Redress Scotland Accessibility Report

June 2025

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Introduction

Scotland's Redress Scheme was established in 2021 for survivors of historical child abuse in care in Scotland. Redress Scotland is one of the two organisations responsible for Scotland's Redress Scheme (the other is the Scottish Government). Redress Scotland was created to make decisions about applications for redress[1]. It is a public body, which is an organisation set up to provide a public service.

Redress Scotland is required by law to recognise that all applicants to Scotland's Redress Scheme should be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion[1]. Its Annual Report 2023 / 2024 contained a recommendation to review the accessibility of its information, communications, and engagement with applicants to the Redress Scheme to identify strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations for change.

This review was undertaken between October 2024 and May 2025. Its purpose was to examine Redress Scotland's information, communications, and engagement with survivors to assess accessibility for people who may have difficulty with reading and / or writing.

What is accessibility?

Accessibility means working in a way that is easy for people to understand. This includes identifying and meeting people's information and communication support needs. To comply with the Equality Act 2010[2] information must be provided in formats that suit the needs of disabled people. It is especially important to consider the needs of people who find reading and writing difficult. This includes people with literacy difficulties, sensory impairment or sensory loss, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, neurodivergence, and mental health difficulties.

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[1] Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act 2021, s 13

[2] Equality Act 2010, s 20

Why is accessibility important to Redress Scotland?

Redress Scotland's role is to make decisions about applications to Scotland's Redress Scheme by survivors of historical child abuse in care. It is important that survivors who have made an application to Scotland's Redress Scheme can understand the decision-making process, and how the decision about their specific application has been made.

Redress Scotland is always working to build the trust and confidence of survivors, who may find applying to the scheme challenging. They may find it difficult to talk or write about what happened to them, and some people may never have spoken to anyone about what happened. Completing an application to the Redress Scheme can therefore be a traumatic experience.

Sometimes Redress Scotland panel members need to ask for additional information to help them understand what happened to a survivor when they were in care so that they can make their decision. Redress Scotland is committed to helping survivors understand what information is needed, and to supporting survivors to provide information in a way that is as easy as possible for them.

Some survivors were in care as children because they had learning, sensory or physical disabilities,[3, 4] and they may have specific accessibility needs. Many survivors had their education interrupted because of their care experience. Interrupted education can affect confidence in reading and writing, and may mean that support is needed during the application process to ensure that applicants can understand what happens to their application and the expected timescale for a decision to be made. It is also important that all applicants understand the decision letter that will be sent to them.

What Does Good Practice Look Like?

Good practice in providing accessible information through communications and engagement is well documented by organisations that have expertise in diversity,

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[3] https://www.scld.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ncf_report.pdf

[4] Kendrick, A, *et al* (2021). Development of Children's Care Services in Scotland. Report for the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. University of Strathclyde

equality, and inclusion. The most commonly reported features of accessible communications and engagement are[5]:

- Use plain language
- Avoid jargon and abbreviations
- Break down complex concepts into small chunks
- Provide information in different formats such as text, audio, video, and graphics to suit different learning styles and preferences
- Use consistent formatting, layout, and design
- Seek feedback from a wide range of people to identify and address accessibility barriers

Accessible communication is helpful for people who face barriers to reading and writing, and is also beneficial to people in other situations. For example, high-contrast texts, designed for people with visual difficulties, also help people read text on a screen in bright sunlight. Video captions – meant for people with a hearing impairment – also enable someone to watch a video on mute in a public space.[6]

The examples below[7] represent good practice in providing accessible information to and communicating with people who may experience barriers to accessing information.

People who have literacy difficulties

Literacy is defined as the ability to read, write, speak, and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world[8].

In general, people who have literacy difficulties find it easier to communicate in person, by telephone, or get information from videos or audio content online. The basic

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[5] https://oxford-review.com/the-oxford-review-dei-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dictionary/accessible-communication-definition-and-explanation/

[6] https://www.make-way.org/toolkit/checklist-for-accessible-communication/

[7] This is an illustrative list of examples of good practice. It is not an exhaustive list.

[8] https://literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/

principles of accessible communication[9, 10] are helpful in providing information in a way that can be understood by most people, including those with literacy difficulties.

People who are blind or visually impaired

A visual impairment means that vision or sight is limited to some extent. This varies from reduced vision in one or both eyes (low vision) to irreversible loss of vision in both eyes (blindness). Some people have limited or no sensitivity to (certain) colours (colour blindness), or an increased sensitivity to bright colours.[11]

Good communication with blind and partially sighted people involves using alternative formats for documents and online information, and fully describing any visual content referenced at in-person events[12]

It is good practice to offer large print, Braille, and audio versions of documents on request. Many blind and partially sighted people use screen readers, screen magnifiers and software that can change the colour or contrast of online text to make it easier for them to read. Alternative text descriptions for images, videos and other non-text content should be used to ensure accessibility for people using screen readers.

