

State of the eNation Reports

August 2007 – Tourism Websites

State of the eNation Reports – a summary

The AbilityNet State of the eNation Reports are a quarterly review of a number of websites in a particular sector. This report concerns tourism websites. The sites reviewed are:

- Edinburgh Castle
- Glasgow Science Centre
- Burns Heritage Centre
- London Eye
- Eden Project
- Kew Gardens
- National Museum Wales
- Portmeirion
- Giants Causeway
- Belfast Zoo

What level of access do these sites offer for the many millions of potential visitors who have a disability, dyslexia, literacy difficulty, or who simply find it a little difficult using a mouse?

Web Accessibility – why it's important

Today many services are only available, or offered at a discounted rate, on the Internet. Other sites provide vital information. If a website doesn't meet a base level of accessibility then it will be impossible for a large number of disabled visitors to use it. Many others with some sort of limiting condition will also have great difficulty.

It is illegal to bar disabled visitors from on-line services and information offered to the general public. No organisation would purposefully do this but many are either not aware of the problem, or don't know what to do to address it. In the UK there are estimated to be 1.6 million registered blind people, 1.5 million with cognitive difficulties, a further 3.4 million people who are otherwise IT disabled and 6 million that have dyslexia. The total spending power of this group is now estimated at £120 billion a year.

A Commitment to Accessibility

All the parties reviewed were contacted several weeks before publication of this report and asked to make a public commitment to accessibility. To date the following have done this (please see Appendix C for the text of these statements):

- Belfast Zoo
- Kew Gardens
- London Eye

The Results in Summary

A 5 star scale was used: ***** = Very accessible.
*** = Satisfies a base level of accessibility
* = Very inaccessible

10 sites were reviewed: 1 site had a **** ranking
4 sites had a ** rating
5 sites had a * ranking

Site Ranking

- Glasgow Science Centre ****
- Eden Project **
- National Museum Wales **
- Portmeirion **
- Giants Causeway **
- Edinburgh Castle *
- Burns Heritage Centre *
- London Eye *
- Kew Gardens *
- Belfast Zoo *

For information on how we decide a site's ranking please see Appendix B.

The Results in Full

All sites were audited in August 2007 for accessibility and usability using a wide range of in-depth manual checks. The testing process was assisted by the Bobby accessibility testing tool, the AIS toolbar and colour checking tools.

Glasgow Science Centre – <http://www.glasgowsciencecentre.org/>

Ranking: ****

This website scored a respectable 4 out of 5 stars:

Text on the site is clear and large enough under normal viewing conditions and the text on every page can be resized by the user – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen. The site uses sans serif text which will assist visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

Often a text label appears when you put the mouse over an image. Blind and dyslexic visitors rely on the presence of text labels as a spoken description of the image. Without them the image is meaningless. On this site almost every image, including most importantly images that are also links are properly labelled. Without these labels getting around the site would be very difficult - imagine trying to make a journey where signposts at every roundabout are left blank!

Many people are not able to use a mouse. The Glasgow Science Centre website is able to be used with the keyboard alone and it is easy to follow the active link when moving through menu items and links.

There were no 'pop-up' windows that did not first inform the user - thus avoiding potential confusion for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

Many websites use mini programs called JavaScript embedded in their pages which can often cause difficulties for those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons. This website seems to operate normally when JavaScript is not supported.

A sitemap is provided that allows users to see at a glance the overall structure of the site as well as find specific information.

Glasgow Science Centre have an accessibility page on the site which provides help on using the website, makes a clear commitment to providing an accessible service and encourages users to feedback any accessibility issues.

The Eden Project – <http://www.edenproject.com/>

Ranking: **

This website includes a number of issues with accessibility:

Whilst the majority of text on each page can be resized by the user – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen, there are some instances of images of text meaning that these cannot be resized, such as the main menu.

There are instances of inappropriate text labels being specified e.g. ‘arrow’ for navigational arrow icons, or where a text label has not been specified.

