Better Information Handbook

advicenow

Contents

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Introduction

The provision of information about law-related issues has always been an important part of the work of government and of the third sector. There is increasing recognition of the need to do it well[1], but the task of producing effective information for the public remains a challenge for many organisations. It is particularly a problem for organisations that don't have information as their main focus, and so lack staff with specialist information skills.

Where individuals within organisations do take on this role they will often find there is little in the way of resources and support available to help them.

Some organisations have in-house guidance and procedures for creating information but apart from this, there is very little published material to help those creating information on rights and the law.

This handbook aims to fill this gap. It discusses the issues involved in the successful delivery of information on law-related issues to the public, draws together existing good practice, and provides practical advice on techniques and procedures. In doing this, it aims to stimulate debate on the best ways to produce this type of information and improve the general quality of what is produced.

Who is the handbook for?

The Better Information Handbook is aimed at all those involved in producing information for the public on law-related issues – whether in a government body, an advice service, specialist charity, or a community organisation. The guide aims to meet the needs of those new to information production as well as old hands, and so not all of the guide will be relevant to every user or organisation. You may already have your own excellent processes and procedures in place, or there may be areas that need to be developed further.

The first section – 'Why produce better information?' – is intended to be of most use to managers and management committees, senior and policy staff, and those designing service delivery. It looks at the issues we need to address in order to produce better information, why the information we produce needs to improve, and what better information could achieve for your audience and your organisation.

The second section – 'How to produce better information' – is aimed primarily at those involved in commissioning, producing, and editing information on law-related issues. It provides practical help on the processes and procedures that help to produce better information and examples of how to manage common problems.

1 The report of the PLEAS Task Force – Developing capable citizens: the role of public legal education, June 2007. www.pleas.org.uk

What is meant by information?

This handbook deals with the wide range of material produced to assist the public to deal with law related issues. It can cover everything from an awareness-raising beer mat to a detailed self-help guide.

Information is used as a way of to get a message across to a large number of people, and so isn't tailored to individual need. Information delivery is usually a one-way process and lacks the interaction that is an intrinsic part of both advice and education. This means that it is a constant challenge for information providers to find out whether their information has been understood or has been helpful.

Information is no substitute for advice or education, but sits alongside and complements these services. This is not to imply that information should be limited to simple facts – good information can deal with complicated issues, discuss options, and suggest actions.

This handbook is mainly concerned with information in written form: leaflets, postcards, posters, and websites. This is still the most common way of producing information, although there is increasing recognition of the value of other forms of delivery – audio, video, and theatre.

However, the issues faced in producing these resources have much in common with the production of written material. The strategic issues are the same, projects still have to be managed, and scripts still need to be written. This handbook aims to assist in the process of producing all types of material.

What is better information?

We all know that information on law-related issues must be accurate, up-to-date, and in plain English. But it has to be more than that. It has to:

- successfully meet the needs of its intended audience;
- get its message across effectively, be attractive, grab attention and hold it;
- successfully inform and lead to appropriate action;
- be efficiently disseminated and available when needed;
- work effectively as a part of wider services and campaigns.

That is what we mean by better information.

In recent years, many organisations have made good progress in improving the effectiveness of their information, but development has been patchy and uneven. There are some great examples of organisations producing effective, innovative materials but projects can be short-lived and lessons aren't shared and are lost.

It is a still a problem that information is often produced on a shoestring budget, but if we share our knowledge and expertise on how to do this work well, we can improve the quality of information available to the public.

Why produce **better information?**

This section discusses the issues involved in the creation and successful delivery of better information to the public. It looks at why better information about law-related issues is needed, what makes for truly effective information, and what is needed to produce it.

What's the problem?

When we look at what's available to the public on law-related issues it is tempting to think that there isn't a problem because plenty of information is already available. It has even been suggested that there is 'too much information'.

But when we look in detail at available information, it quickly becomes clear that there is room for improvement.

A lot of information focuses on what the law says, and doesn't do enough to provide a route to a solution[2]. If the audience is trying to solve a problem, they need to know what they should do, what the process is, who to speak to, what to say, and how and when to access expert help and advice – not just what their rights are. Better information provides a guide to the actions that readers need to take to deal with their problem.

Readers need a route to a solution

2 Reviewing and scoring information resources, ASA Advicenow's research of available information resources for the Legal Services Commission January 2007. www.advicenow.org.uk/reviewing-and-scoring-information-resources/

Law-related information often follows a drab and uninteresting format, at worst consisting of page after page of unbroken text. Standards are improving: the Plain English Campaign has done an excellent job. But information can be more attractive and can use a wider variety of techniques in order to meet the needs of the whole audience. Attractive information can grab people's attention and hold it, making it more effective in increasing understanding.

Information is often produced in isolation and isn't well integrated into other activities like advice giving or campaigns. This fails to maximise the return on the investment and means that information doesn't contribute effectively to other work. A more integrated approach can also use information more dynamically, as well as providing more opportunities for dissemination.

A lot of time, effort and money is spent on producing and disseminating information on law-related issues. OFT research[3] concluded that £43.9 million is spent on consumer information alone. With so much money being invested, we need to ensure it is well spent and achieves its aims.

What can better information do for your audience?

Law-related problems are commonplace: they've been described as the problems of everyday life[4]. Problems at work, with housing, with debt, and family issues will affect most people at some point in their lives. These issues cause stress and anxiety, and in the worst cases lead to health problems, the loss of homes and jobs. And, of course, they have a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged individuals and communities.

Information has a key role to play in increasing people's capacity to deal effectively with these issues.

Well-placed information can raise **awareness** of the law and rights, and help people recognise legal problems. It can increase **understanding** of what the law says and of the routes to a solution – where to go and what to do. It can help develop the knowledge and **skills** needed to deal with the problems, and the **confidence** needed to take action.

Better information has clear benefits for individuals and communities. Better awareness of the law can help people avoid problems in the first place, or take action earlier before problems escalate. Increased knowledge can help individuals manage problems more effectively themselves and know when and how to get advice and assistance.

Better information can help develop more capable individuals and communities that are able to deal with the issues they face. It can address the helplessness that so many people feel when faced with law-related problems, and help them develop the confidence and know-how needed to deal with the complexities of everyday life.

3 Consumer Education – establishing an evidence base. COI, April 2006.

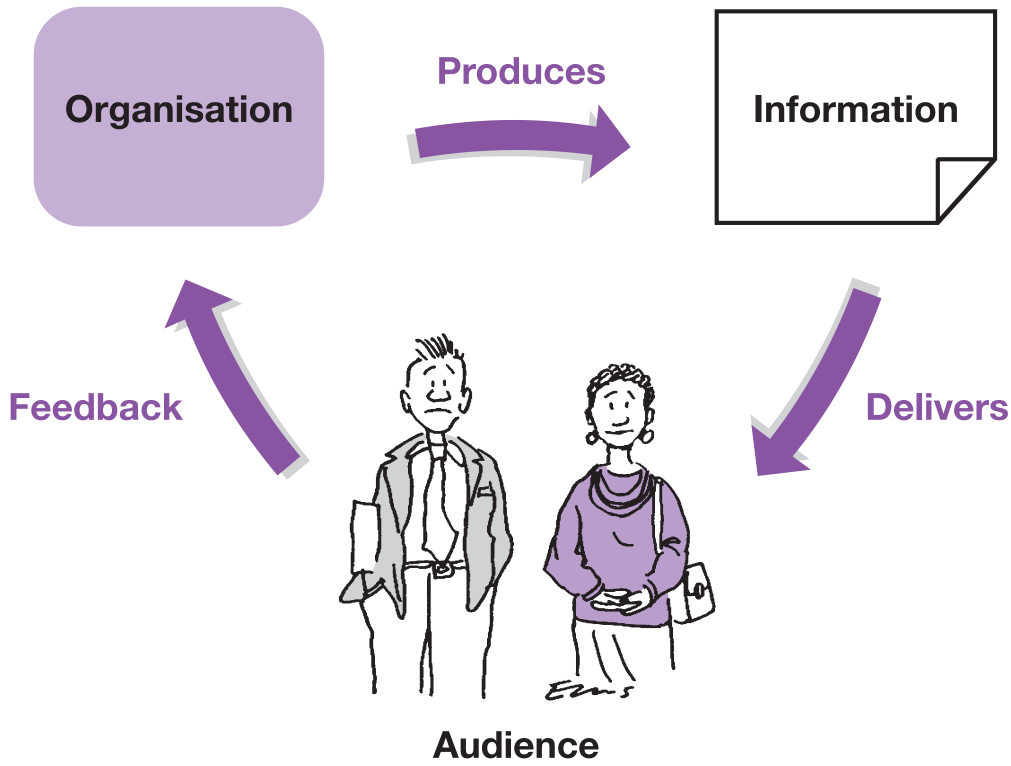
4 Causes of Action: Civil law and Social Justice – Legal Services Research Centre 2006.

Framework for producing information

Producing information can appear to be simple but there are many issues to consider. Information providers need some kind of structure to guide them through the process in an organised and logical way. In producing this handbook, we have developed our own framework. It isn't the only way of running an information project. Much of it will just seem like common sense and we aren't the first to try it[5], but we find it helps enormously to structure the discussion into distinct issues.

The key issues that need to be considered are:

- **The audience and their needs.**
- **The providing organisation and its intentions.**
- **The means of delivery.**
- **The information itself.**
- **The mechanisms for feedback and evaluation.**



These elements are tightly connected and interact. The nature of the audience will determine the means of delivery. The intention of the organisation will be to deliver an outcome for the audience. All will combine to determine the form and content of the information.

5 A model of Social Information Need – Nick Moore, 2004. www.acumenuk.co.uk/papers/a_model_of_social_information_need.php

Capability is about more than knowing the law. It means knowing how to go about dealing with the problem and being able to manage it better.

Capability will mean different things for different people depending on their circumstances and their capacity to deal with problems.

For some, it will be the ability to recognise that a problem has a legal dimension and to know where they can go for help. For others, it will be the ability to act quickly and deal with the problem themselves through better understanding of issues and procedures.

What can better information do for your organisation?

The main benefit of better information for most organisations will be to help meet the needs of users and clients. This is the central purpose for most organisations and better information will help them to improve their service to the public.

Information that helps people avoid problems in the first place can help reduce the demand on advice services and the justice system. Similarly, information that encourages people to take action earlier will stop problems escalating, reduce the complexity of problems taken to advice agencies, and ease the load on tribunals and courts.

Where better information increases people's capacity to deal with problems effectively, it will help more capable individuals achieve satisfactory outcomes themselves, and help everyone use advice and support services more efficiently.

More precision in producing information and more accuracy in targeting will increase the effectiveness of what is produced. This will produce better outcomes for priority groups and reduce the waste of an unfocussed approach.

Good information can promote an organisation and its services. Many organisations, both government bodies and those in the independent sector, would benefit from increasing their profile and improving public understanding of the services they provide.

Better information about process and procedures, such as how to access and use services like courts and tribunals, will reduce pressure on staff and lead to greater efficiency and reduced costs for these organisations.

Advice services can use better information to reach out to a wider audience, which will broaden their user base and increase their visibility. Too narrow a focus on casework and the absence of a preventative role will reduce their appeal to local communities and funders alike.

The process of producing better information requires you to build good working relationships within your organisation and with other peer organisations. This will bring the benefits of better signposting and referrals and make the most of the available resources.

Where information is integrated into other service provision it can support wider work, and its use can be more readily evaluated.

Advisers can underestimate the usefulness of information to their clients

Evaluation of a series of information leaflets[6] revealed that advisers can underestimate the usefulness of leaflets.

The researcher asked both clients and advisers whether they found information materials useful.

The clients said that they did find information useful, making comments like, “They tell you so much that it is really hard to take it all in and remember it. I found it really useful to have some information to take away to read later.”

But when he spoke to the advisers, they said that they didn’t find information useful, making comments like “I can tell my clients everything they need to know.”

Producing better information

Organisations need to focus on several key issues in order to produce better information.

What we are trying to achieve?

Simply, why are we producing the information? How will it benefit our audience?

Our purpose will determine our content, what it looks like, how it will be delivered, and who it will be targeted at. Awareness-raising material, for example, will be short and eye-catching, aiming to deliver a simple message and provoke a clear action. Material aimed at supporting self-help will be more substantial and provide more in-depth information. The outcomes we seek to achieve will also provide the basis of subsequent evaluation.

We also need to be clear about the action we intend our audience to take as a result of reading our publication. Increased awareness and understanding are important outcomes but we will often want people to do something as result of reading our material. Most information should include a guide to action, even if it is simply to direct readers to further information or help.

What are you trying to do? on p24 provides practical help on these issues.

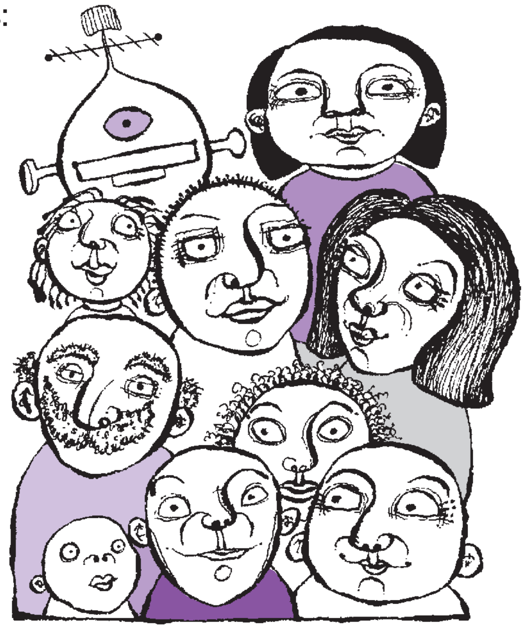
6 Evaluation of ASA Advicenow’s LSC funded guides, May 2006. www.advicenow.org.uk/evaluating-advicenow-guides/

Is the information built around the needs of the audience?

People vary greatly in terms of their needs and capabilities: providers need to have a clear understanding of what these are if their information is to be effective. Successful information provision depends on a good understanding of the 'user situation'[7].

Your knowledge of the audience and their needs will inform everything from what it will look like, what it will include, how it will be presented, and how it can be disseminated.

There's a need to understand the audience's knowledge and capability, and their ability to absorb the information and act upon it. The nature of the issues they face and their likely impact will affect the content and the way it is presented. Stress levels and self-confidence will affect the tone and degree of support given.



People vary greatly in their needs and capabilities

Precision in tailoring and targeting is crucial. It is tempting to try to reach more than one distinct audience with the same piece of information but this will never be very successful – members of the public and advisers, for example, will have very different information needs.

Provider view or user view?

This order form on a contact lens website must lead to many mistakes. The position of the eyes is reversed. It is the optician's view.

7 Evaluating ASA Advicenow Guides p15. http://static.advicenow.org.uk/files/Advicenow_Evaluation_Report-1304.pdf

Social marketing

Social marketing is using commercial marketing techniques to achieve social change. In the UK, its use has been promoted by the National Social Marketing Centre, which has developed social marketing approaches within the Health Service.

Social marketing focuses on getting people to act. The 'Five a Day' campaign to get people to eat more fruit and vegetable is a famous example of successful social marketing. The same approach could be used to get people to make a will, for example.

The approach focuses on specific groups of people. It stresses the need to understand the target audience through research and intelligence gathering. It requires clear insights into why people behave as they do, including the influences on their behaviour and how they think, feel, and believe.

Social marketing puts strong emphasis on what it calls the *exchange*: what is offered to the audience and its benefits, against the cost to the audience in terms of money, time, effort, and consequences. It aims to maximise the offer and its value to the audience while minimising the barriers.

For more on social marketing see: www.nsmcentre.org.uk.

The best information is often that which is produced in dialogue with the target audience – and with those who work with them.

A review[8] of published resources for the Legal Services Commission clearly showed that many of the most effective providers of information have a close relationship with their client base. They know them well through advice or other interactive services, and are well placed to understand their needs. Their interactive services mean that they are also able to get continual feedback on how the information works in practice.

Organisations which are remote from their intended audience face a problem in knowing whether their audience's needs are being met. These types of organisations would benefit from developing mechanisms to ensure that they get feedback on the use of their materials. For example, by developing partnerships with those who are in close contact with their audience, particularly community based agencies.

Who is it for? on p33 provides practical help with these issues.

8 'Reviewing and scoring information resources', ASA Advicenow's research of available information resources for the Legal Services Commission, January 2007. www.advicenow.org.uk/about-us/revewing-and-scoring-information-resources,10050,FP.html

The needs of the audience and the needs of the organisation

Every organisation wants to put the needs of its users first, but policy priorities and internal processes can get in the way. As a result, the information produced often tells you more about the organisation than it does about the intended audience.

