State of the eNation web accessibility reports

Fitness Club Websites

August 2012

Fitness websites exclude Team GB's paralympians of the future

AbilityNet's State of the eNation Reports are quarterly accessibility and usability reviews of a number of websites in a particular sector.

The Olympics and Paralympics have given many of us renewed enthusiasm for sport, or at least a firmer resolve to get fit. Whilst fitness clubs are an extremely useful means of helping us to get in shape and stay that way, for people with a disability or impairment, they are often the only feasible way they can safely get fit or take up a sport in a supported environment.

Our review of five of the top gym club websites found that **most are either difficult or impossible for disabled people to use** – which means they won't be able to follow through on their new found zest for fitness and, who knows, perhaps become Team GB's Paralympians of the future.

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AbilityNet

Adapting Technology ▪ Changing Lives

State of the eNation web accessibility reports

Fitness Club Websites, August 2012

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1 Summary of results

AbilityNet helps people with disabilities to use computers and the internet to improve their lives, whether at work, at home or in education. Our team of web accessibility experts conducted a series of tests on five popular fitness club websites in August 2012. The websites reviewed were:

www.fitnessfirst.co.uk	**	Poor/satisfies some legal requirements
www.lafitness.co.uk	*	Very poor/not legal
www.nuffieldhealth.com/fitness-and-wellbeing	*	Very poor/not legal
www.puregym.com	*	Very poor/not legal
www.virginactive.co.uk	*	Very poor/not legal

A 5 star scale was used

*****	**Excellent**. Site is highly accessible and exceeds minimum legal requirements for accessibility
***	**Base level.** Site satisfies minimum legal requirements for accessibility.
*	**Very poor.** Site is not accessible and does not meet minimum legal requirements for accessibility.

Two or four stars are given when a site meets some of the criteria for the level above. For full details on how we decide a website's ranking please see Appendix B.

All the companies were contacted well in advance of the review, to be given the opportunity to make a statement for inclusion in the report. As of 13 August, none of the five companies contacted had provided a commitment to, or more general statement on, either their approach to accessibility or their legal requirement to comply with the Equality Act 2010.

2 Why is it important for fitness club websites to be accessible?

It's good for business

In the UK there are 11.8 million people with a registered disability. There are estimated to be 1.6 million who are registered blind, 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 these groups is now estimated at £120 billion a year.

Being able to get fit and stay fit is as important for people with disabilities as it is for the rest of us. People with disabilities often have less choice in terms of the sports and exercise they can undertake. Being able to identify their local gym, investigate its facilities and identify the one best suited to them helps them overcome physical barriers, get fit and stay active.

Good business sense suggests that UK's significant disabled customer base should be a key market for any website, yet our research shows that their needs are being widely ignored.

It's the law

Today many services are either only available on, or offered at, a discounted rate on the Internet. Other websites provide vital information or functionality. 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. 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 simply don't know what to do to address it.

3 Customer comments

"The Virgin Active website was very messy! I spent ten minutes trying to locate my nearest club. I did eventually find it but then couldn't see any details about it. I would have been better off googling for it. The Pure Gyms' website wasn't much better. Very confusing. I put in my post code and managed to find my nearest gym but when I wanted to join for £24.99 a month, I was then shown a page which told me to choose my gym either by post code or location which I had already done! I didn't see the point. There was also too much info, some of which I did not understand. I was being charged £25 joining fee plus somehow I had chosen to donate £2 to Cancer Research. I didn't know if it was a monthly donation or a one-off. As I say - very confusing."

Hazel Dudley, blind screen reader user

4 How we carry out the Accessibility Reviews

All websites were audited in August 2012 for accessibility and usability using a wide range of in-depth manual checks. The testing process was also assisted by HiSoftware's enterprise accessibility test, 'Compliance Sheriff' - a market-leading testing tool that can quickly conduct a series of technical checks on a high volume of webpages.

Compliance Sheriff scans a web site for a total of 172 different accessibility checks including images, forms, and dynamic content. The results are then available in a report which includes the exact locations of code issues, as well as alerts to elements that require manual inspection. This test produces a series of charts which are summarised in an overall health rating included in each site report.

Our AbilityNet accessibility consultants then use the results of this scan to undertake an accessibility audit. They report on specific issues and indicate where and why failures have occurred in the automated testing.

This two-pronged approach produces a detailed report that reflects the full picture of the compliance level of each site.

Finally we ask our extensive network of testers with a range of disabilities to look at the sites and tell us what they found. These provide a view from the coalface and relevant quotes are included within this report.

5 Fitness First

URL: http://www.fitnessfirst.co.uk/

Compliance Sheriff health: 51%

Star rating: **

The main accessibility issues found on this website during our investigation and a description of the impact they will have on users, are summarised below.

5.1 Inconsistent Navigation

Important elements of websites should always be placed consistently on every page. This helps all users learn how to use and navigate pages quickly and easily. Placing elements consistently particularly helps those with learning difficulties, those who can only see a small part of the screen at any one time when using screen magnification software and blind users who may be using screen reader.

Figure 1 shows the main navigation menu on the Fitness First homepage.

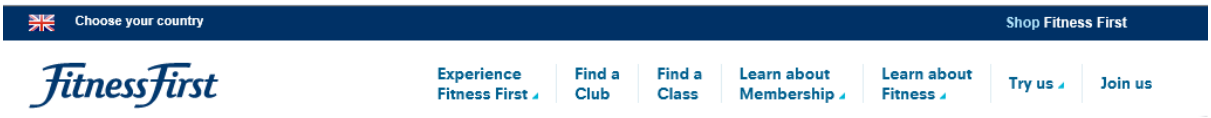


Figure 1: Navigation menu on homepage.

Figure 2 shows what happens to the navigation menu if the user clicks the 'Join Us' link.

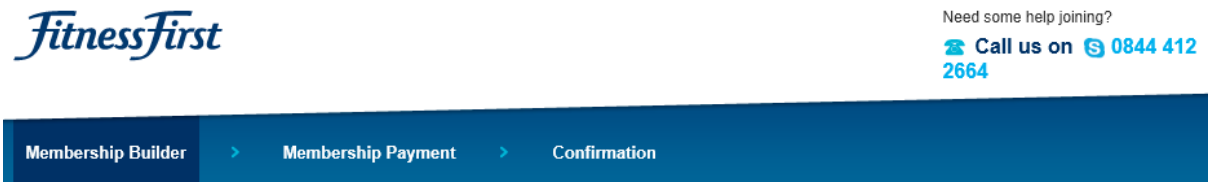


Figure 2: Navigation menu on Join Us page.

The navigation menu has changed completely and all the links to the main sections of the website are no longer visible. This could be very confusing and frustrating for some users if they wanted to visit other parts of the website.

5.2 Text Embedded in Images

A page with text embedded in images makes it less flexible as it cannot be increased using browser settings nor be changed with a custom style sheet. Text embedded in images can appear blurry to users of screen magnification software. Large amounts of unnecessary images make pages less efficient for users browsing on 3G connections as they increase the data requirements needed to view the page. There is also the risk that an appropriate text alternative will not be provided.

Figure 3 shows an image on the homepage with a large amount of text embedded in it.

Figure 3: Image with embedded text.

5.3 Text Alternatives for Images

Text alternatives are important for screen reader users as the text is read aloud by the software. If written properly they can describe the content or function of

an image to someone who cannot see. They also act as a tooltip to sighted users as some browsers display the text alternative when the user hovers over the image with the mouse cursor.

Figure 4 shows three images present at the bottom of the homepage.

