How a service designer can contribute to accessibility

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11 March 2026

What I will take you through

- How the guidance was created
- Making your service accessible
- Design communications
- Designing together
- Key takeaways and resources to learn more

About me

- I’m a service designer
- my pronouns are she/her
- very keen on accessibility and inclusion

Learning about accessibility

Ministry of Justice

2016
Software developer

- Learn how to code so that the interface is accessible for people using it
- Test my code, use screen readers and magnifiers

East Renfrewshire Council

2018
UX designer
User Researcher

- Use the design system correctly
- Recruit disabled people for UR, plan more time, ensure consent works

Scottish Enterprise

2019
Service designer

- Still one of the people going on and on about accessibility
- Start public speaking about it

Each role in a multi-disciplinary team has a part to play to avoid making a service inaccessible

Story time:

DWP Accessibility Manual

May 2021

- Business analyst
- Content Designer
- Delivery Manager
- Digital Performance Analyst
- Interaction Designer
- Product manager
- QA tester
- Software Engineer or Frontend Dev
- User Researcher

GOV.UK

Blog

Accessibility in government

Organisations: Civil Service

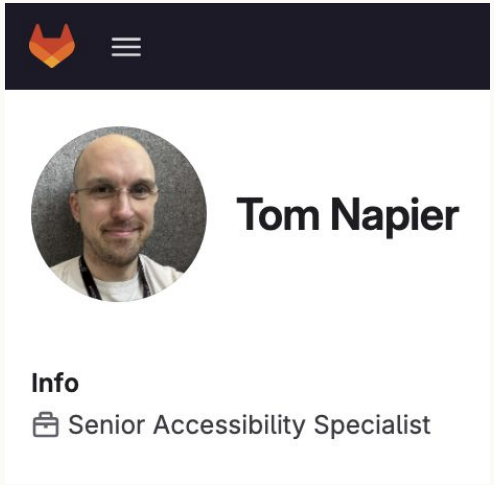
Why we've created an accessibility manual – and how you can help shape it

Craig Abbott, DWP Digital, 27 May 2021 - Accessibility

In my role as Head of Accessibility for DWP Digital, I'm responsible for trying to make sure that all of our services can be used by as many people as possible. For DWP, accessibility is particularly important as we have a higher proportion of users with disabilities than other government departments, due to the nature of the services we provide.

Joining DWP in 2023

DWP Digital



2 reasons:

- not enough time
- unsure what a service designer does

The service designer role

GOV·UK

Service Standard

5. Make sure everyone can use the service

Provide a service that everyone can use, including disabled people and people with other legally protected characteristics. And people who do not have access to the internet or lack the skills or confidence to use it.

Department for Education

Apply the Service Standard

GOV·UK

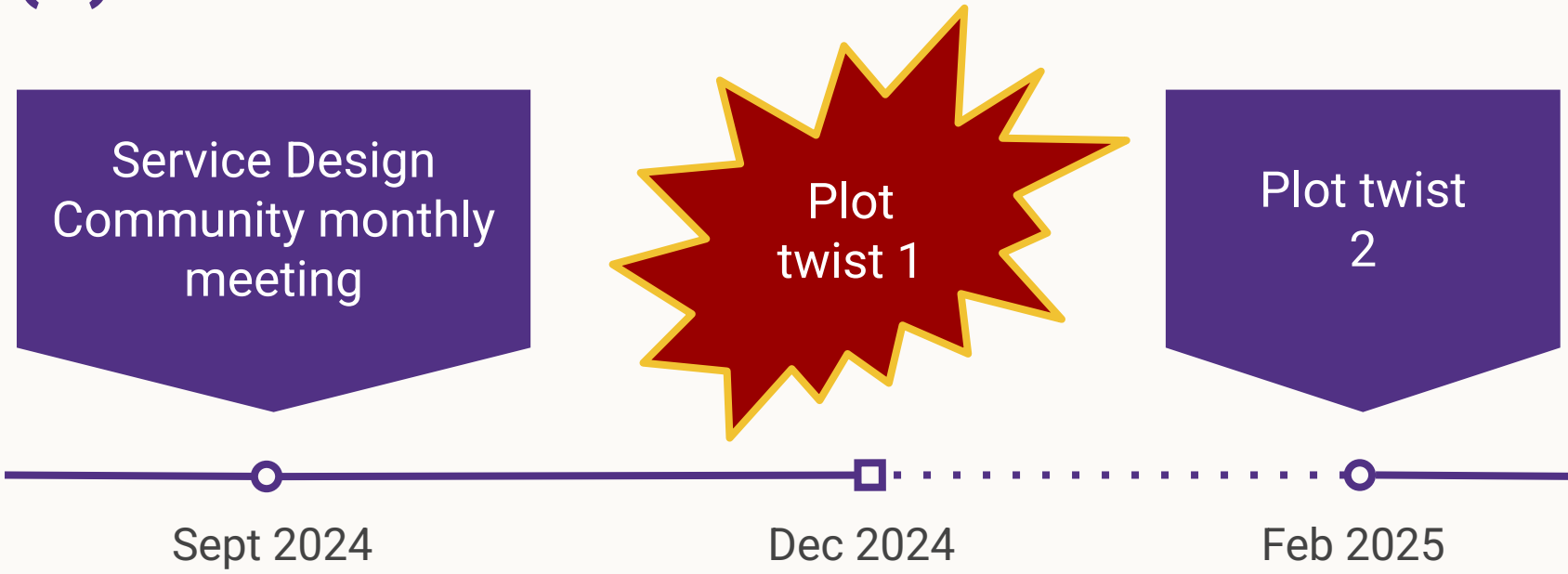
Government Digital and Data Profession Capability Framework

