



**Survey of disability training provision by transport providers  
in Northern Ireland**

**January 2014**

Imtac is committed to making information about our work accessible. Details of how to obtain information in your preferred format are included on the next page.

## **Making our information accessible**

As an organisation of and for disabled people and older people Imtac recognises that the way information is provided can be a barrier to accessing services and participation in public life. We are committed to providing information about our work in formats that best suit the needs of individuals.

All our documents are available in hard copy in 14pt type size as standard. We also provide word and pdf versions of our documents on our website – [www.imtac.org.uk](http://www.imtac.org.uk). In addition we will provide information in a range of other formats. These formats include:

- Large print
- Audio cassette or CD
- Daisy disc
- Braille
- Electronic copies on disc or via email in PDF or word
- Easy read

We will also provide information about our work in other languages if you require this.

If you would like this publication in any of the formats listed above or if you have any other information requirements please contact:

Michael Lorimer

Imtac  
Enterprise House  
55-59 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8FE

Telephone/Textphone: 028 9072 6020

Fax: 028 9024 5500

Email: [info@imtac.org.uk](mailto:info@imtac.org.uk)

## About us

Imtac is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Our role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

Our aim is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development.

## About this report

This report looks at the training about disabled people currently provided to people involved the delivery of transport services. The report makes an assessment of what is currently provided, as well as setting out our proposals for future provision.

## Background to the report

Writing a guide<sup>1</sup> in 1991 a group of disabled people summarised perfectly why training is so important:

**“Our awareness of the reality of disability is limited because we live in a society geared towards people whose bodies and minds are fully functioning. This may seem strange when one considers that disability or illness can happen to anyone at any moment of their lives – it is an inevitable part of the human experience. Nevertheless, society is organised in such a way as to treat disability as an exceptional circumstance that requires special and, in the main, separate provision which is often inadequate and serves only to maintain the divisions and lack of understanding between able-bodied [non-disabled] and disabled people.”**

---

<sup>1</sup> ["Disability Equality Training - Trainers Guide" Published by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work June 1991](#)

From the perspective of developing an inclusive transport system it is essential that people who design and provide transport services have an understanding of who disabled people are and more broadly of inclusive design. It is widely agreed that this best achieved through training around disability. A policy promoting training about disabled people was included in the Accessible Transport Strategy<sup>2</sup> published by DRD in 2005. However there is widespread disagreement about what such training should involve. Understanding differences in approaches to training is essential to understanding how Imtac approaches the assessment of current provision.

Traditionally much of the training relating to disabled people has fallen under what is called disability awareness training. Typically this training is delivered by a non-disabled person and takes a medical or individual approach to disability. This means that disability is considered an individual matter and the training focuses on individual impairment and medical details. It emphasises what organisations and their staff must do to help accommodate disabled people and their impairments. Disability awareness tends to portray a stereotyped view of disabled people and is based around the well meaning but out-dated desire to help those perceived by society as less fortunate.

During the 1980's and 1990's an alternative to disability awareness training was developed by disabled people. This is called Disability Equality Training<sup>3</sup> (DET). DET takes a social rather than a medical/individual model to disability. The social model examines how people have been and are disabled not by any impairment but by society's historical, attitudinal, institutional and environmental barriers. DET explores how organisations and individuals can help remove these barriers and become more inclusive by influencing and changing their policies, procedures and practices. DET is developed and delivered by disabled people and considers disability as an equal opportunities issue similar to issues such as race or gender and stresses that inclusive design benefits everyone not just disabled people.

---

<sup>2</sup> ["An Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland" DRD 2005](#)

<sup>3</sup> Capitals are used by disabled people when referring to Disability Equality Training

Whilst disability awareness training and disability equality training remain distinct types of training there are many courses that mix and confuse elements of both. Issues are further complicated by the emergence of training around compliance resulting from legislation relating to disability and disabled people. The obvious example of legislation is the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Typically such training is characterised by satisfying the minimum standards as set out by legislation, encouraging a checklist approach to providing services. This approach often falls well short of disabled peoples expectations.

Imtac has previously developed guidelines<sup>4</sup> for transport providers around training about disabled people. In these guidelines we make clear that the Committee views Disability Equality Training as the most effective and appropriate type of training. Policy 6 of the ATS requires all providers funded by the DRD to provide staff with disability awareness training.

### **How we approached this report**

In developing this report Imtac contacted a range of transport operators funded by the Department for Regional Development (DRD). Organisations contacted included Translink, the Rural Community Transport Partnerships and providers of the Door2Door transport service. We did this by email and followed up by telephone asking for details about any training provided by the organisation relating to disabled people. This work was undertaken in 2012. In addition, at request of the Community Transport Association (CTA), representatives from Imtac met with the Director of CTA in Northern and a Manager of one of the Rural Community Transport Partnerships to discuss training in more detail.

### **What we found**

In total ten organisations provided us with information. These organisations included Translink, seven Rural Community Transport Partnerships and two providers of the Door2Door

---

<sup>4</sup> ["Disability Training - Good Practice Guidelines for Transport Providers" Imtac 2012](#)

transport service. All of the organisations that responded provided some training for staff about disabled people.