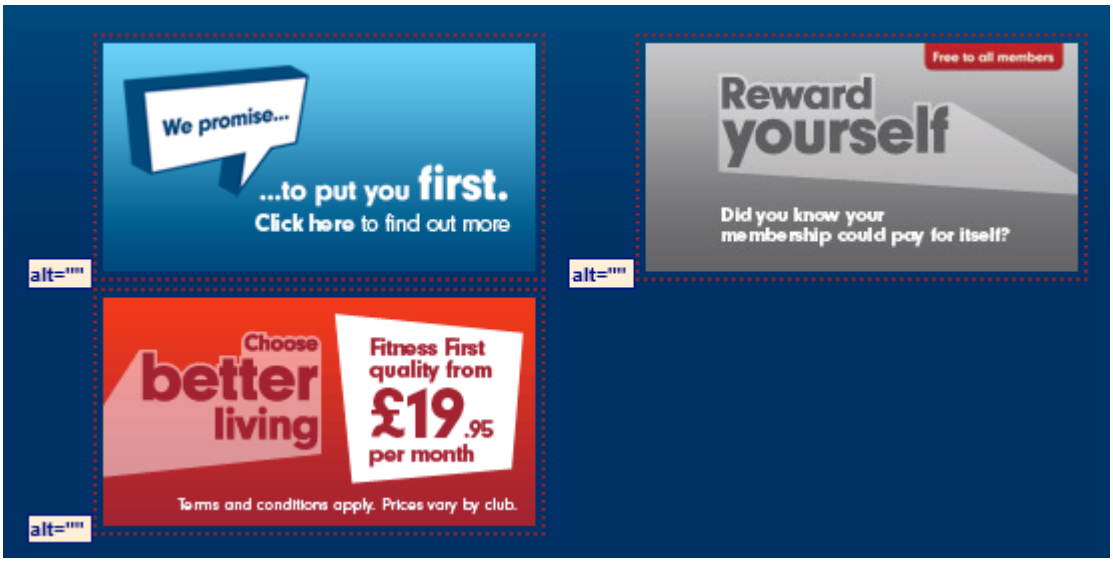


Figure 4: Text alternatives for images.

There are two major accessibility problems. Firstly, each image has text embedded in it. Secondly, the text alternative for each of the images is “” (empty quotation marks). This text alternative provides no useful description of the content of the images to the user.

5.4 Link Names

All links should be given a name which clearly and concisely describes the content accessed by selecting that link. Labelling links with an accurate description of the content behind it creates a positive browsing experience for all users. Screen reader users often browse a web page by using a feature of this software which brings up a list of all links present on a page. This allows them to quickly skim a page when looking for information and can make browsing much more efficient.

On the homepage there are two links named ‘read more’ and on the ‘Experience Fitness First’ main section page there are five links named ‘find out more’ and

one link named ‘here’. These names give the user no indication of the content accessed by selecting that link.

5.5 Scrolling Text

Scrolling or moving text can be very distracting for some users. It might be very difficult to read for users who have learning difficulties, dyslexia or use technology such as screen magnification software to browse a website. It might also cause problems for other people, such as those with low literacy levels and those whose first language is not English.

Figure 5 shows scrolling text present on the ‘Experience Fitness First’ main section page.

Figure 5: Scrolling text.

If scrolling text is essential to the design of the page, then there should be a means for the user to control the speed at which the text moves to make it easier for them to read, such as a ‘pause’ button.

6 LA Fitness

URL: http://www.lafitness.co.uk/

Compliance Sheriff health: 16%

Star rating: *

The main accessibility issues found on this website during our investigation and a description of the impact they will have on users, are summarised below.

6.1 Inconsistent Navigation and Presentation

The navigation mechanism of a website should always be consistent across a website so all users can learn how to find the information they want quickly and easily.

Figure 6 shows the navigation menu on the LA Fitness homepage.

Figure 6: Navigation menu on homepage.

Figure 7 shows what happens when the user clicks on the 'member zone' link.

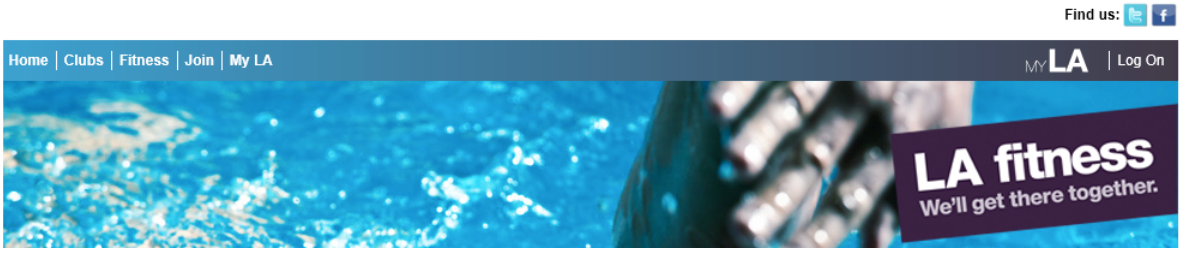


Figure 7: Navigation menu on member zone page.

Figure 8 shows what happens when the user clicks on the 'corporate membership' link.

Figure 8: Navigation menu on corporate membership page.

By clicking two links in the main navigation menu of the homepage, the user is presented with a completely new navigation system. This could be very confusing and make the site hard to use for people with learning difficulties and screen reader users.

6.2 Keyboard Accessibility

If content or functionality is not available using the keyboard it may be inaccessible to screen reader user or those using alternative input devices.

Figure 9 shows the Frequently Asked Questions page. It is not possible to navigate to the links for each question using the keyboard and use of the mouse is required. This means important content on the LA Fitness website will be not be available to some users.

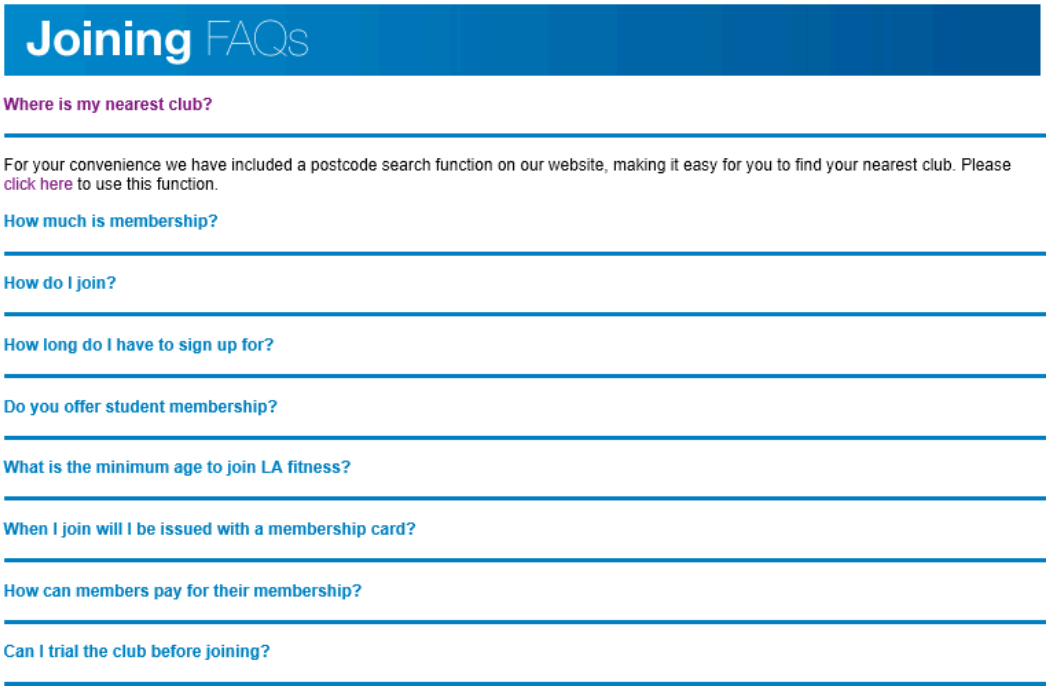


Figure 9: Frequently asked questions page.

6.3 Keyboard focus not visible

If a site is fully accessible using a keyboard, it is usually accessible to a range of other specialist input devices which rely on functions of the keyboard. Instead of using a mouse, it is sometimes possible to navigate through the links on a webpage using the Tab key and then select the link using the Return key. When a user does this, it should be clear which link is active so they know what they are selecting.

When using the keyboard to navigate through the links in the LA Fitness website, there was no visual indication which link was currently active. A keyboard user would very quickly get lost when trying to find their way around this website.

6.4 Text Embedded in Images

A page with text embedded in images makes it less flexible as it cannot be increased using browser settings or be changed with a custom style sheet. Text embedded in images can appear blurry to the users of screen magnification software.

