

Talk for Scotland: a practical toolkit for engaging with people with communication support needs

Overview

Talk for Scotland is a practical toolkit for decision-makers and service providers. It offers key advice on how to engage with people who have a variety of communication support needs.

We produced this toolkit to help remove barriers that individuals with communication support needs may face in achieving equal access to services and decision-making processes.

The toolkit includes:

- the business, legal and equality reasons for engaging with people with communication support needs
- an explanation of the diversity of communication support needs in Scotland
- 6 Communication Support Principles to be followed in all public engagement activities
- quotes highlighting barriers and solutions from a personal point of view.

Plus:

- practical advice to help put these principles into practice
- templates to develop accessible written materials
- sources of further information and support to implement inclusive communication strategies.

Talk for Scotland is produced by Communication Forum Scotland. It is part of the Civic Participation Network project, funded by the Scottish Government. The project aims to remove barriers to people with communication support needs who wish to be active citizens. For more details go to the website:- www.communicationforumscotland.org.uk

Why use the Talk for Scotland toolkit: summary

By meeting the needs of the population of people with communication support needs, you will:

- ensure that your organisation will reach a wider, more representative population
- increase your organisation's cost effectiveness, inclusive policy making, and service design and provision
- reduce the limited take up of services by 'hard to reach' groups
- meet your organisation's statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and Disability Equality Duty
- demonstrate your organisation's commitment to inclusion and effective participation to various audit, inspection and regulatory bodies, such as NHS Scotland, Audit Scotland, Equality and Human Rights Commission.

What's the toolkit for?

People with communication support needs face barriers which may prevent them getting equal access to:

- services
- local, regional and national decision-making and consultation processes.

We have produced this resource to help service providers and decision-makers take action to remove these barriers.

The toolkit is based on the social model of disability. This identifies that the barrier is not due to an individual's communication impairment but the way society is organised and the attitudes that other people hold.

For example

You are setting up an advisory group. A person who has had a stroke responds to your invitation. They require extra time to understand written information.

Barrier

Written information is tabled on the day. The result is that the individual cannot take part in the discussion and their ideas and expertise are lost.

Solution

Adopt a policy of sending out information to be discussed at least 2 weeks in advance of a meeting.

'An equal society recognises peoples' different needs and situations and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be'

(UK Equality Review 2007)

The toolkit will help you to take steps to be more inclusive from the beginning.

We do this by:

- **highlighting the diversity of communication support needs**

These needs go beyond those related to hearing and visual impairments or having English as an additional language. They are often more hidden.

- **providing practical advice**

This advice is for people in public and voluntary organisations who want to engage those members of the public who have communication support needs in the areas of consultation and decision-making.

- **reducing people's anxiety about getting communication wrong**

It does not have all the answers, but it has been written to help you to:

- ask the right questions
- find practical solutions.

The people who have communication support needs are the experts on how to achieve effective interaction. Ask them. You can find contact details in the [Consult the experts](#) section of the toolkit.

Who should use the toolkit?

The toolkit is for decision-makers and service providers in public and voluntary organisations. It is for those who produce information and run events aimed at engaging with the public.

The toolkit should be used:

- **from the initial planning stage**

Consider communication access from the beginning. This will save time and resources. It will allow you also to make any necessary adjustments to timings and budgets.

- **using an integrated team approach**

Everyone who is responsible for the different aspects of the design and implementation of a public engagement activity should be aware of the key principles of communication support.

This means the complete process will be more accessible to a person with communication support needs - from finding out about an event to understanding the outcomes.

The advice in the toolkit will be particularly useful to those responsible for:

- equality and user involvement
- policy and campaigns
- strategic communications and design
- process planning (internal and external organisations)
- event planning and administration.

Equality, legal and business reasons to use the toolkit

People with communication support needs represent a significant part of the population.

It is estimated that around 250,000 people in Scotland have communication support needs.

Like other Scottish citizens, people with communication support needs have both the right and the desire to live like anyone else. They have diverse interests and concerns. They are active:

- students
- voters
- consumers
- service users
- carers
- workers
- volunteers
- campaigners
- committee members
- specialists.

The advice in the toolkit will help you to target them directly and support your equality, legal and business commitments.

Commitment to equality and inclusion

There is growing commitment to equality and inclusion in Scotland.

For example through:

Scottish Government National Outcomes (www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes) in particular those concerned with:

- tackling the significant **inequalities** in Scottish society
- having strong, resilient and supportive **communities** where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others
- **young people** as successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

The development of Single Outcome Agreements (www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/local-government/SOA) and Community Planning Partnerships.

Initiatives such as the National Care Standards (www.infoscotland.com/nationalcarestandards/CCC_FirstPage.jsp) with the emphasis on dignity, choice, realising potential and equality and diversity.

Many service providers are establishing new structures to engage more effectively with service users.

The advice in the toolkit promotes communication which is inclusive. This ensure the participation of the widest possible audience.

Legal obligations

Public and voluntary sector bodies are under a legal obligation to demonstrate equality of access to people with a disability. This is set out in the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and Disability Equality Duty. This obligation includes communication access.

The right to participate and have your voice heard is enshrined also in the Human Rights duties. For further information go to Equality and Human Rights Commission (Scotland) (www.equalhumanrights.com/scotland).

Business interests

It is the business of publicly funded bodies to meet the needs of the population they aim to service. They are made accountable for their actions through regulation, inspection and audit.

By putting this toolkit into practice, publicly funded bodies will make participation easier for anyone with difficulties with spoken and/or written English, including:

- people with communication support needs related to disability
- people with literacy difficulties due to limited participation in education
- people who have difficulty reading, writing, speaking or understanding English because their first language is not English.

The toolkit will help you to meet your strategic objectives and to become a leader in public service provision.