There are many online tools available that can be added to websites to give users a range of accessibility options.

People who are deaf or have a hearing impairment

A hearing impairment limits the ability to hear and varies from impairment (in one or both ears) to deafness (complete hearing loss in both ears). People with hearing impairment may be able to hear sound, but cannot always understand speech, especially when there is background noise.

Sign language is an important aid for deaf people and British Sign Language (BSL) is the most commonly used sign language in the UK. It is a fully functional language that is

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[9] https://oxford-review.com/the-oxford-review-dei-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dictionary/accessible-communication-definition-and-explanation/

[10] https://www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/howto.pdf

[11] https://www.ukaaf.org/

[12] https://www.rnib.org.uk/

very different from spoken language. It uses handshapes, facial expressions, gestures, and body language to convey meaning.[13]

It is good practice to provide a BSL interpretation of video and audio online information, and to have a BSL interpreter available at in-person meetings or events. It is, however, important to keep in mind that some deaf people use Sign Supported English (SSE), or finger spelling, which means that BSL interpretation does not meet the communication needs of all deaf people. Captions for videos and transcriptions of audio content are helpful adaptations, particularly for people with partial hearing.

People with physical disabilities

People with a physical disability have a physical impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities.[14] Some people have physical disabilities that affect their speech, hearing and vision, or their ability to control body movements. This means that they may be unable to hold a pen, turn pages or use standard computers, and involuntary movements may affect their ability to read standard-sized print. Many people with physical disabilities may have experienced gaps in their education due to periods of hospitalisation. This may have affected their confidence in reading and writing.

Each person with a disability is unique. It is important to ask them what their needs are and be flexible in the ways you provide or receive information. Some people may prefer to meet face-to-face.

The list below contains some suggestions that may help a person whose physical disability affects their speech, or creates a barrier to reading and / or writing:

- follow the basic principles of accessible communication noted above;
- offer flexibility when giving or receiving information;
- follow the lead of the person you are communicating with;
- in person or on the phone, speak clearly and naturally to avoid exaggerated slow or loud speech;

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[13] https://www.british-sign.co.uk/
[14] Equality Act 2010, s6

- be patient – resist the temptation to speak for the person or finish their sentences;

- offer documents in large print, high contrast formats;

- be sure you understand what support the person may need before making assumptions.

People with learning disabilities

People with learning disabilities have a significant, lifelong, condition that started before adulthood, which affected their development, and which means they need help to understand information, learn skills and cope independently.[15] It should be noted that this is only part of a description. Each person with a learning disability is unique, and has the potential to achieve many different things in life.

To communicate well with people with learning disabilities you should:[16]

- avoid jargon or long words that might be hard to understand;

- be prepared to use different communication tools, such as Talking Mats[17] or Makaton;[18]

- follow the lead of the person you are communicating with;

- go at the pace of the person you are communicating with.

Take the time to ask the person what works best for them.

In person: Many people with a learning disability prefer face to face and one to one communication.

In writing: Use bigger text and bullet points, and keep writing to a minimum. Too much colour can make reading harder for someone with a learning disability.

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[15] The keys to life: Improving quality of life for people with learning disabilities, The Scottish Government, Edinburgh, 2013

[16] https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/communicating-people-learning-disability?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiAzvC9BhADEiwAEhtlN2--JWjlvi0k-f85IcqkKsW-6HgmhB3rDcP2b6e_Pq4YsHX06b2AchoCdVoQAvD_BwE

[17] https://www.talkingmats.com/

[18] https://www.makaton.org/

On the phone: Speak slowly and clearly, using easy to understand words.

Creating easy read[19] versions of documents can be helpful for people with learning disabilities. However, many people with learning disabilities need support to help them understand easy read documents.

Videos with captions, and audio materials can be easier for people with learning disabilities to understand than written words.

It is important to note that people with learning disabilities often experience digital and financial exclusion, and for these reasons they may not be able to access information from websites.

People who have language disorders

People who have language disorders have difficulty understanding and / or using words, and this may cause communication difficulties. There are three categories of language disorder:

1. Developmental Language Disorder is present from birth and affects the ability to talk and / or understand words. These challenges are likely to be life-long, and some people with developmental language disorder continue to need support throughout their lives.

