



Something for everyone

Your guide to
accessible design

eleven

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Why accessible design matters

In September 2016, a blind man successfully sued Domino's Pizza as their website didn't provide alt text on their images, meaning the customer wasn't able to place an order using his assistive technology. Imagine not giving everyone equal access to pizza!

Accessible design is an opportunity to unlock your content's potential so it can be consumed by underserved audiences.

And while creating accessible content is already a legal requirement for some, the need to create better digital experiences for all is becoming more and more urgent. So there's never been a better time to explore some of the exciting developments in accessible design.



So, how accessible
is your organisation's
content?

So, how accessible is your organisation's content?

Legal requirements

Although accessible design is a practice every organisation should consider, public sector bodies actually have a legal duty to meet accessibility requirements.

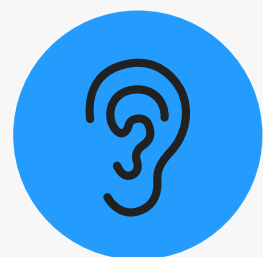
The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) outline how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. They explain how to make digital services accessible to everyone, including:



Users with vision impairments like blindness or colour blindness.



Those with limited mobility who might find it difficult to use a mouse or keyboard.



People with hearing impairments.



People with cognitive impairments like dyslexia, autism or learning difficulties.

Public sector organisations must legally achieve WCAG 2.2 level AA for their digital services. And it's important to note that these guidelines apply not only to websites but to all content housed on them too. This includes digital publications, presentations, videos and animations.

So, how accessible is your organisation's content?

Start with accessibility in mind

A common mistake is to create a full set of assets and then run a quick last-minute check to make sure they tick the right boxes for meeting accessibility requirements.

By reversing this process and considering accessibility from the get-go, you're not only making life a heck of a lot easier but you're also making sure that everyone can benefit from the finished result.

At this stage, you'll also need to determine what level of accessibility is appropriate for your channels and audience – which is where an accessibility consultancy service can add value. Check out how we did this for the University of Huddersfield on [page 27](#) of this eBook.

Designing for accessibility

Making sure your content is accessible is important for ethical and legal reasons. But does this hold designers back creatively?

Designing to WCAG 2.2 certainly adds extra challenges to the design process and may also lead to reviewing existing parts of your brand identity.

Although it's often more challenging, with the right approach to designing with accessibility in mind, there's always a pathway to [balance creativity and accessibility](#).



The four principles of accessible design

Accessible design must be:

Perceivable

This is structuring your content so it can be accessed in a different way. For example, say you have an image of a duck-billed platypus. By giving this image alt text describing the platypus in all its glory, people with visual impairments can enjoy it too.

Operable

Your website or digital content should be accessible for keyboard only use. For example, your audience should be able to use the tab button to navigate around different elements and press 'enter' to get to where they want to go.

Understandable

The "common sense" one. Let's say you have a button called 'about' on your website, but when you click on it you end up on a completely unrelated section of your website. Huh?! Exactly. Keep it predictable, logical, and easy to understand.

Robust

This means your website or app should work equally well across different platforms, technologies and devices. For example, if your website requires a specific version of a web browser to make use of its features, what does that mean for people who can't or don't use that browser?

Recognising exclusion

It's important to be aware there will be people in your audience who will have differing abilities. So ask yourself these questions before you go about creating your content:



Dexterity experience:
What kind of movement does a user need to perform to interact with my site or content?



Vision experience:
What shapes, colours, text and graphics does a user need to understand to consume my content?



Hearing experience:
Does my content produce any sound that's needed for the user to understand my content?



Thinking experience:
How much does time a user need to spend with my content to digest and understand it?

Once you've answered these, you'll have a better understanding of what can and needs to be done to make your work more accessible. Or better still, create a piece of content to share with test audiences prior to launch. There's nothing quite like first-hand feedback to improve the usability of your content.

Accessible design checklist

Dexterity

- ✓ Make large clickable actions.
- ✓ Give clickable elements space.
- ✓ Design for keyboard or speech only use.
- ✓ Design with mobile and touch screen in mind.
- ✓ Provide shortcuts where possible, rather than tiring users with lots of typing and scrolling.



Vision

- ✓ Use good colour contrasts and a good readable font size.
- ✓ Use a combination of colour, shapes and text.
- ✓ Don't use colour to convey meaning.
- ✓ Follow a linear, logical layout.
- ✓ Put buttons and notifications in context.



