

'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'

– John 10:10

'In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek...

There is no difference between male and female.

You are all the same in Christ Jesus.'

– Galatians 3:28



New Ground Churches

Disability Inclusion Policy

Created: October 2016

Reviewed: June 2017, October 2019, June 2021, May 2022, September 2024

Disability Inclusion Policy

Mission statement

We are made in the image of God, and as such all people are of equal importance and significance. In God there is no difference between male and female, Greek or Jew, bond or free – disabled or able. Just as there is a 'bias to the poor' so there is a Biblical imperative to have a corporate responsibility to those on the margins of society and within the structures of our churches.

This policy enshrines the principle that all people employed or accessing services offered by New Ground Churches are treated equally.

Introduction

We are required in law to respond to the subject of disability and this has a bearing on us as a service provider and employer. As such the Equality Act (2010) states that we must take reasonable steps to ensure that our policies, practices and procedures enable people with disabilities to enjoy and fully participate in all aspects of our activities, events and conferences.

This will affect the organisation at all levels of meetings and events in terms of choice of venue, access, large print copies of printed texts, loop systems for hearing aid users, etc. It will also affect churches in the New Ground family in encouraging them to consider their obligation to carry out and implement an access audit. In law these things are not voluntary concessions to people with disabilities. They are necessary obligations laid on us in terms of our theological and the legal imperatives of the Act. The Law requires both employers and service providers to make such provision.

Definition of disability

You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.¹

Physical or mental impairments include sensory impairments (such as those affecting sight and hearing) and learning difficulties. The definition also covers certain medical conditions when they have a long-term and substantial effect on people's everyday lives and mobility. For the purpose of this policy, we also acknowledge the impact of temporary impairment.

¹ [gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010](https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010) (accessed 25th September 2024)

How the Equality Act affects 'service-providers' and employers

The Equality Act states that service providers and employers should take reasonable steps to ensure that their policies, practices and procedures enable people with disabilities to make full use of anything they offer to the public, or to work comfortably within the environment. If your practice makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a person with disabilities to work, or to use your services, you may be in breach of the Act unless you take steps to change. These are known as 'reasonable adjustments'.

If your premises have physical features – including acoustics – that make it difficult for people with a hearing impairment or people with disabilities to work, or to use your service, you should take steps to remove or alter those features. If an auxiliary aid or service would enable a person with disabilities to use your service, then you should take reasonable steps to provide it.

The purpose of this policy

- To consider the theological imperative of this issue for New Ground Churches.
- To consider the legal and legislative imperatives of the 2010 Equality Act.
- To inform and support our churches in inclusive 'good practice' in all areas of their organisation, life, work and strategy.
- To be aware of the necessity that New Ground complies with the requirements of the Equality Act, its obligations to its employees and as a 'service provider'.

Strategies to achieve the purpose of this policy

- To be a catalyst for changing lives by changing attitudes towards disability access and inclusion through its policies and practice.
- To support informed advocacy of inclusive attitudes in all communications.
- To increase awareness as an employer and as a service provider to create accessibility for all. By this awareness we may structurally and strategically respond to the theological and legal imperatives relating to this issue.
- To support good practice for our churches in their role as providers for visitors and members alike.
- To support good practice for New Ground as an employer of both paid and voluntary workers, as required, in law.

Implementation

To ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities we will endeavour to develop the following good practice in areas covered by this policy:

Good practice as a service provider

- A positive attitude to include all people as equals and so enable their full and equal participation, where possible.
- Where possible all should be able to access independently any buildings we use.
- Where possible there should be accessible seating, with varying seat height, some with arms.
- Where possible there should be free movement around buildings we use for someone independently to use a wheelchair or other aids to assist their movement.
- A loop system should be available and used at all times.
- Large print versions, or other suitable alternatives, of relevant materials should be available.
- All activities, events and conferences should be held in fully accessible locations.

Good practice as an employer in terms of its responsibilities under the Equality Act

- Follow best practice for equal opportunities employment – statutory obligations.
- Clear written equal opportunities policy with access issues incorporated. Equality Act access to work requirements apply to all posts – paid and voluntary.
- Voluntary work attracts the same rights as others in a paid capacity. It therefore applies to everyone – i.e. from those working in a voluntary capacity through to employees.

Key aspects to consider

- Job advertisements and applications procedures.
- Application forms in a clear and simple format – available in large print upon request, and online.
- Advertisements in a clear legible format – available in large print and digital audio upon request.
- New Ground website should comply with 'best practice' standards for access of information.

Standardised interview procedure should include:

- Choice of accessible venue with designated disabled parking and toilet facilities.
- Loop system should be available.

- BSL interpreter services available upon request.
- Appropriate provision on request to meet the needs of visually impaired candidates.
- Appropriate provision to cover the needs of any other candidates with specific needs.

Appointments

- Full accessibility, where possible, of all working environments.
- Provision for access needs for visually impaired or hearing impaired candidates and those who have other disability issues.
- Where possible, full access to all buildings, offices and meeting rooms relating to the post.
- Provision of appropriate office furniture and equipment including any specialist equipment required (Access to Work grants are available).

The language we use

It is important to use language that does not reinforce negative images, incorrect assumptions and stereotypes associated with people with disabilities. All language is constantly evolving and the simplest way to make sure you are using appropriate language is to ask people with disabilities themselves.

<i>Language to be encouraged</i>	<i>Language to be avoided</i>
People with disabilities	The disabled, invalid
Those with visual or hearing impairments	The blind, the partially sighted, the deaf
A person with arthritis, with epilepsy	An arthritic, an epileptic
Someone who has...	A victim of, suffers from, crippled/afflicted by
A person with physical disabilities	Cripple, handicapped
Someone with learning disabilities	Retarded, mentally handicapped
A person with cerebral palsy	Spastic/Spaz
Profoundly deaf	Deaf and dumb
Hearing aid	Deaf aid
Specify the need	Special needs person (too vague to be useful)
A wheelchair user	Wheelchair-bound/dependent/confined
Accessible toilet	Disabled toilet

Good practice and Equality Act requirements for meetings, training and conferences

A statement along the following lines should be included in all booking forms and training applications, so that the appropriate provision can be made for all people with disability needs.

In order to enable you to enjoy full participation in this meeting/training/conference, please indicate below if you require any of the following provision:

- Induction loop
- BSL interpreter
- Large print material
- Space for an assistance dog
- Wheelchair access and toilet facilities
- Disabled designated parking space
- Special diet
- Other requirements (please specify)

Please return this form to....

Please also refer to separate practice documents designed to provide procedures in relation to specific events or activities that indicate suggested outworking of this policy document.

Accessibility symbols

The symbols below may be used to promote or solicit needs of accessibility for people with disabilities.



Indicates accessible facilities, paths, toilets and parking areas for people with limited mobility



Indicates enhanced hearing devices or technology are provided



Indicates sign language is provided



Indicates print materials available in Braille upon request



Signifies print in 18 point or larger