience of disability, mental health and family caring, UWE learning technologists and the Disability Rights and Robotics co-production team of social science academics and students, some with their own direct experiences of disability.

It covers the planning journey from first ideas, publicity, prior information, designing the event, managing access during the event, and evaluation. A case study is included to encourage all to try out the various access options available - being afraid to try is the greatest barrier to inclusivity!

## 1.2 Making online public events accessible

- Involve people with lived experience of disability, British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreters, live captioners and UWE technologists in your planning team
- Cost in time and finance to work through arrangements from preparation to evaluation
- Stick to your aims for attendees to have a positive experience - move away from the standard 2–3-hour presentation with slides and offer parts of the event over several days

- Ensure breaks are incorporated into your event for attendees, contributors and professionals providing sign language interpretation and live captioning.
- In the event publicity, communicate the accessibility arrangements, IT instructions/shortcuts and detail any limitations
- Provide advance scripts, video, materials, and activities for attendees to access when convenient so the collective event can be fully interactive
- Use the most familiar and best functioning online platform for live captioning, presenters and attendees using British Sign Language interpretation and accessible break-out rooms
- Dedicate and train two members of your team to supporting attendees and presenters during the events and invite continuous feedback on access in the online chat
- Check lighting, signage, and sound quality, use headphones and mics, and prepare all to keep medium pace, turn take in discussion and read and audio-describe visual material
- Review your event's accessibility and share your learning

## 1.3 Contacts

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## 2. Introduction

The aim of this guidance is to assist members of The University of the West of England (UWE) to make the online public events they hold accessible to all. This aim is informed by the Equality Act 2010 and the [UWE Equality Policy \(https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/values-vision-strategy/equality-diversity-and-inclusivity/policies\)](https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/values-vision-strategy/equality-diversity-and-inclusivity/policies), which promotes a culture of inclusion.

### 2.1 What do we need to change?

Imagine attending an event that has been put online. You try to follow the person speaking and read a presentation slide simultaneously. You stop to comment in the chat column and then find yourself in a breakout room having missed the instruction. If you are deaf or have a sight impairment, you cannot follow both the speaker and the slides and are lost from the outset.

Or you attend an online event where accessibility features have been added. This time you try to read a slide and the live captioning and watch the British Sign Language interpreter on the screen. And you try to read the conversation popping up in the chat column. Or you are relying on the sound of the speaker and you are not aware of the content of the slides or that a chat function is being used. Then you find yourself in a breakout 'room' without any of those accessibility features in place with people chatting over each other making the camera hop from person to person. Some people have their hand over their mouth or chew their pen, and you have no idea what is going on. And you are using a mobile phone screen. This goes on for 2 hours.

We made all these mistakes. These kinds of experiences can leave people feeling isolated, despondent, and discriminated against. Making an online event accessible is a learning journey - being afraid to try is the greatest barrier to inclusivity!

### 2.2 Aims

This guidance has been produced in consultation with [The Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People \(https://cfd.org.uk/\)](https://cfd.org.uk/), [The UWE Hub Group](#)

(<https://www.disabilityrightsandrobotics.co.uk/about-us/uwe-hub-group>) members who bring their lived experience of disability, mental health and family caring, a UWE learning technologist and [the Disability Rights and Robotics co-production team](#) (<https://www.disabilityrightsandrobotics.co.uk/about-us/the-co-research-team>) of social science academics and students, some with their own direct experiences of disability. It covers the planning journey from first ideas, publicity, prior information, designing the event, managing access during the event, and evaluation.

The case study shares our lessons from the 'Disability Rights and Robotics: Co-producing futures', Social Science in the City event held for Disability History Month, 10th December 2020. The top tips suggested below apply to all online public events and explain how to provide live captioning and BSL interpretation using the Human Resources (HR) process. At the end of this document, you can find a range of links to websites offering advice and checklists for online events and websites. This guidance document will be updated annually, so please send your feedback and case studies to the authors listed below.