Figure 10 shows three graphic links on the homepage with text embedded in them.

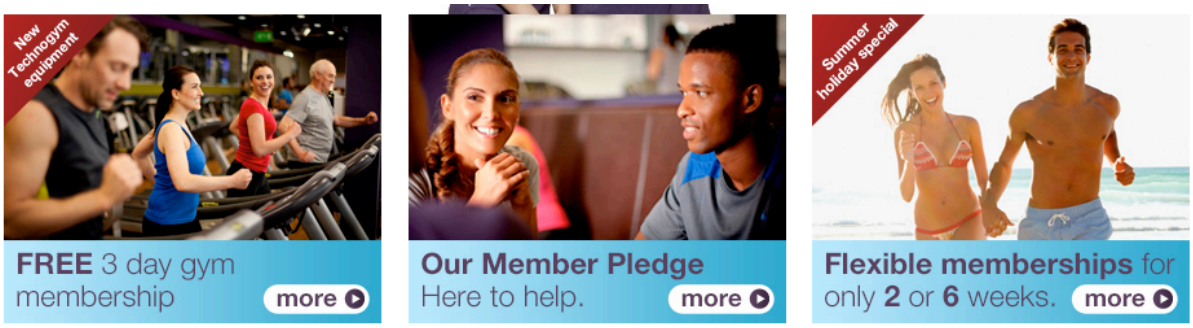


Figure 10: Graphic links on homepage.

As these images are also links, they contain important information. Some users who have low-vision may not be able to see this information, making the site much harder to use.

6.5 Text Alternatives for Images

Text alternatives are important for screen reader users as the text is read aloud by the software. If written properly they can describe the content or function of an image to someone who cannot see. They also act as a tooltip to sighted users as some browsers display the text alternative when the user hovers over the image with the mouse cursor.

Figure 11 shows the main graphic banner on the homepage.

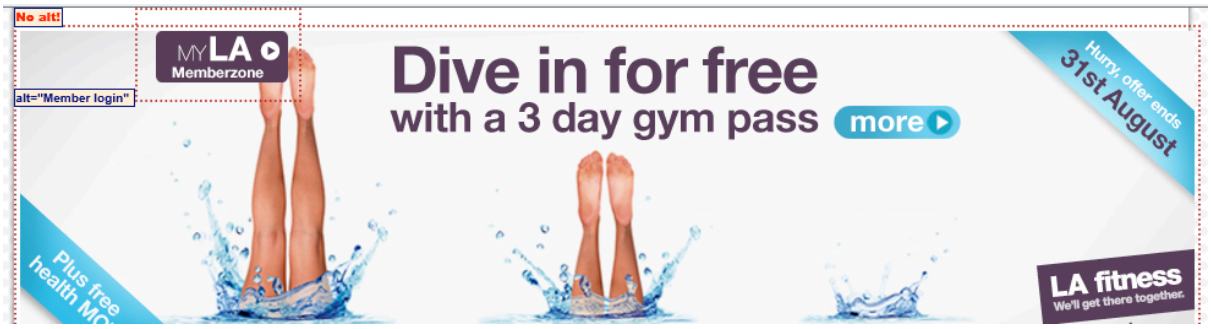


Figure 11: Graphic banner on homepage.

While a text alternative has been provided for the login button, no text alternative has been provided for the banner. As this contains a lot of text, this means that this content will be totally inaccessible to some users.

6.6 Colour Contrast

Where there is not enough contrast between the foreground and background colour used for text (e.g.: light coloured text on a light coloured background), users with low vision or older web users may have difficulty reading information.

Figure 12 shows text used for headings on the Clubs page tested with a colour contrast checker.

Select your club

80 Clubs across the UK

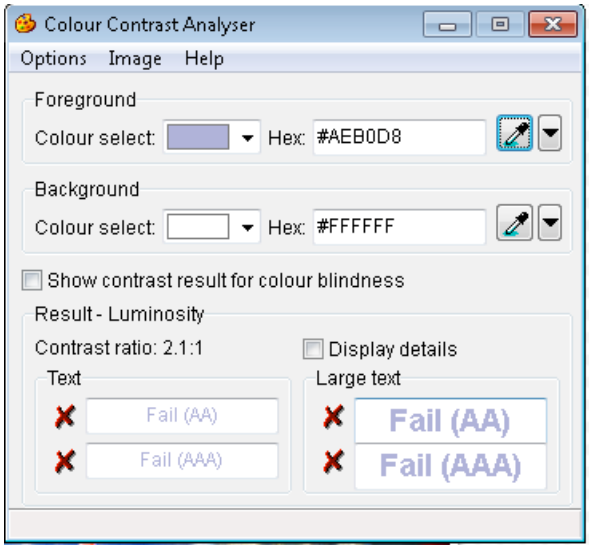


Figure 12: Heading colour contrast checker.

The results show that this colour contrast combination does not meet even the minimum requirements set by accessibility guidelines. This means that some users will find it very difficult to read.

6.7 Form Labels

Forms are an important part of any webpage as they are one of the main ways a user interacts with a page. As such, they should be made as usable and accessible as possible.

Figure 13 shows that a form on the LA Fitness website does not use HTML form labels.

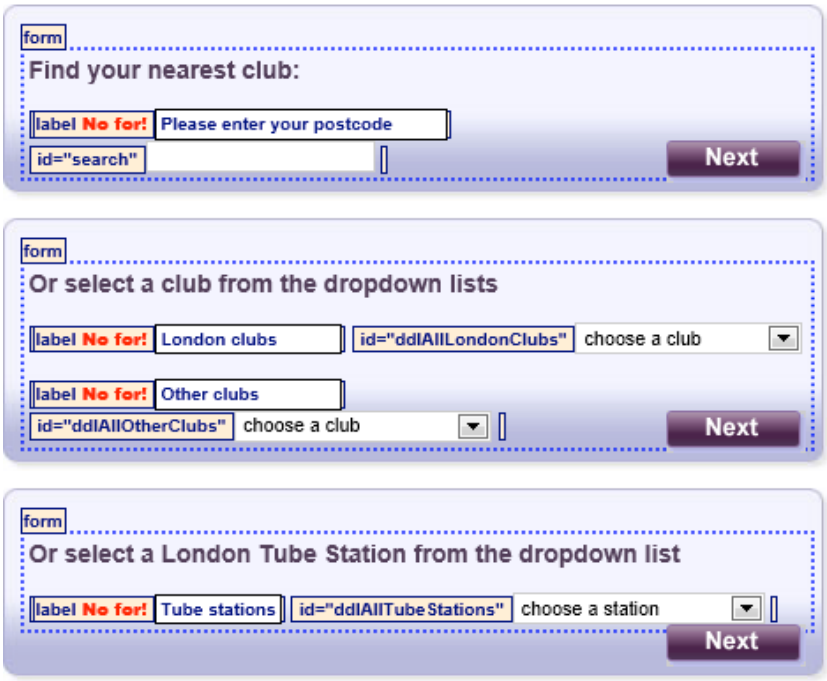


Figure 13: Form with HTML labels.

Using HTML form labels is one way to make forms easier to use for everyone. It provides a bigger target area for mouse users and makes them much more accessible to blind people using a screen reader.

6.8 Poor use of HTML Headings

Using HTML elements for headings is important as screen reader users can navigate a page quicker by using headings. Using HTML headings properly also means the structure of the page is maintained if a user is browsing using a custom style sheet. If the heading structure is not logical, or heading elements are misused to achieve a visual effect, a user may become disorientated.

Some of the pages in the LA Fitness do not use any HTML headings at all, while others use them, but do not use them properly. This could make navigating and finding information on the page difficult for some users.

6.9 Increasing Text Size

It is important to use relative units for text elements so a user can increase the size using the browser settings if they find it difficult to read. The design and layout of the rest of the webpage should be flexible to allow the user to do this. Figure 14 shows what happens to the text on the homepage when we increase it using the browser settings.

