Inclusive Communication Terminology

Prepared by the Inclusive Communication Alliance, August 2020

This document has been created to list the terms that we will use and that we will encourage others to use, and to also set out our shared understanding of what each term means.

It is a dynamic document that will be under continued review to ensure it remains in tune with developments in understanding of inclusive communication and the natural evolution of language.

The document is written and endorsed by people with knowledge of communication disadvantage and experience of overcoming it, including leaders from:

- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
- Disability Equality Scotland
- deafscotland
- Sense Scotland
- Ideas for Ears

Find out more about the Inclusive Communication Alliance at
https://inclusivecommunication.scot/inclusive-communication-alliance

1) Communication includes;

    a) **Received / reception** – hearing, seeing, sensing in any way a sound, sight, touch, taste, smell, movement. or received in some other way.

    b) **Understand / comprehension** – interpretation as intended by the person who produced the communication

    c) **Expression - producing a message by whatever means a person chooses.**

Successful communication requires meaningful messages **to go "in"** (to be received and understood) and **to go "out"** (be responded to through one or more methods of expression).

2) Ways of communicating

As human beings, we have a huge range of ways for receiving and understanding communication and expressing ourselves. Communication can take any form, so long as it allows information and meaning to be exchanged. It can be:

- verbal
- nonverbal
- visual, including written

Speaking, listening, looking, reading and writing are the most common forms of communication. But other forms of communication are also widely used by much of the general population, and for a significant minority they are wholly relied on. This includes:

- gestures
- symbols
- sign
- pictures
- facial expression
- alternative and augmentative communication aids

As well as occurring between two or more people, communication occurs when an organisation shares information with its customers, staff and other stakeholders. For example, through leaflets, door signs, websites, videos, automated phone systems and so on.

We ALL have the capability to communicate and be involved in communication, so long as the form of communication is right for us.

3) Communication Strengths and Preferences

Communication strengths and preferences refers to what we find easiest and what we are good at and these tend to our preferences. Each of us will have a range of communication strengths and preferences and this may change depending on where we are and who we are with.

Most people communicate in a range of ways and use a rich mix of pictures, gestures, facial expression, symbols, speech and writing to receive and understand communication and to express themselves.

Some people find some ways of communicating hard and therefore depend more on other ways. For example, an individual who is non-verbal may have no difficulty understanding pictures, tone of voice, facial expression and gestures and might engage in rich, meaningful communication through these methods.

In the same way, an individual on holiday in a country where their language is not widely spoken might make heavy use of non-verbal communication even if they more commonly use verbal communication when they are at home.

4) Inclusive Communication

Inclusive communication is delivered in a way that is matched to the strengths and preferences of those being communicated with. It allows everyone involved in the communication interaction to take part on an equal footing, with this protected as a human right.

5) Communication Inclusion

Communication inclusion occurs when the communication is free of any barriers that prevent or restrict how any individual or group of people can receive and understand communication and express themselves.

6) Communication Access

Communication access refers to the practical steps and provisions that are taken to remove or reduce known or potential communication barriers, so it becomes possible for everyone to receive and understand communication and to express themselves in their strongest and preferred ways.

7) Communication Difficulties

People have communication difficulties when their communication strengths and preferences are not met. For instance, people with visual impairment or

who have difficulties understanding written language, are likely to experience communication difficulties when provided with written information and/or text provided in small type face.

Communication difficulties can also be caused by the environment. For instance:

- a busy and distracting environment will create communication difficulties for someone who has to concentrate and focus in order to follow the communication.
- noise and/or reverberation ('echo') will create barriers to communication for people who find it hard to hear, understand or process communication in places that are acoustically uncomfortable.
- a poorly lit or glaringly bright space will make communication difficult for those who need good light in order to see visual and written communication.
- a meeting room without the right audio equipment (sound system, hearing loop and microphones) will cause difficulty for people who require clear-sounding speech in order to hear and follow what is said.

People tend to **dislike and avoid** communicating in ways or places that they find hard.

8) Communication Disadvantage

Communication disadvantage arises when communication is carried out in a way (or place) that does not consider their strengths or preferences. It very often arises when only the communication strengths and preferences of people who are in the majority are considered.

This is particularly apparent when organisations communicate only in ways that work for people who find it easy to hear, see, read, write, and use and understand speech. But, for example, it also applies to situations where British Sign Language (BSL) is being used without English interpretation, causing those not able to use BSL to have a communication disadvantage.

9) Communication Bias

Communication bias arises when an assumption is made about the form of communication that is best suited to a situation and/or individual based on a subjective view of 'what is best' and/or a cultural view of what is the 'right way to do things'.

It is based on beliefs that are often formed unconsciously and that go undiscussed or explored. Individuals and organisations are often unaware that

they display communication bias and yet communication bias is in wide evidence across Scotland and the UK.

For instance, communication bias can be seen where there is an expectation or assumption that everyone speaks with sufficient fluidness, speed and volume to be an equal footing in a moving conversation or discussion. Yet people can require time process their thoughts and prepare what they want to say, and/or to discern what they have heard. Others use speaking aids, or have a quiet voice, or find it hard to express themselves when put 'onto the spot'.

10) Communication Discrimination

Communication discrimination arises when reasonable adjustment is not made in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, so that people with a protected characteristic are placed at a substantial disadvantage because of their disability compared with non-disabled people or people who do not share that disability.

Communication discrimination can arise because of the way communication is delivered, the environment or place it is being delivered in, and the culture or attitude of the people organising or taking part in a communication exchange.

Communication discrimination can be apparent at the level of one-to-one interactions and also where there is mass communication with whole communities.

For instance:
- Public information that is only provided to those easily able to read or hear.
- Public services that are only accessible to those easily able to speak, use online services, or to hear and follow spoken language.
- Training or education events involving printed or digital materials of inadequate legibility for individuals known to have visual impairment.
- Community events held in echoey halls with no pre-arranged quiet spaces to give acoustic shelter to those who, due to having a legally defined disability, are sensitive to noise or unable to adequately hear what people are saying in noise
- Building or street signage that is not sufficiently legible, understandable or readable.
- Focus groups where people are side-lined because their communication difficulties are interpreted as not being interested or lacking the capacity to contribute.

Communication discrimination is often linked to institutionalised unconscious bias. It arises where there is a lack of awareness, respect and understanding of inclusive communication and a lack of knowledge, skill and confidence in how to adjust appropriately to meet different communication strengths and preferences.

For those who communicate differently to the majority, it makes them unable to participate in communication exchanges on an equal footing. It acts to deny them equal opportunities and access to education, employment, welfare, justice and their community generally. It makes them feel like they are not valued citizens or members of their communities.