

Trustee Report Reasonable Access

Year:2019-20

About Reasonable Access

Establishment of Reasonable Access

Reasonable Access is a Disabled and Deaf People's Led Organisation (DDPO). We were initially established informally in November 2018 with a website. We received Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) status with charity number 1186271, registered with the [Charity Commission for England and Wales](https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5147663/charity-overview) [<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5147663/charity-overview>] on 11th November 2019.

Reasonable Access's purpose

Reasonable Access's purpose is to educate and empower disabled people to assert their disability access rights and challenge discrimination, using a variety of strategies including information provision and peer support. We aim not to replicate existing work, but signpost people to credible resources like the legislation itself and documents held by the Equality Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI); useful websites like Stammering Law and projects related to disability rights by other DDPOs or law firms.

Reasonable Access have a website with information specific to laws and regulations in Great Britain and Northern Ireland that can relate to disability access rights. We have a small invite-only email group for people taking disability discrimination legal challenges as Litigants in Person (self-represented) and a Slack space we are hoping to expand as a more open platform for people to meet, share ideas, discuss strategies and share for support for people challenging disability discrimination.

Governance

Reasonable Access currently has three trustees:

- Esther Leighton
- Doug Paulley
- Natalya Dell

The Foundation Constitution for Reasonable Access requires that 75% of trustees must be disabled people. Currently 100% of trustees are disabled people. Reasonable Access recognises that some people who support our aim may not be disabled themselves, but may be family, representatives or carers of disabled people who we refer to as 'proxies'. Non-disabled people can play an important role; however, we believe that disabled people should remain in the majority in the leadership of Reasonable Access.

Reasonable Access has a number of individuals who work with us on various ideas, discussions and projects in a voluntary or collaborative capacity. We have not yet formalised a volunteering or collaboration structure, so at present we do not record or retain any personal data about individuals other than the trustees.

This Report and Covid-19

This Reasonable Access trustee report is the first since we received CIO status. We had only just established functioning banking and PayPal accounts for Reasonable Access when the Covid-19 pandemic started to have a substantial impact on all of the trustees and many of the disabled people we collaborate and work with. Many disabled people started planning how to manage in a pandemic weeks in advance of the UK government's official lockdown on 23rd March 2020.

Impact of Covid-19 on trustees and volunteers

All of the trustees and volunteers had to deal with changes to healthcare, social care, education, work, travel and connections to friends and family.

Additionally, within the spirit of Reasonable Access, while not always not formally acting as an organisation, each of the trustees worked collectively with other disabled people to share our knowledge and help others deal with urgent Covid-19 issues including:

- Accessing food,
- Managing sudden withdrawal of health and social care,
- Arranging and managing repairs of disability equipment or dealing safely with tradespeople in people's homes,
- Writing guidance documents for disability specific issues and;
- Giving our support in a range of ways (being claimants, signposting, publicising and sharing information) to a range of urgent legal cases that had to be taken to challenge Covid-19 policies and practices which adversely harmed disabled people.

Issues disabled people faced (and may continue to face) during the pandemic included (in no particular order):

- NICE's hospital prioritisation criteria for treating people with Covid-19 being based on older people's frailty scoring, which adversely affected many disabled people.
- Difficulty being prioritised for, or being able to access food delivery slots.
- Visually impaired people were not given shielding letters, despite difficulties distancing and avoiding tactile contact. Other disabled people didn't get shielding letters or status despite genuine need.
- Healthcare services closing down so staff could be redeployed to Covid-19 care.
- Healthcare services refusing to allow personal care assistants or companions for disabled people who need them while accessing services or staying in hospital.
- Organisations such as supermarkets blocking accessible parking bays with 'Covid queues' or other items.
- Organisations setting up one-way systems, which forced everyone to use stairs, or walk much further - without any adjustments (even on request) for disabled people.
- Social care hours often cut entirely or significantly.
- Lockdown restrictions were unsuitable for some disabled people's needs.
- Covid-19 testing centres were often poorly accessible in a range of ways and had no systems for assisting people who could not self-administer tests.
- Facemasks and screens made it difficult for people to hear, lipread or see facial expressions.
- Organisations often claimed the Equality Act had been paused as an excuse for failing to adjust things to be accessible anticipatorily or on request by a disabled person.

All of the trustees were involved in working with others to challenge the above issues and more. Sometimes under the Reasonable Access 'brand' (see below for our specific achievements) and sometimes as individual activists or using our networks and contacts, which include those made through our Reasonable Access work.