Service designer

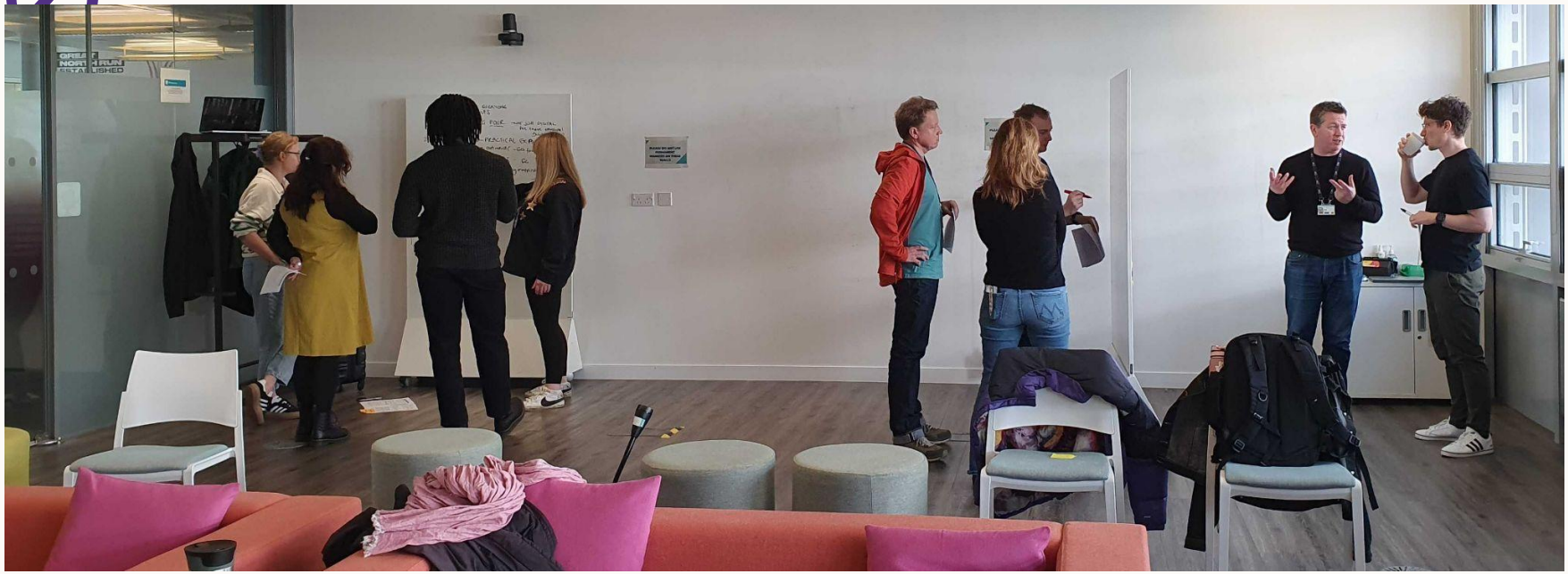
Find out what a service designer in government does.

My own practice

Involving the Service Design Community (1)



Involving the Service Design Community (2)

