ACCESSIBLE SURVEY QUESTIONS PROJECT

THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LINGUISTICALLY EASY READ (LER) SURVEY QUESTIONS

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Impact & Insight Toolkit (Toolkit) offers a suite of ready-made survey questions. This includes the Dimensions questions, but also those contained in Question Banks and Evaluation Templates. Each and every question was created through a careful and considered process, where the primary focus was in accurately capturing the desired information.

However, arts and cultural works in the UK attract diverse audiences from many different backgrounds. When survey questions are overly complex or difficult to understand, they create unintended barriers. This means valuable insights from individuals who find standard survey formats challenging are often missed.

To ensure a fair representation of their experiences in the data, the surveys we offer to arts and cultural organisations should therefore be accessible to everyone who participates.

This report summarises a project carried out by the Counting What Counts (CWC) team which increases the accessibility of Toolkit survey questions.

By adapting our survey questions to more closely align with the Easy Read accessibility standard, we lower these barriers. This ensures more people can share their experiences - thus supporting arts and cultural organisations capture feedback from a broader and more representative cross-section of the community.

The initiative was executed through a three-stage process:

1) Easy Read transcription by A2i[1]
2) Cognitive testing in partnership with Shift Insight[2]
3) Internal consolidation of recommendations by the CWC team.

The result of the project is a collection of new survey questions, labelled as Linguistically Easy Read (LER), available to registered users of the Toolkit which use more accessible language whilst collecting comparable data on the same outcomes.

2. PROJECT RATIONALE AND SCOPE

2.1. Background & need

We learn a lot through our interactions with organisations making use of the Toolkit, and the things we learn often direct any changes or improvements that we make.

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[1] A2i - https://a2i.co.uk/ [accessed January 2026].
[2] Shift Insight - https://shift-insight.co.uk/ [accessed January 2026].

We were made aware that organisations working with some demographics found the Toolkit unsuitable due to the language used in the survey questions. There were a few different contexts where people faced challenges:

1. Adults with learning difficulties
2. People for which English is an additional language
3. People with less experience with an artform or the arts in general

Based on the insights gained through user consultation, it became clear that many organisations would benefit if the language of the surveys was updated to be more accessible.

2.2. Project definition & Easy Read standard

The work took the existing set of templated survey questions for the Culture Counts UK platform and ensured they all meet an accessibility standard. By "templated survey questions" we mean Dimensions[3] questions, questions in the Question Bank[4], and questions included in Evaluation Templates[5].

The Toolkit makes use of surveys targeting different groups - the public, peers and self-assessors. In planning for the project, it became clear that many of the survey questions which were designed with peer and self-assessors in mind were often more complex. As such, it would be impossible to convert these into a more accessible format without losing the meaning of the question.

Therefore, **the project focussed on making accessible questions for public respondents only**.

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[3] CWC Dimensions History Report - https://impactandinsight.co.uk/app/uploads/2023/11/CWC-Dimensions-History-NOV-2023-Adobe.pdf [accessed January 2026].
[4] Question Bank guidance - https://impactandinsight.co.uk/resource/question-bank/ [accessed January 2026].
[5] Evaluation Templates guidance - https://impactandinsight.co.uk/resource/evaluation-templates/ [accessed January 2026].

The accessibility standard we had in our sights was **Easy Read**. The definition of Easy Read below is taken from the AbilityNet[6] website:

> "Easy Read is a way of making written information easier to understand. Easy Read documents usually combine short, jargon-free sentences with simple, clear images to help explain the content."

The Easy Read format is designed for anyone who might have difficulty reading and understanding textual information. This might be because they have a learning difficulty, because English isn't their first language, they are neurodivergent, or other reasons.

2.3. Limitations & paper surveys

A limitation in providing a 'full' Easy Read experience as part of the Culture Counts online survey platform is that we cannot include images to help explain the content of the question. This means that the survey questions when viewed in the platform cannot technically be described as 'Easy Read' (more on this later!).

However, for paper survey versions of Toolkit surveys, it is possible to provide both clear images and jargon-free language.

2.4. Acknowledging complexity

It is important to acknowledge that the CWC team does not comprise Easy Read experts. Furthermore, creating truly accessible language is not an exact science and often involves subjective judgment.

The final set of accessible questions represents our best efforts to align with the Easy Read standard, informed by the expert transcription provided by A2i and the rigorous cognitive testing conducted by Shift Insight, within the constraints of the Culture Counts platform.

We have balanced the goal of accessibility with the necessity of collecting data which still represents the key quality outcomes of arts and cultural work.

