



# EQUALITY OF ACCESS PROJECT

Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice Bureau

A study looking at barriers to access

# Equality of Access Project Report

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## Introduction

The Equality of Access Project is a small scale study looking at barriers to access, specifically those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The aim of this study is to identify any issues which may be preventing people in the community from accessing the CAB service. From there, we can then take steps to remove these barriers, in turn providing a better service and equal access for everyone.

The study focused on those who have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. This act legally protects people from discrimination in the work place and wider society, setting out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone. The act provides a framework of protection against direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation in services and public functions, work, education, associations and transport. The act identifies nine characteristics which it protects from discrimination, known as protected characteristics. These are traits such as gender, ethnicity, health and disability, and sexual orientation. The reason we chose to focus on these protected characteristics is so we could ensure we were fully addressing any issues faced by all groups within Clackmannanshire and a diverse range of opinions were represented.

While we feel that we are in a good position to provide an accessible service to everyone, we believed it was important to ask the people of Clackmannanshire for their views. We worked with local organisations and charities who work with the demographics we were looking to hear from and through sent out surveys to the wider population of Clackmannanshire. We hope by doing this we will be able to address any issues we may have previously not been aware of and in turn provide the best possible service to our community.

## 1. Research Methods

To conduct this research we carried out two online surveys and two small focus groups. By employing two different methods of research, we hoped to reach a wide range of participants. To ensure that we were consulting a diverse range of people, we worked with multiple charities and organisations within the area. Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers Centre, Forth Valley Welcome and Home Start participated in the online survey and Central Scotland Regional Equality Council (CSREC) participated in the focus groups.

### 1.1 Surveys

Two surveys were created for this study and were carried out via Microsoft forms. The surveys were first distributed on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2023 and were kept open until the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2023. The first of the two was a public survey made up of ten questions. These questions can be found in appendix one. This was sent out to the organisations that agreed to participate and was also posted on the Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice Facebook page. We ensured the survey adhered to GDPR regulations. The survey was also made completely anonymous in order to encourage more honest responses from participants, and participants were made aware that no identifying information would be recorded.

Responses were not required for any of the questions and participants were made aware of how the information they provided would be used. We firstly asked participants to specify which protected characteristics they had under the Equality Act 2010. This was done so that we could get a clearer understanding of the experiences of different groups in the community with our service. Participants were then asked a range of questions on issues such as the location of the bureau, disability access, and language barriers. We also enquired about any changes they would like to see introduced or general issues they had.

A second, smaller survey was designed specifically for staff and volunteers within the bureau. The questions for this survey can also be found in appendix one. This survey was also kept anonymous to encourage more honest responses. By surveying staff and volunteers we were able to learn about their experiences and the experiences of their clients. The survey consisted of four questions and enquired about any issues they or their

clients may have faced and any changes they would like to see. The decision was made not to ask about protected characteristics in this survey as it may lead to identifying the respondent, which in turn may have discouraged them from fully expressing their thoughts and opinions.

## 1.2 Focus Groups

Two different focus groups were conducted for the study throughout March. The first meeting was carried out in the Bureau and was made up of seven participants who had been invited to attend by the Bureau's Outreach Co-ordinator. We consulted with the Outreach Co-ordinator for this as he could identify and invite clients with the protected characteristics we were looking to hear from. The meeting took place in the Bureau on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2023 and was completed in just over an hour. The second meeting took place over zoom with a representative from the Central Scotland Regional Equality Council (CSREC) on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March to discuss both their personal experiences as well as the experiences of the services clients. These groups were asked ten questions, near identical to the questions posed in the public survey. They were also asked to identify their protected characteristics to gain a clear understanding of the demographics we were meeting with. To keep these answers anonymous, in person attendees were asked to write their answers on pieces of paper which were to be folded over before collection and wouldn't be read until after the group had finished. For the zoom meeting, an online form was sent out the day prior to be completed beforehand. All groups were made aware of the purpose of the study and what the results would be used for, as well as explaining that we would not include any identifying information within the report. We ensured that explicit verbal consent was obtained before proceeding with the questions and that all participants were happy to take part.

## 2. Results

Over the course of this study we consulted with 47 respondents across all research methods. These respondents represented a wide range of demographics. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to over 75. Many respondents identified having a disability or health condition of some kind, with a few also discussing their experiences as carers. We also heard from people with various religious beliefs, nationalities and sexualities. A full table of the characteristics identified by the respondents can be found in appendix 1. There were a few groups we unfortunately did not receive any responses from, such as those who identify as transgender and those who are either pregnant or on maternity. But overall, we did receive responses from a diverse group of people.