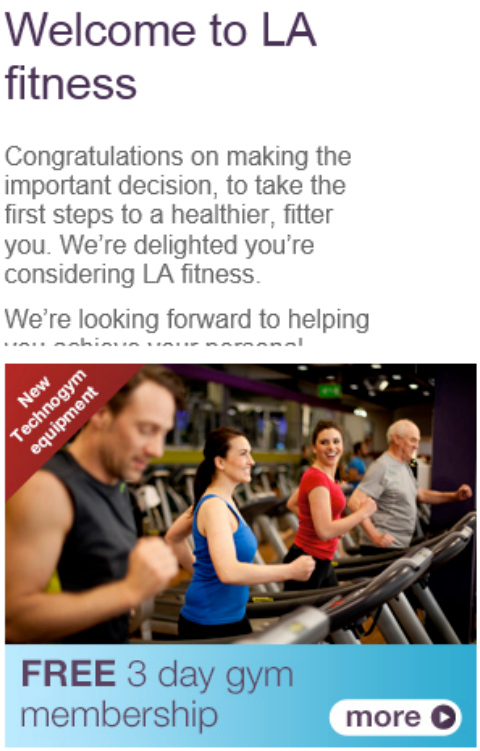


Figure 14: Text size increased.

Although the size of the text can be increased using the browser settings, some of it becomes hidden by an image so the user cannot see it.

6.9.1 Skip Navigation Links

Screen reader users must often listen to repetitive navigation content every time they visit a page. Providing a means to skip over this means they can access the content of the page much quicker. This is often done by providing a 'skip navigation' or 'skip to main content' link.

There was no link like this present on the LA Fitness website.

7 Nuffield Health

URL: http://www.nuffieldhealth.com/fitness-and-wellbeing

Compliance Sheriff health: 29%

Star rating: *

The main accessibility issues found on this website during our investigation and a description of the impact they will have on users, are summarised below.

7.1 Keyboard Accessibility

If a site is fully accessible using a keyboard, it is usually accessible to a range of other specialist input devices which rely on functions of the keyboard. The Nuffield website uses a pop-up menu for its main navigation system, as shown in Figure 15.

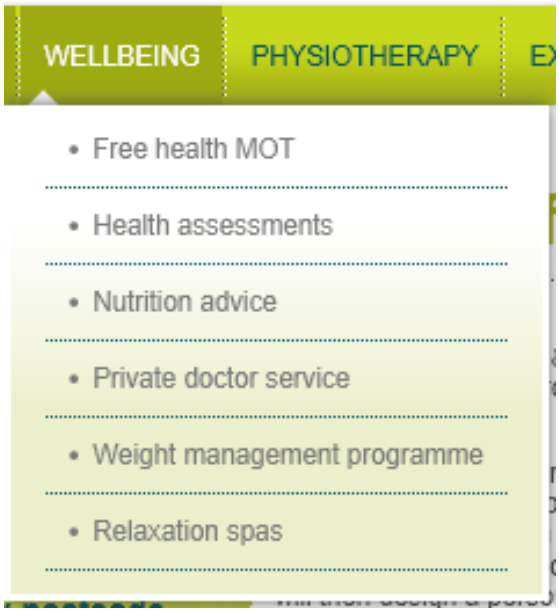


Figure 15: Pop-up navigation menu.

This pop-up is only displayed when the user hovers over the link with the mouse pointer. In this case, the mouse is hovering over the Wellbeing link. If someone is using the keyboard to access the website, they will not know that these links

are there. This makes some content totally inaccessible and means they might not find the information they are looking for.

7.2 Keyboard focus not visible

Instead of using a mouse it is sometimes possible to navigate through the links on a webpage using the Tab key and then select the link using the Return key. When a user does this, it should be clear which link is active so they know what they are selecting.

When using the keyboard to navigate through the links in the Nuffield Fitness website there was no visual indication which link was currently active. A keyboard user would very quickly get lost when trying to find their way around this website.

7.3 Link Names

All links should be given a name which clearly and concisely describes the content accessed by selecting that link. Labelling links with an accurate description of the content behind it creates a positive browsing experience for all users. Screen reader users often browse a web page by using a feature of this software which brings up a list of all links present on a page. This allows them to quickly skim a page when looking for information and can make browsing much more efficient.

On the homepage there are links named ‘read more’ which give the user no indication of the content accessed by selecting that link.

7.4 Text Size

It is important to use relative units for text elements so a user can increase the size using the browser settings if they find it difficult to read. The text on the Nuffield Fitness website cannot be increased using the browser settings in Internet Explorer. This could make it very difficult to read for someone with low-

vision. It also reduces the flexibility of the website when viewed across a range of different screen resolutions.

7.5 Colour Contrast

Where there is not enough contrast between the foreground and background colour used for text (e.g.: light coloured text on a light coloured background), users with low vision or older web users may have difficulty reading information.

Figure 16 shows text used for links at the top of each page tested with a colour contrast checker.

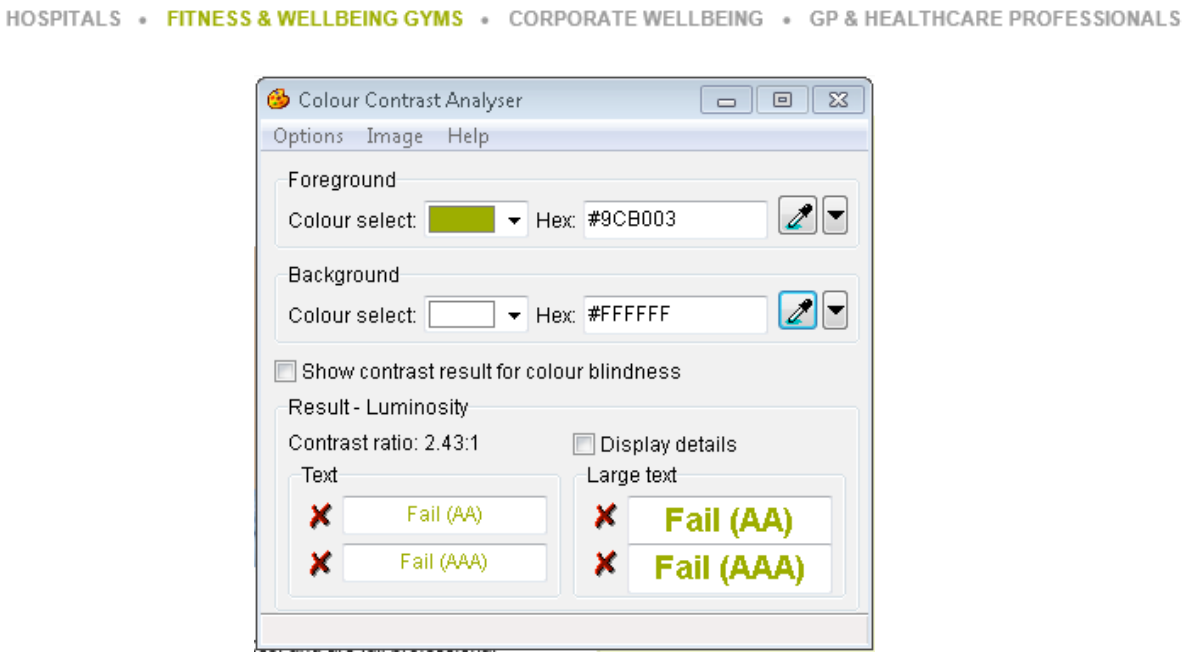


Figure 16: Links at top of page tested with contrast checker.

Figure 17 shows text used for links at the bottom of each page tested with a colour contrast checker.

