



TUS

**Technological University of the Shannon:
Midlands Midwest**

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Sionainne:
Lár Tíre Iarthar Láir

www.tus.ie

**TUS Guide to Effective Practice that Supports Equity in Technological
University Communications 2022 – 2025**



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1.0 Introduction

The Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (hereafter referred to as TUS or the Technological University) is a regionally focused higher education institution with a national and international outlook. Among its shared values includes a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. TUS values and promotes inclusiveness, equity of opportunity and respect for all students and staff. The Technological University aims to provide opportunities for all students and staff to thrive in higher education and in the wider community through the promotion of positive identities and abilities, the celebration of diversity and difference, and the provision of an inclusive, participative culture and environment.

In its application for designation as a Technological University, TUS identified *Equity and Inclusiveness* as a shared value “*we will value and promote inclusiveness, equity of opportunity and respect for all students and staff, especially those from under-represented groups, such as ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities.*”^[1] TUS commits to “*provide leadership in promoting and advancing equality, diversity and inclusivity*” and is committed to ensuring “*that education and service planning and provision embrace the needs of all students and staff and are delivered in an environment that is inclusive and accessible to all*”.^[1]

The Technological Universities Act 2018^[2] requires “*the attainment of gender balance and equality of opportunity to be promoted among the students and staff of the technological university*”. Therefore, the Technological University has in its foundational attributes^[1] specified that it will:

- “*deliver a supportive people-orientated learning environment and student-centred educational experience where students and staff can benefit from opportunities for development, with a shared set of common aims and clear lines of communication*”, and that it will;
- “*take an integrated, collaborative approach that listens to the voices of all stakeholders and that upholds principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion*”.

The Technological University is increasingly diverse and it is vital that all members of its community and external stakeholders are supported through accessible documentation that supports equality diversity and inclusion. This is consistent with the objectives outlined in its application for designation to:

- build an environment where all members of the TU are respected equally and where everybody’s cultural identity and sense of belonging are nurtured.

- ensure that education and service planning and provision embrace the needs of all students and staff and are delivered in an environment that is inclusive and accessible to all.^[1]

The Technological University is cognisant of its obligations under The Equal Status Acts 2000-2015^[3], as amended which prohibits discrimination on the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education. The Disability Act 2005^[4] identifies the requirement to provide information in an accessible format. In developing documentation in accordance with the Guidelines set out in this Policy, the Technological University will be mindful of its statutory obligations under these Acts.

This guide is designed to align to national and international effective practice that supports Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives in Technological University Communications, particularly in its written documentation. This is consistent with the EU directive requiring public bodies to ensure their content is accessible to everyone.^[5] It is also in line with the *Technological Higher Education Quality Framework (THEQF)*^[6] principle of quality assurance and enhancement, “*consistency with policy and international effective practice*”, which has been adopted by TUS.

2.0 Purpose of the Guide

This Guide is produced in the context of TUS’s commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and our commitments within our institutional wide Athena Swan Gender Equality Action Plan. It provides a set of guidelines to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted across the TUS in the development of formal University Documentation that is cognisant of the diversity of all readers.

The Equal Status Acts outline the grounds in which individuals can be/or feel discriminated against and these include disability and gender. It is therefore imperative that our formal University documentation is cognisant of the obligations under the Equal status Act and is fully inclusive

Part A of this guide, *Incorporating Accessibility Features into Documentation*, provides recommendations for developing documentation that incorporates clear layout and structure and utilises accessibility features that support the effective use of the resulting documentation by all readers. Part B, *Making Gender Neutral Documents and Communications*, outlines effective practice and guidance in making gender neutral communications and contains a listing of suggested neutral word/phrase.

Depending on the type of documentation that is being written, it is acknowledged that there may be a number of factors to be considered and a need to balance different

parameters for a variety of formal Technological University documentation.