Users’ Windows colour scheme is reflected; however, in Windows High Contrast the main page banner is not displayed.

There are a number of instances of links sharing the same link text, e.g. ‘More info’, but which link to different pages. When read out of context, it is not clear where these links are pointing and this could be confusing to some users.

The Eden Project has an accessibility page on the site which provides help on using the website, makes a clear commitment to providing an accessible service and encourages users to feedback any accessibility issues.

This website seems to operate normally when JavaScript is not supported.

National Waterfront Museum – <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/swansea/>

Ranking: **

This website includes a number of issues with accessibility:

Text on the site is generally clear and large enough under normal viewing conditions, although the news items may be too small for all users to read comfortably. The site uses sans serif text which will assist visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

The National Waterfront Museum website is able to be used with the keyboard alone, however there are some instances where the onscreen tabbing order is inconsistent and the user would have to tab excessively between screen elements. It is not always easy to follow the onscreen tab focus.

There are a number of instances of links sharing the same link text, e.g. 'more', but which link to different pages. When read out of context, it is not clear where these links are pointing and this could be confusing to some users.

The site search 'search button' is JavaScript dependant, however users can still search the site with JavaScript disabled by pressing enter after typing in a search phrase.

Users' Windows colour scheme is reflected.

Some of the Flash content on the homepage is inaccessible when using the keyboard.

Portmeirion Village – <http://www.portmeirion-village.com/>

Ranking: **

This website includes a number of issues with accessibility:

Text on the site is generally quite small and may be difficult for users to read comfortably, however the site uses sans serif text which will assist visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

There are numerous spacer and decorative images that are unlabelled or poorly labelled – making things difficult for dyslexic users relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software, and leaving blind users well and truly 'in the dark'.

Many people are not able to use a mouse. Although the Portmeirion website is able to be used with the keyboard alone, it can be difficult to spot the dotted outline indicating the currently selected link.

Heading elements have not been used. These are particularly useful for vision impaired users using screenreading software and help break pages up into logical sections.

This website seems to operate normally when JavaScript is not supported.

There is no accessibility or site help page.

Giants Causeway – <http://www.giantscausewaycentre.com/>

Ranking: **

This website includes a number of issues with accessibility:

Text on the site is generally quite small and may be difficult for users to read comfortably, however the site uses sans serif text which will assist visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Also, the text on every page can be resized by the user – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen.

There are many instances of inappropriate text labels being specified, specifically for decorative images. Also, some images have extended text labels comprising several sentences which would be more appropriately coded up as a long description.

The Giants Causeway website is able to be used with the keyboard alone and it is easy to see which is the active link when moving through menu items and links. This navigation is enhanced with a visible skip navigation link.

This website seems to operate normally when JavaScript is not supported.

There are a number of instances of links sharing the same link text, e.g. 'more', but which link to different pages. When read out of context, it is not clear where these links are pointing and this could be confusing to some users.

The audio preview show on the site lacks captions, meaning that hard of hearing users, or users with sound turned off would not understand the information provided.

Edinburgh Castle – <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk>

Ranking: *

This website includes a number of significant issues with accessibility:

The text on every page has been 'hard coded' meaning it cannot easily be resized by many users – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen. The site does use sans serif text, however, which will assist visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

The Edinburgh Castle website is able to be used with the keyboard alone and it is easy to see which is the active link when moving through menu items and links.

Many websites use mini programs called JavaScript embedded in their pages which can often cause difficulties for those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons. This website seems to operate normally when JavaScript is not supported.

There are many instances of missing text labels, specifically for decorative images. This would particularly affect screenreader users, as they would have the filenames read out for any image that is lacking a text label.

There are several instances of text and background colour combinations that do not afford sufficient contrast – making reading difficult for people with a vision impairment or dyslexia. This is particularly prevalent with headings and the main navigation bar.