Both the Rural Community Transport Providers and the providers of Door2Door Transport told us that the DRD required that staff involved in delivering services undertake specific modules of the Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme or MIDAS. These modules relate to assisting disabled passengers. This means that all drivers of minibuses delivering services under Dial-a-lift or Door2door must undertake the module of MIDAS entitled "Additional Training for Drivers of Accessible Minibuses". Volunteer drivers using their own vehicle provide some services delivered by the Rural Partnerships. We were told all drivers providing this service are required by DRD to undertake MIDAS Passenger Assistance Training (PATs) that include modules in providing assistance to disabled passengers.

Some of the Rural Partnerships have arranged other training for staff relating to disabled people. Two Partnerships had arranged for visual awareness training for drivers, several Partnerships had arranged training about disability legislation provided by the Equality Commission. One Partnership had arranged Disability Equality Training for staff delivered by a disabled trainer.

Translink told us that all bus drivers and train conductors receive some training around disabled people at induction and refresher training. In addition bus drivers are required by European Regulation to undertake annual periodic training. As part of this requirement nearly 2000 bus drivers undertook a half-day disability awareness training course in 2010. In 2011 all drivers undertook training relating to customer care for older passengers. Translink worked with older people to develop a DVD to be used in this training. More recently bus drivers received training in relation to people with autism. Most recently Translink worked with Guide Dogs to develop a DVD designed to make drivers more aware of passengers with a visual impairment. It is planned to use this in training delivered to drivers over the coming year.

In addition to this training many bus inspectors and managers within Translink have undergone training around legislation including the DDA delivered by the Equality Commission.

## **Our assessment of current provision**

On the face of it an assessment of the current provision of training must conclude that progress has been made since the publication of the Accessible Transport Strategy in 2005. Frontline staff delivering transport services do now routinely undertake training around disabled people which was certainly not the case prior to 2005. Imtac acknowledges this change and views this as a positive development. However the Committee have three major reservations about the nature of current training.

The first reservation is that current training does not by and large reflect the social model of disability. The components of both Midas and training delivered to Translink staff represent traditional disability awareness training. Disabled people and disability is largely still portrayed as an individual issue and the training focuses on how organisations and staff can accommodate disabled people and their impairments within existing services. This approach fails to address the often fundamental barriers to travel created by the design of transport services themselves.

In addition to the awareness training the other main form of training used appears to be training relating to compliance with legislation. Whilst this again is positive, in the view of Imtac this type of training has limitations, encouraging a checklist or task orientated approach. Compliance training does little to demonstrate a strategic commitment to improving services for disabled people or partnership with disabled people.

The second reservation is that the training delivered appears to be largely confined to frontline staff including drivers, conductors etc. It would appear that management and boards of organisations do not receive training around disabled people and where this does take place training largely focuses on compliance with legislation. Imtac believes that this approach creates three major difficulties. Firstly it reinforces the perception that disabled people rather than the transport services themselves are the problem. Secondly it reduces disability to solely an issue of customer care rather equal opportunities. Finally it denies the opportunity for organisations to look how changes to the design of services, policies and practices can make overall services more inclusive for all passengers not just disabled people.

The final reservation is that by and large disabled people have not been involved in the design and delivery of training delivered. This matters for a number of reasons. Firstly it does little to develop the understanding between disabled people and non-disabled people, encouraging a traditional and stereotypical view of disabled people. Secondly this approach is contrary to obligations on Government to promote the participation of disabled people and positive attitudes towards disabled people under both the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and Articles 8, 29 and 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability (UNCPRD). Finally it does not take account of the published advice of Imtac.

Why should any of these concerns matter? Should we not be focused on ensuring that when disabled people use transport they receive appropriate support and assistance? On a simple level the answer to this question is of course yes. However disabled people account for over 20% of the population of Northern Ireland and despite progress continue to face discrimination, oppression and exclusion from a society that devalues them. In the view of Imtac traditional training around disabled people does little to challenge the cultural, environmental and economic barriers that prevent the full inclusion of disabled people in our environment and does in many ways reinforce a stereotypical view of disabled people. It also means that opportunities to benefit other passengers through inclusive design are lost.

It is worth considering the following scenario to demonstrate the practical differences between approaches to training:

***A bus operator delivers a service using buses with stepped access and a lift to enable access for wheelchair users. A range of passengers including older people, disabled people and passengers with young children use the service.***

Under the traditional model of training the operator views any passenger that has difficulty using the service as having special or particular needs. Drivers will be provided with training around assisting such passengers to be accommodated on the bus.

Under the Disability Equality Training model the operator and drivers will consider, in discussion with disabled people, which

aspects of the design of the service makes access difficult for passengers. The operator and drivers quickly identify that the stepped access presents a barrier passengers, as does the passenger lift. They conclude that low-floor buses with step-free access for all passengers will make the service more accessible and inclusive not only for disabled passengers but for all passengers. Drivers receive training in how to best use the new vehicles.

### **The next steps**

With the implementation of Accessible Transport Strategy due to end in 2015 Imtac believes the time is now right to look again at the issue of training for staff involved the design and provision of transport services.

The Committee realises that many people, including transport providers, policy makers and some disabled people and their organisations, will disagree with our assessment of current training. For this reason Imtac does not believe that prescriptive advice around future training requirements will be helpful. On the contrary we recommend that DRD initiate a review process that seeks to develop a consensus approach to training amongst disabled people, their organisations, transport providers and policy makers.

Imtac does, however recommend two specific requirements to be included in any process. The first is that any future decisions around training are based around the obligations and framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. The second is that disabled people themselves have an active role in the process. The Committee would welcome the opportunity to play a leading role in developing a consensus with Government, transport providers, disabled people and their organisations.