

SCOPE = Equality for
disabled people

Supermarkets, the pandemic and the future for disabled customers

Consumer affairs policy report

Scope
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Introduction

Buying food and essentials should be an easy, barrier-free experience. But for disabled people, supermarket shopping presents challenges. In March 2020, many disabled people were asked to shield. And many more chose to shield out of personal choice. Overnight, the way many disabled people shopped for food changed completely.

Disabled people told us that supermarkets, in their policies and practices, were failing them as customers.

This research highlights the range of barriers disabled customers have experienced over the last year. Barriers across online, delivery and in-store services. We found the pandemic made existing barriers worse, as well as creating new ones. And these barriers will remain unless supermarkets make a concerted effort to change.

When the pandemic began, Scope's helpline was inundated with calls from disabled people struggling to get food.¹

At this point it was clear that disabled people were being disproportionately affected by the pandemic.² We already know that disabled people face around £583 of extra costs a month compared to non-disabled people.³

With some disabled people already living on tight budgets, many were faced with even less choice of where, when, and how they shopped.

Most disabled people avoided shopping in-person. Instead moving to shopping online. However, this was stressful and not always affordable because of:

- the lack of delivery slots
- high delivery costs
- minimum spend requirements
- poor delivery experiences

Some disabled people couldn't shop online due to costs or accessibility barriers. For those shoppers, visiting a supermarket in-store presented new difficulties. Particularly, the risk of catching coronavirus or passing it on to a family member.

The pandemic and lockdown also created additional barriers including:

- large numbers of customers,
- changing store layouts and
- not knowing where items were.

¹ 58% of calls were from people struggling to access food. Insights from the Scope Helpline during the pandemic, May 2020

² Britain Thinks consumer affairs research on behalf of Scope, 18 August 2020

³ Scope, The Disability Price Tag (policy report) 2019

This heightened environment of stress and anxiety left many disabled people feeling uncomfortable asking in-store staff for help.

This report outlines our evidence and our thinking for how supermarkets can improve the experience in-store and online for their disabled customers.

We know that in a competitive market, customer experience and customer loyalty is crucial to gain an increased market share. However, too many disabled people feel let down by poor experiences that continue to happen. Even after many restrictions have eased. Resulting in 71% of disabled people changing where they shopped due to their negative experiences.

This report shows there's an opportunity for supermarkets to increase their customer base. To do this, supermarkets must recognise disabled customers, and implement policies and practices to improve their shopping experience. We hope supermarkets take up the opportunity.



About this research

Scope carried out research over a period of 7 months. We wanted to understand the effect of the pandemic on disabled people's access to food and essentials. We found that the pandemic has created significant barriers, and extra costs, in the supermarket experience. We have identified both the barriers online and in-store.

We know that complex websites have accessibility barriers for people with access needs.⁴ In the first instance, our goal was to identify these barriers and persuade supermarkets to resolve them urgently. Scope carried out accessibility audits on 8 of the main UK supermarket websites and apps.⁵ We shared these insights alongside our survey findings with supermarkets at the time.

The online section of this report uses survey data from Scope's online crowdsourcing tool.⁶ It is based on the responses of more than 3,600 people who identify as disabled. A follow up poll of 183 disabled people⁷ explored how shopping habits had changed since the second lockdown.

The in-store section of this report is based on a poll of 1,001 disabled in-store shoppers.⁸ Scope has carried out a series of interviews to learn more from disabled people. Their experiences have supported much of our research findings.⁹

All participants' names have been changed.

⁴ 97.4% of the world's top home pages had detectable WCAG 2 failures in February 2021. WebAIM Million Analysis

⁵ Tesco, Sainsbury's, Ocado, Waitrose, Co-op, Asda, Iceland and Morrisons

⁶ Crowdsourcing survey data from The Big Hack by Scope Reporting Tool. Carried out between 27 October and 9 November 2020

⁷ Survey insights from the Scope research panel. Based on the responses of 183 disabled people in early January 2021. Respondents shopped both in-store and online

⁸ Based on the responses of 1,001 disabled shoppers in England and Wales who shopped in-store before the pandemic and will also do so after the pandemic. Polling carried out by Opinium on behalf of Scope between the 6 and 11 May 2021. Not a nationally representative sample