A look at the process of producing information can show how the focus on the needs of the audience can be lost. The production process will often involve a range of people within an organisation: lawyers who want to ensure that information is legally accurate and complete; policy staff who want to make sure that the material reflects current policy; communications staff who check that the material meets corporate presentation standards; fundraisers who may want to ensure that their message is included. All of these players are well placed to ensure their voice is heard – but who speaks for the user?

There is a need for processes to ensure the voice of users is heard. It helps enormously if the purpose of the publication is clear and that all participants understand their role. The role of editors in championing the user's view needs to be understood.

Readers groups and pilot testing with users provide a very useful counterbalance to the views of experts and are an excellent way of ensuring that the audience's voice is heard.

What expertise do you need?

It is sometimes assumed that creating information is a straightforward task that can be done by anyone with reasonable writing skills. But it isn't so. Creating better information requires a wide variety of different skills.

In order to produce effective information, it is necessary to have a strategic overview of issues, and be able to identify clear objectives and outcomes; to know the law and the practicalities of the process or problem; understand the needs of the audience; and have excellent writing and editing skills. If the information is a publication, it also needs to be designed with the needs of the audience in mind. It will then have to be promoted and distributed, and the whole project needs to be managed effectively.

It is unlikely – though not impossible – to find all these very specific skills in one person, which is why much of the best information is created by a team.

The editorial and project management role/s are crucial – the person playing this role (often in collaboration with experts and those working in frontline services) will research the need, set the objectives and outcomes, and determine the final shape of the information, as well as deal with timeframe and budgetary concerns.

The writer also has a crucial role to play; a talented writer can make even the most complicated or dull of legal processes or problems interesting and accessible.

Often the writer will work with experts and those in frontline services to ensure that the information is accurate and covers everything important.

Sometimes the expert will also be an excellent writer and capable of writing the information themselves – however, this is unusual. Experts are often deeply immersed in the detail of their subject and may not be best placed to get simple information across to a wide audience. Equally, a writer who lacks experience of legal issues will struggle to maintain legal accuracy while explaining complicated issues in simple terms. In our experience, the best writers are those who have a good overview of the issues, understand the needs of the audience, and can write well.

What they produce will need to be checked by a legal expert. The peer reviewer has to know the law but also understand the purpose of the publication and the needs of the audience. They aren't being asked for a 'legal opinion' of the publication; rather they are checking it is legally accurate within the confines of what it is setting out to do.

In many cases, there will also be a need to use a skilled designer to ensure the information is presented in an effective way. The value of good design shouldn't be underestimated – especially when presenting complicated information. Skilled design can be very effective in helping to get complicated issues across clearly and comfortably.

Have you got time and resources to plan, edit and pilot?

Even the simplest publication is a project in itself and requires careful planning and project management. All too often, information producers are asked to create information in a short time with a small budget, often with little warning. Understandably, this rarely produces excellent results.

There's a need to plan the project, research the needs of your audience, involve experts, write inventively, edit, check the accuracy, and design the publication. This all takes time.

Pre-launch testing is essential to be sure that the material works with your audience. The best practice is to pilot the information with members of the target audience and those that work with them – and then make appropriate changes.

How do you disseminate your information?

The means of delivery is a key part of the strategy for better information. The dissemination of the information can take up as much as half of the total cost of an information project, so it must be planned in from the start.

The key to effective dissemination is to match the means to the message and needs of the audience. There are lots of ways to deliver information, from a slogan on a t-shirt to a video on YouTube. The key is to adopt a method that will work for the target audience and for the type of content you have to deliver.

Traditional methods of delivering legal information by paper leaflet still have many advantages, but the internet is increasingly being used. Its availability 24/7 means it is there when people need it. But despite its popularity, there will always be some groups who can not, or choose not to, use it.

Video is a very effective means of delivery, particularly to engage interest in an issue and to tell people's stories. Video can be expensive, but the availability of cheap digital video cameras and popularity of YouTube has opened up a new opportunity for delivering rights information. There are already large numbers of instructional videos on topics as diverse as how to iron a shirt or how to put on a condom, and there is clear potential to use this format as a way of delivering rights information.

The mass media is often overlooked as a way of reaching a wide audience – but it is where most people get their information. The press, radio, and television are an effective way of reaching a wide audience – particularly with an awareness-raising message. Most stories won't make it on to national television, but local press and radio are always on the look out for a story – especially where there is a local connection.

The LivingTogether campaign[9] run by Advice Services Alliance's Advicenow project (ASA Advicenow) set out to challenge the myth of common law marriage through a combination of website information and a media campaign. The campaign produced information on the different aspects of cohabiting – housing, children, wills, etc and used a PR company (Amazon PR) to sell each issue into newspapers, magazines, radio, and television.

This resulted in very widespread coverage in the mass media, including breakfast television, local radio phone-ins, national and local press, magazines, and leaflets. The campaign was even able to influence the story line on *Emmerdale* to include the split up of a cohabiting couple.

The campaign's approach was to get a simple message into the media, wherever possible with a case study, with a clear link on to more detailed information on the campaign website. By working closely with journalists, the campaign was able to ensure that coverage was legally accurate. Coverage in the media was significant, with nearly 600 items during the first three years of the project.

9 LivingTogether – www.advicenow.org.uk/livingtogether

'Information comes best wrapped in a person'

There is evidence that people take more notice of information if they are given it by a person. Studies[10] have found that NHS patients are more likely to act on a piece of information if they are given it by their doctor or another member of staff, than if they pick it up from a rack in a waiting room.

The National Disability Information Project[11] concluded that 'Information comes best wrapped in a person'. The project used a variety of methods of delivery, but concluded that for many people the best source of information was a person who could respond to their specific needs and provide the information, support, and reassurance they require.

Many professionals get asked about rights and legal issues in the course of their work – health visitors, probation officers, faith leaders, youth workers, registrars, trade union shop stewards – the list is endless. These people, variously described as 'intermediaries', 'problem noticers' or 'informal advisers', are in a very good position to pass on accurate information to their clients, particularly in the early stages of a problem.

Intermediaries provide an excellent way of getting information to people early and of targeting specific groups. There's a need to be realistic: intermediaries have their own job to do and aren't going to become unpaid legal advisers. But where information resources meet their needs and strengthen their service they can be excellent partners in delivering information. This method of delivery can also develop and maximise relationships with individuals and organisations in the community.

Distribution as part of a service

Information works best if it is distributed as a part of, or in conjunction with, a user-facing service. These can be advice services, helplines, and other types of community-based organisations or campaigns.

These services provide a ready-made route to reach intended users and will often provide an effective way of targeting a specific audience. The information materials will have the added benefit of strengthening these services and maximising return on the investment. This means building and sustaining links with organisations who can also provide early warning or evidence of need, and a mechanism for feedback and assistance in evaluation.

Information is a tool to be used: it works best as a part of broader human interaction. Some people will access information directly from a leaflet or a website, but others will gain knowledge through word of mouth or through interaction with a variety of intermediaries.

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10 Review of evidence, DH (E). Quoted in Better information, better choices, better health: Putting information at the centre of health. Department of Health.

11 Access to Information: a Review of the Provision of Disability Information – Nick Moore. Policy Studies Institute 1995.

The HandyVan service

Help the Aged run a fleet of 35 HandyVans which visit older people's homes around the UK to fit smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and security equipment to help protect the home from burglary. On board the HandyVan they keep a stock of Help the Aged's information leaflets so that they can provide older people there and then with relevant information if they have a problem.

The information

The information we produce is the culmination of our efforts to clarify our objectives and understand the needs of the audience. Having done that, we need to ensure that both the form and content of the publication use the best techniques in order to get our message across effectively.

Presentation

Too much legal information appears to exist in a world untouched by the presentation and design techniques that we take for granted in the mass media and commercial publishing.

Commercial publications use an array of techniques to make them attractive, grab their intended audience's attention and hold it to keep them reading through to the end.

In contrast, legal information often seems to be modelled on an old-fashioned textbook approach.

This may be because information about law-related problems is produced on a shoestring budget in a short timescale, and so providers have got used to doing it in a very plain style. Legal information may also seen as a 'distress purchase' that people only reach for when they are desperate and so don't care whether it is nicely presented or not.

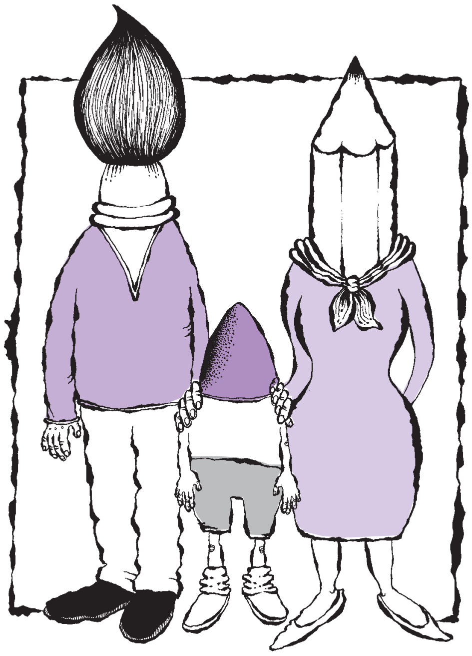
However, this view doesn't take into account the preventative role of information, or the need to reach out to people before their problem gets to crisis point.

The commercial world puts a lot of money and effort into good design because it works for them as a way of getting their message across. The same logic applies to us: it makes sense to use the best techniques in order to make our information attractive.

We can also learn from the methods used in the education world. Teachers and trainers, in common with journalists, use a variety of presentation techniques to get their points across. They know that different people learn in different ways: more visual people will find diagrams and illustrations helpful; others will appreciate stories and examples that reinforce key points.

Law-related information can also make use of these methods to reach the widest audience and to achieve maximum understanding. This means using a range of techniques – case studies, stories, quizzes, diagrams, flow charts, Q&As, jargon busters etc – to aid comprehension and accommodate different learning styles. The repetition and reinforcement of this approach will help ensure that key points are grasped by all members of your audience.

This doesn't mean that every publication has to use every method – but they are all available as part of a rich palette of techniques that information providers can call on to meet the needs of their particular audience.



More visual people…

What presentation techniques will you use? on p56 provides practical help and suggestions for appropriate presentation techniques.

Content

Information on the law and rights must be accurate, up-to-date and in plain English. But it has to do more than that. It has to meet the range of users' needs that we have identified in earlier sections.

An explanation of the law is central to any rights publication. Understanding what rights the readers has, or doesn't have, will have a major influence on how they set about dealing with the issue. But it isn't the whole story.

There's also a need to explain legal processes – the steps someone has to take to find a solution. Too many publications don't make it sufficiently clear what someone needs to do. It's important to provide a guide to action.

There's also a need to address the knowledge and skills needed to manage the problem – whether this is basic communication and recording skills – or the ability to recognise when you're out of your depth and need to get help.

It is still unusual for information to acknowledge or deal with the stress that a problem will cause. Research shows that law-related problems can have a devastating effect on people's lives. The ongoing Legal Services Research Centre research shows that 40% of all problems are worried about by people 'all or most of the time'[12].

Despite this, most rights information adopts a flat neutral tone. We could do more to ensure that our information provides support and reassurance to people dealing with a worrying situation. The tone of a leaflet can have a big effect on the way it is received. Some publications have an official tone, often reflecting the nature of the provider; others take a more sympathetic line, and are more clearly on the side of the reader.

12 Causes of Action: Civil Second Edition p60.

Finally, for many people the most important bit of information is where to find sources of further help. Legal problems are complicated and have serious consequences. Accurate guidance to appropriate advice services can prevent problems escalating.

Other languages

Most organisations would like to make their information available in languages other than English. But making choices about what to translate can be difficult.

If significant proportions of your intended audience read another language and do not read English, translation is definitely appropriate.

But effective translation is expensive. Our own conclusion is that translating everything into all languages is impractical and often a waste of resources that could be better spent on a more targeted approach.

As ever, the key is to know your audience. An approach that is based on the identification of the particular needs of your audience is most likely to be successful. Often the priority will be to address specific problems and increase access to services by explaining rights and sources of help in their mother tongue.

In many cases, direct translation is not enough. The audience for a translated leaflet will have a different cultural background and gaps in knowledge about UK institutions that can produce misunderstandings. If the funding can be found, it is definitely preferable to adapt information to the needs of this audience, rather than simply translate.

Before embarking on translation, it is important to research need and work closely with intermediaries and members of the target community to find out what is required in order to ensure that translated materials address real need.

Welsh

Public sector bodies working in Wales should produce bilingual information. Voluntary sector organisations don’t have to do this by law, unless they are providing a service on behalf of a statutory organisation. However, it is good practice to produce information in Welsh if some of your audience speak Welsh as their first language, particularly if the information deals with sensitive or complicated topics.

Should it be available in other languages? on p46 looks at the practical considerations of translating information in more detail.

Monitoring and evaluation

The lack of interaction and instant feedback from users of information mean that monitoring and evaluation are essential parts of the process of information provision. An adviser can quickly check if a client hasn't understood. A teacher can spot the glazed look of incomprehension and try another explanation. But information staff have no immediate way of knowing whether their information has been understood or has answered a user's questions.

It is useful to treat monitoring and evaluation as linked but distinct activities. Below we discuss them separately and explain the differences between them.

Monitoring

Monitoring the work of a project is essential if you want to evaluate its effectiveness.

Monitoring allows you to know how many people saw or used your information, and basic details about them. It may include some details on who it was that used your information and what for, and feedback from advisers or intermediaries about how they believe it was received by your audience. These details will help you design your evaluation.

All of this will help provide the core knowledge you will need for your evaluation.

Evaluation

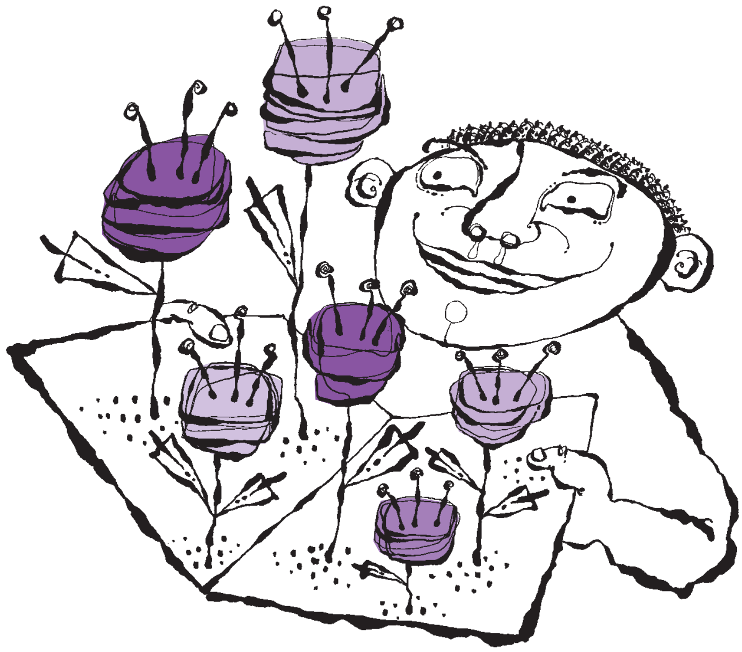
Most evaluation that does occur tends to focus on the piece of information itself. For example, is it presented in an attractive manner? Did readers understand it?

This is crucial, but we can go beyond this tight focus to look at broader questions.

Was the information used and if it was, who by, how, and why? Did using the information benefit users in tangible ways, and if yes, what were they? What action did they take as a result of using the information?

Casting a wider net enables us to relate our knowledge of how the information was used and what happened as a result to the needs of our own organisation, its other services and policy goals.

Evaluation also has longer-term benefits; it enables us to identify best practice, and steadily improve the quality of



Is it presented in an attractive manner?

our information. Each evaluation feeds into the next one, building up knowledge and understanding of how to do things well, what to avoid, and where we still need to learn.

If we don't evaluate, we aren't able to learn and improve. Each time we produce new information, we will do it as though this was the first time. If we do it badly, we will continue to do it badly, making the same mistakes each time. Improvements might occur randomly or through a combination of good luck, skill and experience – but they may not be recognised and repeated.

Evaluation can be time consuming and expensive, and although it is clearly desirable to evaluate every aspect of every piece of information, it will rarely be possible. However, evaluations can be very effective without doing this. You will still learn a lot from evaluating one or two aspects of the information (methods used, language used, presentation techniques, design, etc), or the effects for a single group of target users. Each evaluation can build on the results of the last one, or what you know from the evaluations produced by other organisations with a similar audience. What you test can be decided by what you already know, so that you slowly plug the gaps in your knowledge.

Broadly speaking, the goal of your evaluation must be realistic. We suggest that in deciding what is feasible, you should look at what you already know and build on that. The goal is not some notion of complete knowledge, but of making progress towards a better understanding of how to do things well, in order to do it better next time.