3.0 Scope of the Guide

This Guide shall be a constituent document of the TUS Quality Assurance Handbook. It shall serve as an approved reference point and guidance for Technological University Staff and assist in producing Technological University documentation, including Policies and Reports inter alia, that takes account of accessibility principles and supports inclusivity. The constituent documents of the TUS Quality Assurance Handbook shall be formatted in a manner that takes account of best practices relating to the accessibility principles outlined in this document and utilise gender neutral terminology. This document is not intended as a Guide for UDL principles in the context of the design of learning resources.

Part A of this Guide outlines how accessibility features may be utilised to generate documentation that allows for content to be presented in an accessible manner. These guidelines focus on how formal Technological University documentation such as Policies and Reports can be written and presented in a professional and consistent format.

The guide is designed to further inform staff when writing Technological University documentation on the recommended layout, structure, and style to ensure a consistent approach across the University. The guide covers the following accessibility features:

- Headings
- Typeface and Font
- Bullet points
- Colour contrast
- Alternative text
- Table of Contents
- Hyperlinks
- Forms
- Visual displays diagrams etc
- Accessibility Checker
- Converting a document into an Audio file^[6]

A summary of recommended approaches for the accessibility features is provided. These recommendations are based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Technical Writing Guidelines. However, it should be noted that there are a variety of factors that may need to be taken into consideration and balanced when adopting a particular approach. It may also be necessary to be cognisant of the type of

documentation that is being produced and consider other factors relating to this (e.g. marketing documents, lecturers notes, formal policies will invariably need to look different (for example, while UDL Guidelines recommend that left aligned text is easier to read, Technical Writing Guidelines indicate that the standard format for Professional/Formal documentation is fully Justified^[7]).

Therefore, this Guide does not outline one set standard for all documentation and recognises that a variety of factors may need to be balanced when choosing a document format. The type of document being produced may determine which format is selected once all factors are considered.

Part B of this Guide outlines how *Gender Neutral Communication* can be supported. This recognises the importance of respecting diversity, both individuals and groups, and how to ensure that this is reflected within Technological University documentation.

4.0 Part A: Incorporating Accessibility Features into Documentation

This section looks at some of the general design and layout features in MS Word that can be selected to improve the accessibility of documentation. These include the font style, use of colours and page layout which can be used to assist readers to go through resulting documentation, find information easily and understand the document more readily. In addition to the general features of Word, there are a number of specific useful accessibility features such as text to speech, alternative text (alt text) and the accessibility checker which can assist in enhancing the accessibility of the documentation.

Effective practice based on national guidelines from organisations such as AHEAD and [AHEAD^{\[8\]}](#), the National Adult Literacy Agency [NALA^{\[9\]}](#) as well as EU Guidelines^[5] and international recommendations including the Center for Applied Special Technology [CAST^{\[10\]}](#) are profiled in Section 4.1 to 4.12.

A summary of recommendations to be integrated into the development of University documentation is provided in [Section 4.13](#).

4.1 Using the Accessibility Checker

The Accessibility Checker is a feature within Microsoft Office that checks to see how accessible a document is and how easy the document is for people with disabilities to open, read and edit. When the Checker runs it will highlight any issues within the

document and provide suggestions on how to resolve them. This feature is a useful one to have open from the beginning when writing a document or to look at when a document is being reviewed.

The Accessibility Checker will review the document and highlight issues and warning related to poor accessibility. Some of the areas identified in the Accessibility Checker include:

- Any text where there is poor contrast between the background colour and the text.
- If images or charts are not correctly described or if alternative text is missing from an image.
- Review any tables that have been added to a document and also identify if the order and flow of the table is in sequence.

For further details on how to open and use the Accessibility Checker in Microsoft Word see Appendix 2. Please note that the Accessibility Checker is available in a range of Microsoft Office Applications such as One Note and PowerPoint inter alia.

4.2 Using Headings Appropriately

Appropriate use of Headings makes documentation easier to read and helps provide a clear structure. Microsoft Word provides a variety of heading styles that can be used to automatically generate a Table of Contents.