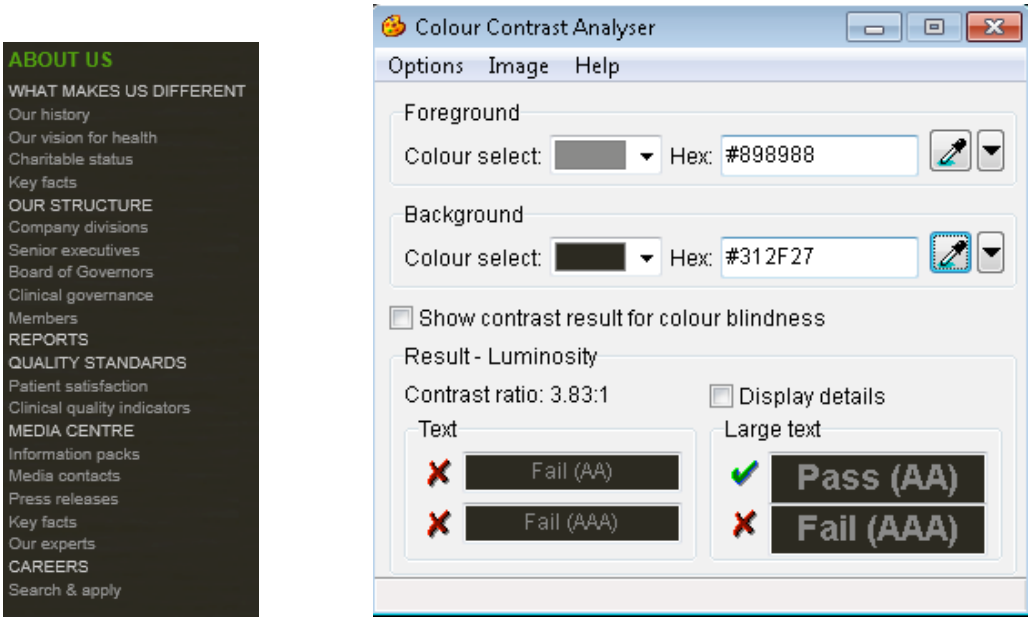


Figure 17: Links at bottom of page tested with contrast checker.

The results show that these colour contrast combination do not meet the requirements set by accessibility guidelines. This means that some users will find it very difficult to read.

7.6 Link Size

Links should be of sufficient size to ensure that users with low vision can read the link text clearly, users with poor fine motor control can easily select the link and users with a very high screen resolution are taken into consideration.

The links at the bottom of the pages of the Nuffield Fitness website are very small and closely packed together. This is shown in Figure 20.

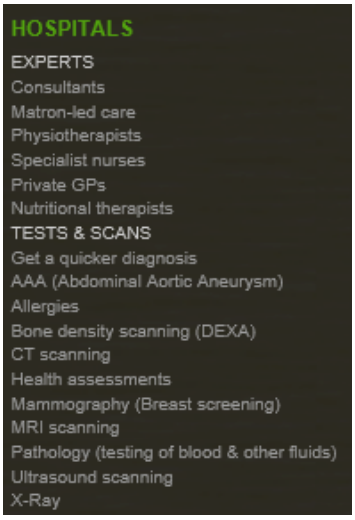


Figure 20: Small links at bottom of page.

These links present a number of accessibility problems. They would be very hard to read for someone with low-vision and be very hard to select using the mouse for someone with poor motor control.

7.7 Animated Banner

The rotating banner on the homepage, as shown in figure 21, presents a large number of accessibility problems, especially in combination with the links to the right.

Figure 21: Animated banner on Nuffield homepage.

7.8 Moving Content

Animated or moving content can be distracting and difficult to read for some users. This causes more serious accessibility problems when the animation contains text which the user may want to read.

When animated content is presented in this way, there should always be a way for the user to control the speed at which the content is displayed to them. There is no way for the user to control animation on the homepage. This could mean they are unable to properly read and understand the information before it changes.

Another problem is that when the user selects the links to the right of the panel, the content in the panel changes. There appears to be no relationship between the labelling of the links and the content displayed in the panel. This could be very confusing for some users.

7.9 Images of Text and Text Alternatives

Text embedded in images can cause a number of accessibility problems, including the additional risk that an appropriate text alternative will not be provided. Not only does the banner contain an image with embedded text, it also does not have an appropriate text alternative. The text alternative highlighted of “Rewards worth £100” relates to the graphic link to the right of the banner.

Figure 22: Text alternative of banner on Nuffield homepage.

The text embedded in images cannot be increased using browser settings or be changed with a custom style sheet, it may also appear blurry to the users of screen magnification software. The lack of an appropriate alternative text also leaves a blind user unaware of the nature of the image.

7.9.1 Inconsistent Presentation

The final issue with the banner occurs when the user selects one of the graphic links. Figure 23 shows what is displayed when the user selects the 'personal action plan' link.

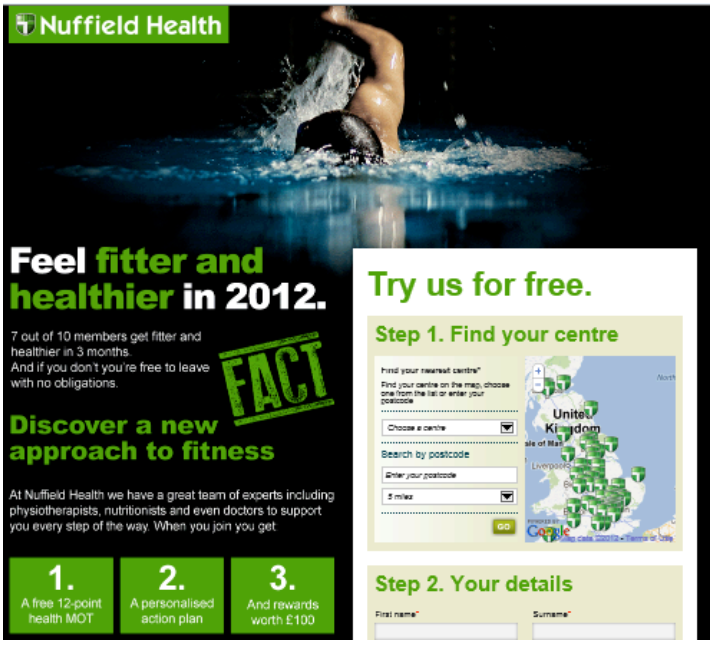


Figure 23: Content accessed from personal action plan link.

Upon selecting the link, the user is presented with a page with a completely different style of presentation. The most serious problem is that the main site navigation menu is no longer displayed. This could leave some users confused about how to return to the main site and continue browsing.

7.9.2 Link Titles

Link titles can increase accessibility when they provide additional information about the link: to inform the user that it opens a new browser window for example. The misuse of link titles is common; in most cases it simply duplicates the exact name of the link. Figure 22 shows where this happens frequently on the Nuffield Fitness homepage.

Figure 22: Duplicate link titles.

This is unnecessary as it means some users such as those who use a screen reader, receive exactly the same information twice. When this occurs on every link on the page, it can be very frustrating.

8 Pure Gym

URL: http://www.puregym.com/

Compliance Sheriff health: 13%

Star rating: *

The main accessibility issues found on this website during our investigation, and a description of the impact they will have on users, are summarised below.

8.1 Keyboard Accessibility

If a site is fully accessible using a keyboard, it is usually accessible to a range of other specialist input devices which rely on functions of the keyboard. The Pure Gym website uses a pop-up menu for its main navigation system, as shown in Figure 23.

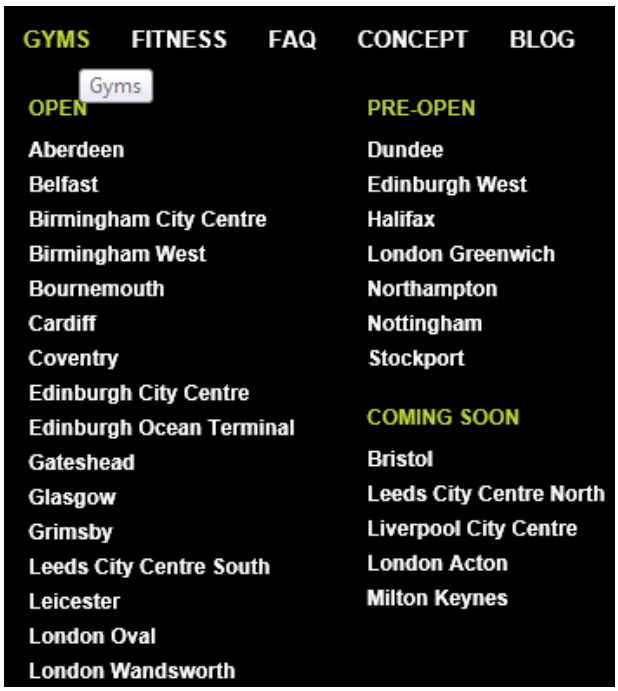


Figure 23: Pop-up navigation menu.