2. Acquired language disorder occurs suddenly as a result of injury, trauma or disease that affects the language centre of the brain. This can result in difficulties in consciously using language while still being able to understand some elements of language at an unconscious level; for example, following a stroke the person may know what they want to say, but they cannot find the correct words, or the words may be disorganised or difficult for others to understand.

3. Progressive language disorder refers to a type of condition where a person's ability to use or understand language gradually worsens over time due to degeneration of brain tissue. People with progressive language disorder may have trouble finding the correct words for objects or understanding words. Over

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[19] https://www.scld.org.uk/easy-read-documents/

time, this may lead to a complete loss of all verbal or written communication skills.

Good practice when communicating with a person who has a language disorder is centred around patience and flexibility. Following the basic principles of accessible communication, and offering flexibility when giving or receiving information can be a good starting point, keeping in mind that specialist support and advocacy may be required[20].

People who are neurodiverse

'Neurodiversity' is a word to describe the natural differences in how people process information and interact with the world. People who are neurodiverse may have a condition such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or dyslexia, and each person has their own unique ways of interacting with the world.

There are some key factors to keep in mind when making information accessible to people who are neurodiverse[21]:

- Use clear, simple language;
- Use dyslexia-friendly fonts, such as sans-serif fonts, which make the content easier to read;
- Use clear headings, subheadings, icons, and organised content to make information easier to digest;
- Keep formatting consistent to create a predictable environment;
- Choose colours carefully to provide maximum contrast and to cater for a wide range of needs, such as dyslexia and colour blindness;
- Offer customisable settings online, such as font size, colour schemes and spacing;
- Switch off the autoplay function for audio or video content, as this function can be disruptive and cause discomfort for people with sensory sensitivities or attention-related difficulties;

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[20] https://www.totalhealth.co.uk/clinical-experts/ms-liz-ackroyd/adult-acquired-speech-language-and-swallowing-disorders

[21] https://www.continualengine.com/blog/neurodiversity-and-digital-accessibility/

- Images, video, and audio content is generally helpful instead of lengthy text-based content for people who are neurodiverse;
- Text to speech technology can make digital content more inclusive, benefitting people with dyslexia or cognitive challenges who find auditory information easier to understand than written information.

People who have mental health difficulties

Survivors of child abuse have experienced trauma, and trauma is a risk factor for mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychosis[22]. It is important to note that this does not mean that every survivor of child abuse is or will become mentally ill,[23] but it does mean that some survivors may experience mental health difficulties as adults. Mental health difficulties can change over time and may vary from day to day.

Poor mental health, regardless of whether a diagnosis of a mental illness has been made, often leads to difficulties in concentrating and understanding complex information. Some people may experience fluctuations in concentration or mood, confusion, or thoughts that come and go rapidly. The day-to-day effects of medication might affect their ability to concentrate and communicate. Self-medication using alcohol and drugs is common, and can add to the barriers to communication and engagement.

Following the basic principles of accessible communication, and offering flexibility when giving and receiving information can help to address these barriers.

Receiving Information from survivors

As noted above, people who have difficulty reading and / or writing for a variety of reasons need support and advocacy to express themselves in writing, or using other formats.

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[22] https://safeguarding-guide.nhs.uk/context-of-NHS-safeguarding/s2-06/

[23] https://uktraumacouncil.org/resource/linking-childhood-trauma-to-mental-health?cn-reloaded=1

It is often easier for people to express themselves in person, or using video or audio recordings rather than completing written applications or supporting documents. Being as flexible as possible is the key to successful communication and engagement.

Methodology

This accessibility review involved the following activities:

- The relevant legislation and guidance were reviewed, and meetings held with key personnel in Redress Scotland. This activity was necessary to establish an understanding of Scotland's Redress Scheme and how it is accessed by survivors of historical childhood abuse in relevant care settings, and their families or advocates

- All available Redress Scotland paperwork and online materials were read and assessed for accessibility

- Interviews were held with members of the Redress Scotland team and panel members[24]

- Meetings were held with organisations who have engaged with survivors, and organisations representing people who may face barriers to accessing the written word

- The output of Redress Scotland's engagement sessions with survivors was examined in detail, paying particular attention to feedback from survivors

- The websites of a range of organisations representing people with disabilities and those facing barriers to communication were reviewed to identify good practice in making information accessible

- Delegates attending the Redress Scotland Annual Conference on 15 May 2025 participated in small group discussions focused on accessibility

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[24] A full list of the individuals, organisations and websites consulted can be found in Appendix 1.