Evaluation needs to be planned and built into the production process from the start. When evaluation is shaped at an early stage, it is possible to ensure that monitoring information is collected at the right stages, and that participants can agree to do this well in advance.

The results of evaluation shouldn't only come at the end of a project. Early evaluations can inform revisions and improvements to the project as you go along, giving the information the best chance of success.

How will you monitor and evaluate it? on p73 provides practical guidance on these issues.

How to produce **better information**

Introduction

This part of the handbook is intended to help with the practicalities of creating and updating information about law-related issues.

It is concerned with the techniques involved in designing and delivering individual information projects – it does not look at the strategic considerations of providing information as a whole.

Not all of the guide will be relevant to everyone. If you are new to information production or have so far only really worked on one type of information, this section will guide you though the process from beginning to end, helping you deal with some of the more thorny and contentious issues.

If you're an old hand, you can dip in and out to find guidance on a particular area of information production. Of course you will already have your own procedures, but chances are there will be something that another organisation is doing that you hadn't thought of before or haven't yet tried.

This section of the handbook could have been organised in many ways. The structure we have chosen deals with each of the key issues you need to consider when designing information in turn.

You can use the Contents list and the A–Z index (p93) to find your way around the guide.

At the back of the guide is a 'Project plan builder' which you can use to help you plan your projects and keep them on track throughout the production process. There is also a list of useful resources for you to use.

What is the need?

If you're thinking about producing new information, you need to be sure that your audience needs it. Before you begin planning your project you need to find out about the issue, who it affects, and how. This will enable you to create more useful and effective information, as well as help you justify the resources spent on it.

What is the issue?

If you are faced with clients experiencing the problem on a daily basis, you may have a very good feel for this already. For other issues or types of organisation, you may need to look into more formal research.

Research the problem

Find out what is already known about the problem and how it affects people.

For example, if you are planning to produce information aimed at encouraging eligible people to claim Disability Living Allowance, look for statistics to show levels of take-up, and if these highlight particular areas or communities who don't claim.

Where to find out more

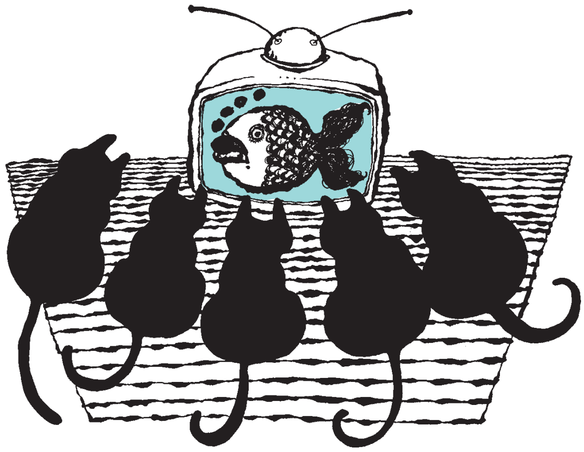
- National Statistics
- The Economic and Social Research Council Question Bank
- Specialist research organisations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Government departments may have commissioned their own research
- Charities sometimes produce research into issues affecting their areas of concern
- Your own service research or feedback.

Check out the media

It's useful to be aware of other sources of information your audience may be exposed to. This can:

- help you to know what level of awareness and knowledge some people already have;
- give you a topical way of presenting the information;
- present you with opportunities to clarify misinformation or confused messages in the press;
- increase your understanding of your audience and what is interesting and important to them.

Think about your audience and what media they use, and then try to read, watch, or listen to a selection. This might include national or local newspapers, magazines or papers aimed at a specific group, support group newsletters, local radio, popular TV programmes, online forums and blogs.



Other sources of information your audience may be exposed to…

Ask those that know

Get in touch with people who are experts in the issue. These might be academics, lawyers, subject specialists, or advisers who deal with the problem on a day-to-day basis. If your information is about a process, speak to people who work in or use that process (for example, if you are producing information on grievance procedures, speak to lawyers, but also speak to people who use the procedures from both sides – perhaps an HR manager, and an experienced Trade Union rep).

Ask them what they think people need to know about it. ***Research the problem*** (p20) may give you some ideas of who to ask. Other professionals and organisations who have contact with your audience (see ***Ask intermediaries*** – p22) may also be of some help.

Asking people that know the issue well from both sides can help you in a range of ways. It can:

- help you to understand the issue and the areas that cause people particular difficulty;
- help you to know what to cover and in what detail;
- answer specific questions raised during the production process.

Some may want payment to be involved in your project or they may be happy with an acknowledgement of their role, depending on their situation and level of involvement.

Experts

By their nature, experts have a special interest in a particular topic and are well versed in all the technical jargon and detail. Sometimes this can mean that they are not good at understanding what information the average person needs to know. You may need to balance what they tell you with what you learn from intermediaries and users.

Be clear with them about their role and the role that others will play in the production process. See ***How will you produce it?*** on p49.

Ask intermediaries

Intermediaries are other professionals and organisations who have contact with your audience during the course of their work. They are not necessarily experts in dealing with the issue. Depending on the issue, intermediaries might include GPs, social workers, teachers, registrars, local community groups, police, youth workers, and advice agencies.

Intermediaries might understand how a particular issue affects your audience, how they use information, and how systems and processes work in practice. They could also provide a means of getting the information to people that need it.

Think about your audience and who they're likely to come into contact with. For example, when ASA Advicenow was commissioned to write a leaflet on immigration advice, they made links with the agencies that 'processed' asylum seekers on arrival at the port. These agencies were far more acutely aware of the real problems affecting newly arrived asylum seekers than the writers, and were able to advise on what to include and how to present it.

Intermediaries

There is a lot to be gained from establishing strong relationships with intermediaries, but it usually takes a bit of work. Naturally, most people working in these roles are likely to be very busy and struggle to make time for extra work.

How to engage intermediaries

- If possible, try and get in touch through an existing contact.
- Emphasise the benefit to their clients and their service.
- Give them plenty of notice.
- Be flexible in the amount of commitment you want from them.
- Explain how you will use their input.
- Feedback how you have acted on what they have told you or explain to them why you have not.

Is there other information on the topic that meets the needs of your audience?

Once you've established that there is a need for information on a particular issue you should check that you won't be duplicating others' material.

Find out what's already out there

Carry out internet searches, look at the publications lists of other organisations which work in the area, and check out directories of resources, such as the FRILLS leaflet service directory.

Develop criteria for helping you to decide if an information resource will meet the needs of your audience, or use the example checklist below.

Ask yourself	Tick
Does it cover the topic in the necessary depth?	
Is it relevant to my audience?	
Does it tell my audience what they need to know/do?	
Is it free?	
Is it independent?	
Is it accurate?	
Is it updated regularly?	
Can my audience access it?	

If information already exists that meets the needs of your audience you could think about signposting to it, distributing it to your clients – or if it could be a little better, approaching the organisation to work together on producing updated versions.

What are you trying to do?

Information initiatives will have a range of objectives and outcomes. Some try to raise awareness or increase understanding, others try to get people to take a particular action, or guide people though a process, etc.

Be clear what your objectives and outcomes are.

Keep them firmly in mind, from the planning stages right through the production process.

Information with only one objective is often the most effective.

However, much of the time you will have more than one objective. For example, you might be trying to raise awareness of a change at the same time as meeting your legal requirements, or trying to get people to take a particular action at the same time as meeting the needs of your organisation.

Where you have more than one objective, decide which is the most important and rank them in order.

There may be times when the needs of each purpose will conflict, and you will need to put the most important one first.

Once you know what you are trying to achieve, you can begin to work out what the information will look like, what format you should use, the length and level of detail, the structure, and what the information actually needs to say. These things should also be influenced by the needs of your audience.

Definitions of the most common objectives follow, with an overview of successful techniques you can use to achieve them.

Raise awareness

Awareness-raising material draws the audiences' attention to a problem, service, or law. It reaches out to the audience, rather than requiring the audience to look for it. It doesn't include detailed information.

Give the user just one instruction.

This is often where to go for more information or help.

Short, eye-catching materials are most effective.

Think about what format will attract the most notice from your target audience, for example – posters, bookmarks, beer mats, flyers, and postcards.

Where can you put your message so that your audience will see it? How will you promote your new material?

(See ***How will you reach your audience?*** on p70.)

Another option is to try to get coverage of your message in media used by your target audience. This can be time-consuming work, often with little certainty of success, but it can pay huge dividends. See ***Promotion*** on p71 for more.

Example

ASA Advicenow's LivingTogether campaign

How to produce better information

Increase understanding and knowledge

This is the classic type of law-related information. It will discuss the issue in more depth and can discuss options, and go into the complexities of the subject to a level that is appropriate for the audience.

Even in brief information, it is helpful to include an overview of the topic and outline the key points.

Express your information in terms and situations relevant to your target audience.

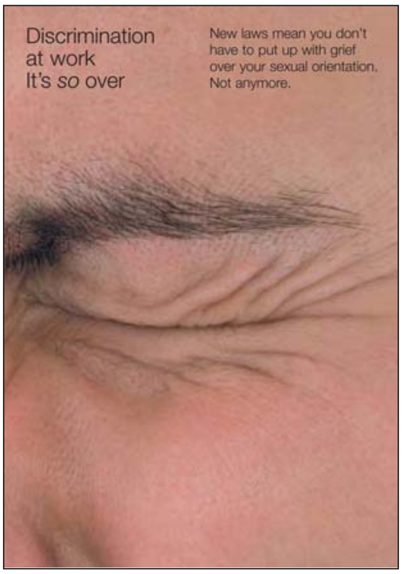
We know that people only look at information that they immediately recognise as being for them, and understand the importance of. This can be done by using:

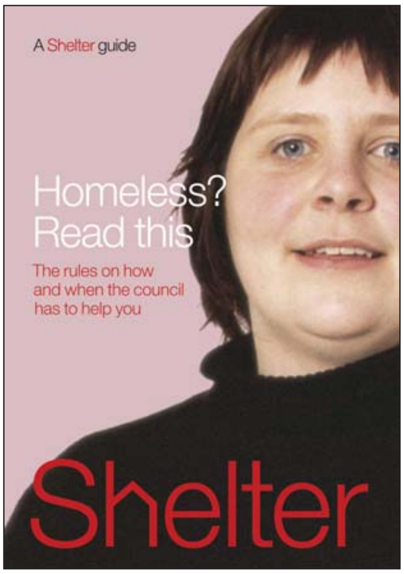
- Case studies and vignettes.
- Photos and images.
- Problem pages or questions and answers (with the questions written from the readers' perspective). These also allow readers to find the information they are looking for easily.

Examples

Stonewall 'Discrimination at work – it's so over'

www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/Stonewall_Employees_English_Final.pdf





Shelter guide 'Homeless? – Read this'.
The rules on how and when the council has to help you.

http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/advice_topics/homelessness/downloads/guide_homeless.pdf

Guide people through a process

This type of information tries to guide the audience through a process or show them how they can use their rights in practice.

The information needs to reflect the audience's situation and how the problem appears to them.

The crucial questions are:

- What is their starting point?
- What do they need to do?
- In what order do they need to do it?

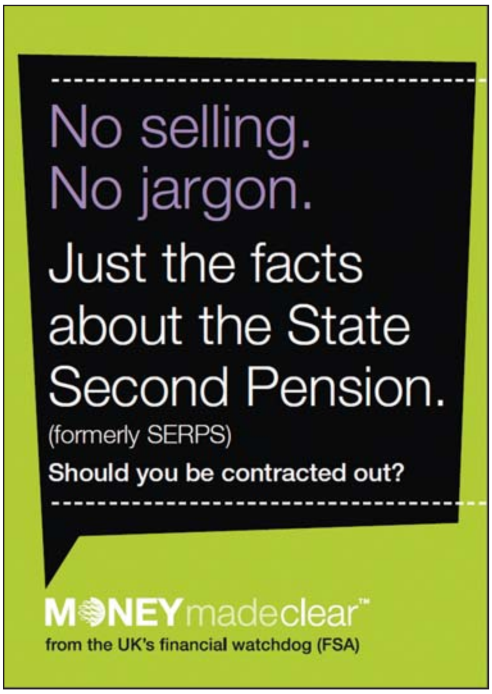
Better information will (where relevant):

- Be structured into manageable chunks that follow the steps the reader needs to take.
- Discuss key points the reader should consider, for example the pros and cons of taking action.
- Include ways to solve problems that aren't necessarily laid down in law – for example, informal negotiation or writing to your MP.
- Explain where to go, what to do, and who to see. Include enough detail to be useful. For example, rather than just saying 'apply to the DWP'; be more explicit. For example, 'you can apply by visiting your local benefits office of jobcentre+, calling the helpline, or get help from a local advice agency. You can find details of your local advice agency…'
- Include simple tips for dealing with the problem such as 'photocopy documents', 'write down the name of the person you spoke to', 'keep the receipt' etc.
- Include things like sample letters, forms, and budget plans where relevant.
- Explain where to get more information, advice and support. A list of useful contacts is important, but organisations should also be mentioned in relevant places in the text. The best information will offer enough detail about the contacts so that readers can be confident they are approaching the right service.
- Show readers how to prepare for an event such as an interview, assessment, or tribunal. For example, suggest readers make a note of everything they want to say, tell them what to take etc. Where suitable, include suggested questions to ask.
- Explain how readers can access good legal help and be confident that it is good. And, if relevant, how to avoid less reputable assistance.

Examples

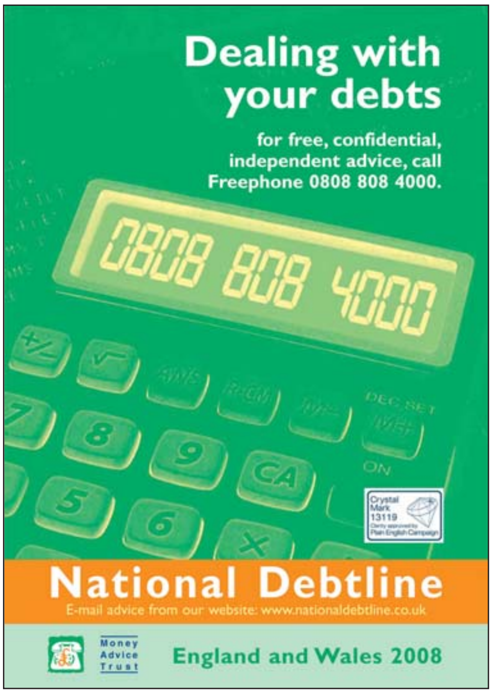
FSA 'Just the facts about the State Second Pension. Should you be contracted out?'

www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk/pdfs/contracting_out.pdf



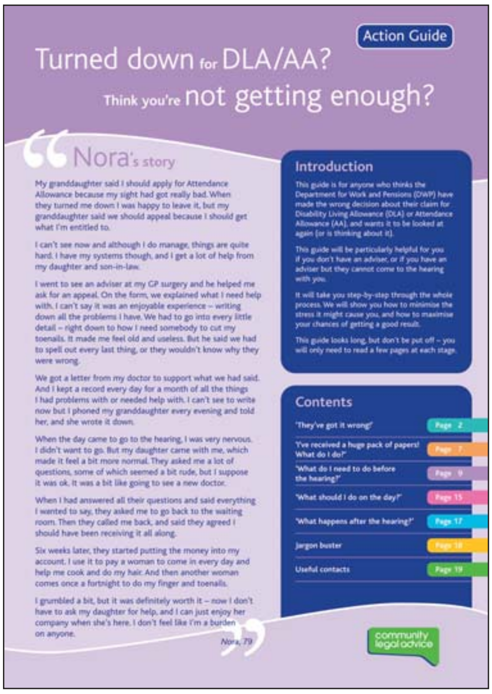
National Debtline 'Dealing with your debts'

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/england_wales/pdf/self_help_pack/full_pack.pdf



Example

Community Legal Advice / ASA Advicenow
'Turned down for AA/DLA? Think you're not getting enough?'
www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk/media/15A/FC/advicenow_dla.pdf



Offer support

This type of information tries to deal with the emotional impact of the situation or problem. This work is based on the understanding that law-related problems sometimes cause a great deal of stress, and often arise because of a stressful or upsetting situation. For example, arranging a care home place, and making child contact arrangements after a separation, both come at an upsetting and stressful time.

Some guides predominantly offer support, with law-related information taking a back seat. Others integrate support into a publication that clearly has the law-related information at the centre. Both methods can be very effective.

There are clear advantages to addressing these feelings in your information because how the audience feels about the problem will usually affect how they deal with it, and whether they deal with it at all.

Speak to members of your audience or intermediaries about the emotions your audience will be feeling and directly address them.