Using separate Headings and sub-headings will automatically separate content and allow readers to find relevant information with greater ease. It will also make information easier to scan and will assist anyone using assistive technologies like the screen reader.

- Headings should be different in colour or size and spacing to normal text so they are easily identifiable as headings.
- Use adequate line spacing around a Heading to help distinguish it from normal text and to ensure it is not clutter on the page.
- Use the Headings in the **Styles** section of the MS Word Ribbon to ensure that each Heading style is the same throughout the document.



Figure 1. MS Word Ribbon - Heading Styles

4.3 Typeface and Font

The typeface and font refer to the style of lettering that is used in the document. The typeface and font selected in a document will impact on the readability of the document and readers will likely lose interest or get frustrated if the words are difficult to recognise.

4.3.1 Typeface

Typeface refers to a collection of related fonts and they are classified by their letterforms. Typeface classifications include, Serif, Sans Serif, Script, Monospace Display and Handwritten inter alia.

- San Serif Typeface like Arial, Tahoma and Verdana are considered more legible to read on-screen and most suitable for documentation being read on a computer.
- In contrast, other fonts like *Bodoni MT poster*, *chiller* and ***Forte*** are quite difficult to read and may cause difficulty for certain readers.

4.3.2 Font

Font refers to the style and variation that can be applied to a Typeface. Examples of changing a Font include changing the weighting, making the font bold or putting in italics.

For example the Typeface Verdana is used below but a different font is used.

- Verdana Regular font
- *Verdana Italic font*
- **Verdana Bold font**
- Verdana Pro Light
- **Verdana Semi-bold**

A document could have one main Typeface throughout the document such as Arial with three fonts used to highlight different sections or content within the document such as:

- Arial Regular for standard text
- **Arial Bold for Headings**
- *Arial Italics for quotes*

4.4 Line Spacing

Line spacing is the amount of space between each line within a paragraph. Too much can make text disjointed and difficult to read and too little can decrease readability. It is important to ensure that same line spacing is applied throughout the entire document to make it easier to read.

- The recommended amount of spacing between lines is 1.2 to 1.5.

4.5 Utilising Bullet points

Bullet points are an effective way of clarifying and presenting data. They can help to focus the reader's attention and provide a visual break from reading longer sections of text. They can be used to highlight the main or key points in a document.

- Avoid long lists of bullet points and sub divide the points if necessary
- Avoid *italics* and underline for emphasis
- Avoid all CAPS because it may convey the wrong tone and make the text more difficult to read. We recognise the word by the shape. This is called Sight Vocabulary and it may slow down the reading process.
- Use Tab button instead of repeatedly using the spacebar. This creates a better experience for students using the "Read Aloud" feature (Read Aloud is a built-in feature in MS Word that will read aloud any text in a document).

4.6 Colour

When using colours in documents, ensure that there is strong contrast between the text and the background. Poor contrast affects the readers ability to perceive and interpret the content. For text to be legible or for data in diagrams, tables and charts to be distinguishable there should be a strong colour contrast. The following are examples of good and poor colour contrast:

- Good contrast between text and background.
- Poor contrast between text and background.

Poor contrast can make text very difficult to read. It is advisable to use dark contrasting colours like blue, red, green and purple.^[7] Certain sight conditions enhance the negative effects for bad contrasts and make text even more difficult to read.

4.7 Alternative Text (Alt Text)

Alternative Text, or Alt Text, provides a description of an image. This text can be used to provide an alternative description of the image for those unable to view the image. A screen reader can be used to process and read out the description provided.

Screen readers are used to read out text written in a document. However, if there is

an image, graph or a bar chart then the screen reader cannot process this, and the reader will miss out on key information if the Alt Text for the image has not been added.

- To add Alt Text, right-click image and click “Edit Alt Text” and then enter image description.
- Enter in a description of the image that can then be read out by the Read Aloud feature in Word.