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[6] AbilityNet - https://abilitynet.org.uk/ [accessed January 2026].

3. PROJECT METHODOLOGY AND TESTING

3.1. Easy Read transcription (A2i)

This first stage of work involved taking all existing ready-made survey questions and transcribing them into an Easy Read format.

We worked with A2i to do this stage of transcription. It involved a person with expertise and knowledge of the Easy Read format reviewing every question and writing a new version of the question which aimed to capture the same meaning but using Easy Read language.

The transcription process was informed by a consultation with a group of adults with learning difficulties. This group was provided a set of original dimensions questions and asked for their opinions about their accessibility and what they found challenging.

However, this stage didn't assess whether the transcribed questions were understood in the same way as the original questions. This is particularly important for the Dimensions questions because we want the new versions of the survey questions to be compatible with the existing versions wherever possible.

The output of this stage was a complete set of transcribed survey questions with images to accompany each question. An example of this is shown below:

The event had some interesting ideas.

3.2. Cognitive testing & concept validation (Shift Insight)

This second stage of work focussed on the limitation of the first stage: assessing whether the transcribed Dimensions questions were, firstly, well understood in general, and, secondly, understood in the same way as the original questions.

If a question is understood in the same way, then, assuming the person understands the language, they should give the same answer to either question.

To achieve this, we worked with Shift Insight. They first conducted a systematic review of every Dimension to identify priority areas and define an approach for the cognitive interviews - looking at the concepts they aim to measure, as well as both original and new question versions.

Prioritising was important as there are over 90 Dimension questions and we couldn't run tests for all of them. We prioritised questions based on a combination of how often that question is used and how straightforward the concept being measured is. For example, the *Enjoyment* Dimension whose statement is 'I had a good time' is straightforward. Whereas the *Rigour* Dimension whose statement is 'It was well thought through and put together' is less straightforward.

Shift Insight then recruited a group of people which might typically benefit from Easy Read content and conducted a series of cognitive interviews with this group.

The definition of cognitive interviewing below is taken from the National Centre for Research Methods[7]:

> "a qualitative method which explores an individual's thought processes when presented with a task or information"

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[7] National Centre for Research Methods - https://repository.ncrm.ac.uk/ [accessed January 2026].

Respondent Group

- Learning difficulty
- Dyslexia
- ESOL
- Low level of literacy
- Stress, memory problems, etc.
- 65+

Chart values: 10, 4, 4, 4, 3, 5

Learning difficulty	Number of participants
Autism	4
ADD/ADHD	4
Down Syndrome	2

First Language	Number of participants
Urdu	2
Pashto	1
Cantonese	1
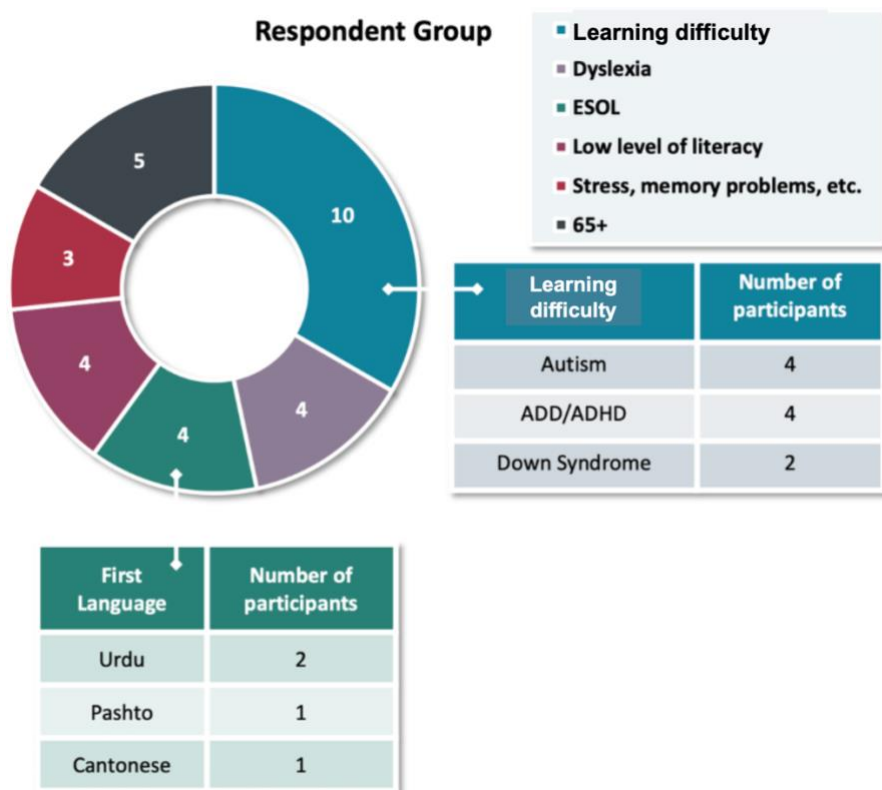
Summary of the needs of Shift Insight's cognitive interview participants

After running the interviews, the information gathered was consolidated into a set of recommendations for all dimensions, tested on whether the new version was measuring the same thing as the original version, and whether any adjustments should be made to maximise understanding and compatibility.