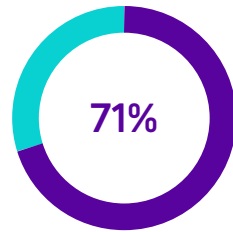
⁹ Scope carried out separate interviews with 13 disabled people with a range of impairments in February 2021, who mainly shopped in-store

Main findings

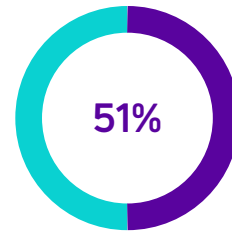
Our research highlighted some priority concerns about disabled people's access to food and shopping at supermarkets.



Disabled customers are **less comfortable** shopping in-store than they were before the pandemic.¹⁰



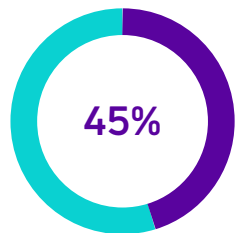
71% of disabled people changed where they shop due to their **negative experiences**.¹¹



Only 51% of people feel comfortable asking for help from staff in-store. Compared to **67%** before the pandemic.¹²



1 in 5 people do not ask supermarket staff for assistance **even if they need help**.¹³



Just under half (45%) of disabled people surveyed said they **experienced accessibility issues** with the supermarket's website or app when buying food online.¹⁴



Many of the supermarket coronavirus policies made ordering food online **difficult or no longer possible**. Like delivering shopping without plastic bags and drivers not bringing shopping into homes.¹⁵



3 in 5 people surveyed would be willing to **travel further** to go to a supermarket where they do not face discrimination.¹⁶



1 in 5 (20%) said they would like **priority delivery slots** for disabled people to **remain in place** after the pandemic.¹⁷

10, 12, 13, 16, 17 Opinion polling (May 2021)

11 Scope research panel (January 2021)

14, 15 Big Hack crowdsourcing data (October 2020)

Recommendations for supermarkets

Delivery and online experience

1. Make it easy for disabled customers to tell supermarkets that they are disabled and communicate the reasonable adjustments they need.
2. Remove delivery charges and lower minimum spend for customers who identify as disabled.
3. Make disability awareness training mandatory for delivery drivers and customer service representatives.
4. Always give a variety of contact options to meet the access needs of different people.
5. Allow customers the option to request their delivery in bags.
6. Make sure websites and apps comply with web accessibility guidelines and test your services with disabled people.

In-store experience

1. Consider keeping some coronavirus safety measures in place after they are no longer mandatory.
2. Provide disability awareness training for all in-store supermarket staff.
3. Have a clear public-facing strategy to detail how you will be more inclusive towards disabled colleagues and customers.

Buying food and essentials online

Even before the pandemic, disabled people regularly faced accessibility issues when shopping online. Like poor colour contrast, website navigation, pop-ups and adverts. But many disabled people said that the pandemic made online shopping much harder for them. It created extra costs and challenges.

Before the pandemic, 38% of disabled people already did their food shopping online. An additional 20% started shopping online at the start of the pandemic.¹⁸

Supermarkets increased the number of slots available by tens of thousands to try and reach the demand. And while the introduction of priority slots for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable customers helped, many people did not meet these criteria. Many months into the pandemic disabled people were still struggling to get online delivery slots.

Several supermarket coronavirus policies have made ordering food online difficult or no longer possible. Like delivering shopping without plastic bags and drivers not bringing shopping into homes.

Scope found that concerns around lack of delivery slots, costs associated with delivery, and minimum spend requirements were at the forefront of people's minds.¹⁹

In January 2021, Scope co-signed an open letter along with 22 other charities.²⁰ This called on supermarket CEOs to suspend the minimum spend requirement and delivery charges for vulnerable people.