Burns Heritage Park – <http://www.burnsheritagepark.com/>

Ranking: *

This website includes a number of significant issues with accessibility:

The text on every page has been ‘hard coded’ meaning it cannot easily be resized by many users – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen. The text on the site is also justified which can cause reading difficulties for some users. The site does use sans serif text, however, which will assist visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

There are numerous instances of images of text, some used as headings, meaning that these cannot be resized or have their colours changed.

The Burns Heritage Park website is able to be used with the keyboard alone and it is easy to see which is the active link when moving through menu items and links.

A number of links open ‘pop-up’ windows without informing the user that this will happen. This could be confusing for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

This website seems to operate normally when JavaScript is not supported.

London Eye – <http://www.londoneye.com/>

Ranking: *

This website includes a number of significant issues with accessibility:

Certain text on the site is generally quite small and may be difficult for users to read comfortably. However, the site uses sans serif text which will assist visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Also, the majority text on every page can be resized by the user – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen.

There are many instances of missing text labels for images including important functionality such as the search button within the search area.

There are a number of instances of links sharing the same link text, e.g. 'more', but which link to different pages. When read out of context, it is not clear where these links are pointing and this could be confusing to some users.

There are no unique page titles; each page shares the title 'London Eye'. Often the page title is useful information to the user to give an indication as to the page they are currently on, particularly so for screenreader users.

This website relies on JavaScript for flight bookings. As online bookings receive a favourable 10% discount, users who have JavaScript disabled will not be able to benefit from this discount and are forced to book via a different method. Additionally, search functionality and combo box functionality such as the 'What are you looking for' combo box relies on JavaScript to function.

Kew Gardens – <http://www.kew.org>

Ranking: *

This website includes a number of significant issues with accessibility:

The majority of text on the site has been 'hard coded' meaning it cannot easily be resized by many users – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen. Where the text does resize, there is evidence of text becoming too big for its containing element. The site does use sans serif text, however, which will assist visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

There are numerous instances of images of text meaning that these cannot be resized or have their colours changed.

There are a number of instances of links sharing the same link text, e.g. 'find out more', but which link to different pages. When read out of context, it is not clear where these links are pointing and this could be confusing to some users.

This website relies on JavaScript for certain navigational aids such as the quick links combo box, which means the functionality these elements offer is unavailable to users who do not have JavaScript enabled.

Belfast Zoo – <http://www.belfastzoo.co.uk/>

Ranking: *

This website includes a number of significant issues with accessibility:

Many images on this site are unlabelled or poorly labelled, making things difficult for dyslexic users relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software, and leaving blind users well and truly 'in the dark'.

There are numerous instances of images of text meaning that these cannot be resized or have their colours changed.

There are no unique page titles; each page shares the title 'Belfast Zoo'. Often the page title is useful information to the user in indicating what page they are currently on, particularly so for screenreader users.

Some 'here' and 'click here' link text which doesn't make sense when taken out of context. For example there are a number of 'click here' link text on the Zoo Events page where the user has to 'click here' to display the document.

This website seems to operate normally when JavaScript is not supported.

Appendix A - Further Sources of Advice and Support

- www.abilitynet.org.uk/web

AbilityNet is able to offer information, advice and a range of services to help make a website accessible and usable for everyone – including accessibility audits, disabled end user testing, training, support, accessible web design and a range of useful resources.

For further details please call Robin on 01926 312847 or email accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk

Other sources of help and information include:

- www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is the body at the forefront of the development of standards in good design on the World Wide Web (including accessibility). The W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) form the basis of all other standards.

- www.w3.org/WAI/wcag-curric

This link will take you to a subsite of the W3C website which tries to explain in plainer terms, with examples of good and bad code, the W3C guidelines checkpoint by checkpoint.

- www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/handbook/introduction.asp

The UK E-government Unit has guidelines on web accessibility (based upon the W3C guidelines). These can be viewed on-line or downloaded as an illustrated Word document.

- www.drc.org.uk

Organisations are legally obliged to provide websites that are accessible to disabled people. This site includes information on the DDA, its accompanying code of practice and their recently published report outlining the findings of research into the accessibility and usability of 1000 websites.