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[8] We understand and appreciate that there has been much discourse around ensuring the appropriateness of language. Having explored language options surrounding learning disabilities and learning difficulties, the phrase 'learning difficulties' seems to be the most appropriate here.
To make this decision, we have been guided by:
Mencap, 'a UK charity that supports people with a learning disability' - https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/what-learning-disability [accessed January 2026].
Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, a UK government body within the Department of Health and Social Care - https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-disability-applying-all-our-health/learning-disabilities-applying-all-our-health#what-a-learning-disability-is [accessed January 2026].
Sense, 'a leading disability charity' - https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/conditions/learning-disabilities/ [accessed January 2026].

The table below provides an example of the recommendations gathered during this phase:

Dimension: The event meant something to me.

Does the dimension fit the concept?		Recommendations
Responses to this dimension aligned with the concept of how deeply the event resonated with attendees. Many discussed their emotional connection to the event.	→	Although the dimension was well understood, to avoid a potential sense of appreciation for the craft, 'personally' could be added to the dimension.

3.3. Final recommendation consolidation (CWC)

As a result of the previous two stages, we had been provided with a wealth of information about ways to make survey questions and surveys in general more accessible.

We combined this information with our knowledge of the Toolkit and the way it is used to make informed decisions about what the final changes should be.

Although not every dimension was tested with cognitive interviews, there were often insights and recommendations from the interviews which were applicable to other questions.

For some questions, it was unfortunately not possible to produce a more accessible version without completely transforming the question.

The result of this consolidation phase is a set of before and after for most of the templated questions for the Toolkit, and we were ready to implement the changes in the Culture Counts platform.

4. PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. New accessible survey questions

New survey questions have been made available to users in the Culture Counts UK platform. These questions are available in addition to the existing questions - **they do not replace the original questions**.

The new questions are labelled in the platform as "Linguistically Easy Read" or "LER" for short. Ironically, this is a mouthful and not accessible language, but it accurately describes the accessibility level of the survey questions, as they are not accompanied by images required to make them fully Easy Read.
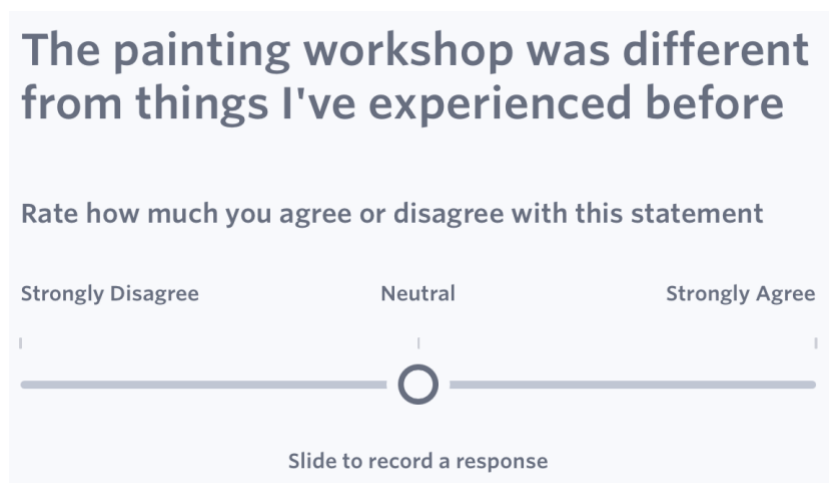
Some examples of before and after survey questions:

Challenge		Challenge (LER)
It challenged me to think in a different way.	→	It made me think again about my beliefs.

Compare to expectations		Compare to expectations (LER)
How did the event compare to your expectations?	→	Was the event as good as you thought it would be?

Gender		Gender (LER)
How would you describe your gender?	→	What is your gender? Your "gender" means if you think of yourself as a man, woman, or something else.

4.2. Dimension flexi-fields

A strong recommendation to increase the accessibility of survey questions was to replace general language such as "it" or "the event" with a more specific description of what the question refers to, like "the painting workshop". This is particularly relevant to the Dimensions questions where most of them do begin with, or include, "It".