Findings

Strengths

Redress Scotland's values of dignity, respect and compassion are reflected in its culture and demonstrated in its work. There is a strong focus on putting survivors at the heart of the Redress Scotland process - being clear, direct, and useful in all communications and engagement. This focus is evaluated formally every year using its Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework. [25] The staff team, board and panel members are encouraged and expected to continuously look for ways they can improve how they work.

Members of the staff team and panel members were keen to be involved in this review, and all of those who were interviewed welcomed the review. Every interviewee identified good practice that is already adopted by Redress Scotland, and they were supportive of the organisation's leadership in developing an open and honest culture that is motivated to implement change to improve its ways of working. The focus on putting survivors at the heart of the process was evident throughout.

Redress Scotland staff work closely with Scottish Government teams, especially the Scottish Government Redress Relations and Response Division. A Joint Collaboration Board has been set up to support the teams to work together and to make sure the work done together is high quality. The Joint Collaboration Board meets at least twice each year. It is chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of Redress Scotland and the Deputy Director of the Redress Relations and Response Division. The Board meetings are attended by team members from Redress Scotland and the Scottish Government. They keep each other up to date on progress, and share learning from their day-to-day experience.

There are several stages during the redress decision-making process where letters are sent to survivors. These letters are important, because in taking a trauma-informed

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[25] Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework for Redress Scotland

approach, trustworthiness counts, and trust is built by being predictable, consistent and doing what was promised. [26]

Redress Scotland's letters are written with great care to give the survivor information about what will happen next, to ask the survivor for more information if necessary, and to tell the survivor what decision has been made about their application. Letters are quality assured by a team at Redress Scotland that includes the Quality Assurance Lead and the Engagement Lead, before being sent to Scottish Government caseworkers, who send them to survivors.

Most survivors say Redress Scotland's letters are helpful. Some would rather have less detail, but Redress Scotland can't know ahead of time what each person prefers. That is why the letters put the most important information, like the decision about a payment, right at the start. All letters can be requested in Braille or large print format.

There is a wide range of information available on the Redress Scotland website in text and video format. This information is consistently written in clear, simple language, and the conversational tone of the web content and its linked documents is helpful. An important feature of the organisation's trauma-informed approach is that each document is proofread by the Communications Lead before publication on the website. In addition, all web content is reviewed by survivors before it is published.

> *'What we say and how we say it has meaning beyond the words: being straightforward and open in our language and communications makes it easier to understand what we do and why and ensures we are living our values.'* [7]

Survivors have said that they find the online videos particularly helpful, because they can watch, rewind, and watch again to help them understand the information that each video covers. There are plans to create additional videos to explain more details of the Redress scheme, such as the decision-making process, reviews of panel decisions, survivor experiences of the Redress process, and panel member Frequently Asked Questions sessions. A working group has been set up to review the website, and feedback from survivors will be considered in that review.

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[26] Redress Scotland Annual Report 2023/2024

Redress Scotland takes seriously its role in ensuring individuals can make informed choices[27]; its direct contact with survivors is positive. This includes telephone follow-up of general enquiries by Panel Support Coordinators. As part of Redress Scotland's trauma-informed approach, survivors are given the name of a contact person who will deal with their enquiry to make sure they do not have to tell their story repeatedly, and individual survivors are supported in a way that helps meet their needs.

> *This is because relationships matter: support should be based on sustaining and developing relationships between survivors and people who are trying to help[7].*

Leaflets are available to provide bite-sized pieces of information on specific topics, and these have been helpful in following up telephone or online enquiries from survivors.

The Engagement Lead has held in-person and online meetings with individual survivors, survivor groups, lawyers and organisations supporting survivors, to answer their questions about Redress Scotland's role within Scotland's Redress Scheme. Survivors are supported to take part in these sessions through pre-session and follow-up phone calls. Notes from in-person events and transcripts of videos are available to survivors who do not have internet access. Support to survivors attending engagement events is provided to meet the needs of individual survivors. For example, arranging for a British Sign Language interpreter to be present to interpret for a deaf survivor.

A Stakeholder Engagement Map has been created to capture information about all the people and organisations that have an interest in Redress Scotland's work. Redress Scotland's work is shaped by feedback from these stakeholders, and it is committed to identifying how to improve its ways of working. The stakeholder engagement map helps Redress Scotland communicate flexibly with a wide range of people and organisations.

The Annual Report for 2023 / 2024 is a well-written, informative document. It shows how public funds were used by Redress Scotland during the financial year, it includes a performance report on its work, describing what has been done well and what could be done better. It contains helpful explanations of roles and responsibilities, and as noted above, it sets out Redress Scotland's approach to trauma informed working practices.