Main findings for shopping online

Just under half (45%) of disabled people said they experienced accessibility issues with the supermarket's website or app when buying food online.²¹

Whilst there were accessibility barriers (poor colour contrast, screen reader accessibility), issues were also found with the delivery process.²²

1 in 5 (20%) disabled people said they would like priority delivery slots to remain in place after the pandemic.²³

^{18, 23} Opinion polling (May 2021)

¹⁹ Analysis of open survey comments. Big Hack crowdsourcing data (October 2020)

²⁰ Joint letter signed by 23 charities on unfair costs to safely access food, Independent Age press release, 18 January 2021

^{21, 22} Big Hack crowdsourcing data (October 2020)

Barriers to online shopping during coronavirus

Lack of delivery slots

Most disabled customers cited a lack of delivery slots as their main barrier to ordering their food and groceries online. Customers who had relied on online delivery slots to do their food shopping for years suddenly found that they could no longer get one. This was in part due to the increased demand for online shopping following the national lockdown announcement.

Others said that getting priority access to delivery slots was made more difficult when they were not included in the government's clinically extremely vulnerable list.

Many customers said they were forced to change where they shop to get a delivery slot.

“I've used online shopping for years and I'm used to booking my slots regularly. But I've only managed to get a handful since Covid. As I am housebound, this has been problematic.”

Mike (mental health condition)

“Give priority to customers with issues that prevent them from accessing their shops other than online. I'd been a regular customer buying online for at least 6 years, once or twice monthly, and then when lockdown came, I was forgotten and had no chance of getting an online delivery slot. I'm not physically able to go to the shops or click and collect, so I was very stressed and had to rely on friends as I don't have family in the area.”

Emily (mobility impairment)

Unaffordable minimum spend requirements and delivery charges

Concerns about minimum spend requirements were another big issue that emerged. For disabled people who live on their own, it can be hard to reach the minimum order requirements to qualify for delivery. This is especially the case for many disabled people who are already on a tight budget.

Over half of disabled people, 56%, said they experienced extra costs from minimum spend requirements for delivery.²⁴ Many described these costs as unaffordable.

“ [Supermarkets] are now starting to charge for delivery if you don't spend £40. In no way can I afford £40 a week. The spend for click and collect is £25, and I am not even sure of spending that amount.”
Robert (hearing impairment)

“ I live alone and therefore do not need a large amount of shopping and do not reach minimum spend for delivery. I have mental health and social issues and often feel anxious and unable to go shopping. So, home delivery could be a lifeline, but I can't afford it. Nor do I need a large shop to reach the minimum delivery amount.”
Daniel (mental health condition)

“ I'm happy to shop online, but the minimum spend for my chosen supermarket is ridiculous for single people and pensioners like me. I'm also a wheelchair user, so it's hard to shop in-store as lots of goods are out of reach. Once I was told they would get a staff member to go with me to help. I waited 20 minutes then did it on my own with other shoppers assisting me. I hate having to ask but what else is there? Online you can see all the products, not ones that are just at eye level (I have non-positional vertigo so struggle to look up). I feel we are being discriminated against for not being able to spend the minimum spend without having to paying higher delivery charges.”
Priya (stamina and mobility impairment)

Extra costs from more expensive delivery slots

Disabled people also faced an increase in costs in the form of more expensive delivery slots. Nearly two thirds (57%) of disabled people reported extra costs from delivery charges for online orders.

Many disabled people said that before the pandemic, they relied on cheaper delivery slots at less popular times of the day to suit their budgets. The increase in demand for online shopping since the pandemic has meant fewer of these slots are available, creating extra costs.

“Due to low income I have to choose a slot late in the evening as they are cheaper. I would prefer not to be dealing with my shopping at 10pm but cannot afford the earlier slots.”

Bianca (chronic pain)

“Consider single people and disabled people when it comes to minimum spend and delivery charges. Disabled people may have to rely on carers to put food away, so are often stuck with the most expensive delivery slots and, like myself, can't afford it.”

Maisie (mobility impairment and chronic pain)

Poor in-person delivery and customer service

Our research also found several issues with the delivery process. In particular, not being able to notify the supermarket or driver of support needs.

Disabled people with mobility impairments said that despite relying on assistance from delivery drivers to bring their shopping into their homes, help is not always provided. Several cited this as a problem that existed before coronavirus restrictions. Others said that the delivery experience was inconsistent and dependent on the driver.

It was often the case that any requirements or instructions requested were not communicated to drivers effectively.