To address this, all Dimensions questions which would benefit from this have been updated to include a flexi-field. This means that the "It" can be replaced with more specific language to tailor the question to the event in question and consequently increasing the accessibility of the question.

Screenshot of the Distinctiveness Dimension question in Culture Counts, using the flexi-field

4.3. New evaluation templates

The Toolkit provides various evaluation templates for registered organisations. Each template includes several surveys, and those surveys contain collections of templated questions.

New evaluation templates have been made available to registered organisations where the public surveys make use of the new accessible survey questions. The new templates do not replace existing templates, so Toolkit users can choose which version they would like to use.

The peer and self-surveys within the new templates use accessible questions where possible.

4.4. Paper surveys option

To ensure there is an option for full Easy Read surveys, registered organisations can request a paper version of a public survey which will include images and be

formatted to match the Easy Read standard. The paper surveys will be provided by the CWC team.[9]

Question 2: How good do you think the event was overall?

'Overall' means if you liked it after thinking about all of it, and not just one part of it.

Please put a cross in one box

☐ It was amazing
☐ It was good
☐ It was okay
☐ It was bad
☐ It was terrible

Screenshot of a LER question in an Easy Read paper survey

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[9] For more information on the process to create paper surveys, please see the related guidance on the Impact & Insight Toolkit website - https://impactandinsight.co.uk/resource/paper-surveys/#2-how-do-i-create-a-paper-survey [accessed January 2026].

4.5. Analysis & Reporting

4.5.1. Reporting Tools

Data collected using the new questions is reported in the same way as existing questions.

For example, LER Dimensions questions will still be reported in the Dimensions sections of the Insights Reports; LER Demographics questions will show in the Demographics section of the Analytics Dashboard.

4.5.2. Benchmark compatibility

The new LER questions were designed with the goal of them being as compatible with the existing set of questions as possible. By "compatible" we mean that a person completing the survey would understand both questions to be asking the same thing and would therefore give the same answer.

This is important for the Toolkit as it provides benchmarks for both Question Banks questions and Dimension questions via the Reporting Dashboard[10]. Benchmarks are an important part of the Toolkit and are used to provide interpretive context to the data.

The compatibility of existing benchmarks with the new LER questions differs based on the type of question:

- **Question Bank Questions**: Most of these questions will be compatible as the answers to these questions are typically clear-cut categories (e.g. overall experience, age, gender) and won't change because of the question's wording.

- **Dimensions Questions:** Given that we are making changes to the question wording and, as a result, the way people understand the questions, we cannot assume that the way people respond to the questions will be the same. Consequently, we cannot launch the questions with the assumption that the original Dimensions benchmarks will be compatible. However, once we have data being collected with the new questions, we will be able to run statistical tests to inform whether the benchmarks from the old questions are compatible with the new. Where there is compatibility, the benchmarks will be combined and made available for the new questions.

To maintain the integrity of the analysis and benchmarks, the implication of this is that **data collected using the new LER questions will not be aggregated**

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[10] Link to the Impact & Insight Toolkit Reporting Dashboard - https://dashboard.impactandinsight.co.uk/ [accessed January 2026].

together with the original questions until statistical compatibility has been established.

5. CONCLUSION

The Accessible Survey Questions Project addressed the need to lower unintended barriers in the Impact & Insight Toolkit, ensuring that arts and cultural organisations can capture valuable, representative feedback from diverse audiences, including those with learning difficulties or for whom English is an additional language.

This initiative was executed through a rigorous, three-stage methodology:

1) Expert transcription to the Easy Read standard by A2i
2) Cognitive testing and concept validation with end-users by Shift Insight
3) Recommendation consolidation by the CWC team.

This thorough process balanced the goals of accessibility with the necessity of collecting data comparable to the key quality outcomes of cultural work.

The project's key achievement is the introduction of a collection of new survey questions, officially labelled as **Linguistically Easy Read (LER)**. These LER questions are available to registered users of the Toolkit alongside the existing questions, allowing organisations to choose the most appropriate survey format. Furthermore, new evaluation templates are available, and a full Easy Read option, complete with images, can be requested as a paper survey.

While LER questions were designed to be as compatible as possible with existing questions, it is critical to note that the data collected using the new LER questions cannot be automatically aggregated with data from the original questions. This is to maintain the integrity of benchmarks, which will be assessed for compatibility through statistical testing once sufficient LER data has been collected. Ultimately, this project ensures the Toolkit remains a valuable and more inclusive tool for the entire arts and cultural sector.