Covid-19 specific work

We wrote a blogpost reminding people that [the Equality Act 2010 is still in full force](https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/coronavirus-should-not-remove-equality-act-obligations/) [https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/coronavirus-should-not-remove-equality-act-obligations/] and no 'easements' had been officially made to it (unlike social care and education legislation which was formally eased for some months in spite of disabled people's concerns and objections). We cited examples of good practice and encouraged disabled people to politely challenge access failings and insist that organisations did not deny or reduce accessibility.

Organisational management and Covid-19

At an organisation level, Covid-19 related impacts resulted in more variability in one or more of the trustees being unable to meet at the same time. We chose to prioritise self-care as described in Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's book '[Care Work: Dreaming of Disability Justice](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/38402046-care-work)' [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/38402046-care-work] which had been influential to us in setting up Reasonable Access.

We recognised that impairments are unpredictable at the best of times and Covid-19 times are far from 'best' for any of us, especially as disabled people (see above section). Feelings of guilt and trying to push ourselves too hard are the result of societal disablism which expects us to mask our difficulties and act as normatively as possible even if that has a negative cost. We actively work to behave differently (even if we still feel guilty) and listen to our bodies and minds. Even if that has meant work didn't happen; happened in a different way or took longer than we hoped.

We have explored a range of ways of working to deal with low-energy or some trustees being unable to attend. We now have a system of regular meetings which can turn into 'co-working' time if a full meeting cannot happen. We conduct many of our meetings in a format which makes it easier to follow an agenda, update minutes and keep track of tasks that we are working on. We have been able to identify tasks that we don't have capacity for and alternative ways to show support where needed. We continue to try and improve our organisational working.

As our plans to meet an expert in strategic planning and capacity building have not been possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic impacts, we are exploring new options to access our need for this advice. We had hoped to run one or more in-person events, which has not been possible. We will continue to avoid face-to-face events until it is safer for disabled people to attend. We hope to explore ways of running accessible online events.

In spite of Covid-19 making things a lot harder, we still have an significant number of achievements to report between November 2019 and February 2021 (The time period for this report).

Achievements

Financial activities

Before Covid-19 started, we managed to set up a business bank account for Reasonable Access. While we hoped to work with a more ethical banking institution, in practice we were very limited in choice. Many 'ethical' banking services were unsuitable and most mainstream and ethical banks required all trustees to attend a branch appointment in person, at the same time, to carry out identity checks and document signing. At that time, there was at least a 6 week wait for an appointment. We were concerned by access issues of a random bank branch combined with the difficulty of all of the trustees being well enough to travel to a certain place at the same time from three different cities.

Had we chosen to wait for an appointment, the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions would have resulted in any face to face appointment being cancelled. Many banks stopped opening new accounts for most of 2020 after from March as they struggled to deal with existing customers and many staff working from home. Small charity accounts were not seen as a priority. We know of new organisations that could not fully establish themselves because they could not get a bank account.

Most banks only provided telephone customer support, which is poorly accessible to all of us as trustees. The only bank that was able to do account creation (including identity checks and document signing) remotely, and text-based customer service support was NatWest - so that became our choice. This has the advantage of being one trustee's personal bank, so they are able to keep an eye on the Reasonable Access account at the same time as checking their own banking.

We would urge ethical banking providers to consider disability access issues so that disabled people running small organisations can access ethical services too.

Online Activities

Website and blog

Reasonable Access has a website at <http://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk>.

Our website is the main way that Reasonable Access currently provides education and information.

Trustee Doug Paulley has continued to host the website through his reseller account and has kept the WordPress installation running smoothly and securely. We would like to thank him for his ongoing hard work in this area.

We have continued to add and amend the website content based on subjects that arise in online discussions, areas of personal experience, and things we have been able to research. We aim to provide links to credible sources where relevant and appropriate throughout our content, especially where material is available in formats like Easy Read and British Sign Language (BSL). We have sought feedback from volunteers to ensure our website is as accessible as we can make it.

The addition of the 'Easy Table of Contents' plugin makes it easier to access a summary of a page's content and navigate our longer webpages. It also allows users to link to a very specific section of a longer page. This enables us to respond to people experiencing specific

types of disability access issues or discrimination with a link directly to relevant information about their rights and possible ways to deal with a specific issue. We regularly share links to our website and encourage other people to do so as well. One way we identify content to add to our website is through sharing links and identifying gaps in information provision. We would like to thank Allan Tyrer for using this plugin on Stammering Law and sharing information about it with us when we asked him about it.

We have also continued to write occasional blogposts on a range of topics or time-limited issues as they arise. The blog is also useful for content that wouldn't be suitable as a webpage in its own right.