“Maybe they should have a form attached to your account that you can complete which explains which disabilities you have, or they ask you at the checkout whether you're disabled and if you need assistance. The driver would then be aware of any problems before they arrive. It takes me a while to get to my door and time seems to be very limited for delivery drivers. A more flexible attitude towards disabled people is overdue.”

Rima (chronic pain)

Shopping not delivered in plastic bags

During lockdown, many supermarkets announced that they would no longer provide plastic bags with online orders.

Several disabled shoppers cited concerns for the environment and overuse of plastics. But many disabled people rely on bagged deliveries to get their shopping into their homes.

“It would be helpful to be able to tell the delivery driver that bags are essential and that I have a significant physical disability. This means that I will be slow to answer the door and I can't pick up items from crates. Even on apps like Asda, which claim that this information will be relayed to the drivers, it doesn't happen. According to the drivers, the [delivery notes] section on the app is non-functional.”

Tina (mobility impairment)

“I have had part of my spine fused. I cannot now, and never will be able to, bend over and pick up Sainsbury's shopping out of a crate on the floor, then put it all into bags, item by item.”

Michael (mobility impairment)

“I know that [supermarkets] want to use less plastic but I have a medical need for my shopping to be in bags.”

Harry (chronic pain)

“If a supermarket is only going to deliver to the door, then they need to bag the shopping, at least for disabled people. I have to decant everything from the crate to my own bag. One item at a time. Then carry to the kitchen. All the time with an impatient driver waiting. I usually can't get a slot for the times when I have a carer here to do it for me. Home delivery has gone from being a positive experience that contributed to my independence to something a lot more painful and stressful.”

Sandra (mobility impairment)

“Delivery drivers are often helpful but are anxious to get on their way. I can't get the food out of the baskets except by taking each item out one by one, now that they are no longer delivered in bags. I find it difficult to lift things out and it takes ages. By the time I'm finished, I'm exhausted.”

Pauline (stamina and mobility impairment)

Accessibility, website design and user experience

Half of disabled customers said they experienced accessibility issues with the supermarket website or app when buying food online.²⁵

Many survey respondents described supermarket websites as confusing and hard to navigate. Some accessibility barriers are easier to detect and resolve in audits, like poor colour contrast. But barriers that affect user experience need more attention. Like menu navigation, search functionality and the checkout process.

Barriers to the overall user experience cannot be diagnosed with an accessibility audit. For example:

- how the menu is structured
- how easily people can search and find the products they need
- how easy the checkout process is

Though a website may technically comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), it does not guarantee a good user experience for people with access needs.

As well as general problems with the user experience, people reported issues with:

- searching for products (17%)
- distracting advertisements and promotional pop-ups (11%)
- product descriptions not being detailed enough (11%)
- contacting the company (11%)²⁶

The issues listed above are examples of user experience (UX) issues that fall outside WCAG guidelines. Only by working with their disabled customers to find solutions can supermarkets start to address these issues and improve the experience for disabled customers online.

“ I get sensory overload when confronted with a busy looking website and get confused when trying to choose items.”

Jay (memory impairment and mental health condition)

“ The product descriptions often don't make sense and it takes me ages to find what I want. For instance, I wanted 6 bagels and it looked like they were individual. I ended up with 6 bags... so 36 bagels.”

Sam (stamina and mobility impairment)

“ The whole process is confusing, long-winded and not easy for me to use.”

Jon (hearing, mobility and memory impairments)

“ It makes me upset that I'm unable to complete what should be a basic task. I shouldn't have to worry about my shopping order not being correct. I shouldn't have to fight with a website that logs me out constantly. I shouldn't have to rely on an inaccessible service just to make sure I have food, especially during a pandemic. Disabilities, both visible and non-visible, should be considered when designing a product that is going to be used by everyone. While online shopping may seem like a nice convenience for many, for some of us, it's our only way to access affordable food.”

Rachel (learning difficulty)

“ I often have a lot of issues using the search function and getting relevant results. Using the navigation menus is really hard on a computer because you have to hover the cursor in a very precise place, or you lose your progress working through the menus.”

Louise (dexterity and chronic pain)



Our online food shopping recommendations for supermarkets

While many of these issues were raised during the pandemic, they will continue to cause problems for disabled people if they are not resolved. Issues like extra delivery costs, requiring help from delivery drivers and poor web design will continue to pose challenges for disabled people, even when coronavirus is no longer a concern.

