

Presentation on IT Accessibility to BCS Council – July 5 2018

SLIDE 1

Good afternoon.

I started working in IT in 1973 and I worked in end user organisations until I retired in 2012. I have worked as Head of IT in an engineering company (Massey Ferguson), a property company (Land Securities) and an IT services company in the educational sector (University of London Computer Centre).

During my 38 year career in these three different market sectors I never once thought about the need to design and implement accessible systems.

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In 2012 I was asked to join, what was then, the BCS Inclusion Policy Panel.

Membership of this Panel brought home to me the scale and potential impact of my ignorance of how to implement accessible IT systems.

Our presentation today will try to show what a challenge IT accessibility is for society, and what we in the IT profession should be doing to address that challenge.

The BCS (i.e. you and I) has never taken a lead in championing the need for accessible IT systems and web sites to prevent exclusion of the disadvantaged in general and disabled in particular.

Nor do we act as a champion for either cause.

What are now generations of BCS disability group members have tried to change this situation, and all have failed.

Consequently, we are here to day looking for your help and advice on better ways of championing the need for truly accessible systems in this era of digital by default.

We will also try and highlight the impact that the lack of accessible systems is having today and try and persuade you to get involved and help us make a difference.

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There are many different types of disability. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 states that a person has a disability if they have 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [their] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.

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Disability is usually categorised into 4 groupings:

- vision impairment
- hearing impairment
- motor impairment
- cognitive impairment

The impacts of all of these types of disabilities can be reduced through the design and implementation of accessible systems.

As with all aspects of IT systems the earlier a requirement is defined and included in the design process the lower the cost of providing that requirement.

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Making accessibility a key part of the design process reduces the incremental cost of implementing an accessible system to nearly zero.

Enhancing an already implemented system to make it accessible can be very expensive.

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At this point I could send you to sleep with statistic after statistic. That is not my intention so I will only highlight some overarching numbers. There is a handout sheet which summarises some of the more relevant statistics and sources.

There are many statistics in the world of disability/accessibility and they don't always agree with each other. The ones I am going to highlight are from reputable sources and give an indication of the scale of the issue.

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Around 22% of the UK population have a disability, over 14 million out of 65.6 million.

8% of children (under 16) have a disability ca 1 million out of 12.4 million

19% of working age adults have a disability, ca. 7.9 million out of 41.4 million.

45% of pension age adults (over 65) have a disability, ca. 5.3 million out of 11.8 million.

This means that roughly one in two of the people in this room will be disabled in some way before they die.

SLIDE 7

Digital technology pervades all our lives and all we do, and the drive to digitally self-serve will only continue, as the Government's own Digital by Default drive to make all public services digital shows.

However, these digital services are not always provided in a way that makes them truly accessible to all.

The Equality Act of 2010 requires a reasonable adjustment to provide digital accessibility for people who are disabled.

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Unfortunately, the interpretation of 'reasonable' means that there are many digital services which remain inaccessible.

Our education system is becoming increasingly dependent upon digital delivery, which can disadvantage individuals with accessibility needs.

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Current statistics:

81.8% of working age disabled people hold formal educational qualifications, compared to 93.5% of working age non-disabled people.

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14.9% of working age disabled people hold degree-level qualifications compared to 28.1% of working age non-disabled people.

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Surveys of disabled peoples' usage of public services show that the percentage of disabled people who have tried to access the 5 most common public services and then experienced difficulties are:

- benefits and pension services (31%)
- social services (28%)
- health services (28%)
- tax services (26%)
- justice services (23%).

Inaccessible web sites are identified as one of the main reasons for this.

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Techniques and standards for making IT accessible are available but infrequently used.

Why is that?

One possible reason is that there are 2 million IT professionals in the UK and, like me, only a very small proportion of them have ever heard of the word 'accessibility'.

It does not seem to form a significant part of any Computer Science degree curriculum.

The IT Professional body in the UK, i.e. us, rarely addresses the issue.

The IT Livery Company is also delinquent in this regard.

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I hope these facts have made you think more deeply about the need for accessibility. If we continue to ignore it we risk creating a divided society where over 20% of the population could be excluded from digital services.

So the question I am posing is whether we in the IT profession can influence this situation?

Is there a role that we, the IT profession, can play in creating a more accessible environment?

What would happen if we educated the 2 million IT professionals in the UK more completely in how to design, develop and implement accessible web sites and systems?

Finally, I would ask a question of us on the BCS Council. As I look round I can see gender and ethnic diversity but I would hazard a guess that we do not have any disabled people on the Council or Trustee Board, yet they make up over 20% of the population.

Should we encourage more disabled people to join the BCS/Council/Trustee Board so that we are representative of the UK population and stand a better chance of understanding the issues that non-accessible systems create?

Robin Christopherson from AbilityNet will now discuss how inclusive design is of paramount importance and will also show you some examples of every day accessibility issues and then we will take any questions that you may have.