

The accessibility of UK University websites in June 2019

At a glance

A new UK law introduces strong new requirements for UK public sector websites, all of which must comply by September 2020.

Silktide researched the accessibility of 123 University websites in the UK, to assess their current readiness for the law.

Number of issues per page

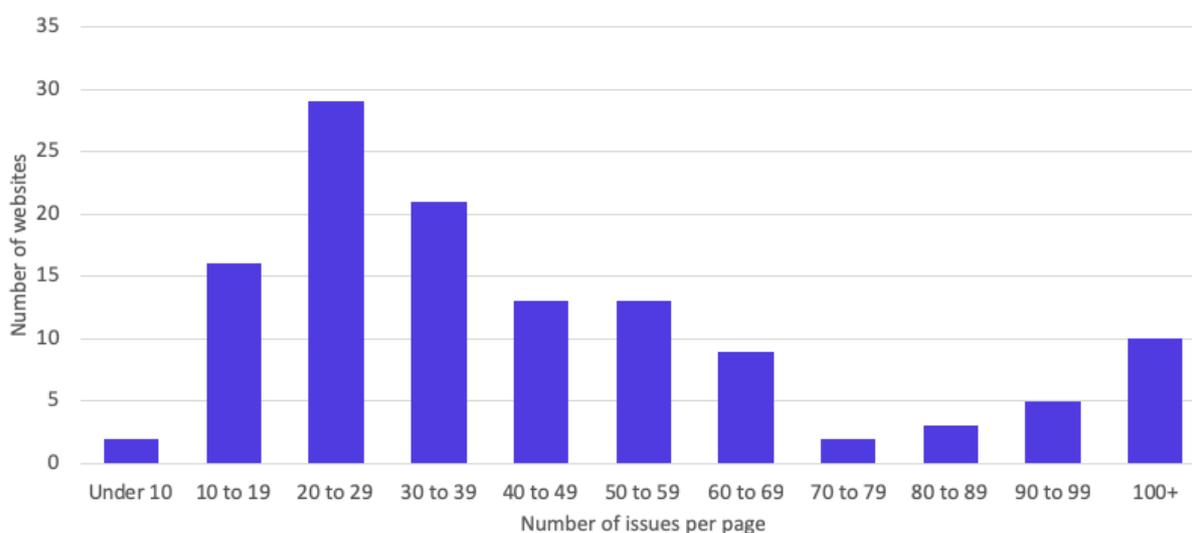
We tested websites for unambiguous WCAG failings only. Subjective issues were not tested, so the actual number of issues will be higher.

The average website had 47.4 issues per page, with the best performing website having 6 issues per page, and the worst with 176.

Not all issues are equally impactful, so this is not a perfect measure of accessibility, but it gives some idea of the scale of the challenge ahead.

Issues per page	Websites
Under 10	2
10 to 19	16
20 to 29	29
30 to 39	21
40 to 49	13
50 to 59	13
60 to 69	9
70 to 79	2
80 to 89	3
90 to 99	5
100+	10

Number of websites with number of issues per page



Most common issues

These 17 issues all appeared on at least half of the University websites tested:

Level	SC	Issue	% pages	% websites
A	2.4.4	Link has same text for different destinations	68%	92%
A	1.3.1	Form controls missing labels	60%	90%
A	1.4.11	Non-text elements have insufficient contrast	62%	90%
AA	1.4.3	Text on images has insufficient contrast	51%	88%
A	2.4.1	Iframes used without a title	41%	88%
AA	1.4.3	Text contrast too low	50%	86%
A	1.4.1	Link contrast too low	47%	86%
A	4.1.2	Link cannot be used by a screen reader	47%	86%
AA	2.4.7	Focus is not visible	47%	86%
AA	1.3.5	Form fields don't identify their purpose	29%	86%
A	4.1.1	Duplicate ID	20%	78%
A	2.4.4	Purpose of link is unclear	23%	78%
A	1.3.1	Empty headings	14%	77%
A	1.1.1	Missing alternative text	29%	76%
A	1.1.1	No text inside a link	13%	64%
AA	1.4.10	Pages scroll in two dimensions on mobile	8%	62%
A	2.4.1	Broken link on same page	20%	59%

Legend

- Level = WCAG level.
- SC = WCAG Success Criterion.
- Issue = The specific issue identified. Note a SC may have more than one issue.
- % pages = The percentage of pages found with this issue on.
- % website = The percentage of websites found with this issue on.

PDFs

99.4% of PDFs contained WCAG issues, with almost all of them reporting:

- Missing title
- No headings specified
- No bookmarks being used
- No default language specified
- Requires tagging

These represent the most basic fundamentals for PDF accessibility.

Methodology

100 web pages were tested for each of the 123 University websites using Silktide Monitor, our automated website monitoring platform. We tested PDFs found within these first 100 pages, discovering 5,047 PDF documents, totalling 59,989 pages.

The latest WCAG 2.1 standard was used, with mobile pages being tested on an iPhone 5.