Significant website and blog updates

We have updated and expanded the website considerably since November 2019, including (in no particular order):

- [Disability Access Bingo](#)
 - o [<https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/resources/disability-access-bingo/>]
- [Asserting yourself during discrimination](#)
 - o [<https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/resources/asserting-yourself-during-discrimination/>]
- [Complaining about disability discrimination](#)
 - o [<https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/resources/complaining-about-disability-discrimination/>]
- [Ombudsman and regulator services](#)
 - o [<https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/resources/ombudsman-and-regulator-services/>]
- [Disability proof](#)
 - o [<https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/legal-stuff/disability-proof/>]
- [Accessing Courts or Tribunals](#)
 - o [<https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/legal-stuff/accessing-courts-or-tribunals/>]
- [Adjustments in Court](#)
 - o [<https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/legal-stuff/adjustments-in-court/>]

Social Media

We have a Twitter account [@Reas_Access](#) [https://twitter.com/Reas_Access] that we use to share information relevant to Reasonable Access's principles and objectives. This might be examples of people successfully or starting to challenge discrimination, links to reports or new guidance that disabled people may find useful or other things related to disability rights. Through Twitter, we have established and sustained connections with individuals and organisations who work on disability rights.

We have decided not to use Facebook for Reasonable Access activities as their 'real name' policies are exclusionary for many people and we wish to retain more control over our community spaces.

Email

We have email contact details hello@reasonableaccess.org.uk on our website. We receive several emails a month from disabled people asking for support to deal with disability discrimination. Where possible we direct people to relevant information or signpost them to other organisations. We have to be clear with people that we are a tiny organisation, we have no legal training and limited resources ourselves. Sometimes people are in a difficult situations that we cannot advise them on as it is not within our areas of expertise. We sometimes have to set boundaries around responding to people who are understandably distressed, but demand more from us than we can provide. We believe that despite our limitations, there is value in validating people's need for support, access to information we or others provide and peer-support as well as recognising the reality of limited legal support options in the UK at present.

Test and trace accessibility - open letter

In June 2020, concerned by our own experiences and multiple reports of poor accessibility of Covid-19 testing and tracing services we wrote a detailed [open letter](https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/covid-19-test-and-trace-open-letter-and-what-you-can-do-next/) [<https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/covid-19-test-and-trace-open-letter-and-what-you-can-do-next/>] got over 120 signatures and sent the letter to NHS England and Public Health England (PHE).

Access issues included no reliable options for people who could not self-administer Covid-19 tests or people who could not manage unsolicited incoming telephone calls from Test & Trace teams who had no systems for people to declare their need for alternative communication and information formats.

While we did not get a response from the NHS or PHE, we started a conversation. Legal professionals told us the letter was educational for them in identifying a wide range of barriers different groups of disabled people may face in accessing Covid-19 testing and wider healthcare in general. We are aware that as a result of these conversations some people were able to challenge access failings directly, in partnership with other organisations or with the help of legal professionals.

Some barriers were reduced or removed but others still remain. We will never know what changes were wholly or partially linked to this piece of work.

Liaison and engagement with other organisations

Reasonable Access trustees collaborated with and supported a number of disability organisations on various projects and activities (in approx order of occurrence):

● Disabled Students UK

- In March 2020, universities suddenly restricted services and shut down shortly before and after the official lockdown announcement. Many disabled students were left distressed and anxious by the lack of institutional information that related to the barriers they now experienced and support available. Natalya used her professional work experience to collaborate with the Disabled Students UK collective between March and May 2020 to rapidly produce a Google Doc with information specifically for disabled students. Information was updated with links to third party and source materials. It eventually became a [fully published guidance document](https://disabledstudents.co.uk/covid-19-guidance/) [<https://disabledstudents.co.uk/covid-19-guidance/>] on the Disabled Students UK website.

● Staying Inn - Virtual Accessible Pub

- All of the trustees delivered a session on Disability Rights Advocacy which was [recorded and written up on our blog](https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/reasonable-access-visits-the-staying-inn/) [<https://www.reasonableaccess.org.uk/reasonable-access-visits-the-staying-inn/>] (We link to the Staying Inn recording from our blogpost)

● Disability Advice Rights TV - online seminar series

run by Chris Fry, of the former law firm Fry Law and Catherine Casserley, disability rights barrister from Cloisters chambers.

- Doug was a panelist on the [Transport episode](#)

- [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxTFOpQLV-E&list=PL8Gf2f3zal2WltjHRmgpORFc8umYICNVE&index=4>].
- Natalya was a panelist on the [Reasonable Adjustments episode](#)
- [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x53XSlv2nhA&list=PL8Gf2f3zal2WltjHRmgpORFc8umYICNVE&index=6>].