There are several ways supermarkets can improve the online shopping experience for disabled customers, beyond the pandemic:

1

Make it easy for customers to tell supermarkets they are disabled and put reasonable adjustments in place

This will allow supermarkets to know which customers may need priority delivery slots and other reasonable adjustments. For example, help from delivery drivers bringing shopping inside.

2

Remove delivery charges and lower minimum spend for customers who identify as disabled

Disabled people living alone or on low incomes find the costs of delivery and the minimum spend requirements impossible to meet.

Many disabled people need to schedule their food deliveries around their carer or personal assistant's hours. This is to help with bringing the food in and putting it away. These hours are typically beyond the disabled person's control. And they could be in the 'high demand' delivery hours which cost more.

3

Disability awareness training for delivery drivers and customer service representatives

All delivery drivers and customer service representatives should be aware of the support needed by disabled customers. This support should be provided without question or confrontation.

4

Always give a variety of contact options to meet the access needs of different people

To cater to the wide range of impairments and access needs of customers, supermarkets should provide different ways for customers to contact the customer service team. Especially if it's to communicate an issue they are having with the delivery. Consider providing a range of contact options like telephone, email, and webchat. Make it easy for disabled customers to contact supermarket customer service.

5

Allow customers the option to request their delivery in bags

During the pandemic, a common change in supermarket policy meant that orders were delivered in boxes and crates without shopping bags. Many disabled people rely on bags with handles to transport their food. Therefore this option must always be available as a reasonable adjustment.

6

Make sure websites and apps comply with web accessibility guidelines and test these with disabled people

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 are a technical global standard for accessibility. Designing to these standards will increase the number of people who can use your digital services. Including those with impairments, conditions or access needs.

But user testing with a range of disabled people is essential to finding more nuanced accessibility barriers. Go beyond WCAG requirements. Test with disabled people and improve the customer experience for everyone.

Buying food and essentials in-store

Next, we wanted to find out what the in-store experience was like for disabled people shopping at supermarkets during lockdown. To do this, we asked disabled people about the barriers they face getting food and essentials in-store.

We wanted to know if disabled people found shopping in-store more comfortable again as restrictions started to ease. And as more people in the UK become vaccinated and coronavirus becomes less of a threat. We asked respondents to consider their experiences before, during, and after lockdown.²⁷

Following this, Scope has been meeting with supermarkets since January 2021.

In these meetings, we have heard about the existing schemes in place to benefit all consumers. Particularly disabled customers. However, what is often missing is communication of these schemes to disabled people.

As with online shopping, many of the problems and barriers that disabled people reported pre-date the pandemic. But they became more pronounced during it.

Main findings for buying in-store

Since the easing of restrictions on 12 April 2021:

A third of disabled people still feel apprehensive or uncomfortable about shopping in-store.

1 in 5 people do not ask supermarket staff for assistance even if they need help.

Only 51% of people feel comfortable asking for help from staff in-store. Compared to 67% before the pandemic.

75% of people feel like invisible impairments are not well understood by supermarkets.

3 in 5 people surveyed would be willing to travel further to go to a supermarket where they do not face discrimination.²⁸