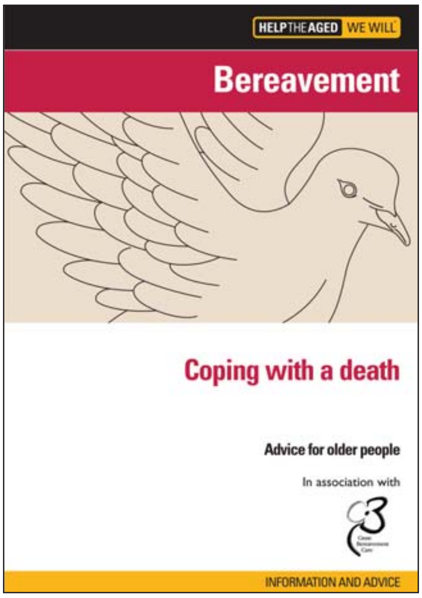
Show your audience that you recognise and accept their emotions and, if appropriate, help your audience to find ways to cope with them.

See What sort of tone is most appropriate? (p39)

Example

Help the Aged 'Bereavement'

www.helptheaged.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/38E4EFAD-DC3A-4DE0-B634-A9CBDB9D4C64/0/bereavement_adv.pdf



Get people to take action

This type of information is aimed at getting your audience to take a particular action (for example, to claim a benefit, or make a will). It needs to go further than simply make them aware of the issue or explaining the processes they need to follow.

It seems to be human nature to put things off.

You will need to motivate your audience to take action sooner rather than later. Explain the benefits of taking the action and flag these up at the very beginning of your information.

Research what it is that prevents people from taking the action, and address these in your information.

Ideally, include this early on in the information. For example, if you found that people don't make a will because they assume their possessions will go to their loved ones even if they don't, explain what will happen to their possessions if no will is made. Consider using a case study or vignettes to show what has happened to other people when their relatives didn't make a will. If you find that people don't do it because of the expense, explain how much it costs and any ways of minimising the cost.

It is usually best to use directive language so they feel they are being spoken to personally.

But be careful with this technique – it can sound a little bossy.

Examples

ASA Advicenow 'Living Together Agreements'

www.advicenow.org.uk/livingtogetheragreements.pdf/

livingtogether Agreements

Sandra hadn't considered what would happen if she and Adam split up...

Adam and Sandra had been living together happily for two years in a rented flat and, as she recalls: "We were suddenly given notice on the property we were renting. We had to decide very quickly whether to rent again or buy."

Amidst a whirlwind of quick decisions, they found a stunning two bedroom flat with a mature garden and sea view that captured her heart and his imagination. Sandra paid the £10,000 deposit on their brand new des res by the sea. Adam, a self-employed architect, drew up plans to re-design the downstairs, project-managed the extension and transformed a pokey kitchen into a bright, airy space with panoramic windows. The home improvements ultimately rocketed the value of the flat to £250,000, a massive profit even after costing in the building work.

They lived happily together for 5 years, sharing the monthly mortgage payments and gradually making their house and garden perfect. "Then, out of the blue, he dumped me." She winces. "He said he'd met another woman. I immediately moved out. For a year I stayed with friends, sleeping on the floor if necessary while he carried on living in our flat. I suddenly had no home, but what was even harder was not having anything! We hadn't discussed how the furniture, crockery, cutlery, gardening equipment, cost of landscaping, curtains or even the rugs would be divided. Everything stayed in the flat with Adam and I was so emotional, the last thing I wanted to do was go round and face him, start trying to negotiate or take legal action."

The wrangling over possessions and the flat took months, until she ran out of energy. They agreed he would put the house on the market but she says: "Strangely, it didn't sell even though everything else seemed to be selling fast..."

Eventually she found a buyer but on the day of the sale Adam declared he wouldn't go through with it, he wanted to keep the flat.

Finally Sandra caved in – she had no power to sell the house against his wishes without going to court over it. She says: "As long as I had to keep going back I couldn't move on." She demanded that he paid her half the asking price (less the money he had been paying on the mortgage since they split up), but she never received it. Now she has settled for a sum that's not even half that amount.

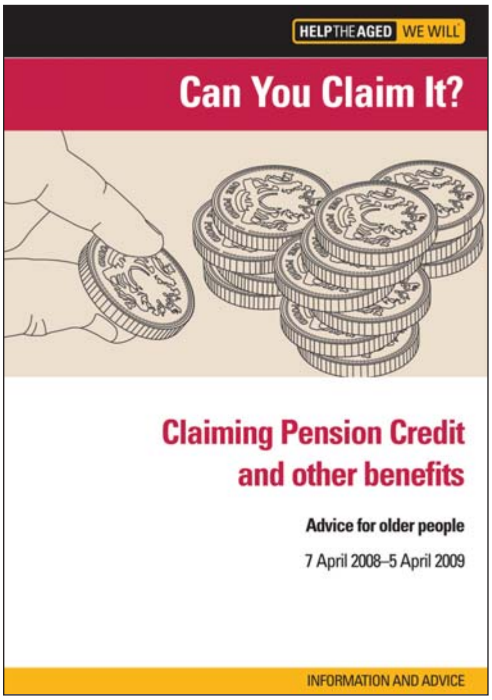
If Sandra and Adam had made a living together agreement it could have been a very different story, with much less heartache and a fairer result. They would have already set out how the house and furniture would be divided if the relationship hit the rocks, and what they would do if one of them didn't want to sell. It could have been locked away out of sight and forgotten about, and only dug out if things went wrong.

If your relationship ends, even if there is little animosity, the emotional turmoil involved means that few people are up to negotiating. Many people do just as Sandra did, and give up. She recalls: "I fell in love with the idea of being in love... and no one else talked about what could happen, so neither did we."

"I was so emotional, the last thing I wanted to do was go round and face him, start trying to negotiate or take legal action ..."

Contents

advicenow.org.uk/livingtogether



Help the Aged 'Can You Claim It?'

www.helptheaged.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/11EA581E-D51D-41FC-BC95-C4F04B88D5C7/0/can_you_claim_it_adv.pdf

How to produce better information

Meeting your organisation's requirements

This objective is slightly different in that it will never be your primary aim in producing a piece of information. However, it is something most of us have to do as part of our projects.

Strong branding enhances the awareness and perception of your organisation, and with it, people's willingness to turn to your information and trust it.

Conflicts of interest

It is vital that meeting these needs doesn't reduce the efficacy of the information for the audience. Sometimes, there may be a conflict between the requirements of your organisation and the needs of your audience. For example, the house style might be inappropriate for your audience, or your organisation might want to include campaign messages which portray your users as victims rather than empower them.

This can be difficult, but the deciding factor should be the immediate needs of the users of this particular piece of information. Sometimes they will want to know that you are campaigning for a change in the law, but at other times, this will be confusing and detract from your message.

Most organisations have different audiences for different services and publications, and so you should adapt styles and messages to suit those different audiences.

Who is it for?

Working through the steps already outlined should have helped you to establish how the issue affects people, and what you are trying to do about it. Next, you need to think in more detail about who it is for and what their needs are.

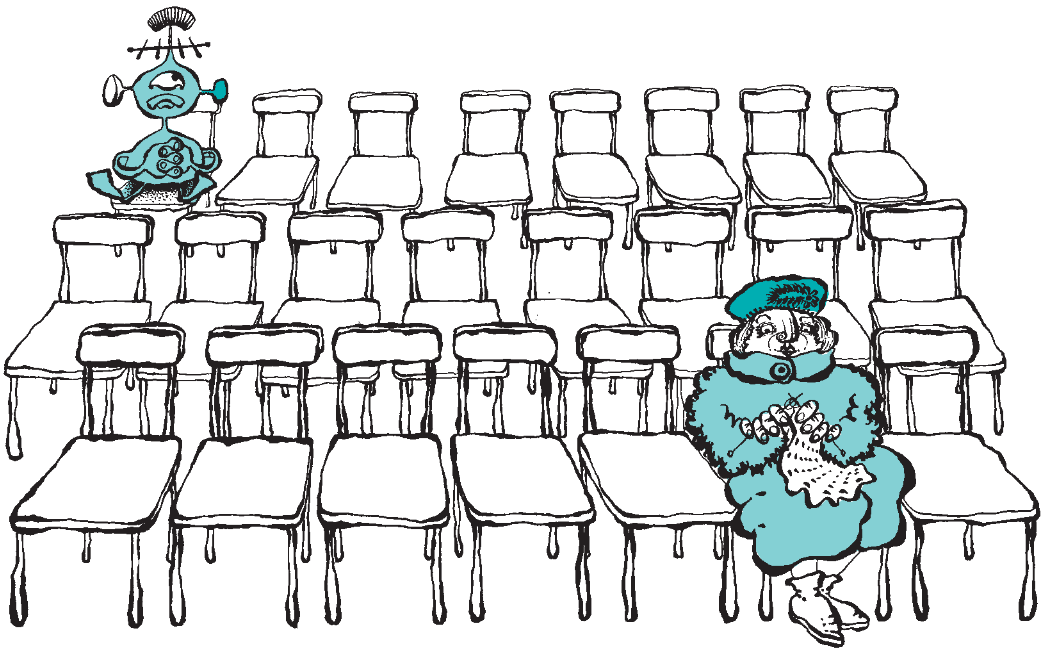
Who are your audience?

It is important to be clear about who you are aiming your information at. Sometimes your target audience will be determined by your organisation – you may have a clearly defined client group you are trying to reach. At other times, it will be determined by the issue or what you are trying to do. If you are trying to help clients deal with a problem or use a process, it may be that the problem is predominantly experienced by a particular group.

Information materials sometimes fail when they try to cater for too broad an audience, or don't try to cater for any specific audience at all.

The more targeted and specific you are, the more effective your information is likely to be.

Once you have decided who your audience is, you need to work out what their needs are.



Too broad an audience, or no specific audience at all…

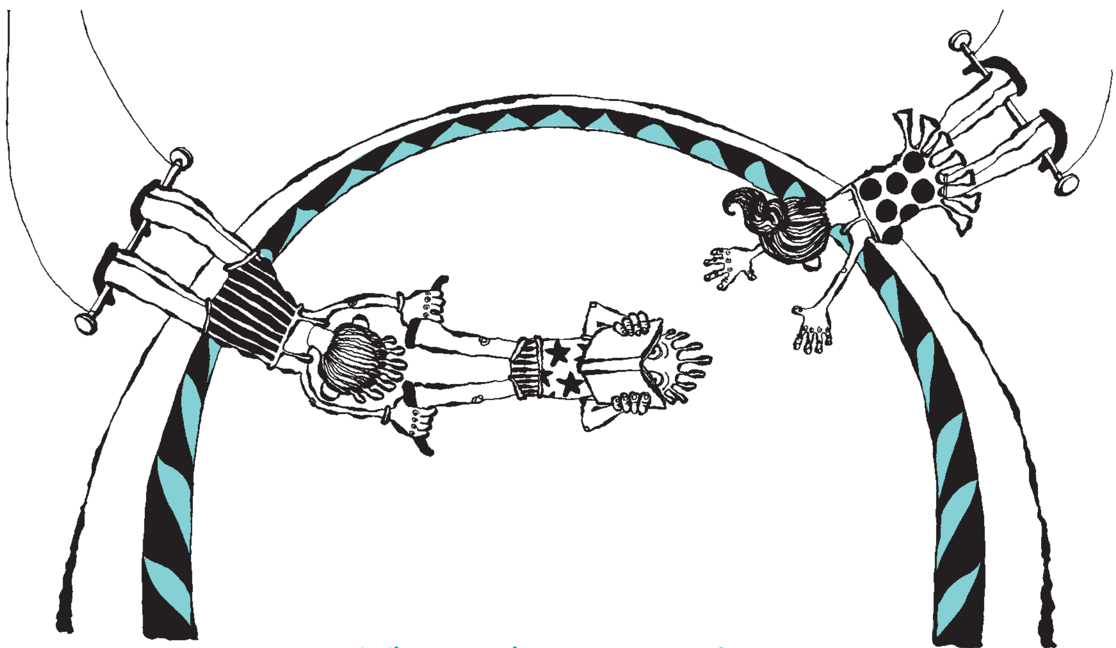
What is their situation?

Your information will be much more effective if you address the person in their real situation, rather than assuming that the problem and its solution happen in isolation.

Addressing the realities of the user's circumstances will make your information more relevant and recognisable to your audience.

Frequently, your audience's situation may affect how the situation occurred, how it can be resolved, and how information should be conveyed to them. For example:

- **Emotional events** – for example, bereavement, redundancy, divorce, leaving care, etc.
  We know that emotions can affect people's readiness and ability to absorb information and take action. If you're producing information around a life event, think about what stage of the process the majority of your readers will be at when they get your information. Reflect this in both the content and tone of the information. Address what they feel, as well as what they need to know and do.
- **Demographics** – age, gender, education, income, ethnic background, etc.
  Socio-economic factors can influence people's likes and dislikes, understanding of particular topics, knowledge of systems, and confidence in engaging with Government agencies and other organisations. All of these may play a part in solving their problem or enabling them to get the best result from the process.
- **Barriers** – access, discrimination, language, etc.
  Does your audience (or elements of it) experience barriers that will make it harder for them to use the process, other help and support, or your information? Failing to address these issues could result in your information being irrelevant.



What is their situation?

Dangers of stereotyping

Be aware of the dangers of stereotyping. You need to make sure that you understand their problems and circumstances properly.

Research your audience's situation.

You may find these resources helpful:

- National Statistics
- The Economic and Social Research Council Question Bank
- Organisations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- The campaign sections of the websites of relevant charities.

Ask intermediaries about the audience's situation, or ask the audience themselves by setting up a focus group.

What is your audience capable of and comfortable with?

There's no point producing a shiny new information product that your audience can't make use of or relate to. It's vital that you know what your audience will understand, are capable of, and feel comfortable with.

For example, some audiences will have no problem writing a letter – and because they won't find it too difficult, they probably won't put it off. But for many groups, writing the letter will be hard; some won't be capable of doing it without help, others will do it but less well than they could have with some help, and others will just keep putting it off. By including guidance on how to write the letter and what to put in it, the information will increase the audience's capacity to deal with their problem (and possibly to deal with future problems).

Think about what skills your audience needs to resolve the problem or use your information.

Investigate whether most of your audience will have these. For example, look for research into literacy levels and writing ability.

Ask intermediaries what they think your audience needs to do, and what people can manage without help.

Pilot a draft with your audience.

(See ***How will you ensure it meets the needs of your audience?*** on p41)

Hitting the headlines

A National Audit Office report into Department for Work and Pensions leaflets[13] hit the headlines in 2006 when it found that people often needed a reading ability above the national average to understand them.

To make matters worse, leaflets for pensioners and disabled people were only available at one in five offices, and where they were available, it was particularly difficult for wheelchair users to access information without help.

What other information and help can they access?

In order to signpost effectively, you need to be sure what other resources your audience can access. If you signpost readers to help they cannot get they are likely to be confused and frustrated.

Research access to services for your audience.

What services are available may differ widely across the country. Make sure, as far as possible, you signpost to services your audience can access and provide alternatives.

Make sure the services you refer them to are appropriate for your audience.

Will they be willing to use them? For example, some groups are unwilling to engage with mainstream services like social services, the council, or the police.

If you are referring to information that involves using technology, consider how many of your audience will have the skills and confidence to access it.

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13 Department for Work and Pensions: Using leaflets to communicate with the public about services and entitlements – National Audit Office, January 2006. www.nao.org.uk/publications/0506/dwp_using_leaflets_to_communi.aspx

Think about any disability issues.

Will your audience be able to read the small print or is there a larger print version you can signpost them to? Will they have the dexterity necessary to access the information in that format, or is there another format you could point them to?

If in doubt, ask your audience.

(See ***How will you ensure it meets the needs of your audience?*** on p41)

What sort of language is most appropriate?

The most appropriate and accessible language and style will obviously depend on who your audience is.

Consider the reading age of the least able in your audience.

You can research the average reading ages of different groups using the statistics on the Literacy Trust's website – **www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/stats/keystatistics.html**

For most audiences, you should:

- Keep sentences short. Make only one point per sentence.
- Address the reader as 'you'.
- Use active verbs and directions.
- Choose language that is used in everyday speech.
- Avoid jargon. But, if your readers will encounter jargon when trying to deal with their problem, explain what it means.
- Keep paragraphs short.

Many people, including those with dyslexia, find bullet points or numbered lists much easier to deal with than lots of continuous prose.

Where to find out more:

The Plain English Campaign has much more information and help: www.plainenglish.co.uk

Some groups and communities will have specific communication needs. For most of these groups, there are good practice guidelines available for you to use. There are some examples below.

