

## F.3 Information services

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## F.3 Information services#

This section offers guidance on the types and standards of information services offered to HER users'. Existing arrangements within HERs, standards to be used and government anti-discrimination legislation are discussed. HERs will also need to work within the constraints of corporate policies and standards for service provision.

### F.3.1 Staff#

In order to successfully deliver HER services to a diverse audience adequately trained staff are essential'. An HER should have an identified staff resource that is appropriate for the level of service being delivered. Staff should understand and be able to impart appropriately their knowledge of HER systems, HER information and the local historic environment'. Basic skills of information retrieval, interpretation and presentation are paramount. An understanding of user requirements, how best to assist each user and when and where to refer a user for additional information are important.

Training of staff is vital to ensure this successful delivery of service'. Training should cover the information systems used, general aspects of the local historic environment, research resources, communication skills, equality and diversity awareness training, with focus on specific areas if appropriate (for example disability, ethnicity) (see section [F.3.4](#) below)'. Training may occur on the job, by e-learning or through courses, conferences and seminars.

### F.3.2 Opening hours#

To maximise the use of an HER users should be made aware of the times during which visitor access to the HER office is possible'. HER managers should ensure that details of formal opening hours and appropriate arrangements at other times are published along with any charging policy and contact details'. This information should aim to reach all potential users and may be on leaflets, posters, and Internet or intranet sites'.

### F.3.3 Facilities and services#

All visitors coming to use the HER should be provided with a desk or table on which to work'. Benchmark 1.2 recommends that this area be supervised, appropriately equipped and that facilities such as copying should be available'. Access to map, photographic and documentary aspects of the HER should be provided, ideally with appropriate guidance in understanding and interpreting such sources'. To assist users in consulting this material, equipment such as sheet magnifiers and stereoscopes might be provided.

Where an HER has a digital component, such as a database and/or GIS, or indeed a dedicated website, access appropriate to the query, user and format of that component should be considered. Direct access through a computer terminal might be offered to those familiar with the information system'. Where the information system is for trained and not casual use a simplified user-friendly interface might be designed to make it easy to frame specific enquiries'. This interface may also be suitable to provide remote access from museums, libraries or via the Internet. (See sections [F.7](#), [F.8](#))

HERs with online facilities should make it clear that their online resource is unlikely to consist of everything contained within the office, paper-based HER, all will contain image collections, maps, primary sources and 'grey literature'.

### **F.3.4 Access for all#**

In line with current government agendas of social inclusion and access for all, access to HER services should be available for all'. 'Access' within this context has a broad definition encompassing access to information, facilities/services and buildings'. Failure to take reasonable steps to address such issues could carry legal implications'. Access and quality of service provided by the HER must not be dependent on a person's gender (including caring responsibilities), race, age or disability'. The relevant legislation that ensures equal access to HER services is the "[Equality Act 2010](#)". It is not enough for an organisation to have a statement that it is committed to eradicating discrimination'. It should be supported by a clear and explicit implementation plan.

Remember, a lack of demand may actually be a low expectation from a group with a history of receiving low customer care'. Alternative ways of reaching out to a group may be needed such as disability forums and other consultation.

### **Equality Act 2010#**

The Equality Act 2010 replaced and unified all the existing anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It simplified the law, removed inconsistencies and made it easier for people to understand and comply with. It also strengthened the law in important ways to help tackle discrimination and inequality.

The Act applies to all organisations that provide a service to the public or a section of the public, whether it is the public sector, private sector or the voluntary and community sector.

Who is protected? The Act protects people from discrimination on the basis of ?protected characteristics?:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership

What the law prohibits?