Hearing

- ✓ Write in plain English – avoid using complicated words or figures of speech.
- ✓ Use subtitles or provide transcripts for videos.
- ✓ Follow a linear, logical layout.
- ✓ Break up content with sub-headings, images and videos.
- ✓ Let users ask for their preferred communications support – don't make telephone your only option.



Thinking

- ✓ Give users enough time to complete an action.
- ✓ Explain what will happen after completing a service.
- ✓ Make important information clear.
- ✓ Give users the support they need to complete an action.
- ✓ Let users check their answers before submitting.
- ✓ Use simple sentences and bullet points.
- ✓ Make buttons descriptive.
- ✓ Follow simple and consistent layouts and align text to the left.
- ✓ Use images and diagrams to support text.
- ✓ Let users change the contrast between background and text.
- ✓ Use simple colours.



How screen readers work

Nearly all computers, tablets and smartphones have built-in screen readers.

Typically, a screen reader will start at the top of a website or document and read any text (including alt text for images).

Some screen readers allow the user to preview information – like the navigation bar or all the headings on a page – and skip to the desired section. For this reason, using navigation styles like headings is a key part of creating accessible documents.

Crafting your content so it's compatible for screen readers is really important. If you don't believe us, just [watch this video of a bad screen reader experience.](#)



Accessible projects to inspire you

Designing websites to meet the needs of a diverse audience

Website accessibility is all about making websites usable for all visitors.

In practice, this means following certain design principles that make sure people with physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities have the same (or a similar) experience as those who don't.

You can use the WCAG guidelines – the official guidance on how to make web content more accessible – to make sure your website doesn't prevent anyone from consuming, navigating, or accessing information. [You can read the WCAG guidance in full by clicking here.](#)

Meeting these standards might feel like a challenge, but the rewards of providing your audience with accessible content are entirely worth the effort.



