Good accessibility means ensuring that the Church of England's digital platforms are open to everyone. It's not just something we should think

about after creating digital content - it should be considered from the very start, so that nobody is excluded. It's also a requirement in law*

We have been working on a large project to improve the Church of England and Archbishops' websites primarily for those who are living with a disability or particular access need. This work has been conducted with an external accessibility auditor to ensure our national websites meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 to at least AA standards and are as accessible as we can make them.

WCAG defines how to make the web more accessible for everyone. The process has involved technical tests, user feedback and live sessions working with people living with disabilities as they navigate and browse the websites.

In this blog we will outline our current progress and the next steps in this project, including publishing a new accessibility statement. Further developments are planned to our platforms as we work on making them more accessible.

Technical tests

A validator test was carried out on the Church of England website to review where the site was not meeting the WCAG 2.1 double-AA standard. A validator is a collection of evaluation tools that helps make website content more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

These initial tests were done by running the site through WAVE (an evaluation test tool). The results were then interpreted and analysed by an expert access auditor who highlighted any errors and alerts and compiled a summary report.

All necessary fixes are stated in our updated accessibility statement - another part of our website accessibility auditing journey which we will continue to update as more work is completed across the platforms.

User testing

By approaching the national Disability Advisors group and our Dioceses, we asked for volunteers to take part in our testing, particularly those who are disabled or with different access needs. Through this process and separate recommendations, we drew together a team of seven people which gave a broad range of different access needs across different devices types. You can read more about their experience guiding us through this part of the audit in a short blog.

Testing involved a range of scenarios based on typical user journeys through our websites. An example was of someone seeking information on having a child christened including identifying their local church. These tasks ensured testers had to manoeuvre through a range of page types, and interact with different types of content across the four websites:

- The Church of England

- Archbishop of Canterbury

- Archbishop of York

- A Church Near You

As a result of the user testing, we received a report that will now inform the next stages of development.

The report informed common themes, such as use of faint text, words in capital letters, unclear or illogical headings, and missing labels for screen readers. These are now being addressed.

There are some other areas of improvement that have been picked up, such as the functionality of maps on the website, that will also be adressed.

Most testers liked the way different content types were used within a page to add variety and avoid long passages of text. In addition, pages written for non-church goers or irregular church goers were praised for comprehensible language and inviting tone.

We are keen to build on these positives in other areas of the websites.

Barrier-free belonging web page

A group has been working to improve a page on the Church of England website entitled 'Barrier-free belonging'. Throughout this page you will find a range of different language choices used. This is to honour the fact that people have different preferences and perspectives when it comes to talking about disability. More information on the language use surrounding disability is covered on the page.

The group consisted of people who are living with disabilities or work in roles supporting those with disabilities.

We're incredibly grateful to this group of helping us learn and understand the right ways in which to talk and engage in these topics, as well as provide a consistent welcome across our digital platforms.

Next steps

We are aiming to have fixed all the functionality required to be WCAG 2.1 AA standard by the end of 2021. This is not a one-off project, or fix but part of continual work to continue to improve the accessibility of our website and all the resources.

We are very grateful to those who have been involved so far. If you would like to offer to help with testing in the future, please contact us using

the email address below.

Future work includes, writing **Digital Labs blogs** to support parishes and others in improving accessibility, and ensuring images across the website represent the diversity of visible and hidden disabilities present in our worshipping communities.

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Hear from our testers who helped with the audit

For further information about this and any other related projects, please email **website@churchofengland.org**.

This accessibility audit is a piece of work funded by **the Digital Communications team**.

*under the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018, which builds on the existing regulation defined in the Equality Act 2010.

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