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[27] Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act 2021, s 9

Areas for Improvement

While Redress Scotland aims to provide accessible resources for survivors, family members, professionals, and anyone else with an interest in Scotland's Redress Scheme, the website requires attention to improve its usefulness and accessibility. In its current format, it is not easy to navigate, and people may therefore struggle to find the information they need. There is no clear area for survivors to access information, and some of the information on the site is repeated and / or out of date.

Definitions of the words 'redress' and 'abuse' are not currently in the 'what our words mean' section.

As a public body, Redress Scotland must comply with accessibility legislation[28] by performing a website accessibility audit as set out in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)[29] every year, and displaying an accessibility statement on the website. The last Redress Scotland website external accessibility audit was in March 2019, and the accessibility statement on the website was last updated in November 2021.

A range of web accessibility tools is readily available to improve website accessibility. Some of these are evaluation tools to support the requirement for regular accessibility audits. A more comprehensive approach is to incorporate flexible accessibility options into the website itself, providing the essential support required by people with disabilities or barriers to accessing information, and at the same time making the site's information easier to access for all users. Recite Me®, used by the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, and the Scottish Commission for people with Learning Disabilities, and UserWay®, used by Sense Scotland, are good examples of web accessibility tools.

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[28] Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018
[29] https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/

Recommendations

Audit of survivor accessibility needs

1. An audit of survivor disabilities and accessibility needs should be completed to evaluate what survivors' accessibility needs were, what adaptations were made to meet those needs and what support was provided.

Website

2. An updated external accessibility audit of the website is required, and a new accessibility statement should be prepared to reflect the website's compliance with current WCAG Guidelines (version 2.2);

3. The web accessibility statement should summarise the accessibility policy, offer to accept feedback, and offer to provide information in alternative formats on request;

4. All web content and documents should be in a format that can be accessed by e-reader software;

5. Web accessibility software should be used to provide flexible online access to survivors and other stakeholders;

6. Add photos of the Chair, Chief Executive and Senior Management Team to the 'Our People' section of the website;

7. Consider creating a BSL section of the website
    a. Video content should include captions and a BSL interpreter as standard;
    b. Expand the offer of accessible documentation to include BSL signing, e.g. for letters to survivors;

8. Frequently Asked Questions should be reviewed monthly and updated as required;

9. Create a Frequently Asked Questions video and update it regularly;

10. Review the web content regularly to ensure it is up to date and accessible;

Documents

11. All Redress Scotland documents should be created using Microsoft Word accessibility standards
    a. Make clear that alternative formats including large print, Braille, audio and BSL are available on request;

12. Make use of contactscotland-bsl.org – a BSL video interpreting service for all Scottish public bodies and Third sector organisations that enables deaf people to make interpreted video calls to services;

13. Easy read versions of leaflets and other key documents should be produced, bearing in mind that people with learning disabilities need support to work through easy read documents;

14. Consider the needs of survivors whose first language is not English;

15. Consider how to make information available to people with no internet access – e.g. more use of information leaflets;

Awareness Raising

16. Consider ways to raise awareness of Redress Scotland's role, e.g. by creating blogs aimed at people who support survivors;

Learning

17. Continue to make full use of the Joint Collaboration Board as a forum for sharing learning between Redress Scotland and the Scottish Government operations team;

Engagement

18. Ensure survivor engagement sessions include people who face barriers to accessing information;

19. Continue to provide accessibility support tailored to the individual survivors attending online and in-person events;

20. Continue to consult with and request regular feedback from survivors;

Action Plan

21. Create a plan to respond to the recommendations made in this report.

Appendix 1

Organisations and individuals consulted during the course of this evaluation:

Organisation	Individual consulted	Role within the organisation
Redress Scotland	Joanna McCreadie	Chief Executive
	Michelle Nairn	Head of People
	Gary Gallacher	Head of Operations
	Melanie Lowe	Head of Policy and Improvement
	Kirsty Christie	Quality Assurance Lead
	Rachael Boyle	Engagement Lead
	Diane Piper	Governance Secretary
	Anne Houston	Panel Member
	Sara Lurie	Panel Member
	Delegates attending the Annual Conference in May 2025	
Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry	Lisa Boyd	Head of Witness Support & Engagement
Scottish Commission for people with Learning Disabilities	Linda Mitchell	Head of Delivery
	Cameron Smith	Development Worker
Scottish Action for Mental Health	Kenny Stewart	Head of Public Affairs and Communications
	Billy Burke	Head of Development & Innovation
Human Rights Consortium Scotland	Charlie McMillan	Director