Appendix B – How We Decide the Ranking

The world standards in web accessibility (W3C WCAG) have prioritised their checkpoints into 3 priority levels. Compliance of your sites with these levels are phrased as - level 1 (highest) = “must”, level 2 = “should” and level 3 = “ought”.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has meant that it has been law in the UK to have an accessible website since 1999. Arguably a site can only meet its legal requirement under the DDA if it is, at the very least, compliant with all level 1 checkpoints.

As it is only level 2 compliance which does not hinder some groups’ access (as defined by the W3C) it is our opinion that the true DDA requirement lies somewhere between levels 1 and 2 compliance.

This said, it has been our experience that many sites that meet level 1 and even level 2 priority checkpoints can nevertheless still present significant difficulties for disabled visitors in practice.

This can be due to a number of reasons. For example, over-reliance on purely visual clues to guide the user (leaving blind users without vital clues about where the designer intends the user’s ‘eye’ to be drawn), small or closely clustered links or buttons (causing those with fine motor control difficulties to miss what they intended to click on - or click on the wrong thing), lack of proper separation of page objects (meaning that users with vision or cognitive difficulties can miss important items which are not sufficiently separated from neighbouring content), the sheer bulk and complexity of links and sections on a page (making those who’s access technology or methodology is slow become frustrated or give up) or a host of other reasons.

Similarly a site that falls short of priority 1 or 2 compliance in a number of respects can nevertheless be very accessible and usable by the vast majority of disabled visitors in practice.

This can be due to the fact that particular checkpoints are only contravened very rarely (still denying the site level 1 compliance but having very little impact on a disabled users overall experience of the site), or because checkpoints that are contravened more widely only impact upon a very small number of users.

Thus we have tried to reflect the overall user experience of a site when deciding its ranking.

***** Ranking**

We have chosen our *** (“satisfies a base level of accessibility”) ranking as compliance (or near compliance where the shortfall has little evident impact on users) with priority level 1 checkpoints.

Further than that we look for significant (in our opinion based upon broad experience of working with disabled users) priority level 2 issues - such as the scalability of text, the avoidance of frames and any positive steps a site has taken to benefit visitors with an impairment (such as accessibility info or offering a choice of colour/text size schemes).

Note - It is our opinion that the addition of a Text only parallel site to the exclusion of addressing the accessibility/usability issues of the main site is neither necessary or in the spirit of inclusion or the W3C WCAG standards.

*** and ** Rankings**

We award * and ** to a site dependant upon how much it falls short of our definition of *** ranking.

****** and ***** Rankings**

We award **** and ***** to a site dependant upon how much it exceeds our definition of *** ranking.

For any further clarification please contact accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk

Appendix C – Statements of Commitment to Accessibility

Belfast Zoo

“Belfast Zoo is committed to providing accessibility to all customers who visit our website. Considerable investment has been made to ensure that all marketing communications are accessible according to current legislation. This process of change has begun and is currently progressing all communications as DDA compliant”

- Joy Bond, Belfast Zoo

Kew Gardens

“Kew's website has evolved over a number of years, and now has over 25,000 web pages. We are aware that there are accessibility issues with some of this legacy content.

Kew is currently developing strategy to re-develop its website, at the heart of which will be best practice accessibility standards.

Kew is committed to providing accessible content and services to all its audiences through its website.”

- Mike Saunders, Director of Digital Media, RBG Kew

London Eye

“In the past seven years following feedback from guests and independent assessors, we have implemented change in order to address the needs of guests with a disability, whether prior to visiting or on the day. As part of the London Eye's on-going commitment to accessibility we have recently begun working on a new website due to launch in the Autumn.

Accessibility is an on-going process, a partnership. It is the London Eye's intention to work with agencies and experts, wherever possible, in creating and maintaining an accessible website and attraction.”

- Courtney Cook, Press & Public Relations, British Airways London Eye