Figure 2 Illustration of the Alt Text Function

4.8 Table of Contents

A Table of Contents is key to helping people review the contents of a document at a high level, it provides an overview of the structure to the document and help readers find relevant information quickly and easily. If the Table of Contents feature in MS Word is used it will automatically update changes that are made to sections and heading within the document. The Table of Contents makes it much easier for students who have learning difficulties like dyslexia to read and process the information within a document.



Figure 3 Image of the Table of Contents Ribbon

- Any Sections and Headings that are added to a document should be formatted using the Styles section outlined in Section 4.1 so they will be recognised and included in the Table of Contents.
- It will automatically edit the Table of Contents based on the Headings that have been added to the document.
- Numbering on Headings and Sections will automatically update if sections are

manually moved while editing the document.

4.9 Generating Hyperlinks

When adding hyperlinks into documentation it is important to distinguish the hyperlink from normal regular text so the reader is aware that a link has been added. The Read Aloud feature within MS Word has a shortcut which will bring up a list of the links in a document. Links need to be unique and descriptive so that they make sense when they are assessed as a list, without the surrounding text for context.

- Avoid displaying the full URL address on the document page, instead rename the link so it is easier for the reader to see what website the link will open.
- Try and use descriptive and relevant text instead of “click here” or similar phrases.
- The standard format for hyperlinks is underlined text in a blue colour, e.g. TUS Midlands Midwest main website would appear as follows: [Home - TUS](#)

4.10 Effectively Displaying Data in Tables, Charts and Diagrams

Data displays refers to data that is presented in a table, chart or diagram and allows for information to be presented in ways that text alone cannot. Diagrams can be used to visually display information, they “*use visual means to show qualitative differences and relationship*” [8]. The number and type of charts, diagrams, and tables that can be used to represent data will vary for each document.

The following recommendations will support readers to interpret and follow data being displayed:

- The best way to make sure that charts and diagrams are readable to visually impaired learner is to use detailed Alt Text;
- When adding Alt Text accurately and comprehensively describe every section and connection points of the chart or diagrams;
- When using line charts, it is important to remember any readers who may be colour blind. A slight change in the line style can instantly make the chart more accessible e.g. the use of dotted lines instead of different colours;
- Ensure when using tables and charts that there is good colour contrast between the text and the background.

Further details on design recommendations for diagrams and charts are available from the following link: [Accessibility at Penn State | Charts & Accessibility \(psu.edu\)](#)

4.11 Forms

MS Word Forms

There are many Technological University Forms for both staff and students that are developed either as standalone forms or may be included as part of the policy document.

When creating a Form, the *Developer Tab* in Microsoft Word allows for tick boxes, drop down menus and lists to be created. These are easier for users to complete and more accurate when gathering data. The Developer Tab can be added to the Ribbon in Word. The steps for adding and using this feature are available in Appendix 2.

Online MS Forms

For online forms, as part of the MS Office 365 suite, all staff have access to MS Forms. This online form allows a link to be sent and shared out to users to gather and collate data. It is recommended to minimise the number of open-ended questions where possible. A generic TUS Template for Online Forms has been created and it can be modified as required. This can be accessed at: [TUS Online Forms Template](#).

4.12 Converting a Document into an Audio File

Information can be processed in multiple different ways and it is important for writers to provide a variety of formats of the information. Producing content in a variety of formats and resources will make content/information more accessible. Many people find that processing information is made easier by listening to it and it is possible to convert a word document into an audio file.

For support on converting a word document to an audio file click on the following guide: [Convert word documents into audio files](#)

4.13 Summary and Overall Recommendations (Accessibility Table)

A summary that may be used as a quick reference guide when writing University Documentation has been collated in Table 1.

