

## **A Church in Wales guide to online accessibility**

*“You now have a legal obligation - following the implementation of section 21 of the Disability Discrimination Act (1999) - to make reasonable adjustments to ensure blind and partially sighted people can access your service” - RNIB, 2005*

As a church, we have a duty to pursue the highest standards of accessibility in our online presence. If we proclaim that our message of good news is for all, then we should make sure that it can be accessed by all.

We have worked hard to ensure that the Provincial and Diocesan websites and the sites created by the forthcoming Parish Website Scheme produce content that meets high standards of accessibility, and are continually trying to improve on this. We welcome feedback on how we are doing, and this should be sent to [webmaster@churchinwales.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@churchinwales.org.uk)

The argument that designing accessible sites is an unrealistic target for smaller organisations with fewer resources is sometimes heard. In order to remove the opportunity for this concern to be a factor within the Church in Wales, we have provided dioceses and parishes with the necessary resources to create websites that follow these guidelines.

The following checklist of common accessibility problems can be used to check whether your website has issues that you should be seeking to correct. If you are planning a new website, then these are issues that you should be aware of – if you are using a commercial design agency, consider sending them a copy of this guide.

### **Frames**

These are no longer frequently used in web design. They essentially work by embedding web pages within web pages and therefore often mean that users with disabilities are unable to access any site content at all, and should not be used.

### **Tables**

Screen readers will read through a table cell by cell, and therefore often have significant problems with tables. CSS should therefore be used to layout and position graphical elements in a page, and not tables. Tables should be used for the layout of tabular information (e.g. tables of figures), and nothing else.

### **JavaScript**

JavaScript causes major problems with screen readers and should not be used, especially in the case of menus. The exception to this is when JavaScript can be used in such a way that the page can be viewed in a browser that has JavaScript disabled without losing any data. For example, the provincial and diocesan sites use JavaScript in one place only, and that is to colour alternate rows in tables. If JavaScript is switched off, then the user will simply see a white table with all the data still there.

If you wish to test for potential JavaScript problems, it's simple: turn JavaScript off and see if your site will still work without it. You can turn JavaScript off quite easily in most browsers – for example, under Tools > Options > Content in Firefox 2, or Tools > Security > Custom Level > Scripting in Internet Explorer 7.

### **ALT tag content**

Screen readers use the descriptions for images contained in the “**ALT**” tag to describe the image to the blind or partially sighted user. All images should have descriptive “ALT” tag content in the correct language. “ALT” tags should never be used to provide tooltip like captions on mouseover.

### **Multimedia content**

All multimedia content should also be appropriately captioned. This means that, even if a screen reader cannot access the content, the user can understand what the content consists of.

### **Text sizes**

If partially sighted users cannot re-size text on a screen, they cannot access the content. It must always be possible to re-size the text in a page using the browser’s text resizing options. In particular, this means that font sizes should **never** be set to absolute values (e.g. “12pt”). Please note that “text” here includes menu options, which must not be graphics – if someone cannot access your menu, they are never going to be able to find any content on your site.

If you want to check for potential problems, try resizing the text on your website. Again, this can be easily done in most browsers – Page > Text Size in Internet Explorer 7, or View > Text Size in Firefox 2, for example.

### **Text fonts**

The fonts you use must be clear and legible. Main paragraph text should be in a Sans-Serif font. The deprecated <b> and <i> tags should not be used.

### **Text effects**

Text that flickers, scrolls, flashes, is centered or is all in capitals is proven to cause problems for dyslexics, and should be avoided. Colour should never be used alone to highlight important information, as this will cause problems for the colour blind, in addition to which most screen readers will ignore colour information.

### **Documents for Download**

Screen readers have particular problems with PDF files, which means that you should always try to make sure that the document is available in an alternative format (such as MS Word).

### **Pop-ups.**

Pop-up windows are often not “seen” by screen readers and are increasingly either blocked by or create alerts from virus-checkers. They should not be used unless there is a good reason to do so.