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CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Accessible Web Design

As part of the Institute of Medical Illustrators' (IMI) scheme for continuing professional development (CPD), worksheets will be published at regular intervals in this Journal. These are designed to provide the members of IMI with a structured CPD activity that offers one way to earn credits. It is recognized that this worksheet requires some time spent undertaking the exercises. This activity has been tested, and hours have been allocated to individual tasks (see clocks), but these are intended only as a guide. The answers to the questions, along with any notes and reflections you make or other publications you find, should be kept in your CPD portfolio.

This worksheet requires the availability of an internet connection only, and a list of sources of information including websites and articles of interest related to accessible web design have been included. Although the tasks below are set out in logical progression, it may be that you undertake several of the tasks alongside each other, or begin with Task 6 because you need it more now. However, please try going back to Task 1 because the sequence is designed to help your practice and thinking, leading on to reflective writing.

Where are you now?

> **Task 1: How do you currently set out to design a series of web pages?**

List the stages you go through by reviewing your design process for a recently completed project. This could be a small part of a site rather than a large project, or, if you have yet to start a web project, use something else you have designed like an information leaflet, poster or even a presentation.

> **Task 2: Take a close look at the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).**

Choosing two or more of the resources listed below, read and reflect on them to make a list of the key issues that you need to take into consideration within your professional practice.

1. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA),[1] and, for anyone involved in education, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.[2]
2. 'Web site design and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995', a paper by Mason and Casserley,[3] also available from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) website.[4]
3. Report on 'The Web, Access and Inclusion for Disabled People' from the Disability Rights Commission.[5]
4. 'Disabled people and the internet experiences, barriers and opportunities', a report by Pilling, Barrett and Floyd for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.[6] A short summary of the findings is available.[7]

> **Task 3: Take the lists you made from 1 and 2.**

Compare how you actually design with the issues you should be taking into account. Do they match up? If not, what are the extra things you should be doing to ensure your designs are complying with the Acts?

Thinking about the design process

An essential part of accessible web design, following on from the DDA, is the involvement of the end-users in the design process from the start, not as an additional task once a project is completed. This is often called 'Universal design' or 'Inclusive design';[8,9] after all, something that is designed to be inclusive will work for everyone, not just people with special educational needs or disabilities. This is in essence going back to first principles: for whom are you designing?

> **Task 4: Make a list of contacts and talk to people whom you can involve in the design process within your organization or local community.**

This could include your Disability Advice Officer, Staff Development Unit, other health workers, local support groups or patient forums. Do not forget, if you are freelance, working with local support groups could lead to

paid work. DDA applies equally to large and small companies with websites.

> **Task 5: Keep a reflective diary or journal with ideas from your meetings.**

This could be integrated into your design record. It is important that this should be reflective thinking about how their ideas affect your thinking about design and how to incorporate the issues raised into your designs. This whole area of end-user research is integral to the web design process, and authors such as Neilsen have brought this issue to the fore.[10]

Practical design considerations

The ideas that users raise with you, and that you have looked at in your design journal, need to be the start of your thinking for your next project. This may well be labour intensive the first time around, but the analysis you do can be used for other projects, and built on, as you develop your accessible web designs.

One aspect of looking at the implications of DDA is the interpretation of what we should do in terms of making a 'reasonable adjustment'. If you are starting a design from scratch, or doing a total re-design, then being inclusive should be accepted practice. If you are trying to make a site more accessible without resorting to a complete redesign, you should be making as many changes as possible that make your site easier to access.

An easy way of assessing how accessible a web page is to a reader is to save a page to your desktop as html, without graphics or images, then open it up in your own web browser (compare *Figures 1 and 2*).

> **Task 6: Take a look at a range of web accessibility guidelines and reflect on how you can include these to help make your web design accessible.**