Table 1. Suggested Guidelines for Writing Documents*

Items	Description	Benefit
Typeface	San Serif such Verdana and Arial & Tahoma	Easier text to read than Serif text such as Times New Roman
Font	Keep to the regular font. Bold should be reserved for Headings or when emphasising key words. Italics kept to a minimum such as quotes.	Students with visual impairments can see text easier in the regular font. Easier reading improves engagement
Font	Powerpoint presentation, size - 24 Word documents – size 12	Improves readability for students with Dyslexia, low visibility students
Colours	Use of contrasting colours - Colours that may not be visible to colourblind students would include light blue and yellow	Increases engagement and easily highlights key information
Line Spacing	Minimum spacing should be between 1.2 and 1.5	Makes text easier to read
Section Headings	Clearly identify headings and section content	Allows readers to find relevant content easier.
Page Numbering	Apply number in clear black at bottom of page in the centre of the page. Avoid the use of Roman numerals.	Page number helps readers keep track of the document.
Table of Contents	Allows for section headings to be easily linked to and sections and page numbers automatically updated.	Allows readers to view content easily and navigate through a document
Graphs	Use graphs with clear data Avoid cluttered graphs/charts	Allows readers to interpret the data clearly.
Images and	Including alt text	Visually impaired readers can

Logos		use read aloud function.
Hyperlinks	Links are blue and underlined	Provides a consistent and standardised format for hyperlinks
References – style	Use Harvard Style	Aligns to the Universities recommended referencing style
Words per sentence	Try to keep sentences between 15-20 words.	Increase accuracy, relevance & understanding
Text Alignment	Justified for the text within the main body of the document	Provides equal spacing on the left and right sides of the text block which gives the text a more formal appearance.

** Based on guidelines from the National Adult Literacy Agency [NALA^{\[9\]}](#) and [AHEAD^{\[8\]}](#) as well as EU and international recommendations including the Center for Applied Special Technology [CAST^{\[10\]}](#).*

Although there are many variances in the type of information that will be included in the different types of documentation being produced such as policies, reports, application forms, inter alia, the aim is that these guidelines will support consistency in the layout, structure and format for how Technological University documentation is developed and accessed.

A template file has been created which has been formatted based on the guidelines below and is available to download and use from this link: [TUS Document Template](#).

5.0 Part B : Making Gender Neutral Documents and Communications

This section of the guide is produced in the context of TUS's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion with particular emphasis on guiding and supporting gender neutral communication. In line with Athena Swan Gender Equality Action Plan commitments, this section offers rationale for and examples of gender neutral terms for use in TUS official documentation as well as for staff who are seeking additional guidance and support in inclusive language.

The Technological Universities Act references promoting the attainment of gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and staff of the Technological University. This Guide supports this objective. It is further noted that the Act references that some Statutory Bodies, such as Governing Body and Academic Council make references to minimum numbers of women and men in their composition and the associated documentation will reflect this. This section is therefore a *guide* to gender neutral communication, and statutory reporting obligations, such as those outlined in the Technological Universities Act, may supersede this guide.

Moving beyond gendered terms can make a document more reflective of the diversity of families and relationships in Ireland - for example, a woman's spouse is not necessarily male, and a single parent is not necessarily female. Gender-neutral language also allows for open interpretation of social roles – for example, the term “fire fighter” allows the reader to imagine someone of any gender, unlike the term “fireman”.

Producing documents that are gender-neutral or updating existing documents to make them gender-neutral, demonstrates our acknowledgement and inclusion of transgender members of our community (students, staff or visitors). Many people do not identify as either male or female and references to “he”, “she” or “he/she” are therefore often not adequate to describe all the people to whom a document applies¹. Finally, it is not necessary to include gender distinctions in most documents (many languages get by without them) and removing them can make documents more concise.

A list of suggested neutral words/phrases is provided in Table 2. This contains suggestions that may assist you in making gender-neutral documents or other communications. Gender-neutral wording decisions may be very simple, and a neutral term can just be slotted into the place of a gendered term. In more complex cases, it

¹ This doesn't mean that all transgender people like to be referred to as “they” – but “they” covers all genders in a document which will be read by a wide variety of people

can help to rethink the order of the sentence, to search alternative terms, or to consider whether the phrase / sentence is necessary at all.