This pop-up is only displayed when the user hovers over the link with the mouse pointer. In this case, the mouse is hovering over the Gyms link. If someone is using the keyboard to access the website, they will not know that these links are there. This makes some content totally inaccessible and means they might not find the information they are looking for.

8.2 Animated Content

Animated or moving content can be distracting and difficult to read for users with learning difficulties, people with dyslexia and users of assistive technology such as screen magnification software. It can also make using the site harder for people with low levels of literacy. This causes more serious accessibility problems when the animation contains text which the user may want to read.

Figure 24 shows an example of two of the seven images in an animated graphic on the homepage.

Figure 24: Two of the seven images in animated graphic.

When animated content is presented in this way, there should always be a way for the user to control the speed at which the content is displayed to them. There is no way for the user to pause and resume the animation on the Pure Gym homepage. This could mean they are unable to properly read and understand the information before it changes.

8.3 Images of Text

Text embedded in images can cause a number of accessibility problems, including the additional risk that an appropriate text alternative will not be provided. A page with text embedded in images makes it less flexible as it cannot be increased using browser settings or be changed with a custom style sheet. Text embedded in images can appear blurry to the users of screen magnification software.

Figure 25 shows the homepage of the Pure Gym website. It contains a number of images with a large amount of text embedded in them.

Figure 25: Homepage consisting of text embedded in images.

This amount of images with embedded text causes a number of accessibility problems. It also makes pages from this website less efficient for users

accessing the site using 3G connections as they increase the data requirements needed to view the page.

8.4 Form Labels

Forms are an important part of any webpage as they are one of the main ways a user interacts with a page. They should be made as usable and accessible as possible to create a positive browsing experience.

Figure 26 shows that a form on the Pure Gym's website does not use HTML form labels.

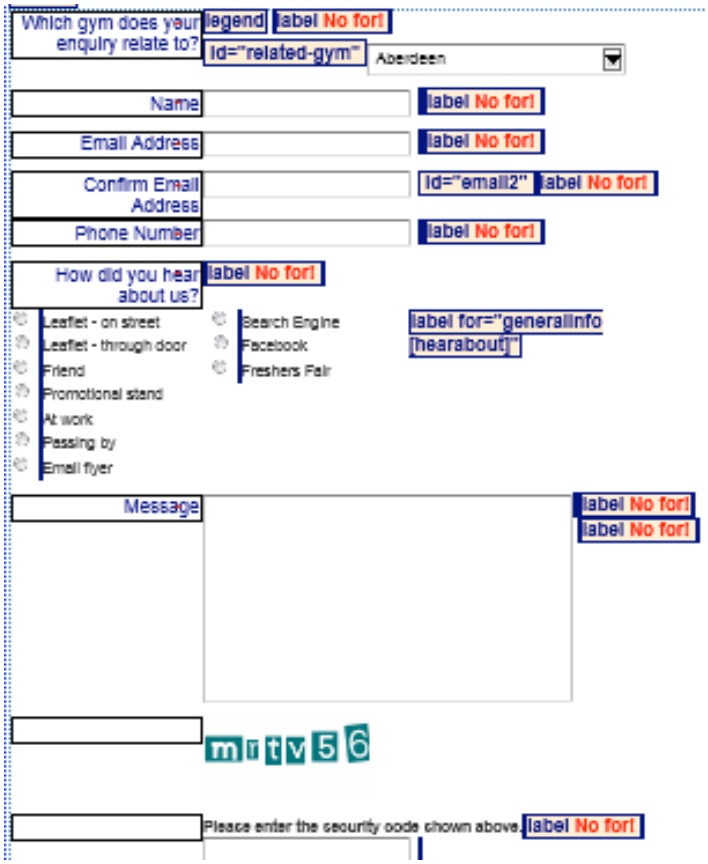


Figure 26: Form elements missing HTML labels.

Using HTML form labels is one way to make forms easier to use for everyone. It provides a bigger target area for mouse users and makes them much more accessible to blind people using a screen reader.

8.5 Accessible Audio Multimedia Content

Users who are deaf or hard of hearing may not be able to understand the audio track of video files, this may make the content completely inaccessible to them. Some users may be browsing the web with a mobile device that does not support multimedia content so some alternative is needed.

There are two videos present on the Pure Gym homepage. The first contains an audio commentary but no captions are provided. This would make is hard for someone who is deaf or hard of hearing to fully understand it.

As with images, the users of screen readers cannot 'see' the content of video files and may need a text description or synopses to get an indication of the content.

A second promotional video on the homepage does not have a commentary, but does contain animated textual content proving general information about the organisation. Again, this content could be inaccessible to a user with visual problems. The inclusion of a short text-summary of this video would greatly improve its accessibility.

8.6 HTML Heading Structure

Using HTML elements for headings is important as screen reader users can navigate a page quicker by using headings. Using HTML headings properly also means the structure of the page is maintained if a user is browsing using a custom style sheet. If the heading structure is not logical, or heading elements are misused to achieve a visual effect, a user may become disorientated.

There are instances on the Pure Gym website where HTML headings have not been properly implemented. Figure 27 shows an example on the homepage.

Figure 27: Poor heading structure on homepage.

The main page heading of the page should be marked up as a H1 heading to show it is the most important. The other headings on the page are not structured properly as the order of the headings should be logical, e.g. H1 should be followed by H2. On this page, H2 is directly followed by H4. In this case, it could be that headings have been mis-used to emphasise some of the content. This could make navigating and finding information on the page difficult for some users.

8.7 Colour Contrast

Where there is insufficient contrast used for text users with low vision or older web users may have difficulty reading information. It is particularly important to ensure there is sufficient contrast for important elements that a user needs to read or interact with.

Figure 28 shows the text and background colour used for the login form tested with a colour contrast checker.

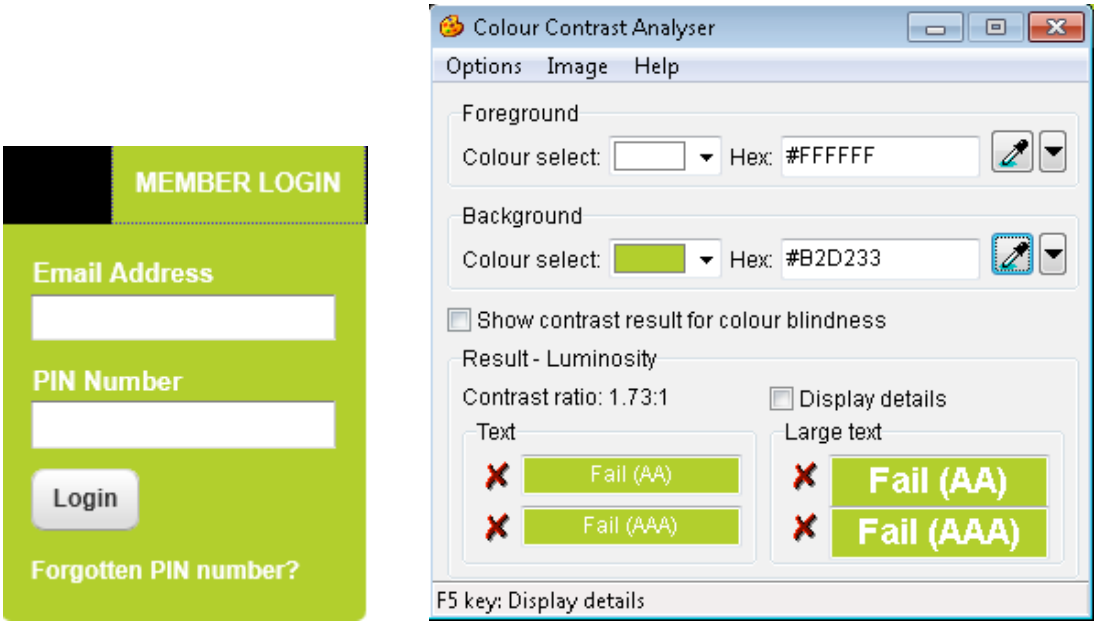


Figure 28: Text on login form tested with contrast checker.