Only unambiguous A and AA checks were reviewed, for example: “links have insufficient contrast”. Subjective criteria, such as “is the focus order appropriate” were ignored.

All tests were conducted between June 17th and June 21st 2019.

Understanding and meeting the new accessibility law

The law

The latest law for UK public sector websites¹ is quite simple. You need to:

- Meet the new accessibility standards (WCAG 2.1 AA)
- Publish an accessibility statement

A small number of organisations are exempt, but even these have to comply with the Equality Act 2010 or Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (for Northern Ireland). Complying with the new law will cover you in all cases.

Deadlines

All public sector websites have to be accessible by 22nd September 2020, but there's a transition before then.

Date	What's covered
22 nd September 2019	New public sector websites (published after 22 nd September 2018)
22 nd September 2020	All public sector websites

By 22nd of September 2019, all *new* public sector websites need to comply with the law. "New" means websites that were published after 22nd September 2018.

¹ The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018

The changing standards

In June 2018, the leading standard for web accessibility changed from WCAG 2.0 to 2.1. The old standard was written when the iPhone came out, and desperately needed updating for the challenges of the modern web.

WCAG 2.1 is an extension of the old standard. So nothing from the old standard has gone away, but there are now 17 extra guidelines. Here are some of the biggest additions:

- **Mobile and tablet devices** Guidelines 1.3.4, 1.4.10
Websites must only scroll in one axis at once on a small screen. They must work in both landscape or portrait, as users may not be able to rotate their device (e.g. if attached to a wheelchair).
- **Automatic completion** Guideline 1.3.5
Modern browsers can fill in common information like your name and email address for you. You must now support this capability where applicable.
- **Better legibility** Guidelines 1.4.11, 1.4.12
The old standard required text to have enough colour contrast to be easy for everyone to read. This has now been expanded to cover things like the spacing between letters and lines, plus the contrast of buttons, form controls, and more.
- **Alternative modalities** Guidelines 2.5.1, 2.5.2, 2.5.4
Websites must provide an alternative to performing gestures (such as swiping), using multiple fingers at once (e.g. pinch-to-zoom), moving their device (e.g. tilting their phone), or drag-and-drop. Accessible alternatives must be provided, e.g. buttons to scroll or zoom.
- **Large enough to touch** Guideline 2.5.5
Areas of your website that can be clicked or tapped must be sufficiently large, especially on mobile devices. This aids users with visual and motor impairments.
- **Accessible statuses** Guideline 4.1.3
Specific technologies to alert a user to content they may not be able to see, such as confirmation that a form is submitted or an error message.

What do I do?

Generally the older, larger, and more interactive your website is, the more difficult it will be to comply. If you were already working towards WCAG 2.0 – the earlier standard – you will find this much easier.

1. **Audit your current level of accessibility**

Without this it's impossible to even plan future steps. You can optionally publish the results as an accessibility statement right away.

2. **Prioritise and commission changes**

Depending on the result of your audit, this may be simple or require a substantial redesign of your web properties. Most likely your content, such as PDFs, will need modifying to comply, and your website templates and forms will need updating.

3. **Complete changes**

You will probably have to train your staff and procure new products and services, which can be a lengthy process.

4. **Re-audit your accessibility**

By this stage, you should be mostly be expecting to identify minor snags and fix them. The result of this audit will become your accessibility statement.

5. **Publish accessibility statement**

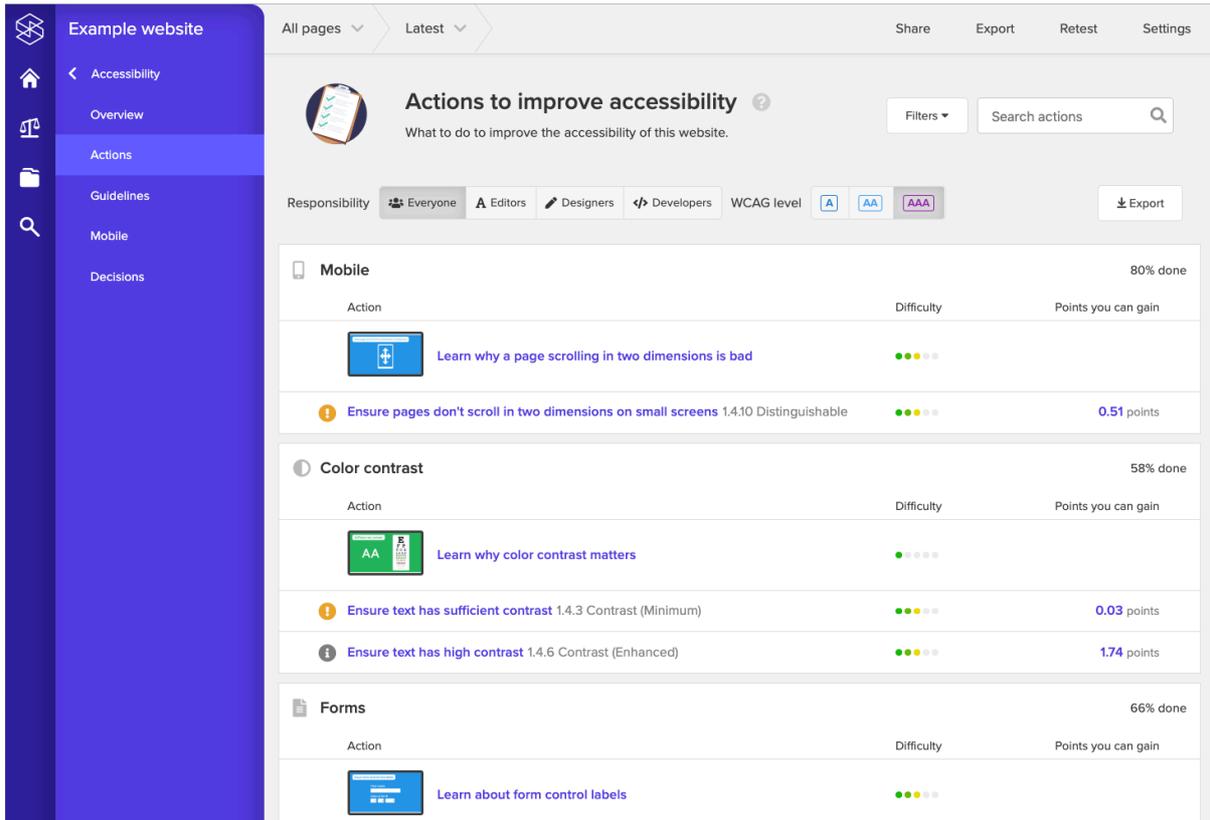
Write and publish a formal accessibility statement (the format for this is not finalised, but will be announced by the UK government in “early 2019”).