Table 2. Suggested neutral word/phrase

Gendered word/phrase	Suggested neutral word/phrase
"He", "She" or "He / She"	They
"His", "Her" or "His / Her"	Their
"Him", "Her" or "Him / Her"	Them
"Mr", "Ms" or "Mr / Ms"	You should avoid using these gendered titles unless they are necessary. If they are necessary, such as on some forms, it is good practice to offer "Mx" as an option as well as "Mr" and "Ms", "Mx" is a title that can be used by a person of non-binary gender or by anybody who prefers not to disclose their gender.
"Father" / "Mother"	Parent (similarly, "Grandparent")
"Husband" / "Wife"	Spouse
"Boyfriend" / "Girlfriend"	Partner
"Son" / "Daughter"	Child
"Man" / "Woman"	Person (or occasionally "human" can be more appropriate, e.g. "humankind")
"Chairman" / "Chairwoman"	Chairperson (or "Chair")
"Dear Sir / Madam"	This could be replaced with "To Whom it May Concern", "Dear Colleague", "Dear Student".
"Ladies and Gentlemen"	"Honoured Guests", "Esteemed Colleagues", inter alia.
Gendered job titles e.g. "Barman" / "Barmaid"	Look up neutral alternatives e.g. "Bartender"
"Male" or "Female" as adjective	Don't use if not necessary to do so: for example, the adjective in phrases like "male nurse" or "female Professor" is not usually necessary. However, you might use these terms where gender is specifically relevant, for example in a report on the number of

	female Lecturers in a department.
“Male” or “Female” on forms	First, consider whether you need to know the gender of each person completing the form, and remove the gender question if not. If you do need to include a gender question, e.g. for statistical purposes, it is advisable to include the further options “Non-binary” and “Prefer not to disclose” ² .
Images	Try to include diversity of gender in the images you use in webpages, posters, etc., and consider how you might overcome stereotyping - show a female scientist or a male homemaker, for example.
Symbols (e.g. on toilet signs)	A range of gender-neutral symbols are available and the Equality Office can advise on this.

² If you report on gender to another body, e.g. the HEA, check their requirements before altering your forms

6.0 References

1. [AIT-LIT Application for Designation as a Technological University](#)
2. [Technological Universities Act, 2018](#)
3. [The Equal Status Acts 2000-2015](#)
4. [Disability Act 2005 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](#)
5. [EU Accessibility Directive](#)
6. [Technological Higher Education Quality Framework](#)
7. Rubens, P., 2002. *Science and Technical Writing: A Manual of Style*. Routledge.
8. [Creating Accessible Documents - AHEAD \(Webinar - Introduction to Making a Word Document Accessible. - YouTube\)](#)
9. [\[NALA - A plain English Design Tips](#)
10. [Centre for Applied Special Technology CAST](#)

7.0 Useful Resources and Links

1. EU directive 2016/2102: [Accessibility of the website and mobile applications of public sector bodies](#)
2. NALA, Plain English writing and Design tips, Retrieved from www.nala.ie/plain-english/plain-english-tips/
3. [Equal Status Acts 2000-2018](#)
4. Making a PowerPoint presentation to a more accessible form: <https://youtu.be/kARiAZFgm2E>
5. Making a Word document to a more accessible form: <https://youtu.be/YVzZQW6-s-8>
6. AHEAD Accessibility Series: [AHEAD Webinar- Introduction to making a Word Document accessible](#)
7. [AHEAD Association for Higher Education Access And Disability](#)
8. Penn State: [Accessibility and Usability at Penn State](#)
form: [Accessibility at Penn State | Charts & Accessibility \(psu.edu\)](#)
9. Diagram Center: [Making Images Accessible - DIAGRAM Center](#)
10. Diagram Center: [How to describe complex images for accessibility](#)

7.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Accessibility Checker

Appendix 2: MS Word Forms

Appendix 1: Accessibility Checker

To access the Accessibility Checker in Microsoft Word select the **Review** tab from the application Ribbon (Fig.4)