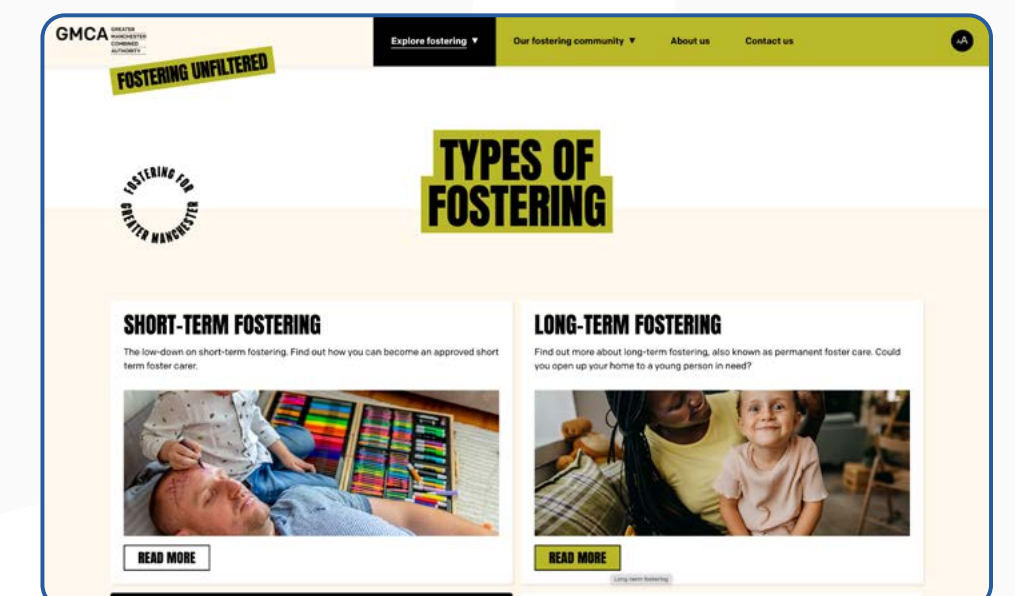
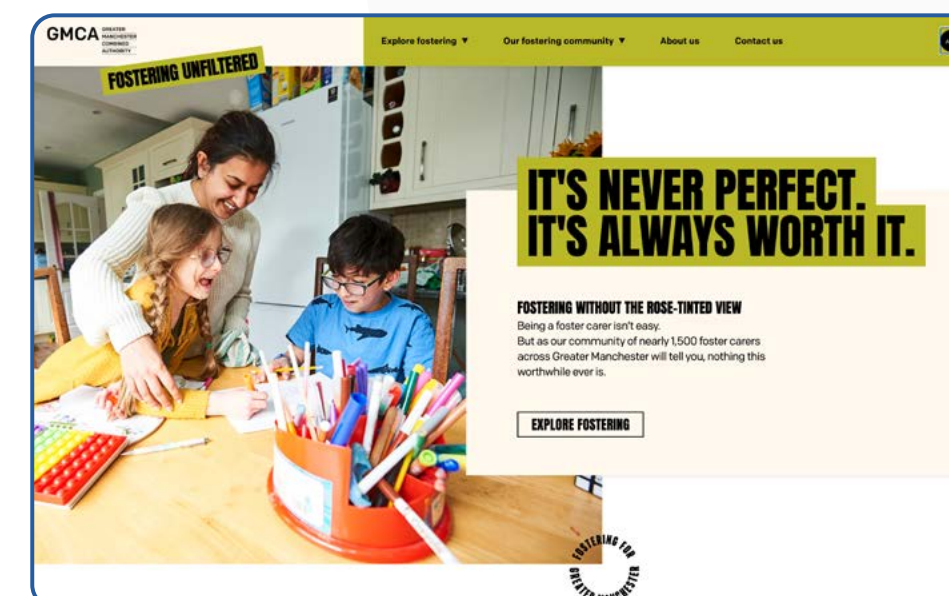
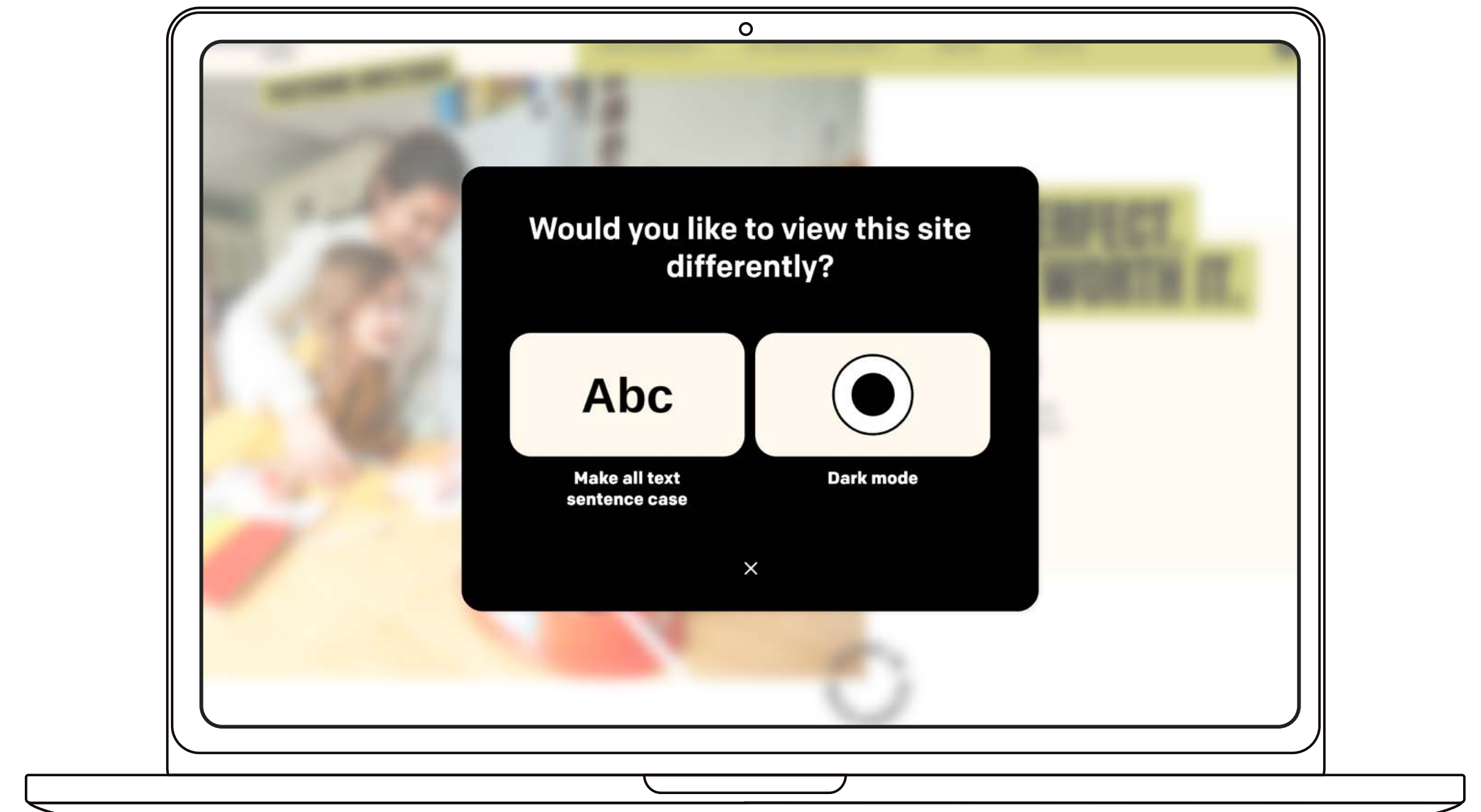
Case study