## 3. Case Study – ‘A Social Science in the City Event - Disability Rights and Robotics: Co-producing futures’

### 3.1 Introduction

The event initially comprised a live online tour of the UWE Assisted Living Studio to demonstrate the use of robotics and an evening two-hour interactive event to share our project and seek participants’ views on how robotics technology might promote disability rights. This included the use of Mentimeter, and the 3D Participation cube to gain insight into the attendees’ priorities and experience.

Initially we had uploaded a poster to an online booking platform, with information on how to book a tour, and how to join the event which took place on the evening of 10<sup>th</sup> December. Once the event was publicised, we were contacted by an accessibility consultant and expert trustee from the Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People (CfD), who let us know that our information on accessible arrangements was not explicit. We had used the phrase 'limited BSL' on our poster to indicate that our tour would incorporate some BSL signs. However, the accessibility consultants informed us that this is not access for Deaf people. British Sign Language (BSL) and English are distinct languages with independent grammars. It is not possible to speak grammatical English and sign grammatical BSL at the same time. They outlined that failure to provide clear accessibility guidance for our event could lead to the public feeling de-motivated due to a lack of prioritisation of access and they were therefore reluctant to share our publicity with their networks.

### 3.2 Which platform for live captioning and BSL interpretation?

We were offered a meeting by the CfD which was conducted on Microsoft Teams. However, at the time of this meeting captioning was not available for external guests joining a MS Teams meeting, and therefore one of our guest consultants could not access captioning. Our discussion therefore began with consideration of different online platforms. Microsoft

Teams does not currently have functions to consistently pin a particular person, so their video feed is always available on the screen, which is crucial if you follow a BSL interpreter. However, on Zoom, the pinning function allows you to pin a particular person and adjust the camera view's size so that the person accessing the BSL interpreter can always see the interpreter and can control the size of the video feed window. For discussion and use of breakout rooms we considered using Blackboard Collaborate, as this was not an option on Microsoft Teams, however we were advised to seek access to Institutional Zoom as this platform offered appropriate functionality to meet access requirements.

The consultants made it clear that a live captioner and BSL interpreter was needed for the live interactive event and both the live and recorded versions of the telepresence robotic tour of the assisted living studio. BSL interpreting is tiring, so it is essential to employ 2 or 3 interpreters for an online event lasting longer than 20 minutes and to allow a couple of minutes to pin the new interpreter when they change shifts. Live captioning does not work outside the main room on Zoom so when using breakout rooms, the facilitator must be aware of each participant's needs to ensure they are in the correct space accessible for them. Each breakout room should have a facilitator to ensure access is consistent throughout the event.

We hired sign language interpreter/s and live captioners from the UWE Equality Unit shortlist of experts who had previously worked for UWE. CfD also hold a list of recommendations of qualified interpreters and live captioners. The sign language interpreters and live captioners then offered their guidance explaining the barriers faced when using Microsoft Teams. On Zoom, it's just a case of providing a code to log in to create captions for a meeting, but for Microsoft Teams, it would require the use of another browser window. When testing Microsoft Teams with the interpreter, we tried to figure out workarounds using Microsoft Teams and Collaborate concurrently. It was clear that this was going to be very complicated and difficult to use. We relayed our progress back to our larger co-production team. Thankfully, one of our members was a part of a sizeable partner public involvement organisation that permitted us access to an institutional Zoom account. It was necessary to create a lead facilitator role to manage the systems we would be using. One of our team underwent Zoom training and managed the online booking platform and email invites to track everyone's access requirements. One of our HUB group members pointed



out that also generally through the pandemic people have been using Zoom to maintain connection with friends and community groups, meaning that there is enhanced familiarity and that this is not the case with the other platforms.

### 3.3 Advance Communication

Guidance for the event provided in advance included a script for the online public event detailing the timing of the speakers and activities. A welcome email also included all advance materials stating whether printed hard copies are available, which promoted equality of access.