Figure 4 Review Tab in Microsoft Word

Next select the **Check Accessibility** menu option (Fig.5)

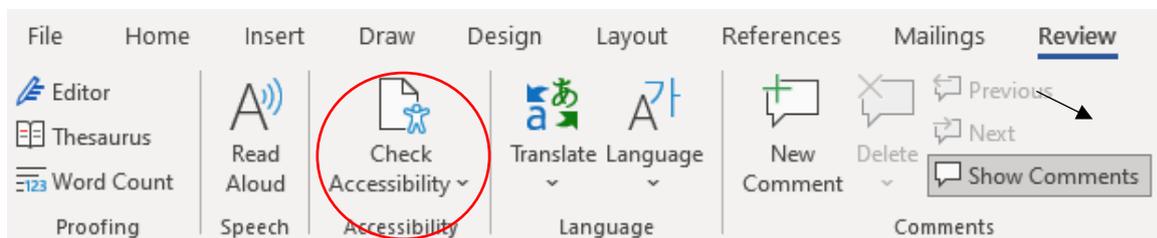


Figure 5 Accessibility Checker Menu Option

The Accessibility Checker window (Fig 6.) will open on the right-hand side of the Word application. Any errors, warnings and suggestions for improving the accessibility of the document will be listed in this window.

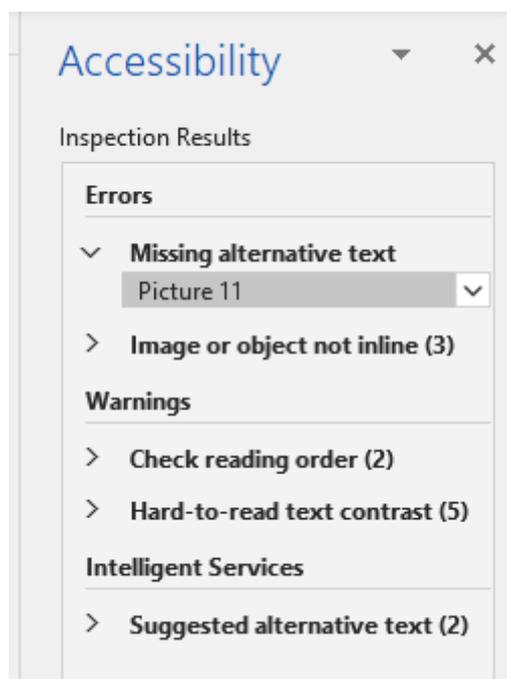


Figure 6 Accessibility Checker Report

Appendix 2: Microsoft Word Forms

To enable the forms feature in Microsoft Word you need to customise the Ribbon in the Word application (Fig. 7). To do this, right click on the Ribbon bar and select the **Customize the Ribbon** option.



Figure 7 Customise Ribbon in MS Word

Select **Developer** from the menu options and then click the **OK** button. (Fig. 8)