The feedback across all research methods was mainly positive. When asked to rate the service on a scale of 1-10, we received an average score of 8.86. The full breakdown of these ratings can be found in appendix 2. While most of the feedback did confirm that we are, in fact, in a good position to cater to the needs of all groups in the community, we also received some feedback on changes we could introduce.

### 2.1 Public Survey Results

The public survey received a total of 17 responses. Of these respondents, 11 had used our services before and 6 had not. Respondents were predominantly women, with 13 of the respondents identifying as female. The majority of respondents were either Scottish or British. We heard from a wide range of ages, with participants being aged between 18 to over 60. When asked if they considered any of their protected characteristics would either prevent them from wanting to use the Bureau's services or if it had affected the service they received in the past, all respondents said no. The general feedback we received from the survey was mainly positive, with respondents rating the service an average of 8.5.

Respondents who had used our services before praised the friendly staff and the advice they received. However, a few issues were also raised. One respondent stated that it had taken a long time to get an appointment with an adviser. Another stated that it took them a few minutes to find the bureau due to it being slightly hidden. While the bureau is in a good

location in the town centre of Alloa, we understand that further signposting may be required to make the specific location of the bureau easier to identify for the public. Another respondent stated that using public transport to get to the bureau is difficult, but also clarified that this issue has since been rectified due to our outreach service.

With regards to disability access, only four respondents provided feedback, stating they felt that the bureau was big enough and the ramps at the main entrance allowed for good disabled access. However, it is worth noting that none of these respondents had reported had a disability, as a result this may not be the most accurate assessment. None of the respondents identified having experienced any language barriers and the majority stated they had found the Bureau easy to get to.

When asked if there were any changes that the Bureau could make to improve their experience, for the most part respondents did not identify anything, with 9 respondents saying no. Out of those who did make suggestions, the most common answer was improving our response times, with 3 respondents stating they had waited quite a long time for advice. Another suggestion from one respondent was to either increase or adjust our opening hours to accommodate those who work full time. Our advice line is open from 10am till 3pm Monday to Friday, which may not be the most accessible for those working full time 9-5 jobs. Two respondents stated that the Bureau did not really assist with their problem. One did not specify what issue they had presented at the Bureau with. The other clarified they had come to the Bureau with an immigration issue and to improve our service we should have access to immigration specialists. In accordance with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), general advisers at Citizens Advice are only authorised to provide level 1 immigration advice. Therefore, enquiries that require a higher level of support must be referred to a specialist who is able to provide this level of advice. We also asked clients if there was anything that would put them off coming back to the Bureau. The majority of respondents either said no or did not answer, but one stated that transport issues may discourage them from returning. But as previously mentioned, our outreach service is addressing this issue already.

## 2.2 Staff and Volunteer Survey

Overall, we heard from 22 members of staff and volunteers. Once again, the feedback was mainly positive, with respondents commenting on the central location of the office and that we have a good number of interview rooms. However, there were some predominant issues raised by many of the respondents. The biggest concern raised was that the main door at drop in is not working fully, with only one side of the door opening. This means that those with wheelchairs or mobility scooters cannot easily access the building. We have addressed this by bringing in those who cannot use the main entrance through the staff entrance but this is a temporary solution whilst awaiting repairs by the landlord. To that effect, there was also mention of only having one drop in room that is big enough for those with a mobility scooter. One respondent discussed how they had to guide their client out of the room due to there not being enough space for them to turn their mobility scooter around. After reversing out of the room, the client then had problems trying to exit through the main doors. Another respondent mentioned how the issue with the door was also difficult for those who have prams, as they have to attempt to squeeze through the one door. An additional issue raised by multiple respondents was the lack of translation facilities. While the bureau has a diverse range of staff and volunteers who can speak a multitude of languages, we are only able to use qualified translators when providing advice. We currently do not have quick access to a translator for general services and the cost of hiring a translator also presents substantial issues. One respondent also mentioned that it may be more difficult for house bound and socially isolated clients to engage with the service, however our outreach service also includes home visits which hopefully will largely address this problem.