Information regarding the availability of live captioning and BSL interpretation for the tour and online café was provided in advance. Our [pre-recorded telepresence tour and script \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= f8sJU1ZCPQ\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8sJU1ZCPQ) was also available in advance.

### 3.4 Making the online tour accessible

The telepresence robotic tour of the assisted living studio at the Bristol Robotics Lab had several consultation points. Initially, three academics from the team tested out what would be good to include in the tour, initial thoughts regarding accessibility, and a consideration of language, using the social model of disability to keep the focus on rights, rather than focusing on impairments using the medical model. Members of our co-production team including UWE HUB group members and students then attended a trial tour to give suggestions for improvements. It became apparent that the tour needed careful planning and sequencing, which led to the creation of a checklist for actions for the physical space. A script should be written and provided before the tour, and that speech needed to be at a medium to slow pace with longer pauses. The script required timings, as this would help with signposting. Lighting in the assisted living studio needed to be made consistent for all the different spaces. Audio quality was unreliable, so this was added to the checklist before the actual tour, including the robot Pepper's volume to be turned up to ensure it was

audible. There was also a suggestion of large signage being put up in the assisted living studio to show the sensors' location and the robots' names.

### 3.5 What happened - how did it go?

Attendees were invited to complete a survey after the tour to feedback their experiences which will be used to develop future online public tours of the space. The telepresence tours were reported to have given attendees a sense of being inside the Assisted Living Studio and explore how it may improve access to many aspects of life such as work, school and cultural activities. Attendees could then consider using different robotic technologies such as telepresence, social and mobility robots, and sensors to ease living at home.

The online café, which is an interactive online workshop, welcomed fifty participants from all over the world who were then encouraged to become co-researchers. The team started by presenting their project, the possible uses and limitations found and the key messages pressing for public involvement from the outset of robotics design, ethics issues relating to consent and control, and equality around access and accessibility. The discussion that followed was successful, as it led to wide engagement. Engagement took place primarily in the Zoom chat, and the messages which were provided by attendees were read aloud by one of the facilitators, and attendees also spoke in the main group.

### 3.6 Evaluation of the online café

Participants were asked to evaluate their experiences of the online café using a four-dimensional framework that has been developed by Andy Gibson (Gibson et al., 2020). The different dimensions of the framework explore various aspects of involvement in an event or project. Andy has recently converted this framework into an online tool. Participants were able to log in and record their feedback on the accessibility of the knowledge café using the tool in real-time. The visual image of responses showed that most people found the event accessible and provided a valuable forum for discussion. Some people found participating in a large online group overwhelming but the use of BSL sign language and captions was welcomed and appreciated. People found using the chat function and the use

of breakout rooms helped them express their view, particularly where people felt it was difficult to intervene in a conversation taking place in the main session. Some people felt that the agenda was too tightly organised and timed, partly to accommodate a lot of material, but that this reduced the room for discussion and questions in the main session. Logging onto the on-line tool itself presented personal technical difficulties for some people but the majority were able to log in and express their views about the session quickly and in real-time. The evaluation is useful as a collective activity, but the instructions need to be sent in advance and a second device to hand is suggested if possible.

### 3.7 Lessons learned - time to rethink!

After our event, we were offered a follow-up meeting with our accessibility consultants who had attended the event and with the co-production team. The availability of a recording of the telepresence robotic tour was regarded as good practice. The tour could have been improved by adding audio description of what is being shown to the advance script, and for this to be signposted in the relevant publicity. At the evening event, some attendees found this difficult to engage with as there were slides, activities on different tabs, breakout rooms, and the event did not include breaks in the 2-hour event. This was found to be tiring, difficult to follow and ultimately led to demotivation.