We worked with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) – which brings together the ten local authorities across the region – to develop a foster carer recruitment campaign with a difference.

As part of the campaign, we designed and built a website acting as an information hub for all things fostering. As we knew this campaign would be targeting a diverse audience with varying needs and abilities, we created an in-built accessibility feature to the site that would allow visitors to choose how the content was displayed to them.

The result? A high-performing website that continues to drive genuine enquiries from potential foster carers across Greater Manchester.

[Check out the accessible website we designed and built here.](#)



Producing quality video that can be enjoyed by everyone

Making video content accessible simply means creating it in a way that everyone can experience and enjoy.

Think of accessible design as best practice for video content – no matter who's watching it – as video that contains accessibility features is more likely to get clicks, likes and shares.

Here are some of the things you can do:



Write and direct your script with accessibility in mind.



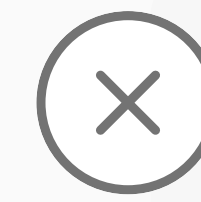
Stick to simple, descriptive language for the script.



Include audio descriptions.



Include British Sign Language (BSL) – where appropriate.



Avoid any flashing content.

Case study

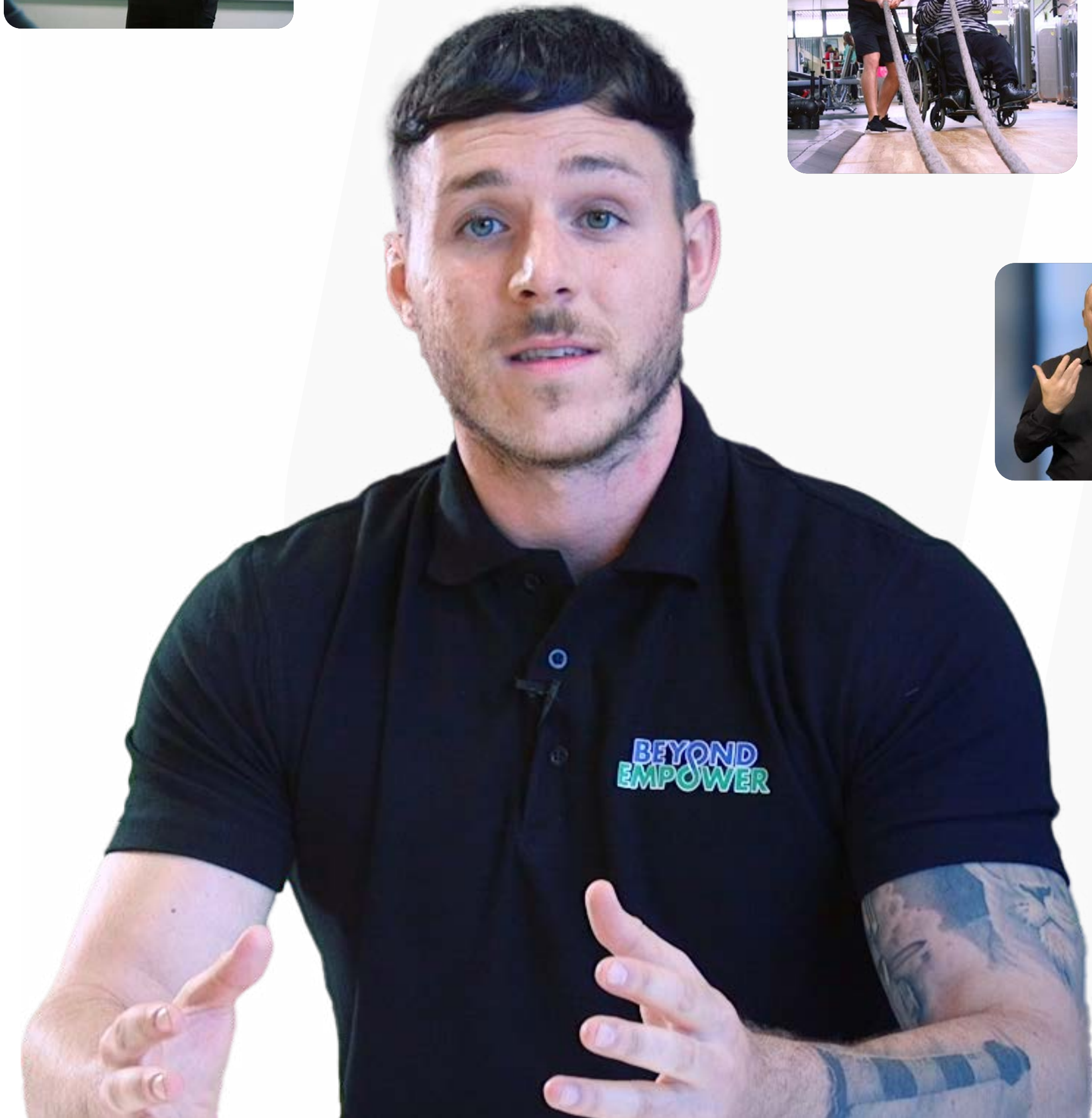
Ben Andrews is a member of The University of Salford's alumni community. He plays a pivotal role in making sure that Salford and Greater Manchester are doing all they can to provide accessible physical activity.

