

Middlesex University web accessibility policy

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1. Introduction

“The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect.” Tim Berners-Lee, W3C Director and inventor of the World Wide Web.

The University provides a growing number of web-based services including the provision of news, information and learning resources to an increasingly diverse group of users. It has a legal duty to make its sites accessible.

The Web Development Team is committed to making the University’s websites accessible in accordance with the Special Education Needs and Disability Act (2001) and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). In order to meet the requirements set out by the two Acts, the University is developing its sites in accordance with W3C’s Accessibility Initiative Guidelines, up to Priority 2 or Double-A (AA) standard.

To this end Manvinder Bassra has been appointed as the Web Accessibility Officer, she will lead the move to ensure all pages on the site are accessible to the required standards.

2. Legislation

- The **University’s Disability statement** states that “Middlesex University welcomes applications from people with disabilities and offers places on the basis of academic ability. We invite applicants with a disability to visit the University – to see our facilities and to talk in confidence to our specialist staff. This way applicants can assess support available before deciding whether or not to apply or accept an offer to study here”.
- The **Disability Discrimination Act (1995) Part III** states that ‘from 1 October 1999, service providers have to make “reasonable adjustments’ for disabled people, such as providing extra help or making changes to the way they provide their services’- this includes information and services provided through the web: promotional, recruitment, general student information.
- The **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)’s Code of Practice** came into operation in Autumn 2000 and was integrated into the QAA audit scheme in late 2001 and seeks to ensure that ‘students with disabilities have access to a learning experience comparable to that of their peers’. (see appendix for further details)
- The **Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001** – which came into effect on 1 September 2002 Discrimination against disabled students in the provision of education, training and other related services is unlawful. Institutions will be expected to anticipate disabled students’ needs and make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to core activities of teaching and learning. Students who feel they have been discriminated against could seek redress through the courts.

3. Policy Statement

It is the policy of the University to make reasonable adjustments in order to make all web-based information and services on the University web site accessible and equally effective to all users, regardless of their disability.

All web pages should be measured against the guidelines published by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) available at <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/>

The University requires that:

- all new web content should be written to at least conformance level 2 standard (AA), but to conformance level 3 standard (AAA) if possible
- all existing web content should meet at least conformance level standard A. Existing pages will be gradually brought into line, as they are periodically updated.

It is the aim of the University that most of its web pages should meet conformance level 2 standard (AA) by Spring 2005.

Each department, school, centre and service that publishes information on the web is responsible for being conversant with accessibility issues, auditing its web material and taking reasonable steps to ensure its sites comply with these requirements.

Any third party contracted to design web pages for the university, whether hosted within or without mdx.ac.uk will be required to comply with these guidelines. Sites will be checked periodically.

4. Implementation

Accessibility issues will be incorporated into the Web Developments Team's, Content Authoring Skills Course.

To facilitate the implementation of the web accessibility guidelines, the University will provide ready-made templates. The templates, which will be used with the University's chosen Content Management System are compliant at AA or AAA level. Any content that is inserted into the template must be checked for accessibility.

5. Review

The policy will be regularly reviewed by the Web Development Team to take into account continually evolving technologies

Appendix1.

Guidelines

The University's Web Accessibility guidelines have been developed based on **W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)**. Following these guidelines when creating new web content or when updating existing content will ensure that all University web pages are accessible.

What is W3C WAI?

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is an international organisation which develops standards for the Internet.

The Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) is a working party set up by W3C to set standards for making web pages accessible to as many people as possible. The first major output from this group was a set of guidelines which are seen as a standard all over the world.

There are 3 WCAG priority levels. Compliance with the recommendations of each level ensures greater accessibility of web pages.

A - the site incorporates all the "must-have" checkpoints of the WAI guidelines. This gives basic access to most groups of disabled users. This is considered to be the minimum level of compliance.

AA - the site incorporates all the "should-have" checkpoints. This brings down all of the significant barriers to users. This is considered to be the preferred level of compliance.

AAA - the site incorporates all the "may-have" checkpoints. Needs significant levels of planning and investment. This is considered to be the optimum level of compliance, although it may not be of practical merit for commercial organisations.

Are there any other important standards?

The Royal National Institute of the Blind offers its own accreditation - the See It Right mark. It draws on some of the same WAI guidelines described above. RNIB describe it as sitting 'between the WAI "A" and "AA" standards'. Winning the mark also gets you inclusion on a list of "approved" companies on the See It Right website - a resource for blind and partially sighted Internet users.