For future events, we were challenged to rethink the classic presentation based on slides. Slides can be 'overloaded', making it difficult for those following the interpreter or the captions if they are also expected to read slides. If words are used on the slides, the speaker must read them, so the live captioner displays that in writing. Use of pictures or images on the slides is encouraged, however for each image, ensure alternative text is included and within the presentation ensure that each time a slide is changed, the audience is informed that the slide has changed, and that the speaker announces that a picture appears on the slide (if that's the case) with a brief description, to ensure accessibility for those with visual impairments. If possible, not using slides is preferred.

There will always be conflicting access requirements, ensuring communication with your participants ahead of time so that accessibility is prioritised, and expectations are clear. We discussed the importance of delivery pace, so keeping a medium to slow pace is necessary

for all speakers. Animations and video, if used, can distract from the overall presentation, and won't always meet access requirements in the same way. Sending any animations or videos in advance is helpful, and where possible, ensure BSL interpretation and captioning is included for all multimedia materials used. Events must embed breaks as following captions / BSL / engaging with different speakers is tiring. If possible, keeping some material asynchronous and other content delivery over multiple days may give participants optionality regarding energy expenditure. Careful consideration of the quantity of material provided must also be considered, as providing excessive material can also lead to disengagement. Similarly, the number of attendees per session should also be carefully considered, as our feedback indicated large groups may also be overwhelming. Could you run the same session more than once over multiple days with smaller groups?

A barrier we encountered after the event was arranging payment for the professionals we worked with. This can take time to arrange and follow up as there are different processes, depending upon how someone is employed. We advise that you have agreed on payment methods with professionals you work with, budget holders, and clear communication with UWE Human Resources team regarding necessary forms so that professionals can be paid promptly. Please see current guidance on the intranet.

## 4. Top tips for planning your event

### 4.1 The Team

Who will be assigned the role of co-ordinator for everyone who is contributing to your event? The co-ordinator will be the point of contact for all contributors, manage the advance accessibility arrangements and all arrangements during the event to ensure communication is consistent.

Recruiting to your team people with lived experience of disability – who will be in your co-design team and involved throughout planning, through to delivery and reflection? Who else will you consult with to ensure diverse expertise is included? Have you specified how much time people need to commit?

Involving people with online technical expertise – is there a contacts list available to you?

How will you cost and fund the event to include advance resources, facilitation, and expertise?

How will you engage with live captioners? Live captioners also need to have breaks, so you need time to bring them into your team, work out costs, and approach HR for payment arrangements.

Which sign language interpreters will you engage with (Makaton / BSL / Sign Supported English)? Interpreters take turns to cover 30-40 minutes of an event and are both working throughout the event.

## 4.2 Resources

Are you going to make a video? If so, the live captioners can provide the script that you could send out in advance. They are experts in what they do, so getting in contact well in advance will give you confidence in your preparations and ensures everyone is supported. IT technical advice will show you the accessibility features and limitations of different online platforms – for example, Zoom allows the viewer to see the sign language interpreter (pinned) and a presentation slide, but Microsoft Teams blocks out everything, so the slide presentation and live captioning may not be available leaving the viewer outside of the event. The IT technologists' team may help you provide your prior information and support you to create an accessible video.

## 4.3 Publicity

How will the event publicity show what is in place to make the event accessible and convey a team welcome and open to flexibility and queries?

How will you know – who will you ask? Try out accessibility of your publicity with some people outside of your team to see if it is accessible. Contact community organisations for feedback.

What information needs to be in the advert? Is sign language interpretation offered?

What information will you need from the people attending about their access requirements? How do you ask people about their access requirements?

What prior resources can you share at that point or once someone has booked a place? If you have designed materials have, they been designed with the whole team – specifically those with lived experience and expertise in accessibility? Are the materials you have provided accessible? If there is a recording, a script or presentation slides, these can be made available in advance, but during the event, it is not easy to use these simultaneously if there is only one screen available. So, offer to send a hard copy event pack. If offering a hard copy, what format will you offer? Braille, large format, colour, easy read?