We also asked respondents if their clients had raised any issues to them. The majority of respondents said their clients had not identified any issues. A few respondents did have concerns raised to them, most of which were the same as issues identified by staff themselves. Once again, the most predominant issue was the main door not working fully. A few clients had mentioned issues with getting in the main door with wheelchairs or prams, and that the door not working fully created issues with disability access. One respondent also raised that a few clients had issues with a lack of translation facilities. Another issue raised was that sometimes clients had problems reaching the main office over the phone.



When asked about any changes they would like to see introduced, it was clear that the priority was repairing the main door with multiple respondents raising this issue. A second key issue which was highlighted multiple times is to introduce a translation service of some kind to allow more people to engage with the service. Other suggestions of things we could do to improve the service included later opening hours for those who work during the day, women only evenings, and a hearing loop to assist our hard of hearing clients.

### 2.3 Bureau Focus Group

The first of the focus groups was carried out in the bureau with attendees that had been invited by the Outreach Co-ordinator. We had seven participants in total, four of which identified as female and three as male, with ages ranging from the 56-65 category to over 75. Many of the participants identified that they suffer from a disability or health condition of some kind, with three stating that they are also carers. None of the attendees expressed that any of the characteristics they identified would prevent them from accessing the service in any way or that they had had an impact on the quality of service they received. All of the participants had used the service before, and when asked how their experience with us was, they described it as “excellent” and “first class.” Specific reference was made to both the Outreach Co-ordinator and the Welfare Rights Officer, who participants stated were a “major help” and that they could not have gotten through their issue without them. When asked to rate the service on a scale of 1-10, all participants scored a 10. They explained this was due to the fact that nothing is a bother and that we are always willing to help.

None of the participants had any issues finding the office. They stated they had either looked up the location beforehand or used maps, and one participant lived nearby. However, it was mentioned that having the sign for the Bureau put back on the wall would make the office more easily identifiable. Another participant said that it had taken them a while to find a parking space. None of the participants identified any issues with language barriers or disability access.

All the participants said that nothing would prevent them from accessing our service and did not identify any improvements to be made, stating that we are already very accommodating. One participant did comment that it was convenient for them when

outreach was still at Hawkhill, but they understand why the change to home visits was more practical. Overall, the feedback from the focus group was overwhelmingly positive, with participants not raising any complaints and stating that we do a “fantastic job.”

#### [2.4 Interview with Central Scotland Regional Equality Council \(CSREC\)](#)

To gain a wider perspective on the views of different groups within the community, we also held an online meeting with a representative from the Central Scotland Regional Equality Council (CSREC). The CSREC works with local communities, enabling people from ethnic minority backgrounds to be aware of their rights and what to do if such rights are not being upheld. By working with CSREC, we hoped to gain an understanding of their client’s experiences with the bureau.

When consulted about any potential barriers that may prevent them or their clients from attending the bureau, they stated that they had not experienced any themselves as they speak English, but that language barriers can sometimes present a big issue. We discussed how the bureau can only use qualified translators but we do not have easy access to them, and agreed that this is an issue that would need to be addressed to encourage those who do not speak fluent English to access the service. It was further raised that even with a translator or a client who has a sufficient understanding of the English language, the client’s levels of literacy and understanding of the UK system can cause substantial barriers to understanding and acting on the advice provided. People who have immigrated to the UK don’t necessarily have a broad understanding of how different UK systems work as they can be highly complex, so even with a translator they may still not fully understand the advice they have been given. This in turn may lead them to not want to return to the service or may put them off attending in the first place.

Finally, we discussed disability adaptations and the possible benefits of introducing a hearing loop. They agreed that this would be a beneficial adaptation for those who are hard of hearing, as struggling with hearing can make it more difficult to communicate with others. This may be due to the fact that the person they are communicating with may not project enough or there may be other noises in the surrounding area that make it more difficult to hear the person. Therefore, it was felt that a hearing loop, which amplifies the voice of the speaker and dulls background noise, could serve as a beneficial addition to the

bureau's interview rooms and encourage those who are hard of hearing to access the service. While a hearing loop would only be beneficial to clients who wear a hearing aid, it would still be a big step to improving the experience of our hard of hearing clients.

## Conclusion

Overall, the feedback across all our research methods was generally positive. Participants highlighted services such as outreach and the work of our Welfare Rights Officer, as well as generally praising the excellent service and the friendliness of the staff.