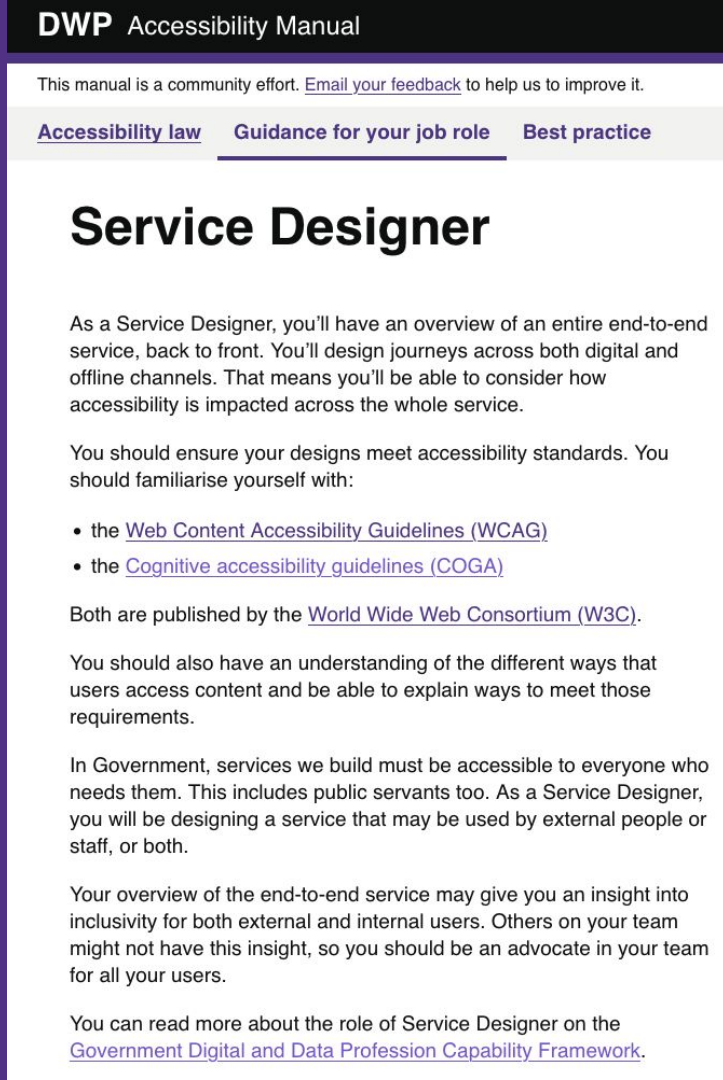


Takeaways from that story

- never too old to change career
- you can contribute to the community of practice as a contractor
- involve contractors in your community of practice
- keep pushing
- involve other practitioners

April 2025

- WCAG Conformance
- Non-digital accessibility
- Design communication
- Design together
- When you can’t make a part of your service accessible



DWP Accessibility Manual

This manual is a community effort. Email your feedback to help us to improve it.

Accessibility law | Guidance for your job role | Best practice

Service Designer

As a Service Designer, you’ll have an overview of an entire end-to-end service, back to front. You’ll design journeys across both digital and offline channels. That means you’ll be able to consider how accessibility is impacted across the whole service.

You should ensure your designs meet accessibility standards. You should familiarise yourself with:

- the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)
- the Cognitive accessibility guidelines (COGA)

Both are published by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

You should also have an understanding of the different ways that users access content and be able to explain ways to meet those requirements.

In Government, services we build must be accessible to everyone who needs them. This includes public servants too. As a Service Designer, you will be designing a service that may be used by external people or staff, or both.

Your overview of the end-to-end service may give you an insight into inclusivity for both external and internal users. Others on your team might not have this insight, so you should be an advocate in your team for all your users.

You can read more about the role of Service Designer on the Government Digital and Data Profession Capability Framework.

What's different in this role?

- "Your overview of the end-to-end service may give you an insight into inclusivity for both external and internal users"
- "You'll design journeys across both digital and offline channels"
- Non digital accessibility → Accessible events toolkit from Scope

When you can’t make part of your service accessible

- a service, technically accessible online might not be the best solution
- you can and should ask for help from accessibility specialists

Covering the bases

Accessibility

1 in 4 people are disabled in the UK

vision

hearing

speech

motor

cognitive

It’s different for everyone

Defining accessibility

“Accessibility means that people can do what they need to do in a similar amount of time and effort as someone that does not have a disability.

It means that people are empowered, can be independent, and will not be frustrated by something that is poorly designed or implemented.”

Source: GOV.UK Blog post

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

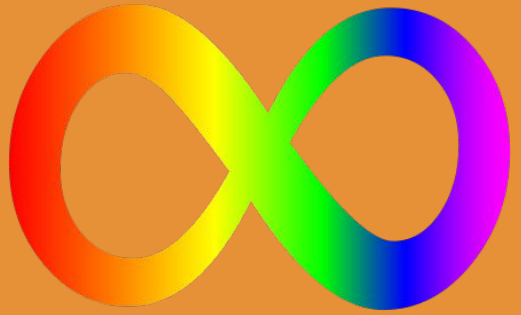
→ Standard you need to comply with for digital accessibility

Currently, version 2.2

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

Published by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

Neurodiversity



An umbrella term

- Dyslexia
- Autism
- ADHD (= Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder)
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)
- Tourette’s syndrome and more

How it affects people

- think, process information and language
- interact socially and communicate with others
- perceive space and time

1 in 7 people are neurodivergent in the UK

This is about 15 to 20% of the general population

But it’s often underestimated and under-declared.

It’s much higher for people working in Tech.