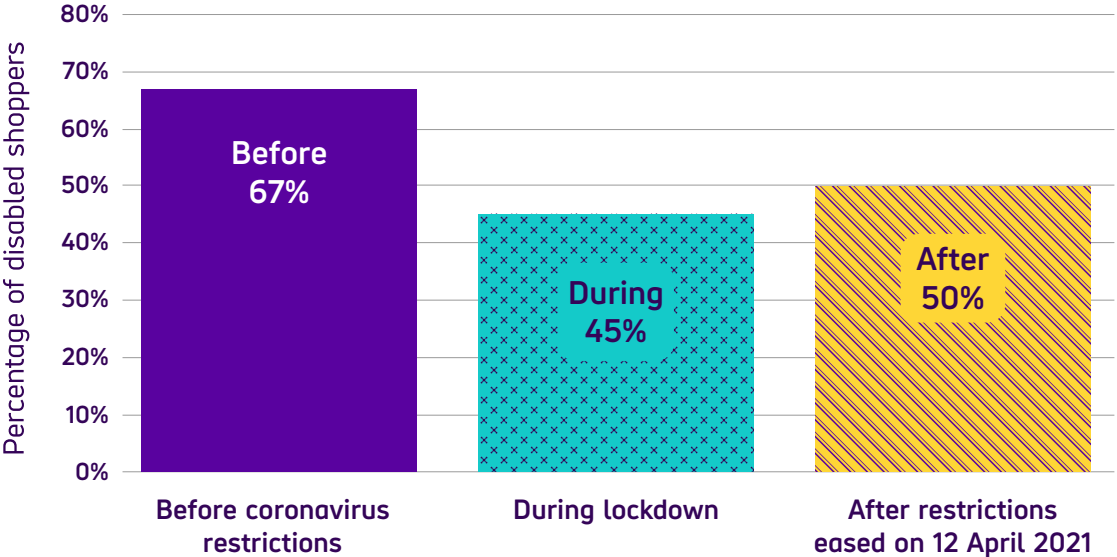
²⁷ This report was written in June 2021. In-store polling was carried out in May 2021. References to “after the pandemic” here refer to the time period immediately after the easing of coronavirus restrictions on 12 April 2021

²⁸ Opinion polling (May 2021)

Tracking supermarket sentiment before, during, and after the pandemic

We asked disabled shoppers to rate their overall in-store food shopping experience. This was to see how many disabled shoppers felt good or very good about shopping in-store over time.

Disabled shoppers who said their in-store supermarket shopping experience was 'very good' or 'good'



Opinium polling for Scope (May 2021)



Before lockdown, 67% of disabled shoppers said their in-store shopping experience was 'very good' or 'good' for all supermarkets.²⁹ This dropped to 45% during lockdown. Since restrictions eased in April 2021, this has gone up to 50%. But there is significant room for improvement.

Disabled people clearly faced barriers before the pandemic. And these negative experiences have had a lasting impact. Supermarkets need to restore the trust and comfort levels of their disabled customers.

Since the easing of restrictions, almost a third of disabled people feel apprehensive (31%) or uncomfortable (29%) shopping in-store.³⁰

Many cited the attitudes of other customers as a contributor to a negative shopping environment. Almost a third (29%) of respondents described other shoppers as disinterested, ignorant (26%) or judgemental (19%).

“ People were going crazy for food. If you went to get something off a shelf and someone was in the way, you'd get people giving you dirty looks for being close. Everyone just started getting an attitude and being unfriendly.”

Jeffrey (hearing and mobility impairment)

“ A customer in a shop swore at me because I couldn't get my money out of my purse because I was shaking”

Jane (learning difficulty and dyspraxia)

29, 30, 31 Opinium polling (May 2021)

“ I could nearly not walk due to back pain, I was in the way of a customer, I apologised and said I had a back problem, he told me he was really irritated with me and that I should have stayed at home, when I got upset and my husband asked what was wrong, the other shopper got more angry and invited my husband outside for a fight, we went and complained to the staff who did not appear to care or take any interest, I still feel uncomfortable visiting this store, this happened a number of years ago.”

Dhriti (chronic pain and stamina)

“ I had just had an operation, nothing physically noticeable, and when I asked for help reaching something because I couldn't stretch my arm up the person actually tutted.”

Lilly (visual impairment and chronic pain)

However, disabled people tend to have a more positive attitude towards supermarket workers. They described staff as:

- helpful (39%)
- friendly (35%)
- supportive (21%)³¹

In-store physical barriers

The most common physical barriers that disabled people reported are:

- a large number of other customers
- items and products are out of reach
- changing store layout and not knowing where items are³²

Large number of customers

From our poll of in-store disabled shoppers, 36% said that a large number of other customers made in-store shopping difficult for them.

During the pandemic, the number of customers inside the store was tightly regulated.

Since the easing of restrictions, disabled people report that the increased number of people in-store makes them feel uncomfortable.

