# A Digital Accessibility Maturity Model

All public sector organisations have a legal obligation to meet a base level of accessibility. Getting it right has costs (training, remediation, alternative procurement) but getting it wrong is worse in terms of inefficiencies, avoidable support costs and litigation or reputational damage.

Where are ***you*** on the spectrum between outmoded practice, minimal compliance or leading-edge excellence? The model below helps you judge the maturity of your organisation’s digital accessibility.

| Stage | Luck | Tokenism | Standards | Ownership | Partnership |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Typical quote** | *“With luck we won’t have any disabled learners”* | *“We’ll help you get DSA funding”* | *“All our systems meet WCAG 2.1 AA”* | *“We train staff to use digital tools and resources to maximise learner independence”* | *“Disabled students co-design courses & assessment approaches.”* |
| What does it look and feel like? | | | | | |
| **What is the main driver?** | Minimal effort / expense | Support for individuals | Legal compliance | Pedagogical excellence | Inclusive excellence |
| **Who is responsible?** | No-one. | Disability team. | Web teams. | Whole organisation. | Organisation & stakeholders. |
| **Which model of disability is in play?** | Invisibility. | Medical. | Social - by compliance. | Social – by conviction. | Social – by collaboration. |
| **What is the focus of effort?** | Justify non action or seek exemption. | React to barriers. | Make websites inclusive. | Make teaching and learning inclusive. | Make everything inclusive. |
| **Skills and expertise** | Unidentified or sparse. | Located in disability teams. | Pockets of expertise available. | Available across broad teams. | Accessible practices are core professional values |
| **Digital accessibility is in which policies?** | Hard to find in any policies. | Assistive tech visible in Disability policies. | Disability. IT and procurement. | IT, procurement, disability & teaching/  Learning. | Wide range of policies (including marketing /comms etc). |
| **The culture feels like...?** | Disability invisibility / ignorance / avoidance. | Silos of expertise but little skills transfer. | Risk aversion by standardis-ation. | Innovation encouraged. Permission to take risks within a framework. | Partnership, creativity & embedding good practice. |
| **Student digital experience?** | Students self-advocate. | Disability team focus on disclosure. | Pockets of digital accessibility. | Mainstream digital accessibility aids productivity. | Students actively involved in shaping practice/policy |
| **Potential next steps to highlight?** | Legal obligations. | Digital accessibility (institutional systems). | Digital accessibility in the classroom. | Inclusive pedagogy and practice. | Celebrate and communicate achievements. |

*Developed from TechDis Accessibility Maturity model (McNaught 2006) with additional input from Alistair McNaught Consulting and AbilityNet.* ***CC-BY-NC-SA***

## The 5 maturity levels in detail

### Level 1 – Luck

This level has very high risk. Disability issues are firmly (and solely) the responsibility of the disability team. They work 1:1 helping learners over barriers that needn’t exist in the first place. Expertise is located in a few individuals, making the organisation very vulnerable to staff changes. Disability policies don’t reference digital accessibility or teaching/learning. Nobody has responsibility for institution-wide digital accessibility and no policy covers it.

#### How to move from Level 1

This is about **priorities**. It will involve being clear about the legislation, your risks and responsibilities, and disability awareness.

### Level 2 - Tokenism

This level is about symptoms, not causes. It is characterised by policies that describe accessibility and inclusion in broad ‘value statements’ without specific commitments to practice. Disability issues are the responsibility of the disability team – perhaps with support from the library – and the focus is on 1:1 or DSA support. There is no recognition of the role of *other* staff in reducing barriers at source. Training tends to be “issue based” such as correct language rather than practices that benefit independence and productivity. Policies are likely to be standalone and very generalised. Any institution-wide digital accessibility role is delegated to people with no budget / authority to influence necessary changes.

#### How to move from Level 2

This is about **mindset**; it involves helping all staff understand that digital accessibility involves all aspects of student experience.

### Level 3 - Standards

Focusing on standards can reduce overall risks but also lead to unintended consequences. Technical accessibility standards are important but teaching is different to other digital contexts. Unrealistic demands on tutors uploading content to learning platforms may backfire, discouraging digital engagement. A different kind of discrimination can result, for example, high-value resources for dyslexics may be removed because they are not accessible to screenreaders. Inappropriate focus on technical standards may force tutors back to more traditional (and less accessible) practices.

#### How to move from Level 3

This is about **focus**; ensuring that positive teaching and learning outcomes drive your approach.