The University of Salford asked us to tell Ben's story in a way that as many people as possible could access and enjoy the content.

We advised on a documentary-style video. Given the nature of Ben's work, it was very important the video was accessible. So, we added BSL (British Sign Language) and audio descriptions to the final cut, as well as embedding captions.

The finished result was a fully accessible video that prompted a very real and emotional response from the audience.

[Click here to watch Ben's video.](#)



University of
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MANCHESTER

Helping you discover if your content has barriers

If accessible design is new to you, an accessibility marketing audit is a great way to gauge how your content is performing in meeting the needs of your audience.

An accessibility audit consists of a series of assessments carried out by accessibility specialists, using various accessibility tools and assistive technologies.

This form of testing helps reveal any barriers preventing anyone from using and interacting with your content effectively.



Case study

The University of Huddersfield needed guidance on how to retrospectively bring their 180-page undergraduate prospectus in line with WCAG accessibility guidelines.

We spoke with the University and their external agency to understand their knowledge of accessibility, as well as the timings for the project.

We created a report for our client, split into two sections. The first was to explain the changes that needed to be made to the prospectus, and the second was to outline the changes that should be considered going forward to the overall look and feel of future student recruitment collateral.

Because our accessibility report and instructions were so clear, the visual accessibility amends were signed off first time around.

Text placed on gradients or patterns is much harder to read for visually impaired people

Text should appear with out the use of gradients to ensure clearest readability possible.



Original Design

Accessible Design



Short paragraph widths and ample text spacing for leading and tracking ensures clear and easily read content.

Page numbers and other details are not set over complex backgrounds.

Meet Eleven's accessibility experts

Meet Eleven's accessibility experts



Dan Muir
Head of Creative

As our Head of Creative, Dan creates visually impactful content that can be accessed by everyone who needs it.



Mark Critchley
Production Lead

As Eleven's in-house accessible design specialist, Mark will make sure your work meets WCAG 2.2 AA standards.



Harley Thomson
Senior Creative

Harley supports Dan in creating impactful content that can be accessed by the widest possible audience.

Start your accessibility journey today

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We hope you've found this eBook (which, as you might expect, happens to be accessible) useful.

Accessible design is very much an ongoing process, which is why it's always best to work with an accessibility specialist who can guide you through it.

Unlock your content's full potential with our accessible design services.

Get in touch

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Email us: hello@elevenagency.co.uk