

How Recite Me can help you comply with the new UK public sector website and app accessibility laws

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Introduction

One in five people in the UK have a disability. This number is rising as the UK has an ageing population and most disabilities are acquired with age. So the older we live, the more likely we are to become disabled.

But evidence shows that most public sector websites don't meet accessibility standards. This means they are inaccessible for people with disabilities.

For example, a recent study found that only 60% of UK local authority websites' home pages are accessible to people with disabilities.

The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 are set to change this.

The regulations came into force for UK public sector bodies in September 2018 and set new web and mobile app accessibility standards that public sector bodies must follow.

These regulations implement the EU directive on the accessibility of public sector bodies' websites and mobile applications into UK law.

This guide will give you a summary of the regulations, plus information about what you need to do to comply and how Recite Me can help you.

Legal disclaimer

This guide offers information about The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 and advice on best practice for making websites accessible. All the information contained in this guide is based on our interpretation of the new regulations. We have endeavoured to ensure all the information in this guide is correct. However, the regulations are due to be updated by the Government and therefore may be subject to change in future.

This guide should be only be used by you in conjunction with advice from your legal advisor about the regulations and their requirements. Any action you take based on the information in this guide is strictly at your own risk. [Recite Me](#) will not be responsible for any losses or damages you may incur as a result of using information in this guide.

Key dates

Every new website (published on or after the regulations came into force in September 2018) must meet the new accessibility standards by 23 September 2019.

Every new website must also publish an **accessibility statement** by 23 September 2019.

Every new and existing mobile application/app (published on or after the regulations came into force in September 2018) must meet the new accessibility standards by 23 June 2021.

Every mobile app must also publish an **accessibility statement** by 23 June 2021.

Existing websites must meet the new accessibility standards by 23 September 2020.

Every existing website must also publish an **accessibility statement** by 23 September 2020.

Accessibility Standards

To make a website or mobile app accessible you must ensure as many people as possible can use it to do what they need to do.

This includes people with: sight loss; hearing loss; cognitive impairments or learning difficulties; and motor difficulties like dyspraxia.

But accessibility isn't all about serving a niche group. Accessible websites and mobile apps are better for everyone because they are quicker and easier to use and they deliver a better user experience to all users.

Your public sector website or app must comply with the principles of the [WCAG 2.1 AA](#) global web accessibility guidelines in order to be considered accessible.

(The guidelines are produced by [The World Wide Web Consortium](#) (W3C), the main international standards organisation for the World Wide Web.)

However, your website or mobile app may not need to fully meet these standards if making the necessary changes would cause your organisation what the new laws call a [disproportionate burden](#).

The new laws build on existing requirements to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities under the [Equality Act 2010](#). Reasonable adjustments include making all information and services accessible.

What you need to do

The new regulations state that to make a website or mobile app accessible it must be '...perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'.

Every public sector website or mobile app must also:

- Publish an accessibility statement
- Provide an accessible alternative format for any content that doesn't meet the standards within a reasonable time, if someone requests it, where it's reasonable to do so.

The government recommends that you ensure your website or mobile app meets accessibility standards by:

- Ensuring your design team or external agency responsible for your website and/or mobile app [understands WCAG 2.1](#)
- Ensuring the content is accessible
- Running [basic accessibility tests](#) before publishing your new website or app

The new regulations apply to public sector bodies including NHS Trusts, local government, central government, and some charities and other non-government organisations.

However, some types of public sector organisations are exempt from the regulations. If you are unsure the rules apply to your organisation check with your legal advisor.

Fixing existing websites

All existing public sector websites must meet the accessibility standards set out in the new regulations from 23 September 2020.

However, you may not need to meet the standards for entire website if it would be a disproportionate burden to your organisation.

The government recommends that:

- You should act now to ensure any new content you publish is accessible
- You should create a plan to meet the standards by the deadline that includes identifying anything that will be disproportionate to fix
- If you're unsure what would be a disproportionate burden for your organisation, you should talk to your legal adviser

Planning to meet the accessibility standards

You should create a plan that will identify what you need to fix and what you need to prioritise.

This should include working out which parts of your website meet the WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines used as the new legal accessibility standards, and which parts don't.

You can do this by running [automated and manually accessibility tests](#), as well as by user testing (getting people with different disabilities to try and complete various tasks on your website).

When you've worked out your website's accessibility issues, you should focus on the areas you need to prioritise. Then create a high level plan to address each issue in order of priority.

Accessibility statements

You need to publish an accessibility statement on your public sector websites and apps from the dates mentioned in the Key dates section of this report.

Websites: you should publish the statement as an html page on websites, and ensure the statement is linked to from a prominent place like the website footer.

Mobile apps: you should make the statement available to users where and when they download the app.

Your accessibility statement must say:

- Which parts of your website and online service don't meet accessibility standards, and why they don't
- How people with access needs can get alternative, accessible formats of any of your web content that isn't accessible
- How to contact your organisation to report accessibility problems

The new regulations require your organisation to respond to requests for information in an alternative, accessible format within a reasonable amount of time.

How Recite Me can help you make content accessible

You must ensure that all new content you publish on your website fully meets accessibility standards.