The results show that this colour contrast combination does not meet even the minimum requirements set by accessibility guidelines. This means that some users will find it very difficult to read the text and complete the form.

8.8 Skip Navigation Links

Screen reader users must often listen to repetitive navigation content every time they visit a page. Providing a means to skip over this means they can access the content of the page much quicker. This is often done by providing a 'skip navigation' or 'skip to main content' link.

There was no link like this present on the Pure Gym website.

9 Virgin Active Health Clubs

URL: http://www.virginactive.co.uk/

Compliance Sheriff health: 14%

Star rating: *

The main accessibility issues found on this website during our investigation, and a description of the impact they will have on users, are summarised below.

9.1 Keyboard Accessibility

If a site is fully accessible using a keyboard, it is usually accessible to a range of other specialist input devices which rely on functions of the keyboard. The Virgin Active website uses a pop-up menu for its navigation system, as shown in Figure 29, and to display additional information about a link, as shown in figure 30.

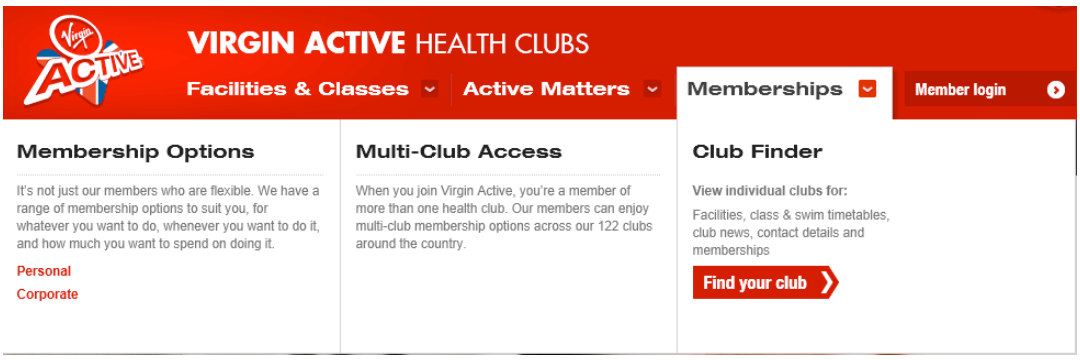


Figure 29: Content displayed when hovering over Memberships link.

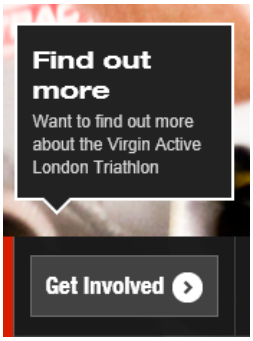


Figure 30: Content displayed when hovering over Memberships link.

In both instances, these pop-ups are only displayed when using the mouse to hover over the item. The pop-up items are not displayed when using the keyboard to navigate through the items on the page. This means that some content will be difficult to access to those who rely on keyboard access such as screen reader users and users of specialist input devices. In the case of the navigation menu, it is possible to access the links, but a related accessibility issue is present. In the case of the additional information about a link being displayed, there appears to be no other way to access this content than with the use of a mouse.

9.2 Keyboard Focus not visible

Part of providing an accessible navigation system is ensuring it is possible to navigate through the links on a webpage using the Tab key and then select the link using the Return key. When a user does this, it should be clear which link is active so they know what they are selecting.

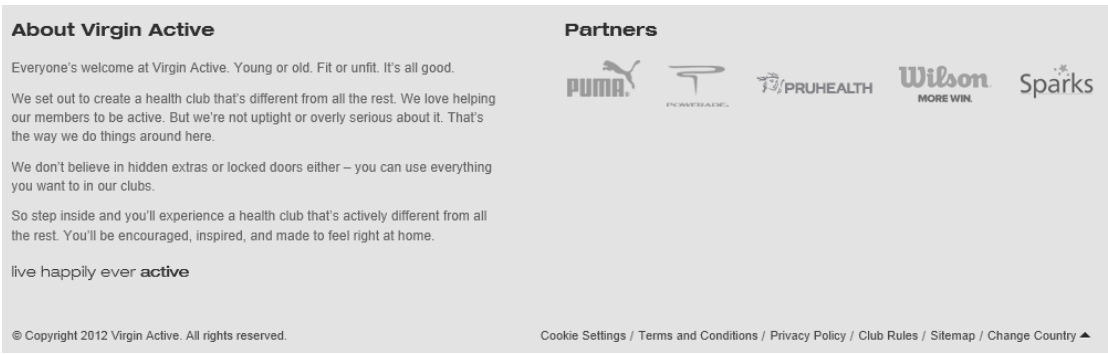
When using the keyboard to navigate through the links in the Virgin Active website there was no visual indication which link was currently active. A keyboard user would very quickly get lost when trying to find their way around this website. Figure 31 shows the membership link with keyboard focus clearly highlighted; this is correct. If the user presses the tab to move to the next link, the focus is no longer visible.

Figure 31: Membership link with keyboard focus.

9.3 Colour Contrast

Where there is not enough contrast between the foreground and background colour used for text, users with low vision or older web users may have difficulty reading information.

Figure 31 shows content presented at the bottom of each page – in this case dark grey text on a grey background tested with a colour contrast checker.



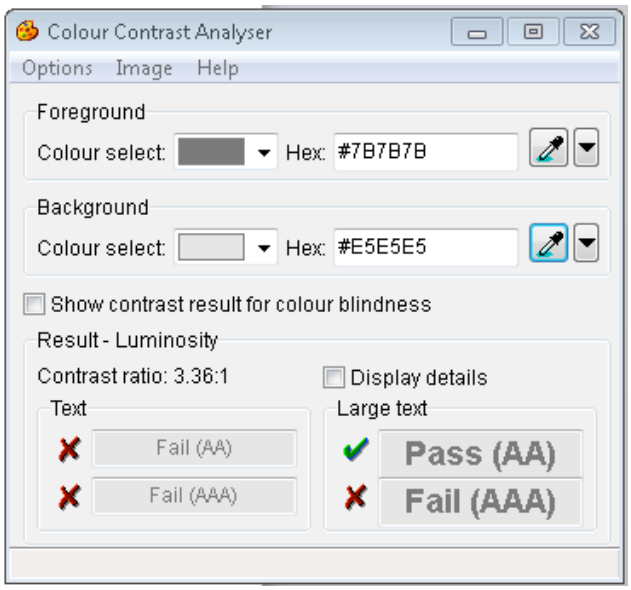


Figure 31: Text at bottom of page tested with contrast checker.

The results show that this colour contrast combination does not meet the minimum requirements for text of that size determined by accessibility guidelines. This means that some users will find it very difficult to read.

9.4 Link and Label Names

Like links, it is important to label items with which the user interacts properly, so that they are fully aware of what will happen when they select it. Figure 32 shows a link or tab label named ‘show more’. This does not give the user any indication of the content that will be displayed by selecting that link.

Figure 32: Labelling of interaction item.

9.5 Text Size

It is important to use relative units for text elements so a user can increase the size using the browser settings if they find it difficult to read. A lot of the text on the Virgin Active homepage is embedded in Images or Multimedia Elements.

Where plain text is used, such as for content in the middle panel and at the bottom of the page, it cannot be increased using the browser settings of Internet Explorer. This could make it very difficult to read for someone with low-vision. It also reduces the flexibility of the website when viewed across a range of different screen resolutions.

9.6 Link Names

Figure 33 shows the Virgin Active Indoor Triathlon panel on the homepage. There is an accessibility problem here. If a screen reader user were navigating the page by scanning a list of links on the page, they would not be aware of the content behind the link.