### Level 4 - Ownership

Digital accessibility is seen as a positive, creative force. The focus is on building staff and student digital competencies. The main risk is unwittingly embracing inaccessible tools, content or activities. This stage recognises that digital competence helps to create accessible content and mitigate less accessible experiences. There are probably good links between teaching/learning policies, e-learning and student support / disability policies. Increased confidence allows organisations to recognise that partially accessible resources may have a role to play. Digital accessibility is a cross institutional responsibility.

#### How to move from Level 4

This is about **sustainability**, understanding the student digital experience and embedding institutional quality assurance.

### Level 5 - Partnership

This final level in the model recognises the value of students as co-designers of learning. Involving disabled students in the policies/processes that impact on them reduces the chances of failure (and litigation). Compromises are easier to justify when disabled students helped make them. All staff recognise their role in reducing barriers. Creative engagement is the norm. Accessibility awareness is distributed, sustainable, embedded into quality assurance processes and perceivable in all policy areas.

#### How we help you at Level 5

This is about effective **communication** of your good practices to staff, students and the wider community.

## What do I do next?

### Build your community and resources

#### Self access / DIY

Subscribe to the [Digital Accessibility Regulations Jiscmail list.](https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=DIGITALACCESSIBILITYREGULATIONS) Explore the [LexDis Accessibility toolkit](https://www.lexdis.org.uk/digital-accessibility/). Join the [Jisc Accessibility Teams](mailto:Kellie.Mote@jisc.ac.uk?subject=Joining%20the%20Accessibility%20Teams%20site) site.

#### Supported services

Sign up  [for our newsletter and webinars](https://www.abilitynet.org.uk/sign-up-for-our-newsletter). Purchase [our accessible component library and accessibility guidelines](https://abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services/products-and-services)

### Planning and prioritisation activities

#### Self access / DIY

Identify stakeholders and form working group. Collate all sites in scope/project plan. Identify strengths and development areas with self-serve maturity model.

#### Supported services

[Guided maturity model planning session](https://abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services/he-and-fe-accessibility-maturity-model) and report. Accessibility statement mapper service. [Digital accessibility consultancy](https://abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services/digital-accessibility-he-and-fe), [McNaught mentoring](https://www.learningapps.co.uk/moodle/xertetoolkits/play.php?template_id=2196#page1) services.

### Benchmarking and auditing

#### Self access / DIY

Conduct automated and manual testing on your sites with [WAVE](https://wave.webaim.org/) tool or [Accessibility Insights](https://accessibilityinsights.io/) etc. Evaluate accessibility of Word documents and PDFs. Map student journeys / pain points in your digital estate.

#### Supported services

Use our [HE/FE Digital Accessibility bundle](https://abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services/digital-accessibility-he-and-fe) of services to create a benchmark of accessibility and roadmap for inclusive journeys. Procure [our automated & manual testing services and website accreditation service.](https://abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services)

### Team training and skills development

#### Self access / DIY

[Future Teacher resources](https://xot.futureteacher.eu/play.php?template_id=4#home). ETF ENHANCE modues on [Accessibility](https://enhance.etfoundation.co.uk/category/accessibility) and [Difference and diversity](https://enhance.etfoundation.co.uk/category/difference-diversity). AbilityNet free webinar services.

#### Supported services

Per seat training courses. 1-1 / group mentoring sessions. [McNaught bespoke training courses](https://www.learningapps.co.uk/moodle/xertetoolkits/play.php?template_id=2196#page1) (inclusive practice; inclusive policies; student support services). Enquire about [AbilityNet bespoke training courses](https://abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services/speak-to-our-experts) (technical and lived experience of disability)

### Student self-help tools

#### Self access / DIY

Link from your site to [My Study My Way on demand](https://mystudymyway.com/), [My Computer My Way](https://mcmw.abilitynet.org.uk/) and our range of [factsheets](https://abilitynet.org.uk/free-resources/abilitynet-factsheets) . [LexDis strategies](https://www.lexdis.org.uk/strategies/). University of Kent [Tools collection](https://www.kent.ac.uk/tools).

#### Supported services

Institution specific [My Study My Way](https://abilitynet.org.uk/HE-services/my-study-my-way). Branded [My Computer My Way](https://mcmw.abilitynet.org.uk/)

### Culture & strategy

#### Self access / DIY

Clear communications and endorsement of accessibility. Whole institution from senior sponsor to student voice.

#### Supported services

Global Accessibility Awareness days (support and/or content). Accessibility Policy & QA Support. [Case Studies](https://abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services/meet-our-clients) and badging. [Guided maturity model planning session](https://abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services/he-and-fe-accessibility-maturity-model) and report

Contact us at [enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk) to arrange a 30 minute call to discuss where you are now and the steps you can take to move forward.