● **Public Law Project - "10 Years of the Equality Act: Where are we now?" webinars**

- Esther was a panelist on the funding discrimination challenges panel.
- Natalya delivered a 20-minute presentation about the barriers disabled people face with the legal system which received positive feedback from attenders, many who despite working in disability rights law and policy, had not realised the frequency or extent of access issues.

● **Trustees providing ad hoc support of other disabled people**

- Supporting people to access food shopping and delivery and signposting people to Fry Law who began taking large numbers of cases on this specific issue.
- Compiling and collating information about Personal Care Assistants visiting people's homes and suggested ways disabled people could keep themselves as safe as possible and adapt their policies, practices and training. Some of this information was copied by the Westminster government in their belatedly published guidance.
- Continued supporting people challenging disability discrimination, writing pre-action letters and signposting people to sources of legal assistance.

Accounts/Finances

Accounts time period

The Charity Commission requested accounts for the period 11th November 2011 (Reasonable Access's registration date) and 1st February 2021 which were submitted on 22nd October, 2021. Reasonable Access had £611 income and £2 outgoings during that time period.

Reasonable Access currently has £1,837.62.

Banking and financial services history

By 11th November 2019 (our formal CIO formation date), Reasonable Access had received £1,130.14 from private donations which until then, was held in a trustee's personal bank account. All donors were advised of how money was held before bank details to receive donations were sent to them. Once registered as a charity, Reasonable Access was able to complete the setup of a charity bank account with NatWest in February 2020. The money held in the trustee's bank account was transferred in full to the Reasonable Access account.

A PayPal account was also set up in February 2020. We have had some difficulties dealing with PayPal's verification demands over 2020 to prove our charitable status and confirm the identities of the trustees. At one point we had to delete the PayPal donate button from the Reasonable Access website as limitations prevented donations from being received.

Eventually the issues were resolved, but the trustees continue to have concerns about the

reliability of PayPal for a small organisation. As such, the trustees are exploring alternative payment services to be used alongside or possibly in place of PayPal.

Sources of income and expenditure

Between 11th November 2019 and 1st February 2021, Reasonable Access have received 16 separate donations ranging from £1.40 to £250. One person set up a regular monthly donation payment of £20 then £10 per month. As trustees, we would like to thank all donors for supporting Reasonable Access.

Donating expense reimbursements back to Reasonable Access

Sometimes when a trustee incurs a cost on behalf of Reasonable Access, they do not wish to be paid back. As we wish to have transparency around organisational expenditure, we have decided to account for these as an outgoing amount and then an incoming amount of money on the same date. We feel it is important to know how much money Reasonable Access needs to run.

We do not expect trustees to refuse reimbursement for legitimate expenditure and do not want to create an organisational culture where trustees or others are expected to refuse reimbursement or made to feel uncomfortable asking for reimbursement. This is especially important to us in light of disabled people often living on lower than average incomes and having higher than average living costs.

Future spending

It is likely that future expenditure will largely be around providing access to online or physical events. This is likely to include hiring more-accessible venues that can be more expensive, or funding communication support such as BSL/English interpreters and or professional human captioning (STTR).

We are also able to provide funding support to disabled people providing peer-support to others in legal situations such as court hearings to cover things like travel and subsistence. During the pandemic most court hearings went online so this demand has been low. Many disabled people still feel unable to travel safely or go to court spaces due to ongoing Covid-19 risk.

| Date | Description | Money In | Money Out | Balance |
|------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------|-----------|
| 11/15/2019 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,130.14 |
| 12/16/2019 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,150.14 |
| 01/13/2020 | Donation | £250.00 | | £1,400.14 |
| 01/15/2020 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,420.14 |
| 02/17/2020 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,440.14 |
| 02/20/2020 | PayPal test fee | £0.01 | | £1,440.15 |
| 02/24/2020 | Donation | £1.40 | | £1,441.55 |
| 02/24/2020 | Expenses ND (Stationery) | | £1.40 | £1,440.15 |
| 03/16/2020 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,460.15 |
| 04/16/2020 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,480.15 |
| 05/18/2020 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,500.15 |
| 08/16/2020 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,520.15 |
| 08/17/2020 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,540.15 |
| 09/16/2020 | Donation | £20.00 | | £1,560.15 |
| 16/10/2020 | Donation | £10.00 | | £1,580.15 |
| 11/03/2020 | Donation | £100.00 | | £1,590.15 |
| 16/11/2020 | Donation | £10.00 | | £1,700.15 |
| 10/12/2020 | Donation | £30.00 | | £1,730.15 |
| 16/12/2020 | Donation | £10.00 | | £1,740.15 |
| | | | | |
| | | £611.41 | 1.4 | £610.01 |

11th Nov 2019 to Numbers used with

1st Feb 2021 Charity Commission £611 £2

[illegible]