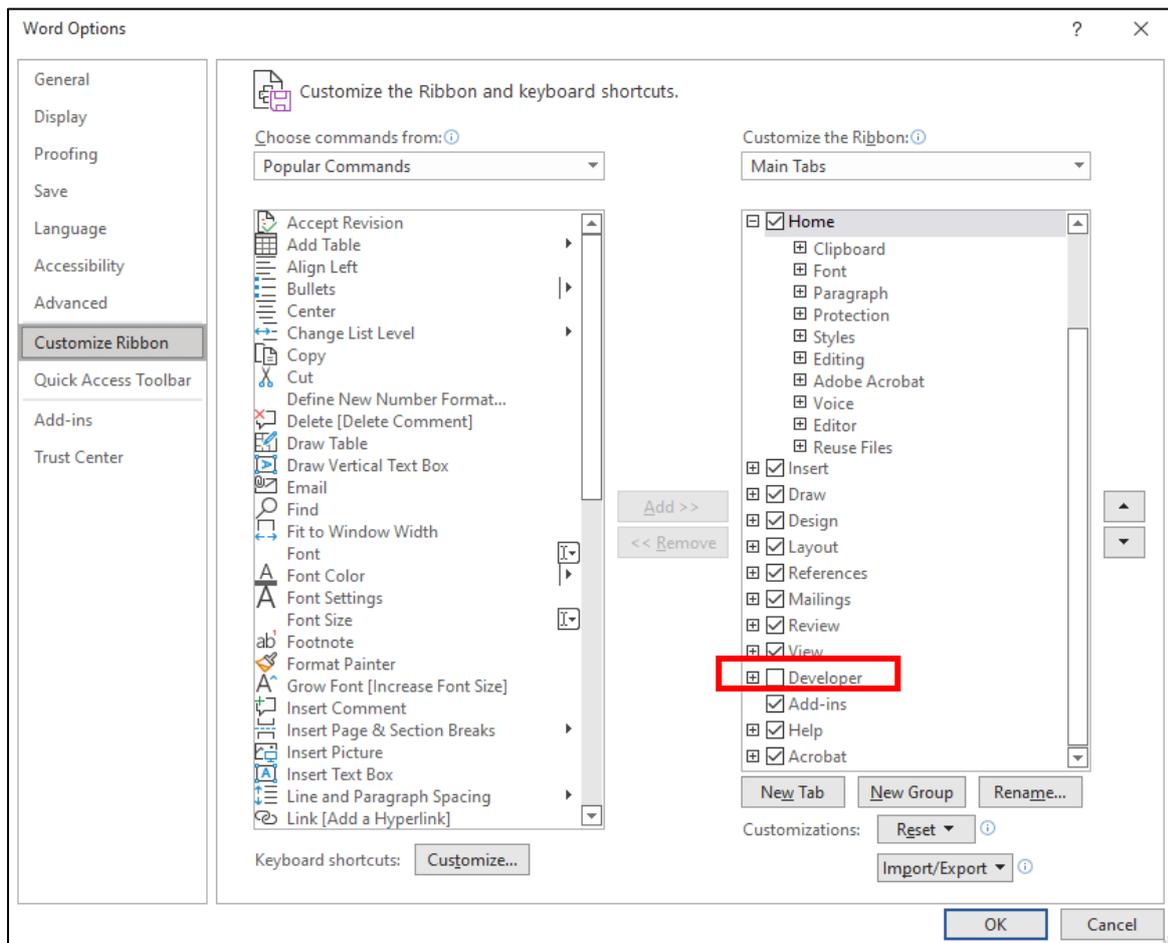


Figure 8 Microsoft Word Customise Ribbon Options

The Developer tab will now be available along the main Ribbon in the Word application (Fig. 9)

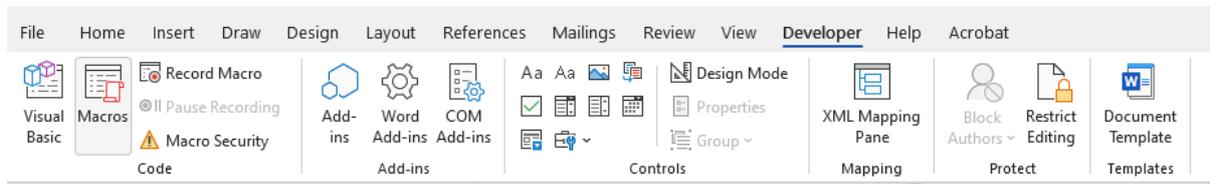


Figure 9 Developer Tab in MS Word

When you select this tab you can access the different questions for designing and building a form. The Developer tab allows you to insert a series of question types including:

- Check box,
- Combo box,
- Drop down list
- Date picker

The Restrict Editing options ensure the document format and layout cannot be formatted by the end user. For additional support on learning how to use the Developer tab please watch the following [video on creating Forms in Microsoft Word](#).