There are a lot of web accessibility guidelines available, but the commonly accepted practice is to conform to the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) web content accessibility guidelines.[11] If you want to know more
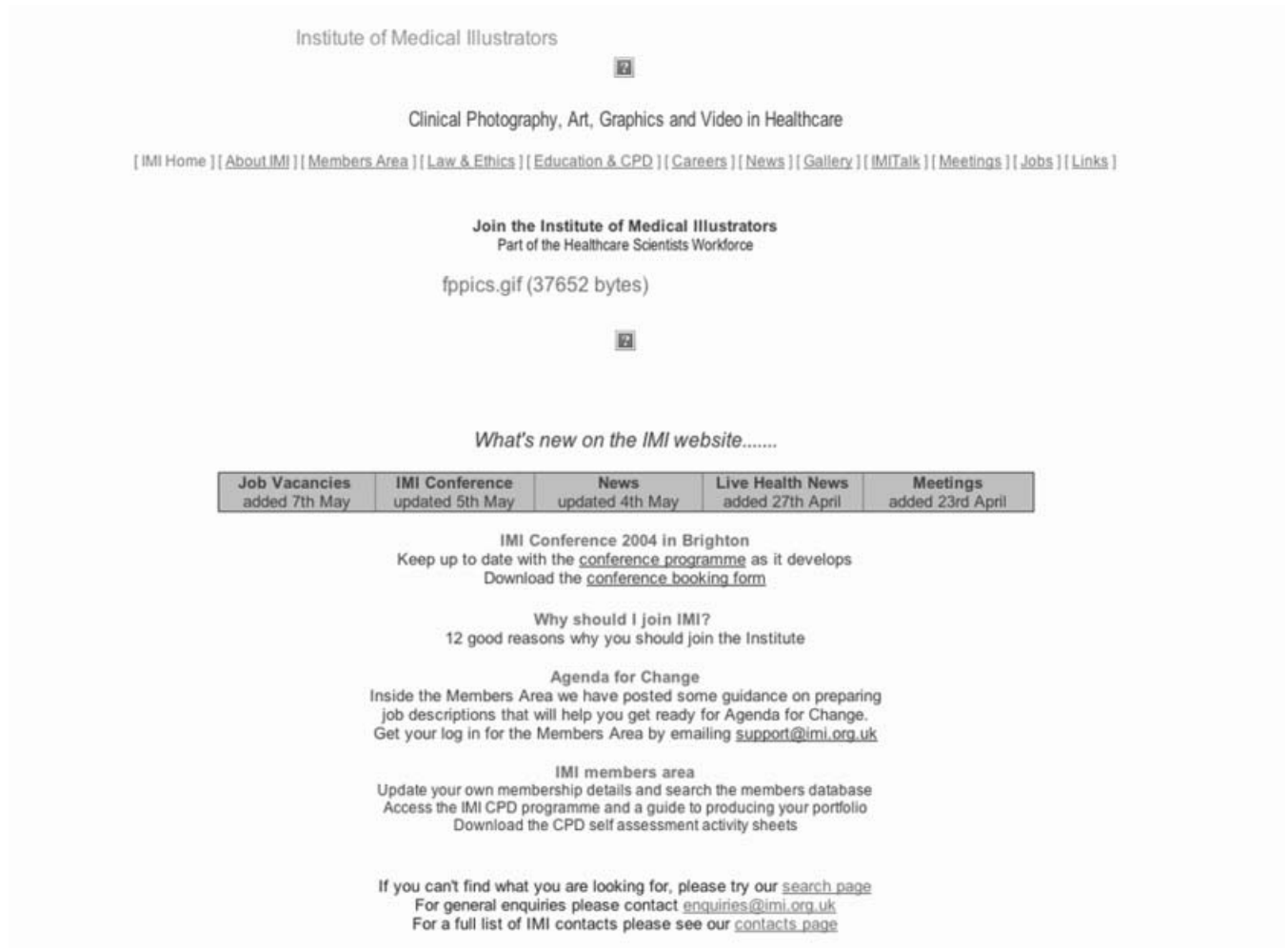

Figure 1.

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If you can't find what you are looking for, please try our search page
For general enquiries please contact enquiries@imi.org.uk
For a full list of IMI contacts please see our contacts page

Figure 2.

about the W3C web accessibility initiative, there is a series of supporting presentations,[12] the general Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) website,[13] and a guide to evaluating websites for accessibility.[14] The National Health Service (NHS) web accessibility guidelines can be found on the NHS identity site.[15,16]

You can also find more advice on web design sites, for example, Alistapart[17] and Sitepoint,[18] manufacturers' websites Macromedia,[19] and educational resources, such as the Learning and Teaching Subject Network for Information and Computing Sciences, which has a large number of useful links to other websites.[20]

You should record this work in your portfolio. CPD portfolios will be selected at random for review by the CPD co-ordinator. Full details of the Institute's CPD scheme can be found at *www.imi.org.uk/cpd.htm.* If you have any comments (positive or negative) about this worksheet please pass them to the CPD co-ordinator – we value your feedback and it will help us in developing future worksheets. If you have any suggestions for topics that we should consider for the next worksheet please also pass these to the CPD co-ordinator.

All website addresses were correct at the time of going to press.

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4. Royal National Institute for the Blind Web accessibility resources. *http://www.rnib.org.uk/accessibility/*.
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7. Joseph Rowntree Foundation *Does the internet open up opportunities for disabled people?* May 2004. *http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialcare/524.asp*.
8. Design Council *http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/*.

9. Helen Hamlyn Research Centre and Design Council Inclusive design education resource. *http://www.designcouncil. info/inclusivedesignresource/*.

10. Neilsen J. *http://www.useit.com*.

11. World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0. *http://www.w3.org*.

12. World Wide Web Consortium Curriculum for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0. *http://www.w3.org/WAI/wcag-curric/*.

13. World Wide Web Consortium Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI). *http://www.w3.org/WAI/*.

14. World Wide Web Consortium Evaluating web sites for accessibility. *http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/*.

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16. Department of Health *NHS Identity*. 13 April 2004. *http:// www.nhsidentity.nhs.uk/*.

17. Alistapart. *http://www.alistapart.com/topics/accessibility/*.

18. Sitepoint. *http://www.sitepoint.com/subcat/accessibility*.

19. Macromedia. *http://www.macromedia.com/macromedia/ accessibility/*.

20. Centre for Information and Computer Sciences, Learning and Teaching Subject Network. *http://www.ics.ltsn.ac.uk/ resources/disability/*.