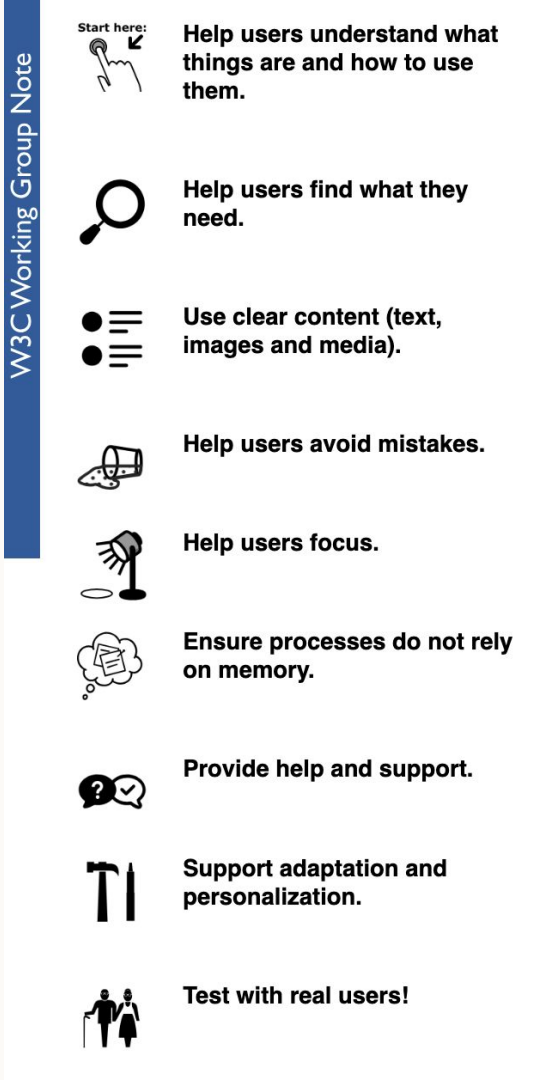
→ above 20% and **probably up to 50% in tech** and the creative industry

Cognitive Accessibility Guidelines (COGA)

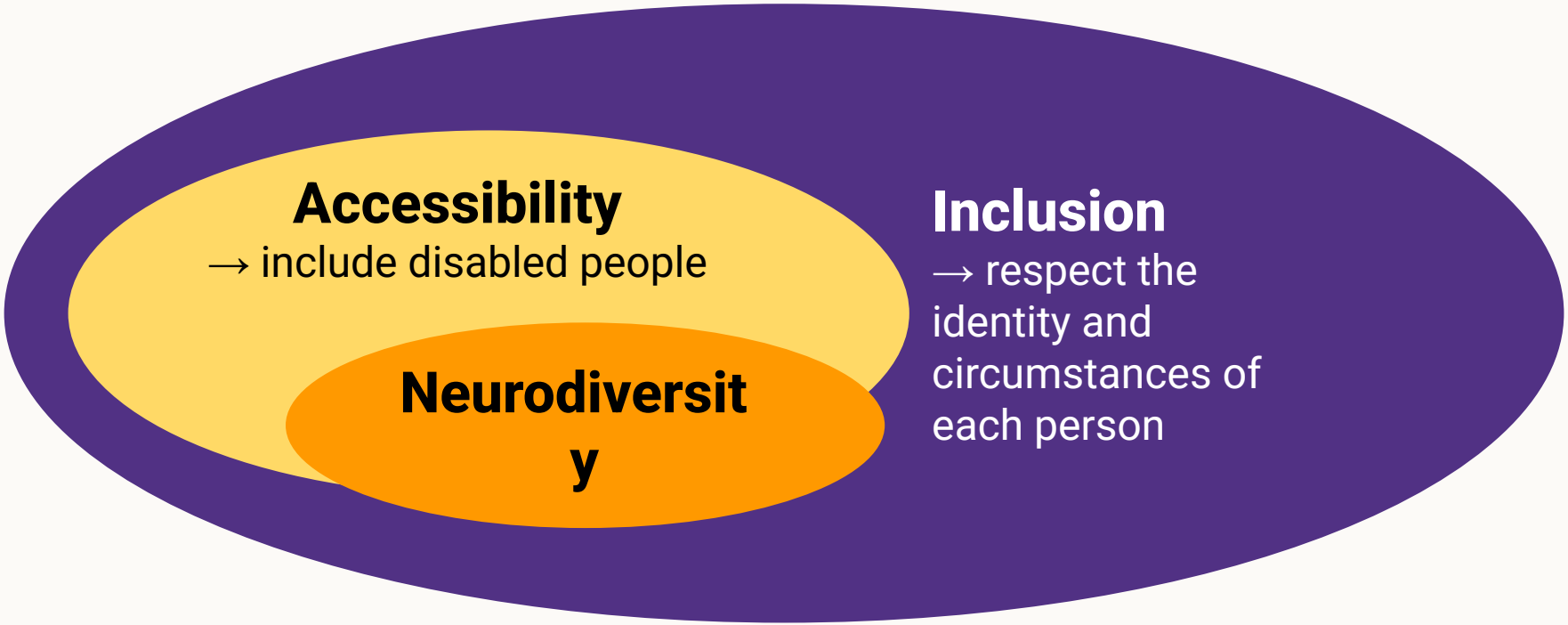
→ set of guidelines for inclusive design

Also published by the W3C.