While we received a lot of positive feedback, there were some issues raised as well. The issue that came up the most was the broken door at the public entrance. As only one side of the door opens, it has made it difficult for those who use wheelchairs or mobility scooters to access the building. It was also mentioned that those who have prams have struggled with this issue as well. Having the door repaired so both sides open is a high priority issue for the Bureau and we are currently awaiting repairs by the local authority, who are the landlords for the building. Another predominant issue was the lack of translators available. This issue was raised multiple times during the staff and volunteer survey as well as by the representative from CSREC, but it was also a problem we encountered over the course of conducting this research. When co-ordinating a focus group with Forth Valley Welcome, we were asked if we would be able to provide an Arabic translator if the group came to the Bureau, as those who would be participating are predominantly Arabic speakers. While we have fluent Arabic speakers in the Bureau, who would've been happy to assist, we needed a qualified translator. We originally intended to attend one of their meetings instead, where a translator would be available, but ultimately ended up sending the online survey instead due to unforeseen circumstances. This highlighted the difficulties caused by the lack of translation facilities and coupled with the survey responses, it was clear this was an issue that needed to be addressed. As we need qualified translators to provide this service, further research into how to address this issue is required.

Other suggestions were made which would also be worth looking into. One such point was an adjustment in opening hours. It was raised in both the public and internal surveys that our current opening times do not accommodate those who work during the day. The suggestion was made in both surveys that we expand our opening hours so that more people can access the service. Similarly, there was also the suggestion of a women only evening. Further research into whether this is something we could accommodate and how much demand there is for such a service would need to be carried out first but it is an issue

worth looking at. A hearing loop was also suggested to improve accessibility for our hard of hearing clients and is another issue that we will research further.

We also received some feedback about long wait times and difficulty reaching reception. Our service is very busy and we try to get back to everyone as quickly as we can. We are taking steps to improve our response times and hopefully this will be further aided by our recent intake of new volunteers.

Finally, there were a few issues which we have either already addressed or there is nothing we can do to address them. Firstly, one respondent mentioned that using public transport is a difficulty when trying to get to the bureau. The office is in the town centre of Alloa and there is good bus links with the surrounding areas, but we understand this may not be practical for everyone. Our outreach service operates in the surrounding areas so that people who cannot access the bureau easily can still access the service, and we hope the continuation of this service will help those who previously felt unable to access the service. It is worth noting that the respondent in question also stated that having an outreach venue in their area has largely rectified this issue. A final point that was raised by one respondent is that they'd like the bureau to have more access to specialists, specifically immigration specialists. As discussed in the previous chapter, we are only able to provide level 1 immigration advice and anything more complex must be referred on to a specialist. Any more complex immigration cases presented at the bureau will be referred on to the Ethnic Minorities Law Centre. Unfortunately, this is the most we can do in cases such as this one.

Overall, the feedback gathered was mainly positive but also helped us to identify issues which need to be addressed. Following on from this project, we can go on to research the issues raised and escalate issues to management for further action, in turn providing equal access for all of Clackmannanshire.

## Appendix One: Survey Questions

### Public Survey Questions

1. Please tell us your:
  - a) Age
  - b) Gender
  - c) Relationship Status
  - d) If you are pregnant or on maternity leave
  - e) If you are transgender
  - f) If you have a disability or health condition
  - g) Race and Nationality
  - h) Religion
  - i) Sexual Orientation
  
2. Based on your answers to the last question, do you feel that any of those characteristics would prevent you from accessing the bureau?
  
3. Have you used our service before? If so, how easy was it for you to get to?
  
4. Did you experience any language barriers at the bureau? If yes, please explain below.
  
5. Did you find that the bureau had good disabled access? Please explain your answer below.
  
6. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the worst and 10 being the best) how would you rate your experience with the bureau?
  