Over 2 in 5 people would like the following to remain in place after the pandemic:

- social distancing measures (46%)
- limits on the number of shoppers in-store (43%)³³

“The amount of people in-store makes me uncomfortable. People tend to forget about others who may need a bit more patience, understanding and help from others. Sometimes I can hear mutterings of ‘speed up!’”
Oliver (mobility impairment)

“I find it difficult to be around other shoppers who don’t respect my space.”
Meg (learning difficulty)

“I don’t like having people close to me, it makes me feel uncomfortable.”
Bella (visual impairment)

Reaching items

Nearly a third (30%) of people polled said that the placement of certain products on high shelves made in-store shopping difficult.³⁴

Many disabled people struggle to reach items on higher shelves in supermarkets. For wheelchair and mobility scooter users, the reachable height is limited to a seated level.

“ [I’ve] felt less able to ask for help to reach items on high or low shelves [than I did before the pandemic].”
Martin (mobility impairment)

“ Because of my disability I find reaching for items on high shelves impossible but can rarely see a member of staff to get help.”
Terry (mobility impairment)

“ Once I asked for help getting something from the bottom shelf, and the member of staff looked at me like I was lazy.”
Rehana (chronic pain and stamina)

“ At my regular supermarket, the milk I like is on a high shelf. After a couple of cartons have been taken, they’re hard to reach. Several times I’ve had to ask staff to reach them for me which is often met by eye rolls and tuts.”
Luke (mobility impairment)

Changing layout

A quarter, 25%, of people said that the frequently changing store layout contributed to a negative in-store shopping experience.³⁵

For some disabled people having a routine while shopping is the only way they can make sure they get everything they need. When items move around in-store, this creates a significant barrier.

This is especially the case for people with visual impairments and autism who may rely on consistent layouts to navigate around the store.

“It’s a big thing for me, not changing where all the items are. I’ve noticed almost every time I go into store that things are in different places. And I don’t mean things that are on special offer. It’s the usual items that are stocked. If I can’t find something where I normally find it, I tend to just write it off.”

Simon (mental health condition)

Reasonable adjustments

Disabled people told us about the reasonable adjustments they typically need when in-store at a supermarket.³⁶

- Nearly a third (29%) would like regular quiet hours.
- 23% need a staff member to help with reaching items.
- 16% said they need another person they know, for example a carer, to assist them.

Asking for help

Before the pandemic, 67% of disabled shoppers said they were 'comfortable' asking supermarket staff for help.³⁷ This dropped to less than half (46%) during the peak of the pandemic. Since restrictions eased, this has increased marginally to 51%.³⁸

Several schemes already exist to support disabled customers who need help with their shopping. Including wearing a disability lanyard or carrying a card to communicate disability. These schemes can help staff recognise those customers who may need more support or time to do their shopping. We found that 47% of disabled shoppers would consider signing up to one of these schemes.³⁹

When asked about their reasons, nearly a third (28%) said wearing a lanyard is helpful as it means awkward conversations can be avoided. But only 21% said that they feel confident they would get the support they need from staff when wearing one.⁴⁰

Other disabled shoppers felt differently. With 16% saying they would prefer to ask for help when they need it⁴¹ rather than wear something that identifies them as disabled.

37, 38, 39, 40, 41 Opinium polling (May 2021)



Our in-store recommendations

Scope's recommendations for creating a more inclusive shopping environment.

1 Do not immediately remove all safety measures

Consult with your disabled customers. Some (pandemic-related) measures may improve the shopping experience.

For example, providing regular 'quiet' slots for a smaller number of customers in-store.

Establish regular hours where you only allow a small number of customers in at a time. This was common practice for supermarkets during the pandemic.

These should be offered at different times of the day, not just early in the morning. For many disabled people, an early morning start is not feasible.

For example, if a carer is required to assist someone in getting up and ready for the day. This delays a person's start to the day and makes an 8am or 9am supermarket trip impossible.

2 Provide disability awareness training for in-store staff

This will give staff an understanding of the social model of disability. Training will also help staff:

- feel less awkward around their disabled customers
- understand reasonable adjustments and meet people's requirements
- understand the impact of their actions on disabled customers

Communicate that staff are willing and able to help disabled customers and understand disability. For example, this could be:

- a tannoy announcement to remind customers they can ask for help
- a button, lanyard or badge worn by staff who have been disability trained

3

Make a public commitment to disabled customers

Use existing channels to demonstrate being an ally to disabled people.