[Nice COGA version by the Department for Education]



Accessibility → Inclusion



Designing for everyone

General recommendations

1 in 4 person is disabled

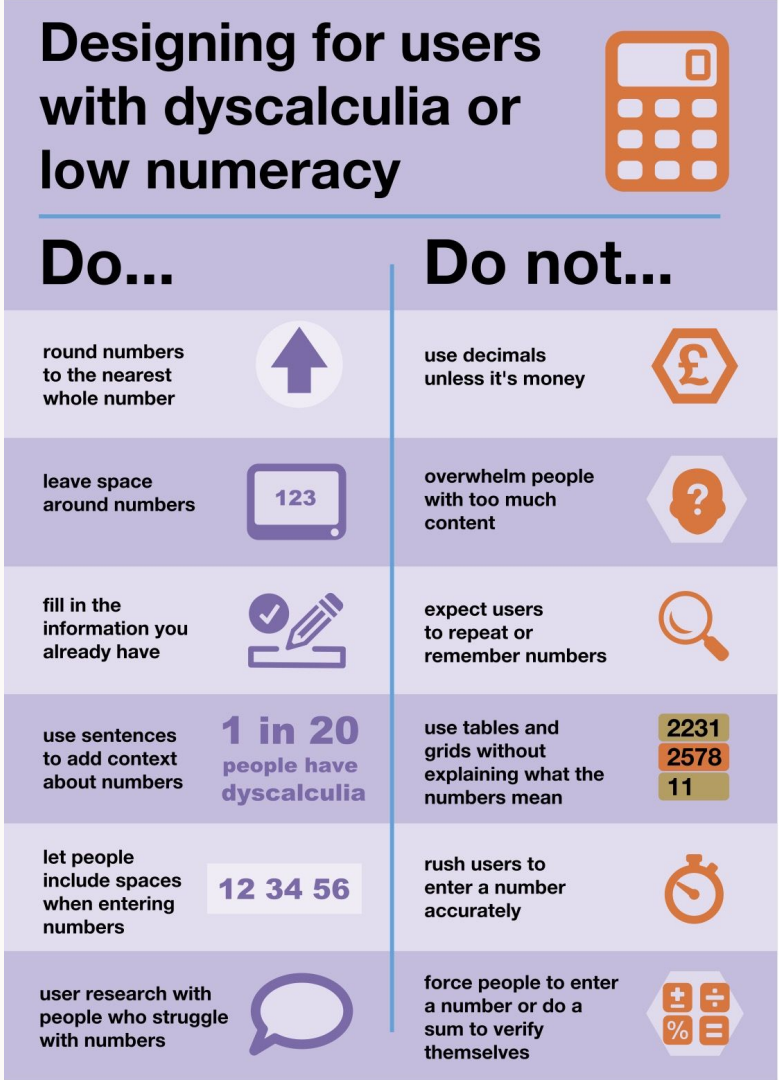
- think of accessibility right from the start
- involve disabled people at every stage of your research
- don’t forget internal users
- everyone in your team needs to be involved
- ask for feedback (accessible and not only online)

Numbers

Low numeracy affects half the working-age adults in the UK

[Accessible numbers project]

by Laura Parker



End-to-end, back-to-front

- Integration with other services
- Asking Questions
- Consistency
- Service features guidance in the manual
  - Redundant entry
  - Accessible authentication success criteria

