

Investigation into the experience of people with dementia visiting Mecca bingo in York

The logo for 'rica' is displayed in white lowercase letters on a teal square background. A thin yellow horizontal line is positioned directly beneath the letters 'i' and 'c'.

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1. Executive summary

This research was completed by Rica in partnership with Innovations in Dementia (iD), Mecca York bingo, and the York Minds and Voices DEEP group, developed through the Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project (DEEP). It is part of a three year project funded by the John Ellerman Foundation to develop and carry out consumer research with people with dementia.

The aim of the research was to gain feedback from people with dementia on their experience at Mecca York and to produce recommendations for bingo halls on how best to accommodate people with dementia.

The research was informed by six participants (four with mild to moderate dementia and two who were partners or carers) and consisted of three parts:

1. Initial exploration – participants were asked to buy tickets for the bingo games and explore the venue.
2. Playing the bingo games – each participant played two bingo games on Max tablet or paper book. There was a break in between the bingo games for participants to explore the venue further.
3. Group discussion – participants were asked to give feedback on their experience of Mecca York and discuss how they thought it could have been improved.

Two Rica researchers and a group representative from York Minds and Voices took notes throughout the session, and pictures and audio where possible.

The three main recommendations from the research to improve the experience for visitors with mild to moderate dementia were:

- **Where possible, have staff available to explain essential information to visitors. Ensure it is also written down and available for visitors to take with them.**
- **Run the bingo games at a slower pace or put on designated games run at a slower pace as introductory or relaxed games.**
- **Increase signage around Mecca York, especially route signage, to help wayfinding.**



2. Acknowledgement

Central to this work is the willing collaboration of our participants to express their thoughts and feelings freely and to be open to further exploration of their opinions. We would like to thank all of our investigators, who entered into this spirit of open discourse and who were a pleasure to work with.

We would also like to thank our research partners:

Innovations in Dementia - a community interest company that works nationally with people with dementia, partner organisations, and professionals, with the aim of developing and testing projects that will enhance the lives of people with dementia. Innovations in Dementia facilitates the Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project (DEEP), a UK network of groups of people with dementia who want to influence policy and practice. www.innovationsindementia.org.uk

York Minds and Voices - a monthly peer support group for people who have a dementia. Members aim to work together to improve the lives of people in York who live with dementia and to change perceptions of what they are able to do. York Minds and Voices is part of DEEP.

Mecca Bingo York - a fully-modernised, thriving bingo club with over 4,500 active members serving a broad cross-section of the community from students to senior citizens and everyone in between. Mecca Bingo boasts a loyal fan base who use the club as a hub for meeting their friends and family, and rely on the venue for fun, entertainment and companionship. The club offers a place to meet, relax and socialise, enjoy competitively-priced food and drink and play exciting slots and bingo games for big cash prizes. The club has something for everyone and its welcoming team will make sure you have a fantastic time whenever you choose to visit. www.meccabingo.com

3. Rica

Research Institute for Consumer Affairs (Rica) specialises in consumer research with older and disabled consumers. Founded through the Consumers Association, publishers of Which?, Rica became independent in 1991.

Rica has its own [consumer panel – the RicaWatch panel](#) – of over 700 people and is a disability-led organisation. Ten of the charity’s twelve Trustees have a disability. Rica carries out [commissioned research work](#) with industry, other charities, service providers and policy makers to improve products and services. With grant funding Rica also publishes free [consumer reports](#) based on independent research.

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4. Introduction

In March 2016 the York Minds and Voices DEEP group approached Rica with an interest in being involved in Rica's research into accessible products and services for people with dementia.

The research is part of a three-year project funded by the John Ellerman Foundation, completed in partnership with Innovations in Dementia (iD) and local groups developed through the Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project (DEEP).

Following a meeting with the York Minds and Voices DEEP group to discuss potential areas to research, bingo was chosen. Mecca Bingo was approached by Rica to assist with the research and they agreed to host and to make their facilities available.

The aim of the research was to gain feedback from people with dementia on their experience at Mecca York and to produce recommendations for bingo halls on how best to accommodate people with dementia.

5. Background

The Alzheimer's Society estimates that there are 850,000 people with dementia in the UK. People with dementia need and want to be consulted about environments, services, and products, just the same as other consumers. Conversations and surveys with people with dementia and their carers, indicate that their main areas of concern relate to the practicalities of everyday living. Group work, especially with those living alone, reveals that it is the increasing inability to cope with the day-to-day activities that frustrates and depresses them and leads them to withdraw from even trying.

6. The participants

All names used in this report are pseudonyms.

Four members of the York Minds and Voices DEEP group with mild to moderate dementia or Alzheimer's attended the research. Two came alone [Andy and Jack] and two came with their partners [Matt with partner Elizabeth and Laura with partner Graham]. The two partners [Elizabeth and Graham] also gave feedback on their experience, so there was a total of six participants for the research.

Also in attendance was a group representative from York Minds and Voices DEEP group [Damian].

7. The environment

The research took place at Mecca York bingo (68 Fishergate, York, North Yorkshire, YO10 4AR). Matt and Elizabeth were already members of Mecca York so knew the venue but the rest of the participants had not been before. Mecca York occupies three floors, two of which are open to the public.

On the ground floor next to the entrance is a small reception area with a desk, which is only open during busy times. This area on the ground floor is connected to the first floor by a shared atrium-like space. The first floor can be reached by stairs, a lift or an escalator.

The first area on the first floor is the main reception, which has one large curved desk where visitors buy their bingo tickets. There are two adjoining rooms to the main reception: a slot machine room and the main bingo hall. Visitors must go through the slot machine room to reach the main bingo hall. In the main bingo hall there's a cafe area, toilets, some slot machines, a podium for the caller, and a stage. To exit the main bingo hall there's a door which leads directly back into the main reception.

Usually only staff have access to the second floor; however, a meeting room was made available for the research so introductions and discussions with participants could be held in private. The meeting room could be reached by the lift or stairs and had one table in the centre of the room.

8. Method

In a DEEP group meeting prior to the research, participants were given an information sheet which briefly explained Rica, the project aims, the format of the session and the discussion points. Participants were also given and asked to complete a Mecca York membership form and bring it to the research as they needed to be a member to participate in any bingo. See Appendix A for the participant information sheet and Appendix B for a copy of the membership form.

The research took place on Friday 27th January 2017 at 11.30 pm and lasted two hours and 45 minutes. Two Rica researchers and the local DEEP group coordinator (Damian) attended the research.

On arrival participants were greeted at the entrance of Mecca York by a Rica researcher and Damian. All participants were accompanied from the ground floor entrance area to the second floor meeting room using the lift. While the participants were getting settled, the Mecca membership forms were processed by Mecca staff.

To start the session a Rica researcher introduced Rica, the project and its aims, and the format of the session. All participants were given a consent form to read and sign, and a payment form to complete. See Appendix C for the consent form. One participant also had to complete a Mecca York membership form. While participants were completing their consent and payment forms the Mecca membership cards were distributed.

The rest of the session was arranged into three parts:

8.1. Initial exploration

The group was split into two sub-groups, with a Rica researcher in each. See Table 1 for the participant split. Participants were asked to buy tickets for the 12.30 and 13.00 bingo games, explore the facilities and be seated ready for the 12.30 bingo game. For the initial exploration the researchers and Damian were given prompt sheets to note any observations or comments made by the participants (Task A). See Appendix D for the prompt sheet.

To follow the start of Mecca York's timetable (see Appendix E) participants were given 20 minutes for their initial exploration – this is the usual time given between the doors opening and the start of the first game.

Table 1: Participant group split for the initial exploration

Researcher 1 + Damian	Researcher 2
Laura	Andy
Jack	Matt
Graham	Elizabeth

8.2. Playing the bingo games

All participants reconvened in the bingo hall for the 12.30 bingo game. This first game lasted 15 minutes and was followed by a 15-minute break. During the break the participants were invited to explore the facilities further and, if they wished, to play the table top bingo games. The group reconvened again in the bingo hall for the second bingo game at 13.00. This game lasted 30 minutes.

For this part of the session researchers had three prompt sheets guiding them to note any observations or comments by participants:

One for the 12.30 bingo game (Task B)

One for the break (Task C)

One for the 13.00 bingo game (Task D)

See Appendix F for the prompt sheets.

8.3. Group discussion

Once the participants had returned their Max tablets to the main reception and collected any prize money, a group discussion was held in the second floor meeting room. The discussion was audio recorded and the following topics discussed:

- Entrance to the venue
- Membership sign-up form
- Buying the bingo game tickets
- Entering the bingo hall
- Using the facilities
- The environment
- Playing the bingo games

See Appendix G for the group discussion prompt sheet.

Each participant with dementia was given £50 as a thank-you for attending the research. Three participants were reimbursed £4 to cover the cost of the bingo games played and one paid for the bingo themselves. Those who were reimbursed for the bingo games gave any prize money to the York Minds and Voices group, whereas those who paid themselves kept any prize money. Each participant specified their decision on their consent form prior to buying the bingo tickets.

9. Results

The participant feedback and researcher observations across all parts of the session have been combined and arranged into three results sections:

- 9.1. The facilities and environment
- 9.2. Preparing for the bingo games
- 9.3. Playing the bingo games

9.1. The facilities and environment

9.1.1. Wayfinding

From the entrance it is clear which direction to follow to reach the main reception, as the escalator and stairs lead to it. When in the main reception area there are three sets of double doors visible: two sets located behind reception on either side and one to the right of the main reception. The correct route to take is through either of the sets of doors behind reception; however the more logical choice is the door to the right as the bingo hall can be seen through these doors.

There is no signage to indicate the route to take from the main reception to the main bingo hall. The participants found this confusing.

“I don’t know where I’m going” – Laura

“There’s no sign to say ‘main door for bingo’ or anything” – Matt

“I didn’t see any signs to indicate which way to go on from the main entrance and nobody said which way to go” – Elizabeth

Once in the slot machine room the lack of signage continues. Researchers noted that although the main bingo hall could be seen through a set of double doors (see Figure 2), if the doors weren’t open it wouldn’t be as clear. There is also no exit sign once in the main bingo hall.

9.1.2. Slot machine room

After buying tickets at the main reception, the slot machine room is the first place visitors enter to begin their bingo experience. The room has dimmed coloured lighting with several slot machines located around the edge of the room and in the middle. See Figure 1 and Figure 2 for images of the slot machine room.

Figure 1: Slot machine room



Figure 2: Slot machine room to main bingo hall



During the initial exploration the first sub group made their way quickly through this room into the main bingo hall whereas the second sub group, particularly Jack, spent more time. Jack was observed to be looking between his Max tablet and the slot machines trying to work out how the two connected.

“This is like a different world” – Jack

The participants didn’t use the slot machines and weren’t interested in using them.

“I think it would drive me round the bend with things spinning round and things like that. I wouldn’t want to go” – Matt

Researchers noted that there is no sign in the slot machine room identifying the main bingo hall or main reception.

9.1.3. Bingo hall

The bingo hall can seat up to 910 people. Most participants were not concerned about the size of the bingo hall; however Jack was overwhelmed. See Figure 3 for an image of the main bingo hall.

“I can’t believe it. It’s massive” – Jack

“I’d rather be on Mars. I’m overwhelmed with what I see, there’s too much overload” – Jack

The first sub-group of participants was seated first, at the far side of the bingo hall, and when the second sub-group entered to join them they weren’t sure how best to navigate the large amount of seating to get to them.

The seating was divided into red and blue seats, which researchers thought might cause some confusion over whether this meant something to the bingo game. Participants either hadn’t noticed this or weren’t affected by it, commenting that it depends on the stage of one’s dementia.

Researchers noted that there was no sign in the main bingo hall identifying either the slot machine room or the exit to the main reception.

Figure 3: Main bingo hall



9.1.4. Toilets

The toilets are located in the main bingo hall and have separate doorways for the ladies and gents. There is an illuminated sign above each doorway, an example of which is shown in Figure 4. Once in the bingo hall participants were able to locate the toilets. However they commented that there was no signage elsewhere to inform visitors where to find them; for example, in the reception.

“In fact I don’t think there are any signs up to tell us where the toilets are, are there?” – Matt

For both the ladies and gents there is no exit sign inside the toilets, which caused some confusion. See Figure 5 for the exit route from inside the toilet.

“I’ll follow you or else I’ll never get out of here” – Jack said to Damian

Figure 4: Toilet sign



Figure 5: Toilet inside door and exit route



9.1.5. Cafe area

The majority of participants went to the cafe during the break between bingo games. There’s no sign for the cafe, but because of its open design all participants located it easily. One participant had trouble locating a bin in the cafe area as there was no sign.

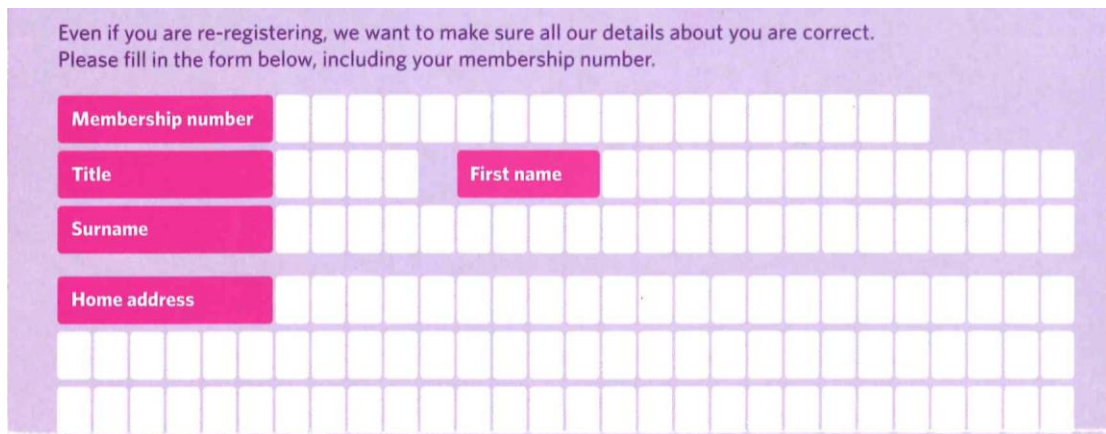
9.2. Preparing for the bingo game

9.2.1. Membership forms

Participants all liked the use of colour on the membership form; however all had some difficulty in completing it. Collectively participants thought the font needed to be bigger and the squares assigned to write in to also be bigger or, ideally, removed and replaced with one line per question to write on. See Figure 6 below for a section of the form or Appendix B for the full form.

“I don’t like the little squares; it makes my eyes go all queer. It would be better with no squares and just one line” – Laura

Figure 6: Section of Mecca membership form



9.2.2. Purchasing tickets

At the main reception participants were informed by Mecca staff that they could either play bingo on paper tickets or on a Max tablet, for which there is a difference in price. Although the pricing is written up on a card at reception participants felt this could have been bigger and also further explained by the staff. Participants commented that they were unsure whether it was the number of lines, games or tickets, or a combination, that determined the overall cost.

Elizabeth was concerned that when using the Max tablets people could end up spending more than expected.

“I think they could be a bit clearer with the prices” – Elizabeth



Four participants [Laura, Andy, Jack and Graham] selected to use the Max tablet and two [Matt and Elizabeth] the paper tickets. When participants purchased the Max tablets Mecca staff briefly explained how to use them; however participants were still unsure how the tablets operated. Laura had to return to the reception desk twice as she had forgotten what she had been told and Matt later commented he wasn't able to process any of the information presented to him.

Participants thought an extra member of staff was needed to thoroughly explain the Max tablets.

“When I first got it I didn’t understand what she was talking about” – Laura

“You could do with an extra person there to explain them as the people come for them [the Max tablets]” – Matt

Due to the amount of information delivered verbally to them, participants found the experience of purchasing tickets slightly overwhelming and they were concerned about the time it could take them.

“Are holding the queue up whilst you’re trying to decide and you can get a bit embarrassed because you’re holding people up” – Elizabeth

“I can’t recall. I so have memory problems and it became so confusing. There’s so much information for me that I think I switched off and didn’t even realise it. I went into la la land, like I do on some occasions unfortunately” – Jack

“It’s a bit too fast you know. It doesn’t register” – Laura

9.2.3 Timing

Participants were given 20 minutes to prepare for their first bingo game; this reflected the amount of time between Mecca’s opening time and the first bingo game of the afternoon session. All participants were able to buy their tickets and be seated to start their bingo game in this time.

The 15 minutes’ break in between the bingo games gave participants enough time to either go to the cafe or play the table top bingo games. It was felt the break was quick, especially if questions needed to be asked or if the bingo hall was busier.

9.3. Playing the bingo games

9.3.1. Following the game

Participants were waiting for the caller to start speaking as a signal for their bingo game; however the caller started speaking at the end of the previous table top session. This resulted in confusion and uncertainty among participants as to whether their game had started. When the bingo game did start a lot of jargon was used in quick succession which added to the participants' confusion. There was no pause for participants to process the information before the numbers started being called, which left participants flustered.

All participants had difficulty following the first bingo game due to the fast pace at which the numbers were called and the game moving on after a claim. Again, there was a lot of jargon used after a claim was made and no pause for participants to process the information to help understand how the game was to proceed. Figure 7 shows the participants playing the bingo game.

"He's too fast I can't keep up with him" – Laura

"It's like a race. You've no sooner got one number then you look up at the next and you're getting dazzled" – Elizabeth

"I haven't got the ability [to keep up]. It's far too quick" – Jack

Participants found the second bingo game easier to follow as they understood the game process and how to use the Max tablets. However all still thought the numbers should be called at a slower pace.

Figure 7: Participants playing the bingo game



9.3.2. Using the Max tablets

As mentioned in section 9.2.2. participants felt the explanations of the Max tablets were not sufficient and/or that they wouldn't remember the details given verbally. This was evident when participants were playing the first bingo game as all using the Max tablets had difficulty. The root of the confusion when using the Max tablets stemmed from the lack of explanation.

There were four main problems encountered when using the Max tablet:

1. Screen dimming – if the Max tablet was not pressed for a while the screen would dim. Participants were not told about this and so did not know how to re-activate the screen. Researchers suggested participants touch the screen to re-activate it however all were cautious in case it ended or impacted their game settings. See Figure 9 and Figure 8 for examples of screen dimming.

Figure 9: Max tablet screen dimmed



Figure 8: Max tablet warning



2. Auto dab – when auto dab was switched on the numbers called would automatically be marked off whereas when it was switched off the participant would have to press the numbers themselves. Participants were not told about this setting on the Max tablets, therefore when the game started none of them knew what they needed to do. Laura, Andy, and Graham had auto dab switched on and in time realised they did not need to do anything but Matt had auto dab switched off. Matt did not know if he was meant to be pressing the numbers himself, and as the other participants weren't having to he thought his Max tablet was broken. For Matt, this, coupled with the fast pace at which the numbers were being called out, meant he found it very difficult to keep up with the game.

“You could do with about five seconds to find your number. It’s just too fast” - Jack

3. Sheet movement – the sheets on the Max tablet automatically move and re-order according to which have the most numbers marked off. This wasn't explained to participants. For participants with auto dab switched on this did not cause any problems and was accepted as the norm. However for Matt, with auto dab off, it added to his difficulty.
4. Claiming – the Max tablet alerts the user when to claim during the bingo game. Participants did not know about this feature. They were unsure what on the Max tablet indicated a full, and so correct, claim.

Participants had mixed opinions of the Max tablets.

“Brilliant. It plays itself”, “It takes the pressure off” – Laura

“You could fall asleep it plays for you” – Andy

9.3.3. Using the paper tickets

Only Matt and Elizabeth played bingo using the paper tickets. Both had played bingo at Mecca before, using the paper tickets, so were familiar with the process. See Figure and Figure 11 for images of the paper tickets.

Figure10: Paper ticket

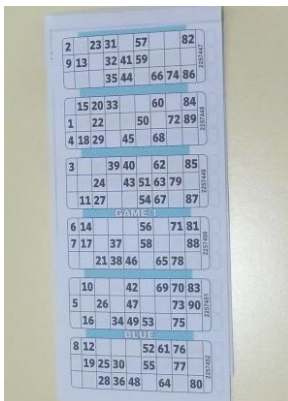


Figure 10: Playing with a paper ticket



The main difficulty in using the paper tickets was associated with the speed at which the game took place. Matt and Elizabeth thought the numbers were called too fast and that the games were started too quickly. This resulted in difficulty changing the sheets over and so keeping up with the game.

All the participants who had used the Max tablets commented they would want to use the paper tickets if this difficulty was removed.

“If it was slower I’d like to dab myself” – Laura

“I think the paper books are exciting as far as you’re having to find the number to dab it but in the question of looking whether you’ve got one line, two lines or a full house you can get really overwhelmed” – Elizabeth

“When someone shouts and they check the board they don’t give you a chance to change your sheet over and get ready to start again” – Matt

Elizabeth also mentioned that other possible games that could be played are on the paper tickets, even if not bought by the user. This means certain numbers are highlighted in a colour or surrounded by a shape, which could be distracting when looking for the numbers being called.

9.3.4. Claiming

To make a claim an individual must call out, which subsequently stops the game while their numbers are checked by a member of staff. If a correct claim is made the game moves forward, whereas an incorrect claim is announced by the caller as a ‘false claim’. While playing bingo three participants made claims; two correct and one incorrect. Laura made the incorrect claim and the claiming process made her error very public.

Participants were not sure whether they needed one or two lines in order to claim, as a lot of jargon was used to explain this. Coupled with the fast pace, there wasn’t enough time to ask a question or process the information before the numbers started being called again.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

Although initially all participants found the bingo experience at Mecca York slightly overwhelming, all said they would like to return to play again. From the participant feedback and researcher observations three main points emerged for how the bingo experience could be improved for people with dementia.

1. Where possible have staff available to explain essential information to visitors and also ensure it is written down and available for visitors to take with them.

A key problem for participants was their lack of understanding of how the Max tablets worked. Although all using the Max tablets were given a brief explanation of how they worked when purchasing their tickets, it was not detailed enough and was forgotten by some. This led to great difficulty in the first bingo game.

To alleviate this ideally a staff member would be available to explain how to use the Max tablets and their features to visitors. It is acknowledged, however, that this wouldn't always be possible. Alternatively, written instructions of how to use the Max tablets could be given out when tickets are purchased, which would inform visitors and serve as a reminder throughout the game. Written information on pricing would also be useful and would enable participants to take their time when purchasing tickets and make a more informed decision.

2. Run the bingo games at a slower pace or put on designated games run at a slower pace as introductory or relaxed games.

All participants thought the pace of the bingo game was too fast. This included the speed at which the numbers were called and at which the game moved on after a successful claim. The fast pace negatively impacted the participants' bingo games because they felt they didn't have time to process the information or to properly engage and follow the game.

Participants recognized that having slower-paced games might not suit all visitors to Mecca York and that this would reduce the number of games possible in a day. It was suggested that the first game of the day should be run at a slower pace and introduced as an introductory or relaxed session. This would ease visitors into the standard bingo games and give them the opportunity to fully understand the game process.

3. Increase signage around Mecca York, especially route signage to ease wayfinding.

It was noticed by participants and researchers that the signage at Mecca York was limited. Where there was signage, for example above the toilets doors, it was clear. Signage showing visitors which route to take would be beneficial, especially at the main reception, as the correct route to get to the main bingo hall isn't clear, causing confusion. The signage should be carried on throughout the venue, linking up all the facilities, areas and exits.