For people who are blind or partially sighted:

RNIB – See it right guidelines:
www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_seeitright.hcsp

For people with learning difficulties or low literacy:

Equality and Human Rights Commission – formerly the Disability Rights Commission (DRC)
Easy read guide – how to use easy words and pictures:
www.equalityhumanrights.com/Documents/Disability/General_advice/How_to_use_Easy_Words_and_Pictures.pdf

For people who are deaf or hard of hearing:

RNID – Producing information for deaf and hard of hearing people:
www.rnid.org.uk/information_resources/factsheets/deaf_awareness/factsheets_leaflets/producing_info_4_deaf_people.htm

The information needs of black and minority ethnic deaf and hard of hearing people:
www.rnid.org.uk/information_resources/factsheets/your_rights/factsheets_leaflets/the_information_needs_of_black_and_minority_ethnic_deaf_and_hard_of_hearing_people.htm

If you are writing for an audience not included above, try searching the web. A Google search on 'information needs' reveals research and good practice guides on the information needs for many groups – from stroke survivors to Scottish jurors! You may find that somebody has already done some of the hard work for you.

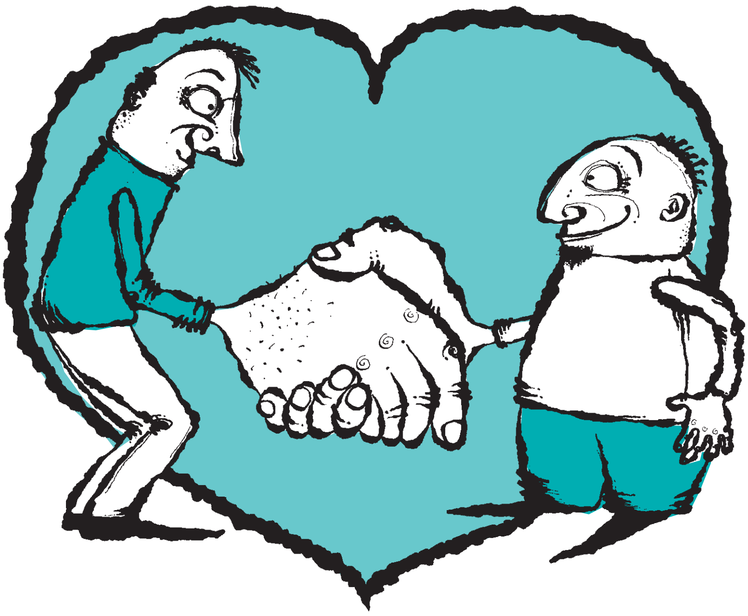
Use the checklist below to help ensure you've got the language right for your audience:

- Pilot a draft with users.
- Ask intermediaries.

What sort of tone is most appropriate?

After considering what type of language to use, you need to consider what tone is appropriate. For example, information for children moving into foster care will need a different tone and style than information for leaseholders on buying the freehold of a property. The leaflet for children will need to use a tone that takes into account the complicated emotions the user will be feeling, as well as the lower reading age. Information for leaseholders can use a more business-like voice.

Your tone may also be affected by the purpose of your information. You may want to encourage users to stand up for themselves and their rights, in which case a feisty tone might be suitable. In other situations, you may wish to encourage users to solve their problem by taking a more conciliatory approach, in which case a less feisty tone might be better. And if you are producing information for people who will be experiencing very strong emotions, you will need to take those emotions (stress, loss, grief, anger, fear, etc) into account when selecting your tone.



A more conciliatory approach…

- **Speak to intermediaries about the tone you should take.**
  (See ***Ask intermediaries*** on p22)

- **Pilot the material with users to ensure you've got it right.**
  (See ***How will you ensure it meets the needs of your audience?*** on p41)

- **Consider having it peer reviewed for tone by an appropriate organisation.**

How they do it

Shelter Scotland ensures that their information for people experiencing domestic abuse is checked by Scottish Women's Aid for tone, after it has been peer reviewed by a lawyer to ensure it is legally accurate.

How will you ensure it looks relevant to your audience?

Research has shown that users dismiss information that doesn't look relevant to them. As far as possible, your information needs to look like it is aimed at all of your target audience.

Use case studies and examples. (See p56)

Stories about people can be used to introduce both situations and people that the reader relates to.

Use images.

Try and include images of people from a range of backgrounds and in a variety of situations.

Pilot your draft with a range of intended users to ensure that they feel it is appropriate to them. (See p41)

How will you ensure it meets the needs of your audience?

The best way to help ensure that you meet their needs is by asking users what they think of your material during the production process. This is generally referred to as 'piloting' your information.

Schedule in time to pilot a draft with a group of end users.

You might do this by asking users for their views via a questionnaire or by hosting a focus group.

Usually you will primarily want to discover if your information is understood by your users, or if there is anything you have missed that would be helpful. A piloting exercise can also provide guidance on your approach, or answer specific questions which have arisen during the production process.

As far as possible, you should take account of all the responses you get. If you just go with the consensus of the group, you may exclude the views of those in your audience with the least understanding and capability.

Be aware that it is usually difficult to create a pilot group that is representative of all your users. People who volunteer to take part may well be more confident and have a better understanding of the issue than many people you are trying to reach. You may be able to get a more representative group by inviting particular individuals to take part. What method you use is also likely to make a difference. Experiment!

It is often useful to pilot a version with advisers as well.

Be aware that participants are likely to influence each other in a group setting.

For guidance on how to design a self-completion questionnaire see p 81.

ASA Advicenow/Ministry of Justice

The Ministry of Justice asked ASA Advicenow to produce a leaflet for advisers and solicitors on the new Mental Capacity Act. The timescale for producing the leaflet was tight and it was difficult to find the time to pilot, but it paid dividends.

Simple questionnaires were sent to 20 users. It was striking how diverse the responses were. Some were asking for references to detailed legal information, whilst others wanted greater explanation of basic themes. This confirmed anxieties that advisers and solicitors needed different information.

It was decided that solicitors should be catered for separately, and the leaflet was refocused to meet the needs of advisers.

What format should you use?

Most organisations tend to produce information using the same delivery mechanism and format each time. And of course, we are usually constrained by budget, available technology and staff expertise. But the needs and preferences of the audience should, as far as possible, be the main factor in deciding what delivery mechanism and format you use. For example, is your audience comfortable with written information? Do they have easy access to the internet? Are they more comfortable with paper leaflets or web pages?

All formats have pros and cons.

Paper information

Traditionally most information on the law and rights has been produced as leaflets or factsheets. Most people are comfortable with information in this format. Some groups seem to place extra trust in printed materials.

There are other benefits to paper information. They can be easily passed on to others, or taken to places, making it easy to use them to explain your rights to others (including the person you are in dispute with). Paper resources which are displayed in public areas and taken into people's homes are a good way of getting your logo seen.

However, they are also expensive to produce and are only accessible to people who go to places where they are available. In order to get maximum value for money you have to ensure that you only print as many leaflets as you can distribute during the period that the content remains accurate. This is a very hard calculation to get right, and money is often wasted.

Printed materials are not accessible to many people with visual impairments, who need an alternative format.

See ***What will it look like?*** on p66 for information on design.

Online written information

Increasingly, written information is available over the internet. This is a great way to reach lots of people and publish and update information more cheaply. And, if you have a good search engine rating, your information can be found by anybody who needs it. Being online, you also have the option of making your information interactive. You can provide links to all other useful resources and can use calculators, decision trees, and online forms etc. If you have staff time available, you can even answer questions from users.

If you follow web accessibility guidelines, your information will be accessible to people with a visual impairment or dyslexia.

Access to the internet is still increasing, but there will always be those who can't afford or don't want internet access. These will include some of the most vulnerable groups, and their needs will have to be met by other methods of dissemination.

It is very easy to underestimate the costs and staff time involved in maintaining links to other help and ensuring the information remains up to date.

See ***What will it look like?*** on p66 for information on design.

Other formats

There are many other ways of presenting information beyond the mainstream formats of online and printed information. Audio files or DVDs work for a broad audience. Other formats are for people with particular needs, for example, Braille, Moon, BSL videos, or easy to read.

When deciding what format to produce your information in, think about your target audience. What suits them best? Where are they most likely to pick up information? Will that format suit all of them?

Usually, not all your audience will be able to make use of any one format or delivery mechanism. For example, a sound file on the web will be accessible to most of your users who have access to the internet, but you should also make a written transcript available for people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

How they do it

Help the Aged's main audience is older people, but carers and relatives also use their information. Eyesight generally deteriorates with age and older people are less likely to have internet access. Help the Aged produces its full range of information on paper in a clear print format with larger than average type as well as online. It also produces a selection of its most popular and relevant titles on audio tape. Help the Aged puts aside a small budget for reasonable one-off requests from individuals for other formats, for example, Braille.

✔ **Produce your information in a format that most of your audience can access.**

✔ **Think about what other formats may be commonly used by your audience and, where possible, produce your information in those formats too.**

Put aside a small amount of budget for one-off requests for other formats.

Promote the fact that other formats are available.

Develop an alternative format policy

Adopting a standard approach to meeting the needs of your audience will help you to assess requests for other formats from individuals.

You can find more information on alternative formats on the RNIB website:
www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_method.hcsp

Examples of audio files

ASA Advicenow:
www.advicenow.org.uk/top-tips-for-the-appeal-hearing/

Learn Direct:
www.learndirect-advice.co.uk/podcasts/previous/audio-exoffenders/

Examples of DVDs

HM Court Service:
www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/infoabout/attend/witness/going-to-courts-witness.htm

Law Centres Federation:
www.lawcentres.org.uk/news/detail/pride-not-prejudice/

What are your legal obligations on accessibility?

We all want to reach as many people as possible, particularly those who may face barriers because of discrimination, where they come from, or a disability. We also have legal obligations to make information more accessible to these groups.

'Reasonable adjustment'

Public, private and voluntary organisations have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to help people access their information. For example, if someone with a visual impairment contacts your organisation because they can't access your printed or online information, you should think about how you could reasonably meet their needs.

What is reasonable depends on things like what is practical for your organisation, and how much it will cost. You should consider the cost against the overall budget of your organisation rather than the individual budget for your department or project, as this is what the courts look at.

For more information on reasonable adjustments and the Disability Discrimination Act:
www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/serviceproviders/pages/areasofresponsibility.aspx#Making%20reasonable%20adjustments

'Positive duty'

Public bodies, and voluntary organisations with contracts to carry out services for them, have a positive duty to promote equality for disabled people, between men and women, and to eliminate racial discrimination.

You can view a round up of equalities legislation here:
www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5145524

Should it be available in other languages?

As discussed on p16, producing information in languages other than English is a difficult issue and financial constraints make it even tougher.

We are probably all agreed that, in an ideal world, information on every issue would be available to everybody in a language and format that they could best access it. In this imperfect world, we need to look at whether or not translation is an effective use of resources (if any can be found).

This calculation should, like everything, be based on the needs of your target audience. Gauge how many of your target audience will not have good enough English to use the information in English. If it was translated, would it meet the need of the remaining group? Which languages would the information have to be available in for you to reach all of your target audience? How will you get your translated information to those that need it? Consider this against the cost of translation, and of any extra printing and distribution.

Tips for researching whether to translate

Research what languages might be spoken amongst your audience.

There are no official statistics on most commonly spoken community languages in the UK. Languages spoken by immigrant communities can change rapidly with world events. The National Centre for Languages has gathered what statistics, surveys and census maps there are: www.cilt.org.uk/faqs/langspoken.htm

Ask intermediaries what languages they most frequently encounter.

Find out what languages are most often requested from your own organisation.

Will it work in translation?

The information you are considering translating should make sense and provide clear guidance as to what to do on its own. If it depends on lots of references to other documents which are not available in the appropriate language there may no point in translating it.

It may not be appropriate to translate written information into all languages. There may be low levels of literacy amongst the community (or the section of it you are trying to reach) that means that written information in any language is not particularly helpful.

Your organisation may not be recognised or particularly trusted by the speakers of the languages concerned.

Tips for translation

Form partnerships with community organisations.

This will help you:

- find out how best to present the information to that particular community;
- improve your visibility and credibility in that community;
- disseminate the information;
- get feedback on the usefulness of the information.

Employ translators who have an understanding of the issue and the needs of your target audience.

A bilingual adviser is a good bet.

Translations should be peer reviewed by somebody who is fluent in the relevant language and who knows the area of law or process you are covering.

Failure to check translations has led to some very embarrassing mistakes, few more amusing than Swansea Council's mistake when attempting to make a bilingual road sign. The council emailed the wording needed to their in-house translation service and assumed the reply they received was the translation. Unfortunately, it was an automated response saying "I am not in the office at the moment. Send any work to be translated". Welsh speakers must have been rather confused.

Idioms and technical language often have no direct translation.

In most circumstances, the most helpful thing to do is introduce readers to the English terms but explain them in the audience's own language.

Pilot the translation with users or intermediaries from the relevant community group(s).

Make it culturally appropriate

Translating information without adapting the content to make it culturally specific can sometimes prevent it from being fully understood by its intended audience.

Welsh language

The Welsh Language Board has lots of useful guidance on how to commission a translation:
www.byig-wlb.org.uk/english/using/pages/howdoicommissiontranslation.aspx

How will you produce it?

Once you are clear on the need for information, your purpose in producing it, who it is for, and what format you will use, you need to think about how you will go about producing it.

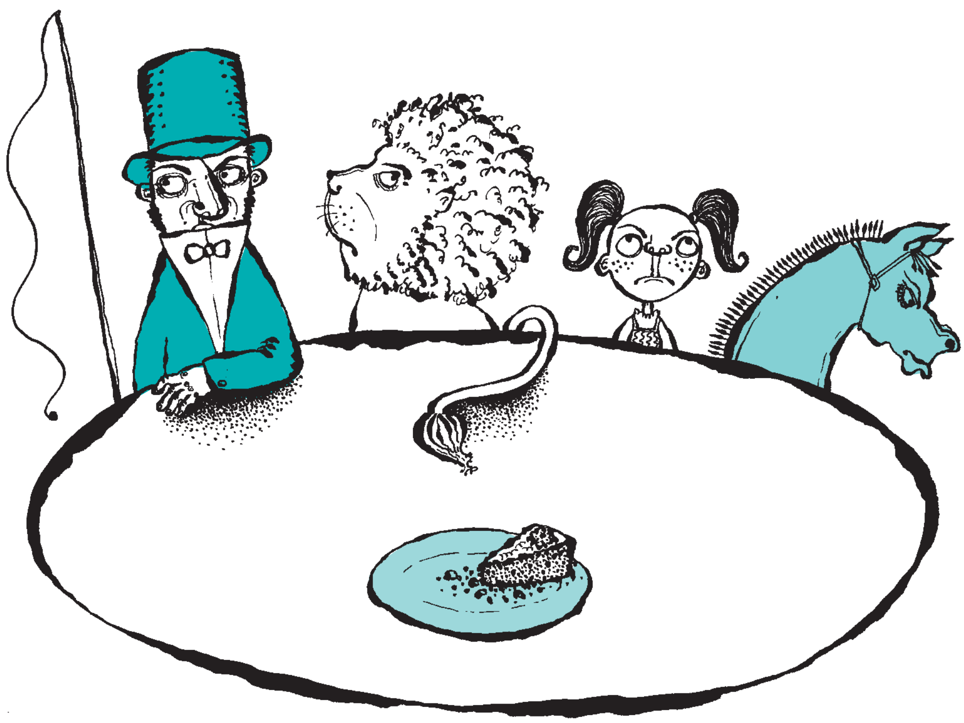
Who will write it?

The most effective combination is often to have both a writer and an editor who have a sound understanding of the issue *and* the audience's needs. This is not to say that both have to be an expert in the issue. Indeed, neither has to be, as long as they work in collaboration with one (this might be somebody who advises on content, a panel who comment on drafts, and/or a peer reviewer who ensures accuracy).

Everyone needs to be clear on exactly what their role is.

Give everyone involved a brief explaining their role, what you expect from them, and what you don't need from them. For example, ask the peer reviewer to comment on the accuracy of a draft. Make it clear that you don't need them to comment on the structure or punctuation.

Don't expect everyone to agree. This is important because there are often tensions between the different roles.



Tensions between the different roles…

One person needs to have the final say when disagreements arise.

A little compromise might lead to a better product, but too much of it and you could end up meeting nobody's needs. For guidance on how to decide what should and should not be included see ***What will you include?*** on p52.

If you are having problems, get a second opinion.

Ask advisers who help clients deal with the problem, or pilot the information with your users (p41).

What stages will you go through?

How will you actually go about producing your information? It's never as simple as just sitting down to write it.

Below is an example of a standard production process.

Project plan

Your project plan is where you lay out exactly what you want to do and how. Thinking through all the issues at an early stage will make the production process much smoother and mean that everyone involved will be singing from the same hymn sheet. You can use the Project Plan Builder on p85 to help you put your own plan together.