7. Please explain your answer to the previous question.
  
8. Is there any changes the bureau could make that would improve your experience with us?
  
9. Is there anything that would put you off coming back to the bureau?
  
10. Any other feedback?

### Staff and Volunteer Survey Questions

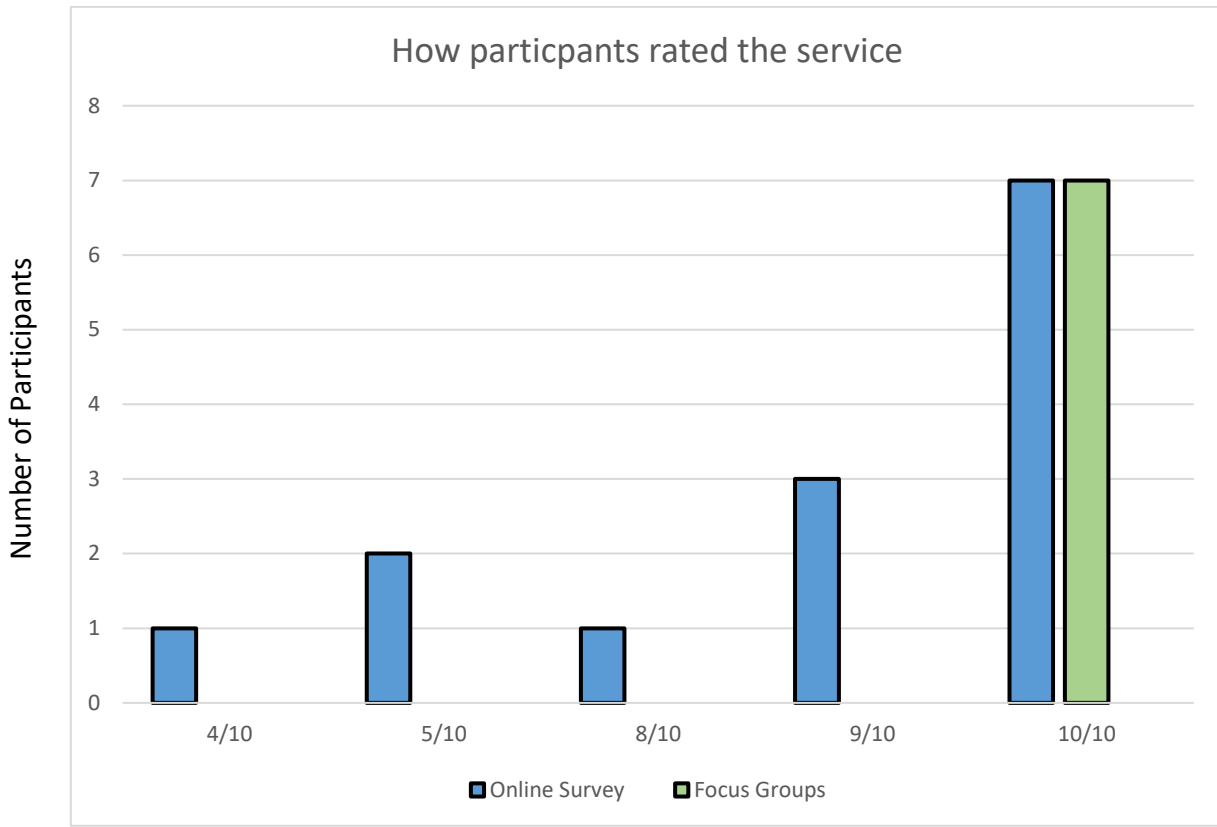
1. Have you identified or experienced any barriers to accessing the bureau? This may be things such as disability access, language barriers, etc.
2. Have any of your clients raised any issues with you about the accessibility of the bureau? If so, please explain below.
3. Is there any changes you feel should be made to improve the accessibility of the bureau?
4. Any other feedback?

## Appendix 2: Table of Characteristics

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>Age</b>	18-25= 7 26-35= 4 36-45= 2 46-55= 3 56-65= 6 66-75= 0 75+= 3
<b>Disability and Health</b>	Disability= 6 Health Condition= 3 Carer= 3
<b>Gender</b>	Female= 18 Male= 7
<b>Marriage/Civil Partnership</b>	Married= 12 Not Married= 13
<b>Nationality</b>	Scottish= 16 British= 8 Polish= 1
<b>Pregnancy and Maternity</b>	0
<b>Race</b>	White= 24 Latin= 1
<b>Religion</b>	Atheist/ Agnostic= 10 Christian= 13 Roman Catholic= 1 Unspecified= 1
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Bisexual= 2 Heterosexual= 21 Homosexual= 2
<b>Transgender</b>	0



### Appendix 3: Feedback Chart



*Chart shows the responses participants gave when asked to rate the service on a scale of 1-10. The x axis (the horizontal line) shows the scores that participants gave and the Y axis (the vertical line) shows the number of participants that gave that score. The blue columns represent scores given in the online survey and the green column represents scores given in the focus groups.*