Design communication

Some basic steps

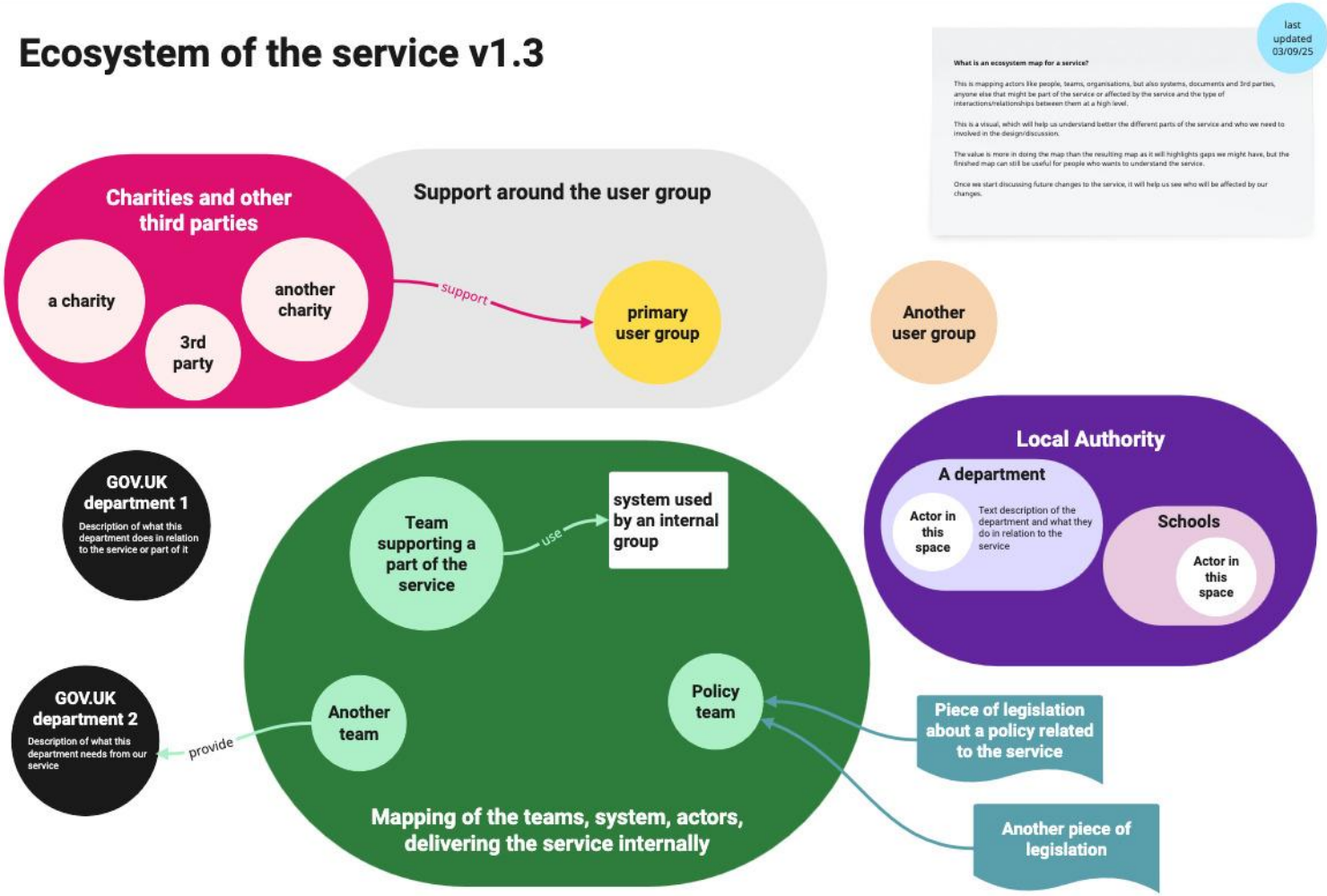
- Use legible fonts, and structure your text with the right headings
- check colour contrast especially for your text
- do not rely on colour alone to convey meaning
- use plain language and explain acronyms
- be careful with numbers
- use accessibility checkers for your slides
- send your presentation ahead of the meeting when possible

Maps

- colour contrast are still important, and not just for the text
- legible font is still important, but more flexibility on the size
- beware: people will look for meaning in colours and alignment
- not too much info, not too many colours and shapes
- who is your audience? what’s your intent?
- create alternative formats

Example:

Mapping an ecosystem



Example: Turning the ecosystem visual into a deck (1)

Name of the service or project

Ecosystem of the service v1.3

Last updated 03/09/2025

What is an ecosystem map

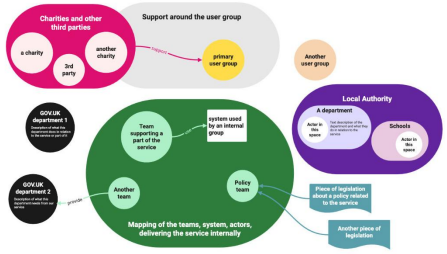
Explanation of the purpose of this type of map

Setting expectations

How to read this map

If people still want to understand and use the visual

Ecosystem of the service v1.3



Description of the map

Example: Turning the ecosystem visual into a deck (2)

Our users

Primary users

Another group of users

Charities and third parties

Charity 1

Explain their role
Provide links

Example: Turning the ecosystem visual into a deck (3)