Outline

Your writer, perhaps in conjunction with an expert, should produce an outline showing a proposed structure for your information resource, including an overview of the main areas you want to cover. You may want to send your outline to intermediaries or other sections of your organisation for comments.

Drafts

The next stage is to flesh the outline out and produce a first draft. This draft can be sent to colleagues and intermediaries for comments. A second draft should be produced based on their feedback.

Pilot a draft with users (see p41). As well as making the information more useful for readers, piloting helps you to resolve any contentious issues and avoid unforeseen problems.

Peer review

Once you have a draft you're happy with, you need an expert to check it for accuracy. This shouldn't be someone who was involved in the production of the information. Generally, if you've engaged experts and intermediaries earlier in the process there won't be many surprises at this stage (although there is always room for a difference of opinion).

You may need to pay an expert to take on this role, but sometimes voluntary organisations or government departments are happy to do this as part of their job.

Depending on the issue, you may also want to check the information for tone (see ***What sort of tone is most appropriate?*** p39).

Pre-publication final check

You should also carry out a final check of contact details like addresses, telephone numbers, and URLs, as these may have changed during the writing process.

What will you include?

With any type of information, getting the level of detail right can be very tricky. Sometimes described as the Goldilocks conundrum, too much detail can be overwhelming and confusing for your audience, too little can leave them uninformed and frustrated.

Think about what the majority of your target audience will need to know, and take this as your starting point.

Decide what further details you should include by considering the potential benefits and risks to the user of including or excluding a particular issue.

Consider varying the level of detail in your resources.

For example, if there are exceptions that only some people will need to know about, put it in a different section or appendix, and signpost to it from the text (clearly saying who needs to look at it).

If you need everyone to read a particular detail, consider using a coloured text box.

Recent ASA Advicenow and CLA evaluations[14] found that some people assume the most important things are in the boxes and so always read them.

Check you have the level of detail right by asking advisers and intermediaries what they think. (See p22)

Pilot a draft with your users. (See p41)

14 'Turned down for DLA/AA? Think you're not getting enough?' and 'How to handle and interview under caution': An evaluation of ASA Advicenow self-management guides, 2008. And Community Legal Service Direct's 'A Step-by-Step Guide to Legal Aid': Key findings from a qualitative study, 2007.

How will you make the information easy to use?

We all know how hard it can be to make sure that the language you use is clear, the concepts make sense, and that the resource works as whole.

Use a clear structure

Think carefully about what order to present your information in and how users will find their way around it. The best structure for each project will depend on what it is you are trying to do (see ***What are you trying to do?*** on p24).

There are some general rules of thumb:

Don't put a lot of detail and exceptions at the very beginning.

Lawyers are sometimes very keen on this but it is not suitable for a public audience. It is better to give the reader an overview of the issues or draw the reader in with a case study. Too much detail at the beginning will overwhelm most readers[15], and only the very persistent will continue.

Wherever possible, deal with the issues in the same order that the user will have to.

For example, if you are providing information for the public on the provisions of the Mental Capacity Act, don't deal with them in the same order that the act does. Start from the perspective of the user who has realised that their relative is having difficulty making decisions[16].

Have lots of headings and make sure that they are clear and accurate.

Several studies make it clear that using lots of headings is very helpful to the reader. It improves the ease with which text can be used, and enables people to find, or re-find, the bit they need. It also increases the chance of the information being read in the first place[17].

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15 This was one of the key findings from Community Legal Service Direct's 'A Step-by-Step Guide to Legal Aid': Key findings from a qualitative study, 2007. They suggested dealing with necessary detail later in a publication.

16 The importance of this was highlighted in Linda Flowers' 1980 study, as quoted in Designing Public Documents: A review of research, by Elaine Kempson and Nick Moore, p20. More recently, evaluation of CLA leaflets has confirmed this is still popular and well understood by their audience.

17 Designing Public Documents: A review of research, by Elaine Kempson and Nick Moore, p32–33.

Bear in mind that the information will often not be used as a whole.

It will often be scanned for the answer to a specific question. This may mean that you need to repeat very important pieces of information (or refer the reader back to them) where relevant.

Have a simple contents list.

Contents lists are vital, particularly in longer information, in helping the user to find their way around[18]. They also give the user a good idea of what the information is about, but they should be kept simple. Long contents lists can be off putting[19] .

Most resources will include certain elements. Have a look at the list below to see which might be appropriate for your information.

- Contents list
- Introduction – to explain what is in the publication and give an overview of the issues
- Outline of the key legal/procedural points
- The central content (the substance of which will depend on what you are trying to achieve)
- Conclusion/summary
- Useful contacts list/further information
- Glossary/jargon buster.

Use a clear writing style

What constitutes a clear writing style will depend very much on who your audience is. See ***What sort of language is most appropriate?*** on p37 for more information.

If you're struggling, get an external editor

If you're struggling to translate technical language into user-friendly prose, or if your resource is too long or doesn't hang together, consider getting an external editor to give it a once over. See ***How will you produce it?*** on p49.

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18 Department for Work and Pensions: Using leaflets to communicate with the public about services and entitlements – National Audit Office review, 2006. www.nao.org.uk/pn/05-06/0506797.htm

19 Don Preddy's 1985 study, and MIL Research Ltd 1986 – as quoted in Designing Public Documents: A review of research, by Elaine Kempson and Nick Moore, p30.

Get feedback and pilot with users

To check that these techniques have worked, seek feedback from experts, intermediaries and users. See p22 and p41.

Work with your organisation

Information is sometimes produced in a sort of vacuum, away from other sections of the organisation. But developing good working relationships with other sections of your organisation can be a great help in producing effective information.

- If you have an advice team, work closely with them. They will have a clear idea of their clients' needs and the common pitfalls.
- Have regular meetings between information, advice and policy teams to share information. This could help ensure you produce information that is really needed, on the issues most important to your audience.
- If you have a communications team, you may be able to utilise their expertise with proof reading, editing, design, and print buying.

Working with other departments in your organisation can also raise the profile and understanding of your work within the organisation, which might bring other benefits.

What presentation techniques will you use?

There are many different ways to present information. Many organisations use Q&As, case studies, problems pages, flow charts, pictures, quizzes, cartoons, and other presentation techniques to get their message across.

Use a variety of presentation techniques.

It helps to grab and maintain reader interest and make the resource visually stimulating. Moreover, it caters for different people's learning styles and the ways that they best absorb information. It can also be an extremely effective way of reinforcing key messages.

Don't see it as an 'either/or decision'. For example, if you are producing information on what will happen if you die without a will, the best approach might be to explain the rules in text, show them as a flow chart, and have a short case study explaining what happened to one unlucky person.

Case studies

Case studies tell the story of a real person or a composite of people to explain the problem, and how they dealt with it.

Studies have shown that if you ask people to explain a legal point, they will very frequently put it into the context of a person experiencing a problem. This suggests that, for a lot of people, this is a natural way of taking in and retaining information[20].

Case studies can be used to:

- provoke interest and draw the reader in;
- help the reader identify with the information and recognise it as being relevant to them;
- illustrate a key point;
- give insight into the context of a particular problem, process, or piece of legislation;
- motivate the reader to take action.

20 This was shown in analysis by Linda Flowers and others. They asked readers to explain the meaning of parts of leaflets. Most did not paraphrase the leaflet or use easier words, they responded by putting the information into the form of a concrete story or event. As quoted in Designing Public Documents: A review of research, by Elaine Kempson and Nick Moore, p19.

Always be clear what you are trying to achieve with the case study. Have only one or two objectives.

If you are trying to grab a reader's attention, keep it short and breezy. If you are trying to illustrate how a process works or a legal point, you can go into more detail, but don't swamp them with unnecessary details.

Show some imagination.

Case studies don't need to be long or boring to do the job. They don't even need to look like a case study – they could take the form of a short quote, or a letter to a problem page.

Make sure the user understands what you're trying to do.

An ASA Advicenow evaluation found that sometimes readers were confused by the change in voice from text to case study[21]. Consider explaining clearly why you have included the case study. For example, 'Wondering what an assessment is like? Jay's story explains what happened at his.'

Don't include anything in the case study that isn't covered elsewhere.

Evaluations have found that some users never read case studies.

Examples

Tell us about the old days (page 3)

www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/revised_employee_guide_06_english_1.pdf

I tried to ignore it – Aisha's story

www.advicenow.org.uk/advicenow-guides/work/dealing-with-discrimination-at-work/i-tried-to-ignore-it-aishas-story-html,439,FP.html

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21 'Turned down for DLA/AA? Think you're not getting enough?' and 'How to handle and interview under caution': An evaluation of ASA Advicenow self-management guides, 2008.

Images

Images don't just brighten up your publication. Photos, illustrations, and cartoons can be very useful to:

- increase understanding;
- aid memory;
- sum up an issue or illustrate a key point;
- help the reader to identify with the information.

Similarly, graphics like ticks and crosses, thumbs up/down, road signs etc can be used to help the user find, or re-find, what they want more easily.

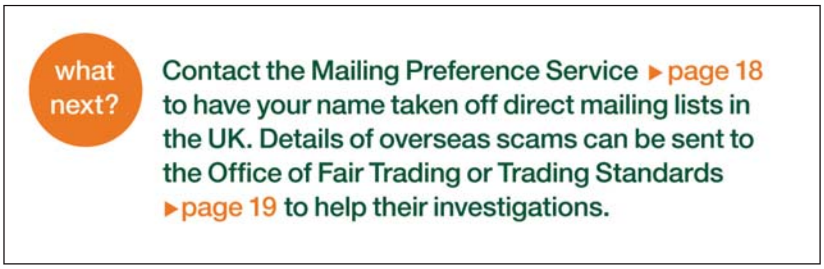
Examples

Three things that don't exist

www.advicenow.org.uk/livingtogetherintroduction/

'What next?' graphic in Age Concern's leaflet series –

www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/info_guide_17.asp


what next?

Contact the Mailing Preference Service ▸page 18 to have your name taken off direct mailing lists in the UK. Details of overseas scams can be sent to the Office of Fair Trading or Trading Standards ▸page 19 to help their investigations.

The people depicted in your photos or cartoons should be as diverse as your audience.

Use graphics and images that are recognisable to all your audience. For example, using British road signs might not work with new arrivals to this country.

Flow charts and decision trees

Flow charts can be a very effective way of showing the process or what the user needs to do to deal with their problem. Similarly, decision trees can make very light work of complicated information. Both offer a visual and often attractive way of imparting information, which may provide a welcome change in a document full of text. They are also more accessible to people with particular learning difficulties.

Try to avoid dealing with anything in a chart that isn't covered elsewhere.

Research has shown that flow charts and decision trees are well liked and very efficient – but only for those that understand them. A minority find them very hard to follow[22].

Decision trees can be a great way of dealing with complicated exceptions.

Try to keep them as simple as possible.

Show some imagination.

Flow charts don't need to look boring. One of ASA Advicenow's most popular leaflets deals with the divorce process in the format of a board game.

Examples

Which type of Child Trust Fund account for my child?

www.childtrustfund.gov.uk/Documents/toolkit_leaflet/toolkit%20leaflet%20-%20low%20res.pdf

Red wants to divorce Blue (page 9)

http://static.advicenow.org.uk/files/divorce-16-7-08-1-16.pdf

Interactive decision trees can be even easier to use, as readers only have to look at information that applies to their situation.

22 Hedges and Ritchie's 1986 study, and MIL Research Ltd's studies in both 1984 and 1986, as quoted in Designing Public Documents: A review of research, by Elaine Kempson and Nick Moore, p59–60.

Examples

Shelter's 'Tenancy checker'

http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/downloads_and_tools/tenancy_checker

Shelter's 'homelessness assessment'

http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/downloads_and_tools/does_the_council_have_to_house_you

Quizzes and Q&As

Quizzes and Q&As can be effective ways of explaining complicated concepts in manageable bite-size pieces. They also enable users to find the information they are looking for quickly[23].

If they are covering information imparted elsewhere, they also allow the reader to check their knowledge and to be corrected if they have misunderstood.

Questions should be direct, addressed to the reader or written from the reader's point of view.

(For example 'Can I take it back?' or 'Can you take it back?'). Or they can be combined with mini-case studies (for example, 'Can Pat take it back?'). The mini-case study approach works particularly well if you are dealing with popularly held myths or complicated exceptions.

Questions and answers should be as succinct as possible, or broken down into short sentences.

Examples

Age discrimination quiz

www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/5381300.stm

Who is breaking the law?

www.health-promotion.cdd.nhs.uk/breakingthelawquiz/

23 The National Audit Office found that customers particularly liked leaflets where information was in the form of questions and answers. Department for Work and Pensions: Using leaflets to communicate with the public about services and entitlements – National Audit Office review, 2006. www.nao.org.uk/pn/05-06/0506797.htm

Other presentation techniques

There are other techniques that are or could be effective. Be imaginative. If you pilot your information with your users, you will soon find out if it doesn't work.

Make sure that they are culturally relevant for all sections of your audience.

How will you ensure that it is accurate at the time of publishing?

Sometimes a piece of information can take months to get to the publishing stage. Addresses can change, rates go up, and new schemes introduced while you're busy debating phrasing with the expert. So you need to make sure that your information is accurate from the start and then carry out a last minute check just prior to publication.

Use reliable source material.

If you're doing some of the writing yourself it's important that you base your information on sources that you can trust and understand.

- Legislation, guidance, and codes of practice are the obvious places to look. For example, the College of Law use specialist legal textbooks and electronic legal information as the basis for their training pack materials. However, this kind of information can be difficult to penetrate if you're not legally trained.
- Information from government departments is usually easier to understand and should be reliable. There are of course exceptions. For example, in 2000 it was discovered that the government had been giving out incorrect information about SERPS (the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme) for years[24]. However, this was an aberration.

How they do it

The Public Information team at **Citizens Advice** uses Advisernet, the information system used by advisers in bureaux, to write their information. Advisernet is written by internal experts at Citizens Advice.

If you don't have access to these kinds of resources, ask an expert to put some source material together for you.

Keep a record of your sources.

Leaflets for the public shouldn't be splattered with references to legislation, but it's useful to keep a log of the source of all information for yourselves to help when answering queries and updating.

24 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/678592.stm

How they do it

Shelter Scotland keep a copy of all their webpages on file with notes explaining the source of the information.

If you have a panel of experts commenting on drafts, any inaccuracies are very likely to be spotted as soon as they creep in.

If you don't, you should try to check the accuracy of each draft yourself.

Ensure you have the information peer reviewed by an appropriate expert. (See p50)

How many nations?

Are you aiming your information at people in more than one country of the UK? If so, you need to be aware of differences in the rules for each nation.

- Make sure you speak to intermediaries and users from each country.
- Make sure your information looks relevant to people from all the nations included by using case studies and examples that explicitly include them.
- When signposting, include appropriate regional organisations, and check that 'national' organisations you signpost to really do cover the whole of the UK.
- Check that your peer reviewer is familiar with the situation in all the nations you are covering or have it peer reviewed separately for each country.

How will you ensure that it stays up to date?

Out-of-date information is of no help to your users and sometimes dangerous. It also reflects badly on the providing organisation. You need to make sure that your information stays current for its ‘shelf life’, whatever its format.

If you’re producing hard copies of resources (for example, leaflets or audio tapes), you need to produce only as many as you can distribute before you need to review the content again. This calculation can be complicated and mistakes can be costly.

This process is easier for information published online, but even then, you need time to plan staff time to carry out the review and make the changes.

Set a formal review date.

Schedule a review date while you’re working on the information. How frequently you review the information will depend on how often you think changes to the content will need to take place. Frequently, you’ll have a good idea of when things are likely to change. For example, did you include rates that will go up in April? Is there legislation going through Parliament that could affect the rules? etc.

How they do it

Help the Aged
‘We use several checklists and logging systems for updating. We also have a system for filing and sharing relevant press and legislation that could affect our information. This is a vital resource when we come to update.

We update on a rolling programme. All financial information is updated in line with budget changes. Other, less time-sensitive, information is reviewed at least every 18 months (schedules are put in place annually). If there have been changes to legislation or other developments, reviewing may be in-depth. At other times, we may only need to amend some address details (although everything would need to be checked to ascertain that). One member of the team will have responsibility for updating each title.’

Maintain an interest in the topic and keep checking for changes.

You will often be able to use some of the sources and techniques you used to research the problem during the planning stage.

Always date your information.

If you know when you plan to update it, include that date too so that your users know if they are using an out-of-date version.

If you have updated a resource, do your best to let your users and anyone who distributes your information know.

If you provide information on the web ensure your updated information has the same landing page/url. This will help anyone who has bookmarked or linked to your information. If your information is in the form of PDFs, check if it is being made available on any other sites. Let them know there is a new version.