- Direct discrimination
- Indirect discrimination
- Discrimination by association
- Discrimination by perception

- Harassment and harassment by third party
- Victimisation

## Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act also introduced a Public Sector Equality Duty on all public authorities. In fulfilling this new duty the HER host authority will generally have regard to:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advancing equality of opportunity between different groups and
- Fostering good relations between different groups

## Access to information#

In order to widen access to all HERs should also be able to supply, on request, information in alternative formats appropriate for those with disabilities or with a specific language requirement'. This may be in large print, languages other than English, Braille, tape, or total communication, a communication system using signs/symbols, pictures and gesture/visual expressions predominantly for people with learning disabilities'. All documents produced for the general public should have a strap line stating the alternative formats available.

The RNIB can supply a 'See it Right Pack' that gives guidance on designing, producing and planning for accessible information for those with sight impairments'. All information, no matter how it is to be received, should be presented in clear, understandable language'. The Plain English Campaign has produced some useful guides to assist with this.

It is important to remember that producing documents in different formats or translations in advance will not ensure equality access to services'. Not only is this a costly exercise, it may be unnecessary'. It is more important for staff teams to be knowledgeable of the needs of their 'customer base', confident about the different processes for arranging alternative formats/translations and to be able to do this quickly and to be trained in equality and diversity to meet the needs of their customers more effectively. [Panel 11](#) gives a model policy statement on access to buildings, facilities, services and information and an example of assessment of disabled access is given in [panel 12](#).

## Panel 11: Model policy statement, access to buildings, facilities, services and information#

All HER Users can expect:

- to be able to use the services available to the public including facilities, buildings, spaces, furniture, equipment, transport etc;
- reasonable changes to be made or extra equipment used to help solve the problem, on request, if services are not accessible to them;
- to know when changes are permanent so that they do not have to ask every time they want to use the service
- to be treated fairly, with respect, dignity, and understanding by anyone working for the HER or working on behalf of the HER.
- to be able to read, see or hear (on request) all information given by the HER in the way that they normally communicate.
- any language and images used to be positive and free from stereotypes and discrimination

## Panel 12: Example of an assessment of disabled access (Buckinghamshire HER)#

Disability/Impairment	Visitors	Online Users
Deaf/Hearing impaired	HER Officer qualified in BSL (level 1). Written information about the HER can be provided with advance notice.	N/A
Visually impaired	Hand-held and full-page magnifiers available. Digital text or data can be produced in a variety of colours and fonts. Paper records can be supplied as enlarged photocopies. Limited amounts of information can be read aloud to users.	Website designed to be user-friendly to visually impaired users: Scalable fonts available. Text labelling for all photographs, drawings, diagrams and so forth. Sympathetic layout and use of colour. Compatible with voice-synthesiser software.
Disabled / Mobility impaired	Access ramp to be provided. Doors to main office sufficiently wide for wheelchair access. HER information to be provided at staff desk in main office. Wheelchair users to offered alternative of HER information provided at Centre for Bucks Studies where ramp, full disabled access and disabled toilets available.	N/A
Learning impaired	HER Officer available to interpret information and explain technical terms.	Easy to use website. Use of accessible language. Use of images. Thesaurus for technical terms. Provision of interpreted thematic modules.
Non-English language speakers	Written information about the HER can be provided in advance for users to obtain translations. Photocopies of paper records can be supplied for users to take away and obtain translations. BCC staff may be available to provide limited non-technical translations (there is an informal register of BCC staff able to provide help with non-English languages).	Summary information about the Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past Project to be available in major European and ethnic minority languages.

### Useful sources of Further Information#

Equality and Human Rights Commission <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

[Equality Act 2010](#)

Royal National Institute for the Blind <http://www.rnib.org.uk>

Royal National Institute for the Deaf <http://www.rnid.org.uk>

Language Line (Telephone Translation Service) <http://www.languageline.co.uk>

RNID Typetalk service for those using 'text' phones (or Minicom) [http://www.rnid.org.uk/information\\_resources/communicating\\_better/typetalk/](http://www.rnid.org.uk/information_resources/communicating_better/typetalk/)

Campaign for Clear English <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk>