

Designability Three Year Strategy 2023 – 2026

Building on our progress to date

Designability, formerly known as the Bath Institute of Medical Engineering (BIME), was established in 1968. An independent charity founded by the renowned inventor and engineer, Bevan Horstmann, and consultant surgeon, Kenneth Lloyd-Williams, the charity's purpose was to create medical equipment that would make a difference to people's lives.

Since we first began, we have created over 300 products, improving the lives of more than 300,000 people; from the bottom wiper which has enabled over 94,000 people with limited movement to be independent in their personal hygiene, to the day clock, enabling over 18,000 people with dementia to know the time of day in a simple way, and the iconic Wizzybug powered wheelchair, which has helped over 1200 disabled children across the UK to be independently mobile. We've also pioneered research into the needs of disabled people which are not fulfilled elsewhere and the application of new technologies for disabled people, which have resulted in new products and new ways of thinking about assistive technology.

1. Overview

Designability created its first published strategy in 2019, following a wide-ranging consultation with staff, trustees and stakeholders, along with in-depth analysis of trends in healthcare and disability in the UK. The core assumptions behind this ambitious strategy have not changed – rates of disability in the UK are still rising, and disabled people still do not have all that they need to live the life they choose.

There are 14.6 million disabled people in the UK today – that's 1 in 5 people¹ – with 7 million people having a disability that affects their mobility. Covid-19 caused significant challenges for disabled people, affecting their health, lifestyles and wellbeing.

The fundamentals of our vision, mission and values are the same now as they were four years ago. We have taken this opportunity to reflect on how we express our purpose and these statements have been refreshed and updated. They now reflect the social model of disability which essentially² states that people are disabled by barriers in society and not by their impairment or difference.

The new way of describing our strategic framework has been created to adopt this shared understanding.

¹ Source: Family Resources Survey 2020/1 Dept Work and Pensions

² Source: [Scope](#)

UPDATED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:

PURPOSE

Designability believes that it is not a person's condition or impairment that creates a disability, but barriers in society that disable people.

Our purpose is to remove these barriers and ensure disabled people have an equal opportunity to be independent and live the life they choose. We do this by convening and harnessing the perspectives of disabled people and their lived experience. By using the principles of human centred design, we listen to disabled people and co-design innovative products and services that enable disabled people to be independent.

VISION

A future where disabled people live the life they choose.

MISSION

To create equality of opportunity for disabled people by removing barriers to independence.

VALUES

Creative	We are innovative, inspiring, imaginative yet simple
Authentic	We listen and are honest, open, welcoming, respectful and informed
Practical	We are pragmatic, down to earth, professional and deliver on our promises
Ambitious	We create change, and are driven to make the world inclusive for disabled people

WHO WE HELP

Designability focuses its work on enabling disabled adults and children with physical impairments to be independent.

Our Ambitions and Goals

1. Enabling disabled people to live a life with more independence and fewer barriers

Ambition: We will help disabled people have more independence through new products and services they can use in the way they want. We will ensure they face fewer barriers to independence by creating our own products and helping other product designers, retailers and manufacturers increase the accessibility of their products. We believe disabled people should have the freedom to make decisions about the way they live their lives. We aim to deliver choice and create innovative solutions to challenges that affect disabled people every day.

Around a third of disabled people experience difficulties related to their impairment in accessing public, commercial and leisure goods services³. Encouragingly 6 out of 10 businesses would find information about the consumer behaviour and preferences of disabled people useful in order to help them determine how to meet their needs⁴.

Goals:

- We will create a new and exciting innovation strategy and have a clear road map to greater innovation and new product development.
- We will continue to work with carefully selected partners on user engagement and design projects to increase accessibility and remove barriers to independence for disabled people.

2. Expanding the reach of our products and services

Ambition: We will enable thousands of young disabled children in the UK to be independently mobile with a Wizzybug.

There are currently five million children with a disability in the UK. Reports indicate that 1 in 5 disabled children in the UK have a mobility impairment, while there are 75,000 disabled children with wheelchair needs⁵. 95% of families with disabled children report that they do not have access to all the equipment they need.

³ Department for Work and Pensions, August 2015, Opinions and lifestyle survey data for the 2014 fulfilling potential outcomes and indicators framework: official statistics

⁴ Extra Costs Commission, 2016, Driving down the extra costs disabled people face. Progress review October 2016

⁵ Source: McKinsey report for Whizz Kidz Wheelchair Needs of Disabled Children in the UK 2017

Our free Wizzybug Loan Scheme aims to address these needs, reaching as many children as possible and ensuring that they can have Wizzybug for as long as it's suitable.

Goals:

- We will achieve a step change in the number of young disabled children who have independent powered mobility using a Wizzybug.
- We will deliver a new business model for Wizzybug, with partnerships at its core.

3. Developing new products

Ambition: We will help disabled parents and carers who are manual wheelchair users with young children become independently mobile by using the world's first widely available wheelchair-accessible pushchair.

Over 16,000 disabled parents of children aged 0-3 years in the UK are manual wheelchair users and despite a global pushchair market worth around \$3 billion, there are currently no commercially produced pushchairs widely available for disabled parents. This means they have no safe way to get out of the house independently with their young children.

As we face the long-term consequences from the pandemic of increased isolation and mental health challenges, providing a solution that gives disabled parents independence to go out with their baby and toddler has never been more critical.

Goal:

- We will produce a pushchair for wheelchair users which is available to buy across the UK through commercial partnerships, with thousands of disabled people enjoying independent mobility with their young children.

"I might have a medical condition that restricts my mobility but that doesn't make me a disabled mother. What disables me is the lack of appropriate equipment to assist me. All I want to do is look after my child independently and have the equipment to liberate me to do that." – Parent from our user engagement group

4. Enabling better access to transport

Ambition: We will establish better access to transport for disabled people, allowing them to be independently mobile when using different methods of transport.

Recent research shows that disabled people in the UK currently make 38% fewer journeys than non-disabled people⁶ - a figure that has remained the same over the past decade. 30% of disabled people say that difficulties in public transport have reduced their independence, while 1 in 4 say negative attitudes from other passengers prevent them from using public transport.

In January 2023, Designability, along with five other members led by Coventry University, launched the new National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) with the aim of improving access to travel for disabled people. ncat's mission is to make transport accessible for all by engaging with disabled people to better understand their experiences and co-design solutions; amplifying their voices in all decision making and collaborating widely with transport stakeholders.

Goal:

- We will make evidence available on how some forms of transport can become more accessible to disabled people through Designability's active participation in, and delivery of projects for, the National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat).

5. A rewarding place to work, for everyone, constantly evolving and improving

Ambition: We will be a more accessible and inclusive organisation, with disabled people at its heart, and be an even better place to work. We will strive to understand, validate, demonstrate, continually improve and articulate our impact, plan how to increase it, and be well known for our innovation solutions which remove barriers to independence.

We have expanded our team considerably in recent years to make progress with the goals outlined in this strategy. We have introduced several new initiatives, including further investment in training and development and promoting health and wellbeing through the Mental Health First Aid Initiative.

In October 2022, Designability achieved Level 1 'Disability Confident Committed' Employer status. Disability Confident is a government initiative designed to encourage employers to recruit and retain disabled people and those with health conditions.

Our aim is to work towards becoming a Level 2 Disability Confident Employer, and longer term, to achieve Level 3. This will demonstrate our commitment to ensuring that disabled people are treated fairly and have access to the same opportunities as everyone else, and to supporting existing employees in work if they are or become disabled.

⁶ Motability The Transport Accessibility Gap 2022

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Goals:

- We will increase engagement with and involvement of disabled people across and within our organisation.
- We will build on the culture of our organisation and ensure everyone has what they need to maximise their potential.
- We will use clear, measurable articulation of our impact as an organisation, which in turn will lead to increased awareness of, and funding for our work.

Conclusion:

As a charity we receive no statutory funding and rely almost entirely on voluntary donations from individuals and organisations. It is only thanks to their generosity that we can meet our ambitions and goals, to help disabled people achieve greater independence.