Communicate widely any schemes that could help disabled people. Make them clear and easily accessible. For example, cheaper delivery opportunities and bagged delivery. Make sure to include disability representation in supermarket marketing. This will help disabled people to feel represented, recognised, and will build trust in your brand.

Scope analysed all the supermarkets' annual reports and public information related to equality, diversity and inclusion. We could not find any examples of a strong, co-produced commitment to disabled customers.

Build a clear strategy as to how you will be more inclusive of your disabled customers and colleagues. This strategy needs to be co-produced by both disabled staff and customers. All strategies should be based on the social model of disability.

During the pandemic, we have seen big brands showing their support for social justice campaigns such as the Black Lives Matter movement. Therefore, we know public brand allyship is possible. And that there is a willingness for big brands to take action on matters of social justice.



Charles' story

“ I was putting myself at more risk shopping in-store ”

“I'm registered blind. But if you met me in the street, you'd struggle to recognise I had a disability. Before the pandemic, I'd often do my online order with Iceland, to keep the freezer stocked, but would use other shops whenever I needed. Even then, I feel like supermarkets struggled with a basic understanding of disabled customers. Often, I'd ask staff for help and get told the item I was looking for was “Over there!” whilst the shop assistant pointed. Obviously, I was just stood there with my guide dog, thinking “over where?”

I remember one day trying to find hand soap, walking to 5 separate shops in my local area and returning home shattered and empty handed because everywhere was sold out. This was the moment I knew that shopping was going to be a nightmare. And that I might not be able to get basic stuff to survive.

Staff in all the shops I visited during the pandemic were very friendly. But they were unable to assist me fully as this would break social distancing rules.

This meant that I was putting myself at more risk by getting within two metres of other customers. And having

to handle all the products on the shelves to be able to see what they were. I also have asthma, which I thought would qualify me to be on the shielding list. But I was only classed as Clinically Vulnerable, not Clinically Extremely Vulnerable. As a result, I was left to do the food shopping for the first couple of months on my own.

It was in late April after lots of arguing with my local authority, that they got me on the priority shopping list for online deliveries. I then received emails from Tesco, Asda and Iceland, all inviting me to book slots. But due to the high demand, both Tesco and Asda's websites wouldn't work properly, so I just gave up with them.

I was very thankful that Iceland contacted me. The only issue I did have with them during the pandemic was that if you didn't use the priority slot one week when emailed about it, you wouldn't then be invited for another slot the next week.

As I live alone, I don't need the £50 plus worth of food each week, to then do it again the next week once things expire. Clearly retailers weren't fully taking into account everyone's financial situation.

If I could make one wish, it would be that supermarkets understood that not all disabilities are visible and to never just presume someone is non-disabled. I really hope supermarkets realise that online delivery services are paramount for disabled people, allowing them to live more independently.

I'm proud that I'm an independent disabled person. For retailers that do step up, the disabled community will no doubt respond with their custom and loyalty."

Charles

27, from Coventry (visual impairment)



How Scope can help

We work with businesses to make company culture, products and services more inclusive of disabled people. Scope offers the following services for organisations:

Digital inclusion and accessibility auditing

We provide detailed insight into how your digital services perform against internationally recognised accessibility standards. As well as identifying issues with the user experience that go beyond Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) guidelines.

Customer research, insight and testing

Gather insights on the barriers disabled people face with Scope's research panel.

Our research panel is a community of more than 800 disabled people and parents of disabled children. Their lived experience can help organisations develop and test their products and services.

Social model training

Social model training helps colleagues understand the social model for disability. At its core is the belief that people are disabled by the barriers in society, not their

impairment. This training can help employees feel more confident to work with, manage, and meet the needs of disabled colleagues and customers.

Content accessibility training

Everyone in your organisation has a part to play in creating accessible content. Learn how to optimise your digital content for accessibility. From webpages and emails to presentations and internal communications.

Inclusive employment support

Scope's Disability Employment Experts can work with you to understand your organisation's needs. Through Get Inclusive, we deliver a tailored package of workshops and activities. These address cultural, attitudinal, and procedural barriers that can prevent companies from hiring disabled talent.