If any content you publish isn't accessible, you will have to fix it to meet the key dates of the implementation of the regulations.

You will also have to fix any content published on your website before 23 September 2018 if a user will need it to complete a task or access a service.

This existing content will need to be fixed by 23 September 2020.

And you will also need to inform any of your colleagues who create content for your website that they must ensure all the content they create and publish is accessible.

You may need to give these people training on how to create accessible website content.

You need to take a number of steps to make your website content accessible. Making content accessible includes ensuring you create accessible formats of PDFs and other documents like Microsoft Word documents.

It also includes ensuring images are made accessible by applying alt text tags to them, plus ensuring you have sufficient colour contrast between text and backgrounds on web pages.

Web accessibility software like **Recite Me** adds a layer of accessibility that can make your website content accessible. It has a unique combination of features that allow people with disabilities to access your website and its content in the way that works best for them.

Recite Me also helps makes websites more useable for **everyone**. For example, it lets any website user choose to have the text on a website read aloud to them.

See the table below for a list of some of the most common accessibility problems and how **Recite Me** fixes them. As you will see in the table, one of the most common accessibility problems is inaccessible documents like PDFs.

This means some public sector bodies with large numbers of such documents on new and existing websites have a real challenge to make them accessible to comply with deadlines set out in the new regulations.

Recite Me can offer you a quick and easy solution to this and other common website accessibility problems...

PROBLEM: Inaccessible PDFs and other documents

FIX: Recite Me can read all your website text and documents out aloud to users, which is a great way of making documents such as PDFs accessible for people with visual impairments and cognitive impairments like dyslexia.

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PROBLEM: Insufficient colour contrast between text and background colours

FIX: Recite Me offers the ability to customise the background colour of your website and the colour of the text, so people with dyslexia will be able to access your content up to 25% faster. This feature is also great for people with sight loss, including older people whose eyesight has detreated with age.

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PROBLEM: Text is too small and very hard (or impossible) to read

FIX: Recite Me quickly and easily changes font sizes. It also lets the user zoom in on any part of a web page. And it can even change the font type from an inaccessible font to an accessible font. These features are great for people with sight loss, including older people whose eyesight has detreated with age.

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PROBLEM: Content is not written in plain English

FIX: Recite Me has a full dictionary and thesaurus built into it. This feature is great for people with dyslexia and other cognitive conditions, and people with a low reading age.

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PROBLEM: Inaccessible mobile websites

FIX: Recite Me is cloud-based software, so it works across all mobile (and desktop) devices and helps people with disabilities access your website on any mobile device.

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PROBLEM: Content isn't accessible for people who don't speak English as their first language

FIX: Recite Me can translate your website content into over 100 languages. This means the one in ten people in the UK who don't speak English as their first language can easily access your website content.

Exemptions

There are some types of website content and websites that are exempt from the new regulations.

Exempt types of content include:

- Pre-recorded audio and video (published before 23 September 2020)
- Live audio and video
- Part of a heritage collection e.g. scanned manuscripts
- A PDF published before 23 September 2018 that is not essential for services your organisation provides

Exempt websites (including intranets and archives):

- Content on intranets and extranets published before 23 September 2019 (unless you make a major revision after that date)
- Archived websites if they are not needed for services your organisation provides

However, in the UK you are still required to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 (or Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland).

And you have to give information in an alternative, accessible format if someone requests it, where it is reasonable for you to do.

Ultimately, ensuring your website and its content follows the WCAG 2.1 accessibility guidelines shows how you make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities.

User testing

As mentioned earlier in this guide, you should carry out some kind of manual user testing to test the accessibility of your websites and mobile apps with people with disabilities.

This requires getting a variety of people with different disabilities to carry out different tasks using your website and apps.

You can do this user testing yourself or you can use an outside provider like [AbilityNet](#), which is the UK's leading charity on digital accessibility.

Once you have gathered the feedback from user testing you can analyse and evaluate the findings, think about what you need to fix and pass this information to your design team.

They can then do the necessary development work to ensure your website and mobile apps are accessible to as many people as possible.

Remember social media

It's not a requirement of the regulations, but you should also ensure your organisation's social media accounts and the content you publish on them is accessible.

Social media platforms have accessibility settings and accessibility best practice tips you can use to make sure your profiles and the content you publish on them is accessible.

For more information on how to make your social media activity accessible see the [Guide to Digital Inclusion For Recruiters](#), produced by Recite Me and Guidant Global.

Support, advice and training

Here are some organisations and groups that can help you to ensure your organisation achieves best practice in digital accessibility to comply with the new regulations.

- The local government digital network – an organisation for digital practitioners working in and around local government.
- The central government accessibility community – a group where you can ask questions about accessibility, develop your knowledge, and get advice and support
- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) – information about digital accessibility and WCAG 2.1 guidelines
- AbilityNet – digital accessibility consultancy, training and user testing
- Recite Me – cloud-based web accessibility software
- Big Voice Communications – accessible and inclusive communications PR and marketing consultancy and support

100's of organisations including public sector bodies already use Recite Me to help make their websites accessible for people who have disabilities – call 0191 4328092 to find out more or book your [free demo](#) now.