## 4.4 Designing the event

The whole team need to be involved with every step.

What are your aims for the event? What do you want people to experience and takeaway with them? This is an opportunity to drop old habits and think afresh so the event really achieves your aims.

Could the event be broken down into several shorter different events over a day or a week, or different events with various groups? Plan in your breaks into your event for attendees and contributors, and ensure that professionals providing sign language interpretation, or live captioning have time to switch.

For example, an advance online or hard copy information pack depending on braille preference, a pre-recorded information video with captions and BSL interpretation, followed later by a live online discussion, and lastly, a post-event reflection/evaluation activity.

## 4.5 Designing a video

Is there a script for your video?

Is the script an accessible document?

Is the script downloadable?

Does your video include captions and audio description?

Have these captions been checked for accuracy?

Is sign language offered?

## 4.6 Planning a live online tour

Is the physical space you are showing well lit?

Have you added large-format labels of different items on your tour?

Does your tour encompass pauses?

Is a medium-slow pace commentary provided?

Is a script available to tour attendees before the tour?

Is there enough time for questions? Is it clear how questions are asked (in the chat box / use of mic / engage with sign-language interpreter)?

Are there contact details of the tour guide available for those to ask follow-up questions afterwards?

Is there enough time for people to give you feedback?

## 4.7 Planning a presentation

If you decide that part of your event needs to be a presentation, you can ask yourself whether you are talking about information already sent out or will you be using slides?

Slides are not always necessary and are generally not seen as helpful. If you have useful slides, check if they are overloaded with text.

Are you using images on your slide and if so, will they be audio described in the event? Have you added alt-text to all images?

Have you planned time to read all words on the slide and time to inform the audience when the slide is changing?

Have you produced a script for each presentation and does this specify the timings and speakers? Is this to be offered in advance in the publicity?

Will you be using break out rooms – have you made arrangements for the accessible formats and interpreters to be in those rooms or do you know who needs to stay in the main room? Take care to keep groups diverse and not segregated.

Are you using interactive activities that require attendees to open another tab such as Mentimeter? How will you guide attendees through this step mindful of the potential overload of too many demands and instructions?

Are all your speakers informed and made comfortable about what is required?

## 4.8 Evaluation

How are you going to evaluate and find out how accessible your event was? Will you do this at the end of your event and provide time for discussion?

You could use a simple impact log or evaluation form to gather feedback or a quick to use on-line tool like the one we used. There are several potential options to explore.

What will you do with the findings? Will you have a reflection session with your whole team and review any lessons learned?

Will you contribute your lessons learned and achievements to future versions of this document?

Are you likely to ask attendees to do too much at once? What can you send in advance?

## 5. Contacts

This guidance reflects our points of learning May 2021. Feedback and challenges are very welcome. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of The Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People, The UWE Hub Group and the Disability Rights and Robotics Co-production Team. This guidance was funded by The Department of Social Sciences, and the FET Enterprise Fund.

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## Glossary

BSL – British Sign Language

BRL – Bristol Robotics Lab

SSE – Sign Supported English

Makaton - Makaton is a unique language programme that uses symbols, signs, and speech to enable people to communicate.

Telepresence - the use of virtual reality technology, especially for remote control of machinery or for apparent participation in distant events.

## Additional Resources

UWE – Digital Accessibility

(<https://www.uwe.ac.uk/about/website/accessibility>)

Government Guidance - Understanding accessibility requirements for public sector bodies

(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>)

Social Care Institute for Excellence – Making events and meetings accessible

(<https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/supporting/making-events-accessible/introduction>)

Autistica – Hosting accessible online events

(<https://www.autistica.org.uk/what-is-autism/coronavirus/accessible-online-events>)

Disability Advocacy Resource Unit – Accessible Online Meetings

(<https://www.daru.org.au/lesson/accessible-online-meetings>)