The delivery of the service internally

An area of the department

Description of the team and what they do

Policy - Legal

Description of the teams

Provide links to relevant policies and legislations

Systems and tools

Names, descriptions
Who use them

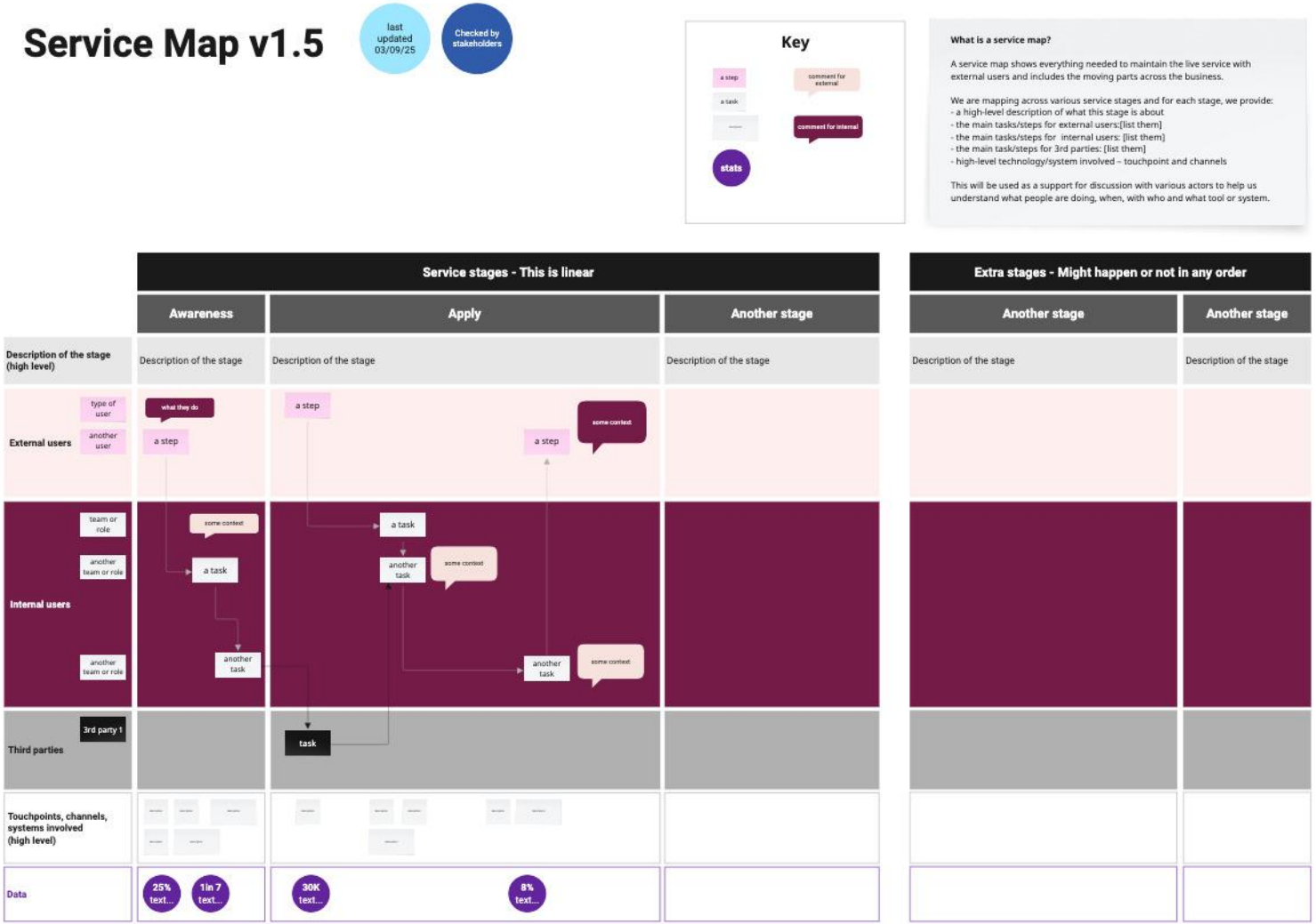
We welcome your feedback

Contact name@dept.gov.uk

Thank you!

Example:

A service map



Example: Turning the service map visual into a deck (1)

Name of the service or project

Service map v1.5

Last updated 03/09/2025

What is a service map

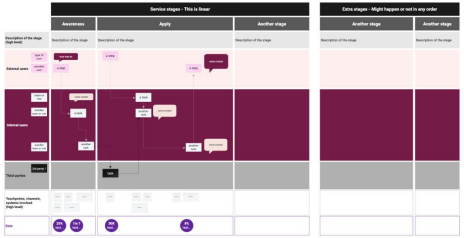
Explanation of the purpose of this type of map