How they do it

Shelter Scotland
'To keep our information up-to-date, we monitor legal and government websites (for example, the Office of Public Sector Information and the Scottish Government) on a daily basis to make sure we always know about any changes or developments which would affect our information. This is a really vital part of what we do to ensure our website remains accurate.'

What will it look like?

Users will make split-second judgements about your information based on its appearance. Research suggests that if it doesn't appeal to them, they will dismiss it – and all your careful planning and hard work will be for nothing!

So it's important to think carefully about design and positioning.

Style over substance?

A project in Camden, London involving pharmacists giving leaflets to their customers found that the design of the leaflet was vital. Leaflets that weren't attractive or where the cover didn't make the subject matter clear or appear relevant, were not used much. Design is important!

What to consider when getting information designed

This section applies to all paper information, including anything on the web that is intended for printing or downloading.

The 'look'

You need to think about what 'look' you want the resource to have. For example, are you hoping to look solid and authoritative, or eye catching and contemporary? The 'look' for leaflets or PDFs will be most defined by the front page.

Studies in the 1980s and 90s seemed to show that the use of colour on the cover has a significant impact.

People seemed to prefer attractive, brighter colours to uniform dark colours such as black or dark blue. Other studies showed that bold visuals or concrete objects on the cover were attractive[25]. More recently, the NAO concluded that the most popular leaflets had front cover images that made it clear what the leaflet is about, and who it is for[26].

In this, as in everything else, you need to consider the needs of your audience. For example, will your readers want to pick up a brightly coloured A4 leaflet on domestic violence?

25 Epstein 1981; MIL Research Ltd1984a; Research Business 1986; Campbell Keagan Ltd 1990, and Behavioural Research Consultants 1985. As quoted in Designing Public Documents: A review of research, by Elaine Kempson and Nick Moore, p28–9.

26 Department for Work and Pensions: Using leaflets to communicate with the public about services and entitlements – National Audit Office review, 2006. www.nao.org.uk/pn/05-06/0506797.htm

Size and composition

What size and shape do you want the resource to be?

There have been various studies about size and format of leaflets.

Although many of these were some time ago, it is likely that the findings still hold today. When it comes to paper information, people seem to prefer A5 or A4. Evaluations of CLA leaflets have found that their new size (100mmx 210mm) is also popular because it 'fits in pockets'.

Credit card-sized information also seems to be on the rise – evaluation of Shelter Scotland's fold out contacts card found the small format to be very popular with both users and the organisations who distributed them.

Broadsheet, concertina, and four sheet fold-outs should be treated with caution though as they seem to cause confusion about which order things should be read in.[27] They can also be more difficult for people with limited dexterity.

If you are producing a longer piece of information, consider ways in which you can break it up into manageable sections.

This should make it less daunting for users, and help them find their way around. An ASA Advicenow evaluation found that the use of different colours for each section was understood and warmly received by the public[28].

Accessibility

Clear design improves information for everybody as well as responding to the needs of people with a visual impairment or learning difficulty.

If you are producing paper resources, it is important to use clear design.

Clear design makes your information more attractive and more readable for everybody. It can also specifically help people with dyslexia, lower levels of literacy, older people, and people with a visual impairment.

You can find out more from:

RNIB
www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_printdesign.hcsp

Plain English Campaign
www.plainenglish.co.uk/designguide.pdf

27 Designing Public Documents: A review of research, by Elaine Kempson and Nick Moore, p27–8.

28 'Turned down for DLA/AA? Think you're not getting enough?' and 'How to handle and interview under caution': An evaluation of ASA Advicenow self-management guides, 2008.

Pages with a lot of white space on are popular.

People feel that they make things easier to understand. This is also particularly useful for people with dyslexia.

People who have dyslexia often find it easier to read information on matt paper in a pastel shade, rather than plain white paper.

Corporate or campaign requirements

Does your information have to reflect the image of your organisation or follow a corporate style guide? Is this appropriate for your audience and this topic?
See p32.

If you're not sure you've got it right, pilot a design proof with users.

(See ***How will you ensure it meets the needs of your audience?*** on p41)

What to consider for information on webpages

This section applies to all information on webpages.

How your information is presented on the web will depend on your website design and functionality. However, there are some tricks that should be possible on most sites.

Page length

It is even more important to keep it short on the web.

Studies have shown that people read between 25 and 40% slower from a screen than they do from paper.

Don't be afraid of longer pages for substantive information.

The received wisdom used to be that you should avoid long pages because readers don't like to scroll endlessly. However, there now seems to be a consensus that longer pages are ok, and certainly preferable to breaking up information that belongs together.

It seems that people don't like scrolling when they are searching for information, but are happy to scroll when they find information that meets their needs.

Consequently, it is best to keep initial pages short, but don't be afraid of longer pages for substantive information. For example, the BBC News site has most information above the scroll line on the home page, but news items are 500–700 words.

'Scanability' and positioning of key points

People don't tend to read the whole page on the web, they skim. Studies indicate that as little as 11% of people read a whole page on the web. We have to accept this and write with 'scanability' in mind.

Users tend to scan information on the screen in an 'F' pattern. Information at the top or left hand side of the screen is more frequently read than elsewhere.

- Put the most important information in the top two paragraphs, or in bullet points on the left hand side.

- Use lots of headings and subheadings.

  They should be meaningful and make it clear what the section is about. If readers don't understand the relevance of headings they are likely to assume the paragraphs below are not relevant to them.

- Putting two or three words **in bold** in the middle of a sentence will draw attention to key words.

  Don't overdo it though – readers become immune and it can make a page much harder and slower to read.

- If it's possible, put any other important information in coloured boxes or short paragraphs in bold on the side of the page.

Further help:

Plain English campaign
www.plainenglish.co.uk/websitesguide.pdf

RNIB
www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_clearlanguage.hcsp

How will you reach your audience?

With all the effort of producing the information, sometimes the act of getting it to the intended audience is overlooked. Boxes of excellent leaflets are sometimes left to gather dust in warehouses or cause trip hazards in small offices. Similarly, excellent information and innovative interactive games go undiscovered and unvisited on websites. So, it's crucial to plan and budget for dissemination.

Through your organisation

If your organisation works directly with clients, perhaps through an advice service or local groups, you may have a ready-made distribution network.

Ensure that everyone in your organisation who has contact with users knows about your information and can access it.

The same should go for staff in any partner organisations. Given most people's high-pressured working environments, it is usually worth telling them about it a second time a few months later.

Through intermediaries

Intermediaries (other professionals who encounter your target group as a part of their work) are ideal people to promote or distribute your information.

GP practices, advice centres, hospitals, schools, social services, registrars, youth workers, libraries, community groups, and countless other organisations can enable you to reach people you wouldn't otherwise be able to reach. They will often be happy to display or distribute your information if it is related to their work, or if it covers a problem that their clients encounter.

The value of using intermediaries in this way shouldn't be underestimated. It also has the added benefit of increasing the visibility and credibility of your organisation amongst professionals.

Consider making fliers and/or posters to advertise your information.

Intermediaries will often be happy to put these up or hand them out to relevant clients. This is particularly helpful if your information is provided on the web, rather than paper copies.

See p22 for more information on working with intermediaries.

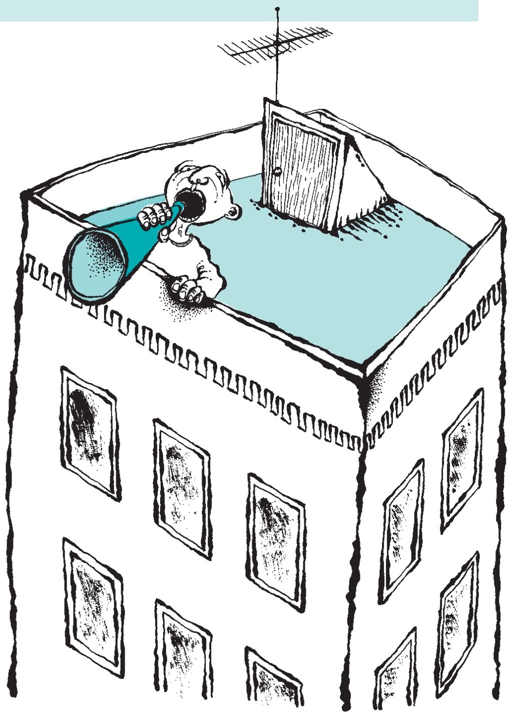
Tips for distribution

Storing and distributing paper information can cost a small fortune, so it's worth looking at ways of minimising the cost.

- Check if you can share distribution costs with others who also want to send information to your users.
- Consider avoiding sending information to users unsolicited. It can be irritating for users, may be a waste of money, and it may lower the perceived value of the resource.
- Monitor the number of requests for your information and the number distributed. This will help you keep track of interest in the publication and stock levels, and may be of interest to funders.
- If you haven't got one, think about setting up a formal system for recording who requests publications and when. You can use this information to get a better idea of who your users are, and patterns of use across a geographical area, sector or year. This will help you promote new and updated resources. Don't forget to follow Data Protection principles.

Promotion

It's important to promote your information so that people know about it. How you do this will vary depending on your budget, who the information is aimed at, what it is about, and probably the kind of organisation you work for. We've looked at how you can use your services and intermediaries, but there are also other options.



Promote your information...

✔ Consider starting a mailing to users or intermediaries that you could use to promote new and revised information.

✔ Get in touch with relevant networks or members organisations and let them know.

Ask them to include details of your information and how it can be accessed in their next mailing or on their website. For example, if you have produced a leaflet on divorce, you could promote it through members of Resolution and Relate.

Get in touch with any websites dealing with similar issues to make them aware of your fantastic resource and encourage them to link or signpost to it.

Consider trying to get your message in the media used by your target audience.

This is time-consuming work, often with little certainty of success, but it can pay dividends. It might be your best option if your target audience doesn't engage with any particular service.

If your information is on the web, it would be ideal if you could set aside time to work to increase your website's visibility on search engines.

This isn't quick and, for it to be effective, involves a lot of ongoing work. However, it will mean your information gets to more people. Charities may be able to get a professional to donate time to do this.

Tips for dealing with the media

- Tailor your approach to the amount of time and money you have available. If you have only very limited resources, it might be best to start local – contact your local papers, radio and TV stations. If you have more funds available, consider engaging the services of a PR company. This doesn't just give you access to their expertise but also their contacts.
- Write a press release and send it to journalists you have the name of. Follow it up with a phone call, and then phone again.
- If you can put them in contact with a real person who has experienced the problem who is willing to be interviewed (this can be under a pseudonym), you are much more likely to be successful.
- Don't give up. It may not work at all at the beginning, but that doesn't mean it never will. Build on the contacts you make, and keep your fingers crossed for a slow news day.

Be aware that the media won't be interested in every issue.

They love stories of when things go wrong, but are quite hard to interest in other types of story.

How will you monitor and evaluate it?

Monitoring

Monitoring is usually needed to provide project funders with evidence of project activity, achievements, and costs.

For typical funder requirements you will need to keep records of how many leaflets have been given out, or log the number of people who have accessed your information on the web. It may also include providing feedback forms with your information and analysing the results.

Direct feedback from intermediaries using the information, describing their own experiences and assessments will help too. (But bear in mind professionals will have their own particular perspective. They won't have as good an understanding of users' need as the users themselves.)

To monitor effectively you need to arrange for different activities to be recorded throughout the life of a project. For example:

- Staff and intermediaries could record how many times they give the information to somebody, and, if relevant, basic facts about that person (age, gender, ethnicity, why the information is relevant etc).
- You could ask users to fill in self-completion questionnaires – either by post or online (see p81 for guidance on designing self-completion questionnaires).
- Web usage statistics – The number of times information on the web is accessed, by how many different people, and where users have come from (search engines, links form other sites, coming directly to your site etc) will usually be recorded automatically.

Collecting basic facts is essential for both monitoring and evaluation.

Most project staff are able to contribute to these activities. However, if you're asking colleagues to put themselves out, you should only collect information that will be put to good use. If colleagues are asked to make an effort for something that does not show results, they will not cooperate next time.

Evaluation

Evaluation enables us to gather valuable and reliable feedback which we can use to inform all our future work. Without evaluation, we cannot learn from our mistakes or our successes, and we get no closer to establishing good practice.

Don't leave it until you've finished producing your information to think about evaluation. For evaluation to be effective, it needs to be planned from the start.

How you can best evaluate your information will depend on including what you want to know, how formal you want it to be, and what resources you have to carry it out.

What do you want to evaluate?

You might want to evaluate:

- The production process or aspects of it.
- Different features of the information (the style of writing, the presentation techniques used, the design, etc).
- Who used it.
- What they used it for.
- What they thought of it.
- Whether they used it more than once.
- The effect it had (outcomes).

Don't be afraid to do a partial evaluation.

Evaluating one or two aspects of the information or its production can be as useful as attempting to evaluate everything.

Expect the unexpected

Good evaluation will reveal things you did not expect, and which you simply did not know about. It is essential to design evaluation so that it will permit these 'unknowns' to emerge. This can be relatively easy to do – for example, by adding an open-ended question to a questionnaire or in an interview (perhaps along the lines of "Did anything else change after you used the information?"). This is about giving people the chance to say what is on their minds.

Other 'unknowns' can be more complicated to uncover. For example, the patterns of use may not be what you expect, and unless you are alert to this possibility, you may miss important interpretations of the data you have collected.

Evaluation questions

There are really only three types of question you will want answers to:

- **What happened?** For example, did the users do anything with the information? If they did, did it make a difference to them?
- **What do they think about it?** For example, did the users think it was useful for them?
- **Why are the answers to the above as they are?**

Evaluation techniques

Different evaluation techniques have different purposes, work in different contexts, and give you different types of feedback. Some techniques will be more useful for particular questions than others.

Evaluation techniques are often divided into quantitative and qualitative. You are likely to use both when evaluating information projects. The differences between the two are quite complex, but broadly speaking, quantitative evaluation counts numbers and qualitative explores processes, views, and feelings.

However, this rule does not hold up for all types of evaluation. Because of this, we have decided not to use this distinction. Instead, we describe the different evaluation techniques that can be used, and indicate the purposes, strengths and weaknesses they each have.

Getting feedback from users and others

If you want to know what people thought of the information (Did they like it? Did they think it was easy-to-read?) or how they used it, you can ask them in a range of different ways:

- Self-completion questionnaires – by post or online (see p81 for guidance on designing self-completion questionnaires).
- Face-to-face or telephone interviews.
- Group discussions, including focus groups.
- Intermediary or user diaries of activities and impressions.

All of these techniques will benefit from input from evaluators.

Some of these techniques – those that involve face-to-face interaction with intermediaries or users – are best undertaken by independent evaluators. If interviews are carried out by the creators of the information, it risks biasing people's responses.

Less interactive techniques like self-completion questionnaires and diaries are less prone to these bias issues, and so can be done without external help. However, you may still need the input of an evaluator to get the most out of them.

There is free software available that you can use to create simple online surveys or questionnaires.

For more complex surveys you will usually have to pay.
www.surveymonkey.com
www.questionpro.com/free-survey-software.html
www.esurveyspro.com/

Understand how things work in practice

If you want to know how things worked in practice (how it was really used, if users really understood it, etc), or to relate processes to the effectiveness of the information, you can find out by:

- informal observation – being around and watching what goes on;
- actively observing people doing things – intermediaries and users, users using the information;
- going through the information with them and asking them to explain it.

These techniques are extremely valuable because they show how things work in the real world. Good observation is very difficult to do well (probably impossible if you have been involved with the project and therefore have particular expectations), and does need to be carried out by an independent evaluator in order to get the most from it.

A word on outcomes and impact

'Outcomes' or 'impact' are ways of describing the effect the project had. A lot of emphasis is currently put on outcomes, and it is common for people to regard outcomes as the central aim of project evaluation. And not without reason, it is clearly hugely valuable to examine the influence of a project.

There are however two downsides to this current popularity that you should be aware of. The first is that social changes are very hard and usually very costly to measure with any confidence. It might be possible to identify a 'reliable' outcome with a project that has many thousands of users, with control groups who do not get the service, operating over a five-year period, and controlling for other social changes. But this might well cost several million pounds. The second is that other useful evaluation techniques are often dismissed because they do not obviously measure outcomes. This is a mistake.

Outcomes or aims are decided when the project is designed. Your evaluation should focus on these, and try to get as close as you can to assessing how far they were achieved, within the limited budget and time frame you have.

Finally, it is quite difficult to shape an evaluation so that it delivers an assessment of project outcomes. All evaluations of this type will benefit from the support and guidance of an experienced evaluator to get the most out of them. However, for smaller projects with moderate aims, it may be possible to do this without external help.