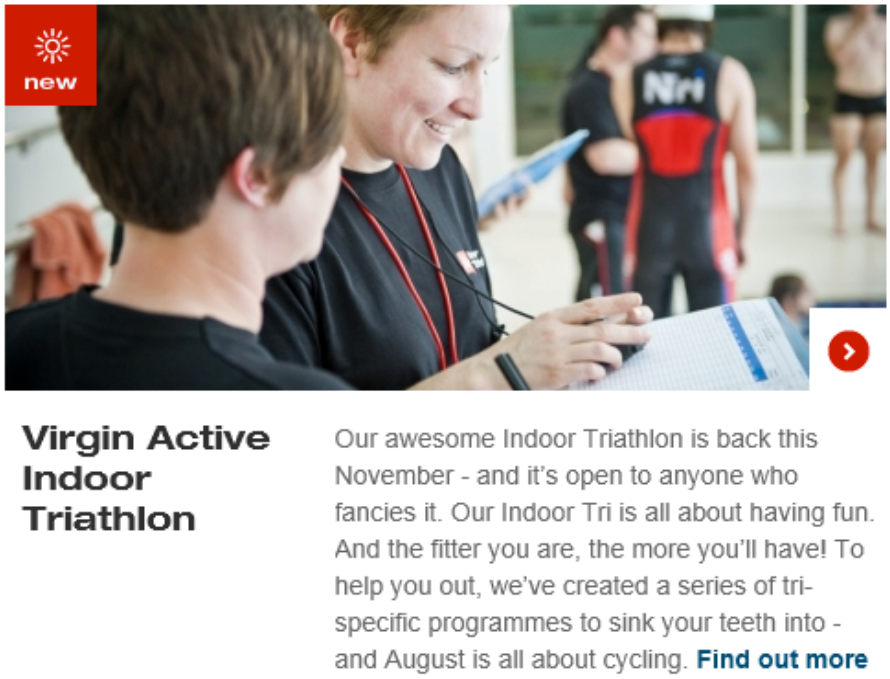


Figure 33: Virgin Active Indoor Triathlon panel on homepage.

Another accessibility problem is found with the 'take a look around' link in the Introducing 200 Aldersgate panel shown in figure 34.

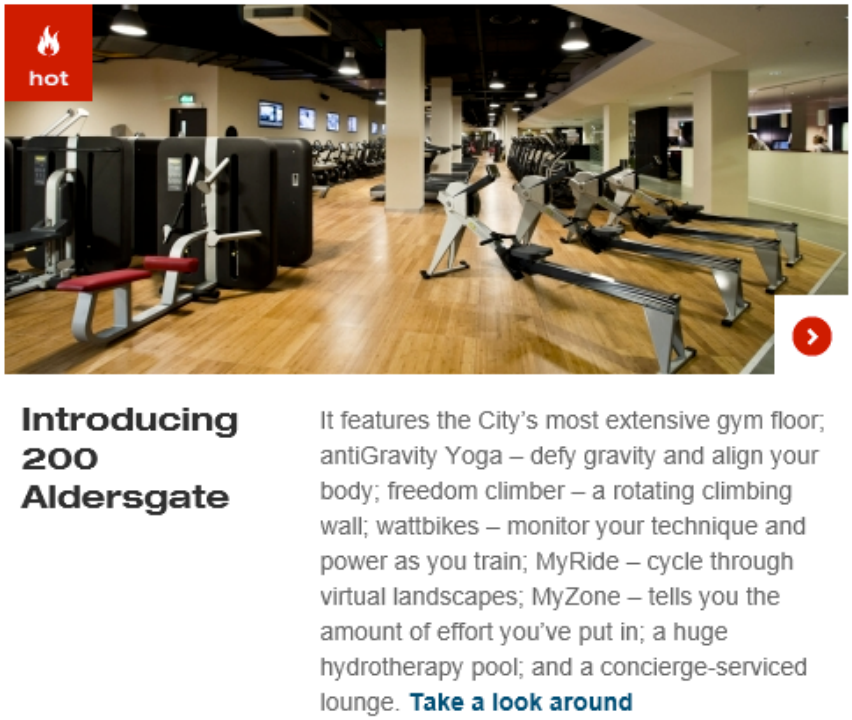


Figure 34: Introducing 200 Aldersgate panel on homepage.

If the user selects the link ‘take a look around’, the user is taken to a page with a completely different visual style, layout and navigation mechanism, shown in Figure 35.

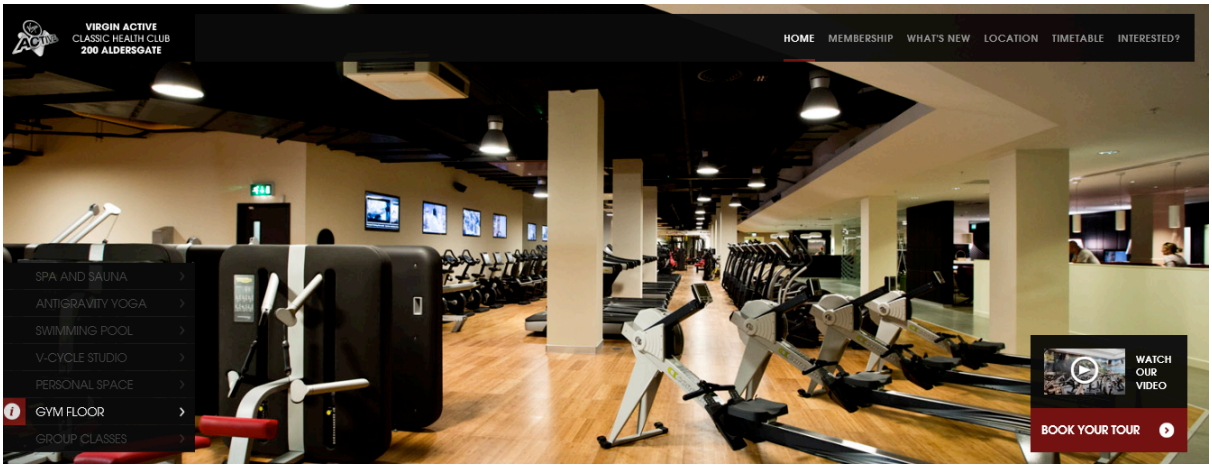


Figure 35: Page accessed from ‘take a look around’ link.

This could be very confusing and disorientating for some users, especially screen reader users, who would have to learn how to use the new page layout.

End Report

Appendix A - Further Sources of Advice and Support

AbilityNet

www.abilitynet.org.uk

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 and accessible web design.

For further details please email accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk

Other sources of help and information include:

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

http://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.

Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines 1.0

www.w3.org/tr/wai-autools

The W3C publish standards for tools which allow users to publish content. Vendors of content management systems (CMS) and applications which allow the user to create content, should adhere to the Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines (ATAG).

Accessible Rich Internet Applications Suite (WAI-ARIA)

www.w3.org/WAI/intro/aria

Many websites and web applications heavily rely on scripting languages such as JavaScript and AJAX to allow complex interactions with the user. The Accessible Rich Applications (ARIA) suite is a series of documents which are working towards making AJAX and related technologies accessible.

Illustrated handbook for web management teams

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20081105160428/archive.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.

Equality and Human Rights Commission

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com

(Please note since October 2007 the Disability Rights Commission became part of the Equality and Human Rights Commission)

Organisations are legally obliged to provide websites that are accessible to disabled people. This website includes information on the Equality Act (2010), its accompanying code of practice and their report outlining the findings of research into the accessibility and usability of 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 websites with these levels are phrased as - level 1 (highest) = “must”, level 2 = “should” and level 3 = “ought”.

The Equality Act (and before that the Disability Discrimination Act) has meant that it has been law in the UK to have an accessible website since 1999. Arguably a website can only meet its legal requirement 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 legal requirement lies somewhere between levels 1 and 2 compliance.

This said, it has been our experience that many websites 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) and a host of other reasons.

Similarly a website 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 website level 1 compliance but having very little impact on a disabled users overall experience of the website), 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 website when deciding its ranking.

A 5 star scale is used

*****	**Excellent**. Site is highly accessible and exceeds minimum legal requirements for accessibility
***	**Base level.** Site satisfies minimum legal requirements for accessibility.
*	**Very poor.** Site is not accessible and does not meet minimum legal requirements for accessibility.

*** Meets minimum legal requirements

We have chosen our *** ("Site satisfies minimum legal requirements for 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 website 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 website to the exclusion of addressing the accessibility/usability issues of the main website is neither necessary or in the spirit of inclusion or the W3C WCAG standards.