Setting expectations

How to read this map

If people still want to understand and use the visual

Service map v1.5

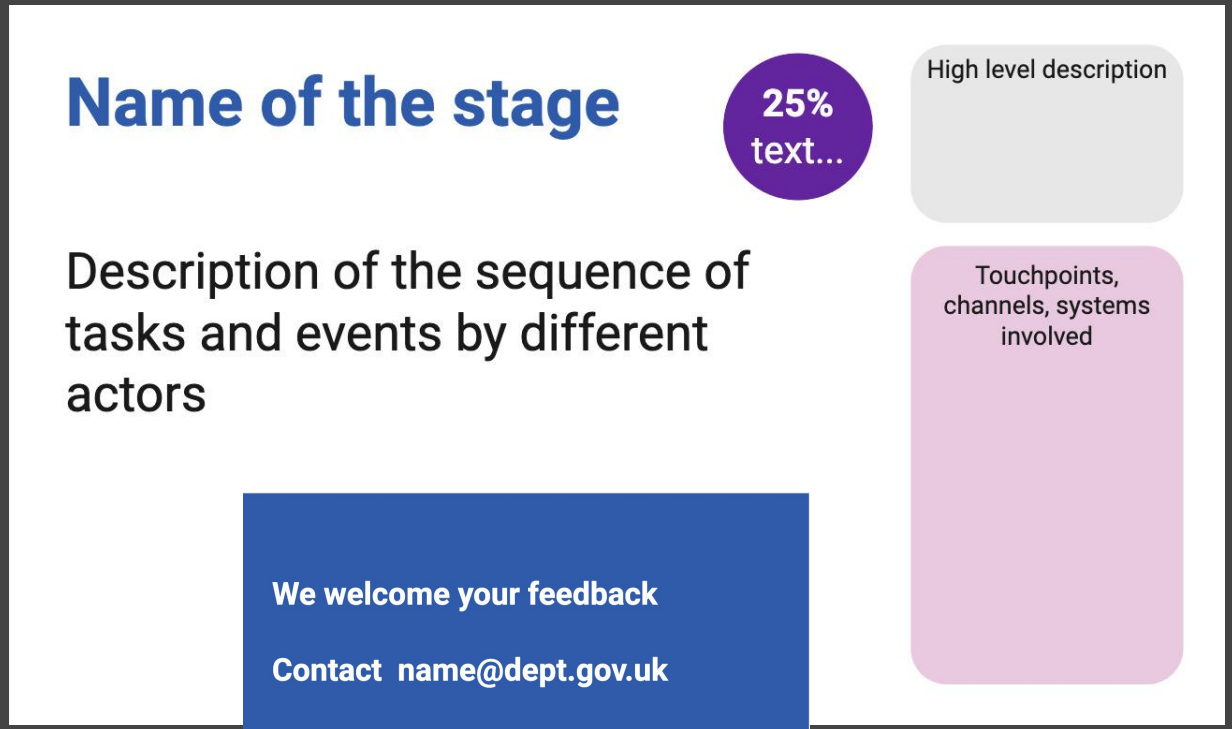


Description of the map

Example: Turning the service map visual into a deck (2)

Linear part of the service

Extra stages that might happen



Pros and cons of alternative formats

- time consuming
- need to maintain two formats

→ more feedback and engagement from people who are not designers

→ improve my mapping

→ this is accessible for people who are colour blind, visually impaired and for some neurodivergent type

Designing together

But there are no disabled people in my team

→ many disabilities are not visible

Neurodivergence in tech / creative industry:

→ over 20% - probably up to 50%

→ people sometimes don’t declare their disability

Things can change

- actual employees can become disabled
- a new joiner might be disabled

→ **Make sure your systems, processes and practice are accessible for all**

Creating a safe space

Do not force people to disclose a disability or medical condition

→ **offer help for everyone**

Instead of providing accommodations for disabled people

→ **offer various options to all**

Invite for feedback and allow people to reach out privately

Don’t assume you know what is best

People don’t have the same needs even if they have the same condition, and needs vary in different contexts.

- always best to ask what would help
- have that discussion with the person
- do not assume you’re doing the right thing

Manual of me

- help you tell others what you need
- learn about what other people in your team needs

Do not make people share more than they are willing to

Examples of sections:

- condition I like to work in
- time and hours I like to work
- best way to communicate with me or provide feedback
- things I'm good at
- things I might need help with
- how I like to be helped

Organising - hosting a meeting / workshop

- before the session: set expectations, provide an agenda, do it again at the start of the actual session
- invite people to tell you if this might not work for them
- if using online tools like Mural or Miro, plan for an alternative
- if over an hour → plan for a break and stick to it
- repeat the question someone asked before answering unless you're sure everyone has heard/seen it

Presenting during a meeting

- share your slides at the start of a presentation or in your invite
- keep content short and simple, test the accessibility of the deck
- use a mic, speak facing your audience, camera on if online
- leave some space at the bottom of your slides
- describe any image/ diagram, assume at least one person cannot see
- don’t assume people can read the text on slides

Getting people in a physical venue

- access to toilets
- enough space to move around
- can the light be controlled
- sitting arrangement - standing
- provide photos or video of the space, and how to get there
- plan more time!

Key takeaways

Designing for everyone

- think about accessibility right from the start
- do not forget about internal users
- consider neurodivergence and low numeracy in particular
- ask for feedback
- focus on: integration with other services, questions, consistency

Design communications

- provide alternative formats for your visuals and maps
- check colour contrast especially for your text
- do not rely on colour alone to convey meaning
- use plain language and explain acronyms
- be careful with numbers
- use accessibility checkers for your slides and word documents
- send your presentation ahead of the meeting

Designing together

- do not assume there are no disabled people in your team
- consider neurodivergence
- do not assume you know what is best
- use manuals of me

More resources

About accessibility and neurodiversity

- Past videos (of the Accessibility Scotland conference)
- Inclusive Design 24 online and free, in particular this video: How to be inclusive to neurodivergent people - Rachel Morgan-Trimmer
- Public neurodiversity support center
- The Neurocrats: Civil Service Live podcast on YouTube
- Estimate how many people using your website might be disabled

Guidances

- DWP Accessibility manual
- Accessibility and inclusive design manual from the Department for Education
- Scope: checking the accessibility of an event or venue and accessible events toolkit
- Accessible numbers project
- Why you need to make your maps accessible - GOV.UK Blog post

Some of my blog posts

- Different levels of inclusion awareness
- Inclusion in the workplace
- Avoiding misconceptions on your accessibility learning journey
- Removing barriers to inclusion
- Advice for speakers (to present in an accessible way)
- Is my website accessible?

Thank you!

To Craig Abbott, Tom Napier, Alice Forward, Lindsay Stephens, Shalom Jesusanmi, Helen Spires, and the whole DWP Service Design Community

And thank you for listening!

Any question?

Get in touch: **stephanie.krus@proton.me**