Unless you are confident in your current level of accessibility, you should allow 12 – 18 months to get ready.

Need help with your accessibility?

We can help you meet the challenges of the new law.

Silktide is a platform for automating your website accessibility testing. We measure your accessibility and guide your team through the steps you need to become accessible.



The screenshot displays the Silktide platform interface for an "Example website". The left sidebar contains navigation options: Accessibility, Overview, Actions, Guidelines, Mobile, and Decisions. The main content area is titled "Actions to improve accessibility" and includes a search bar, filters, and a table of actions. The table is organized into sections: Mobile (80% done), Color contrast (58% done), and Forms (66% done). Each section lists specific actions with their difficulty levels and points that can be gained.

Section	Action	Difficulty	Points you can gain
Mobile	Learn why a page scrolling in two dimensions is bad	●●●●○	
	Ensure pages don't scroll in two dimensions on small screens 1.4.10 Distinguishable	●●●●○	0.51 points
Color contrast	Learn why color contrast matters	●●●●○	
	Ensure text has sufficient contrast 1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum)	●●●●○	0.03 points
	Ensure text has high contrast 1.4.6 Contrast (Enhanced)	●●●●○	1.74 points
Forms	Learn about form control labels	●●●●○	

Key features

- Automatically measure your WCAG 2.1 compliance
- Identify actions to fix each problem
- Notify your team automatically as problems occur (when you publish a page)
- Benchmark your websites against each other and your peers
- Training, videos, and webinars on how to become compliant

The Silktide platform can also cover your SEO, quality checks, and GDPR compliance.

Request a free demo

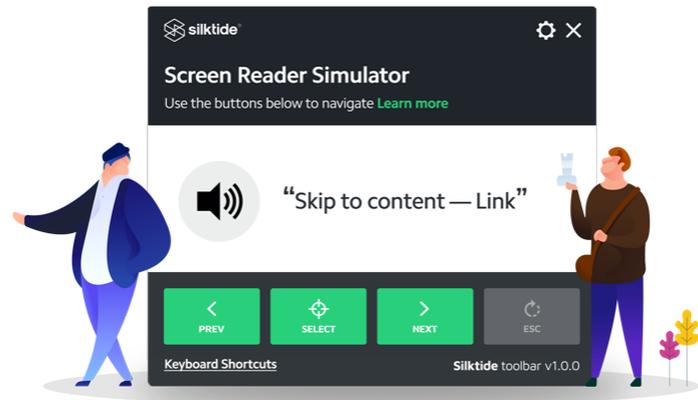
Get in touch at silktide.com/demo or call us on 01332 460 460.

Useful resources

Free screen reader simulator

Experiencing your website through a screen reader is a key requirement for accessibility, but screen readers themselves can be overwhelming. We built a free, easy-to-use simulator designed to help anyone experience the web like a blind or partially-sighted person.

Download it from:
silktide.com/toolbar



Web Accessibility Made Easy

Amazingly enough, there's not a single book covering WCAG 2.1, or any modern aspects of web accessibility. The few books that cover web accessibility at all are all heavy and technical. So we're writing a book on web accessibility, for the rest of us.

Learn more at: silktide.com/book

Questions?

More questions about web accessibility? Send an email to our CEO oliveremberton@silktide.com or message him on Twitter at [@oliveremberton](https://twitter.com/oliveremberton).