How they do it

Arthritis Care collects feedback from people with arthritis and healthcare professionals through self-completion questionnaires. They usually include questions about behavioural changes so that they can gauge the real impact of their information. Feedback also comes via letters, emails, and their discussion forums.

The helplines team also conduct a survey every year, which includes questions about the information.

What evaluation process will you use?

Below, there is a step-by-step guide as a framework for planning and carrying out your evaluation. Don't worry if this seems daunting! You don't have to include all these steps in this order. But it could be useful to use as a framework for establishing a process for your organisation.

In evaluation, as with most things, the best results always come from teamwork. Involve your colleagues!

Step 1 – Align goals for information and evaluation

If you are creating new information, you have the opportunity to evaluate not only the information itself and its uses, but also the processes that created and disseminated it. This is *project evaluation* rather than mere *consumer testing*.

Think about what the goals are for your information.

Your evaluation needs to find out to what extent you achieved them.
Write out questions for each objective to describe what you want to find out.

List parts of the production process that you think are key to getting a good result and write out questions for each of them.

Discuss and agree the questions with team members.

Which evaluation methods you use should be decided by what it is you are trying to find out.

Step 2 – Link each evaluation question to a stage of the process

- Attach each question to the relevant stage(s) of the project.

Step 3 – Devise the evaluation plan

- Put these questions and their stages into a coherent evaluation plan.
- Review and agree the plan with colleagues.

Step 4 – Make arrangements to implement the evaluation

- Decide which questions you can answer in-house and identify where you need an external evaluator.
- Prepare a tender for external evaluation.

Step 5 – For in-house evaluation

- Identify or prepare the evaluation tools needed.
- Select or develop an evaluation guide for each evaluation.
- Brief/train colleagues involved in the evaluation on how to use the guides.

How to draft interview schedules, discussion guides, and observation guides

- List all the things you want to find out. Put them into questions. List the prompts and additional questions you will use. Check that this answers your overall question – will you get what you need?
- Write an introduction of yourself and other explanations.
- Write closing statements and give reassurances about how the data will be used.

For guidance on how to draft self-completion questionnaires see p81.

Step 6 – For external evaluators

Commission external evaluators.

For more information, see the Charities Evaluation Service guides 'How to cost an evaluation' and 'What to include in an evaluation brief': www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=112

Step 7 – Monitoring systems

Devise and set up the monitoring systems you will use. These might be:

- In-service monitoring of different aspects of the process.
- Monitoring of the work of intermediaries.
- Monitoring of the delivery to users, including online.
- Intermediary and users diaries and other contemporary tools.

Step 8 – Active evaluations

Plan and carry out the required active evaluations. These might be:

- Interviews with intermediaries or users.
- Group discussions with intermediaries or users.
- Observations of contemporary use of the information.

Step 9 – Collect and analyse data

Collect and analyse data.

Write up the assessments.

Step 10 – Deal with sensitivities

Deal with the sensitive issues that may arise. These might be:

- Negative findings about the information.
- Negative conclusions about the process of producing it.
- Negative feedback about your own organisation.
- Negative feedback about other agencies and their practices.

Step 11 – Share the results

Share the results of the evaluation with:

- Participants.
- Other users of the information.
- Other intermediaries.
- Other organisations. This will enable them to learn from your mistakes and successes too, rather than have to reinvent the wheel. You can share evaluations on the Public Legal Education Network (Plenet) website www.plenet.org.uk

Step 12 – Develop conclusions

Consider what the findings tell you, and how that should inform future work. These might be:

- General 'lessons'.
- Quality measures.
- Good practice.

How they do it

Help the Aged has a Readers group, made up of people who volunteer to be involved in evaluations. They conduct approximately four evaluations of specific products a year. About 70 individuals each time are selected randomly to answer questions or comment on a particular leaflet, via a questionnaire. These surveys get a very high response rate (often 90%). The results of the evaluation then inform the revision of a leaflet – both in terms of content and design.

Other feedback comes through colleagues – for example, the advice line regularly passes on comments from staff or from older people that they talk to.

Designing self-completion questionnaires

As a rule of thumb, the numbers and complexity of questions should be kept to a minimum unless you have substantial evaluation resources and are using (or are closely supported by) experienced evaluators.

Questionnaires are generally used to find out what sort of involvements individuals have had, and what their assessments of the information are. Although you will have routinely collected data on the project's performance – how many leaflets were given out, how many viewings your website pages got – you may also need to understand what the questionnaire respondent did, before you ask what they thought of it.

If you limit the questions to yes/no answers, this keeps it simple, but does make it difficult to cover everything. You can expand the possibilities by giving options to tick, and by having a space for comments or explanations. But remember that it will be easier to analyse yes/no responses than free text written by the respondents.

You will want responses on four themes:

- **Who the respondent is.**
- **What they have done with the information.**
- **What they think of it.**
- **What effects or influences it has had on them.**

Theme 1: Identify the respondent

Agency name; individual name; other.
In some cases you will want to allow for anonymity.

Type of respondent: end user; intermediary; sister agency; other.

Theme 2: Identify their involvement

Specific questions will depend on the details of the project, and will include what they did, how many times, what for, and who with. The level of detail is up to you. The more detailed, the more difficult the analysis. For example:

Q1 **Have you seen the leaflet?**
Or have you viewed the information on the website? YES / NO

Q2 (For intermediaries) **Have you given the leaflet to users?** YES / NO

How many have you given out?

(continued)

Q3 **What did you do with the leaflet?** Options might be:

- ☐ Just glanced through it
- ☐ Read it through carefully
- ☐ Discussed it with others
- ☐ Looked at it with my adviser
- ☐ Used it to deal with a problem/problems

Q4 **What was the problem?**

Leave space to describe it. Or offer a list if you are clear what it is you think the leaflet can help with.

Q5 **Did it help with the problem?**

YES / NO

or

- ☐ It helped a lot
- ☐ It was fairly helpful
- ☐ It wasn't very useful
- ☐ It wasn't helpful at all

Q6 **If yes, how did it help?**

You can either list options to tick, or leave clear spaces to write in. It depends on how sure you are about the range of problems that it might get used for.

- ☐ I was able to understand better
- ☐ I was able to explain it to others
- ☐ It helped me to discuss my problem with my adviser
- ☐ I was able to sort out the problem

Q7 **If no, why not?**

(continued)

Theme 3: Find out what they thought about it

Q8 **Thinking about the leaflet in general, did you like it?**

Q9 **Were there particular things about that it you liked?**

List the aspects you're interested in – for example, ease of understanding, amount of information, use of design, colour, language, etc.

Q10 **Were there particular things about it that you didn't like?**

As before, list the aspects you're interested in – for example, ease of understanding, amount of information, use of design, colour, language, etc.

Theme 4: Find out if it brought other benefits to the respondent

Q11 **Here is a list of the sorts of benefits the leaflet might bring. Please tick the boxes for all that you think apply to you.**

(This will depend on what you think the leaflet might achieve.)

Examples might be:

- ☐ I feel more confident about dealing with my problems now
- ☐ I've been able to use other information about other issues
- ☐ I've been able to help others – friends, family etc

Who are your respondents?

You may want to understand who is responding to your questionnaire – for example by age, income, ethnicity, disability, geography, and so on. If you do need to ask these questions, try to keep them to the minimum needed to meet the goals of your evaluation. You should put them at the end, and reassure your respondents with a clear statement about confidentiality.

Conclusion

Thanks to everybody who contributed to this handbook. We hope you will find it helpful.

This version of the handbook reflects our own experiences and that of our panel members. But there are many other examples of good practice we haven't been able to include as we haven't come across them.

We are always looking for more examples of good practice, helpful techniques, and lessons that have been learned from evaluations. If you have any to share, or have any other comments, please contact us at **info@advicenow.org.uk**. We will use your contributions on the website or in future editions of the Handbook.

We will be running seminars to promote better information and will be developing the better information website to include more examples and to provide ongoing discussion. To stay in touch with these developments, sign up to receive Advicenow's email updates at **update@advicenow.org.uk**

Project plan builder

This has been designed to help you plan your projects, and to help you keep on track throughout the production process.

At the beginning of a new project, use it to decide which techniques you will use to produce the resource. You can then refer to this checklist during the project or use it to create a brief for the writer/editor/evaluator etc.

What is the need?

Ask yourself:	Actions or techniques:	Find out how:	✔
What is the issue and how does it affect your audience?	• Research the problem • Scan relevant media • Ask experts • Ask intermediaries	Page 19	
Is there other information on the topic that meets the needs of your audience?	• Research what information is already available	Page 23	

What are you trying to do?

Ask yourself:	Decide what you will do:	Find out how:	✔
What is this information trying to achieve?	• Raise awareness • Increase understanding and knowledge • Guide people through a process • Offer support • Get people to take action	Page 25 Page 26 Page 27 Page 29 Page 30	

Who is it for?

Ask yourself:	Actions or techniques:	Find out how:	✔
Who are they?	• Decide who your target audience is	Page 33	
What is their situation?	• Research their position • Ask intermediaries	Page 34 Page 22	
What are your audience capable of and comfortable with?	• List the skills they will need • Ask intermediaries who know your audience well • Pilot a draft with your audience	Page 35 Page 22 Page 41	
What other information and help can they access?	• Research access to services for your audience • Consider any sensitivity, capability, or disability issues that may affect your audience when you signpost to further help or information	Page 36 Page 37	
What sort of language is most appropriate?	• Look at research on literacy levels • Follow good practice guidance • Ask intermediaries • Pilot a draft with users	Page 37 Page 37 Page 22 Page 41	
What sort of tone is most appropriate?	• Look at the issue and what you want to achieve and decide what tone might be appropriate • Speak to intermediaries • Pilot a draft with users to ensure you've got it right • Have it peer reviewed for tone	Page 39 Page 22 Page 41 Page 51	
How will you ensure it looks relevant to your audience?	• Use case studies and examples • Use images • Pilot a draft with users	Page 56 Page 58 Page 41	
How will you ensure the information meets the needs of your audience?	• Pilot a draft with users	Page 41	

What format should you use?

Ask yourself:	Decide what you will do:	Find out how:	✔
What is the best format for your audience?	• Paper information • Online • Other formats	Page 42 Page 42 Page 43	
What are your legal obligations on accessibility?	• Consider if there is a need for you to make a reasonable adjustment	Page 44	

Should it be available in other languages?

Ask yourself:	Actions or techniques:	Find out how:	✔
Should your information be available in other languages?	• Research what languages might be spoken amongst your audience • Ask intermediaries • Research what languages are most often requested from your organisation	Page 46 Page 22 Page 46	

How will you produce it?

Ask yourself:	Actions or techniques:	Find out how:	✔
Who will write it?	• Decide will be involved in the writing, and what their role will be	Page 49	
What process will you use?	• Our process • Your own process	Page 50	

What will you include?

Ask yourself:	Actions or techniques:	Find out how:	✔
How will you decide what to include?	• Think about the needs of your audience • Get expert input • Ask intermediaries • Pilot a draft with users	Page 52 Page 21 Page 22 Page 41	

What will you include? – continued

Ask yourself:	Actions or techniques:	Find out how:	✔
How will you make the information easy to use?	• Use a clear structure • Use a clear writing style • Consider using an external editor • Seek feedback • Pilot a draft with users	Page 53 Page 37 Page 55 Page 22 Page 41	
What presentation techniques will you use to get the message across?	• Case studies • Images • Flow charts and decision trees • Quizzes and Q&As • Other presentation techniques	Page 56 Page 58 Page 59 Page 60	
How will you ensure it is accurate at the time of publishing?	• Use reliable source material • Have a panel of experts comment on each draft • Check each draft for accuracy yourself • External peer review	Page 62	

How will you ensure that it remains up to date?

Ask yourself:	Actions or techniques:	Find out how:	✔
How will you ensure that it remains up to date?	• Set a formal review date • Monitor developments in the topic	Page 64	

What will it look like?

Ask yourself:	Decide what you will do:	Find out how:	✔
What to consider when getting your information designed	• The look • Size and composition • Accessibility • Corporate or campaign requirements	Page 66	
What to consider for information on webpages	• Page length • 'Scanability'	Page 68	

How will you reach your audience?

Ask yourself:	Actions or techniques:	Find out how:	✔
How will you get the information to your audience?	• Through your organisation • Through intermediaries • Promotion	Page 70	

How will you monitor and evaluate it?

Ask yourself:	Actions or techniques:	Find out how:	✔
How do you want to monitor the project?	• Record how many times the information is requested or given to somebody • Web usage statistics • Self-completion questionnaires	Page 73	
What do you want to evaluate the project?	• Production process (or aspects of) • Different features of the information • Who used it • What they used it for • Whether they used it more than once • Effects it had (outcomes) • Something else…?	Page 74	
What techniques will you use?	• Getting feedback from users and others • Understanding how things work in practice	Page 75 Page 76	
What evaluation process will you use?	• Follow our step by step process • Your own process	Page 77	

Resources

We have gathered details of all the useful resources referred to throughout the text, and other useful contacts together here.

Researching the problem

You can find the latest National Statistics on the **UK Statistics Authority**'s website **www.statistics.gov.uk**

There may be specialist research organisations, government departments or national charities who have researched the issue you are interested in. Try:

- **The Economic and Social Research Council Question Bank**
  http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/index.htm
- **The Joseph Rowntree Foundation**
  www.jrf.org.uk
- **The Legal Services Research Centre**
  www.lsrc.org.uk

Or search the internet.

Researching what information is already available

The **FRILLS Leaflet Service** database contains details about free public information leaflets from government departments, official bodies, and voluntary organisations. Access to the full database is available on subscription:
http://frills.camden.gov.uk/frills/Login.aspx

Or search the internet.

Help with appropriate language

The **Literacy Trust**'s website (**www.literacytrust.org.uk**) has information on the average reading ages of different groups:
www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/stats/keystatistics.html

The **Plain English Campaign** has lots of information and has free guides to writing in plain English:
www.plainenglish.co.uk

Researching the specific information needs of disabled groups

RNIB (**www.rnib.org.uk**) provides guidelines on making information accessible to people who are blind or partially sighted. These guidelines are part of their ‘See it right’ campaign:
www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_seeitright.hcsp

RNID (**www.rnid.org.uk**) has a factsheet on producing information for deaf and hard of hearing people:
www.rnid.org.uk/information_resources/factsheets/deaf_awareness/factsheets_leaflets/producing_info_4_deaf_people.htm

RNID also has guidance on the information needs of black and minority ethnic deaf and hard of hearing people:
www.rnid.org.uk/information_resources/factsheets/your_rights/factsheets_leaflets/the_information_needs_of_black_and_minority_ethnic_deaf_and_hard_of_hearing_people.htm

The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** (**www.equalityhumanrights.com**) has helpful guidance on how to use easy words and pictures:
www.equalityhumanrights.com/Documents/Disability/General_advice/How_to_use_Easy_Words_and_Pictures.pdf

Alternative formats

RNIB has lots of information on accessible formats. This is called ‘Formats and ways of communicating’:
www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_method.hcsp

The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** has information about obligations to make reasonable adjustments and provide accessible services:
www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/serviceproviders/pages/areasofresponsibility.aspx#Making%20reasonable%20adjustments

The **Improvement and Development Agency** (**www.idea.gov.uk**) has a round up of equalities legislation:
www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5145524

Other languages

The **National Centre for Languages** (**www.cilt.org.uk**) has gathered together statistics, surveys and census maps in a section of their website called 'Languages spoken in the UK population':
www.cilt.org.uk/faqs/langspoken.htm

The **Welsh Language Board** (**www.byig-wlb.org.uk**) has lots of useful information about the welsh language and guidance on how to commission a translation:
www.byig-wlb.org.uk/english/using/pages/howdoicommissiontranslation.aspx

Design

RNIB has guidance on how to design information to make it as accessible as possible:
www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_printdesign.hcsp

The **Plain English Campaign** also produces a design guide:
www.plainenglish.co.uk/designguide.pdf

Monitoring and evaluation

Surveymonkey, **Question pro**, and **Survey Pro.com** all have free software that you can use to create simple online surveys. For more complex surveys you will usually have to pay.
www.surveymonkey.com
www.questionpro.com/free-survey-software.html
www.esurveyspro.com/

The **Charities Evaluation Service** (**www.ces-vol.org.uk**) has several useful guides to help with designing evaluations and commissioning external evaluators – 'First Steps in Monitoring and Evaluation', 'How to cost an evaluation' and 'What to include in an evaluation brief':
www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=112

Share evaluations and learn from the evaluations of other projects on the **Public Legal Education Network (Plenet)** website:
www.plenet.org.uk

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If you would like this guide in another format please contact ASA Advicenow
on **020 7398 1483** or email **info@advicenow.org.uk**

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