



Ensuring design
and facilities are
accessible for all

Foreword

Kirstie Loveridge

Senior Vice President, Human
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It's a matter of challenge versus opportunity, a phrase which risks opening the door to a torrent of corporate gobbledegook but which is very valid when talking about accessibility.

The challenge will hopefully be seen by many as identifying the best way to provide equal treatment and opportunities to all customers and staff. Others may see it as finding the cheapest and quickest way to make sure their organisation does enough to avoid being sued. There may also be a few for whom the challenge is one of doing nothing, just crossing their fingers that everything turns out OK.

But even the hard-nosed business types know an opportunity when they see one, and that's what accessibility is all about. The reason a business opens its doors is to let the customers in and make money; in unlocking those doors and thereby removing a barrier to access, have a look for anything else that might be preventing

people from getting into the building or using your services.

Designing buildings and providing services in a way which enables disabled people to use them is essentially the right thing to do. Even a slight lack of foresight or failure to appreciate the needs of disabled people can cause upset and offence, and the law is there to protect people from the more serious transgressions.

But where I'm coming from is the business angle. Even if you don't know what levels of accessibility are required by the various regulations, and even if you haven't got a clue about which aspects of your building or business might present an obstacle to someone with an impairment, you should be interested in attracting as many customers as possible.

We operate in retail, food and beverage, exhibitions, live sport and entertainment up to arena scale, nine to five and much, much later, into the

night and even the next day. We have car parks and we work closely with providers of public transport. We have several venues. We employ a lot of people. It is very much in our interests to do all we can to help them visit our premises safely and enjoy the experience to the full.

We recognise that the starting point isn't necessarily the front door. We have a section on our website dedicated to accessibility, because it is helpful to let disabled people know in advance what your facilities can do for them. Our online guidance goes beyond facilities for wheelchair-users and includes assistance dogs, essential companions, and accessing visual and audio information.

We work hard to make sure the signage is helpful, inside and outside our buildings, pointing people towards the right entrance, showing them what is inside and where they can find it – loos, catering facilities, shops, merchandise, prominent features within the building which people might identify as a good – and easy-to-find – place to meet family and friends.

Individual tenants have responsibility for their own premises and their own services, but we recognise that the experience of their customers reflects on us and can tarnish our reputation, so we expect them to demonstrate the same philosophy and level of care that we adopt.

As someone with a career built around HR, I am acutely aware that we must make our premises accessible to our people, and for the same reasons.

It's not about avoiding disputes and legal claims, it's about looking after our staff, attracting and keeping good people, being a responsible and progressive employer.

The make-up of our team reflects the wider community and that helps us anticipate the requirements of anybody and be prepared to welcome them. By ensuring diversity within your workforce you can gain a better understanding of the challenges that might be faced by your customers and visitors. This includes culture, faith and disability – if employees identify accessibility issues, the chances are that problems will be rectified before they present difficulties for the customers.

It is frequently forgotten that most impairments are acquired during a person's lifetime. You might have a workforce at the moment in which nobody is identified as a disabled person, but there remains a chance that someone will become disabled during the course of their lives. This has happened within our business and we always do what we can to make reasonable adjustments to keep those employees here.

We remember that they were hired for their skills and for their ability to make a positive contribution to the business, and we recognise they can still do that even if they have acquired an impairment. If they become unable to work in their usual area of the business, we will support them in moving to work in other roles where they can bring to bear the benefit of their experience and ability. ●



Access consultancy

New-build is an obvious situation where a business, local authority or other organisation might come to About Access for the guidance that will ensure – even before a brick is laid – that the design and facilities are accessible for all.

However, it is far from the only scenario and, because of that, our access consultancy service takes many different forms and is shaped by the requirements of the individual client.

It may be that a building is to undergo some alterations, and so the occupiers need advice about access around the new-look premises. There may even be questions about new furnishings, signage or colour schemes – on one occasion we were called in to advise on the possible impact for partially-sighted people of the pattern on a new carpet.

Generally, as access consultants we provide advice on how to incorporate accessibility into the policy and management of the built environment by thinking about the broad spectrum of disability. Our information allows for informed decision-making.

We ensure that the facilities and services provided in buildings are accessible to disabled and non-disabled people alike. We offer support throughout the property development process to completion, giving ongoing advice at all key stages. We can also assist where accessibility issues emerge due to factors such as customer complaints, and we help to achieve resolution with minimum cost and inconvenience.



Case study

Our role at The O2 in Greenwich is to provide broad-brush access consultancy, as you might expect with such an enormous property which houses an unrivalled array of facilities and accommodates a wide variety of customers and staff. We might get involved in reviewing the design of a concourse refurbishment, providing training to the maintenance team to give them a better understanding of issues including tonal contrast and the most effective layout for accessible loos. We also help to run their access group, a role which extends to sourcing new candidates to join, helping to set the agenda for the meetings and providing advice along with the members of the group. The entire ground floor area is more than 80,000 square metres. It can accommodate

20,000 people at a single event and it is used for sport events, entertainment, retail and leisure, and we do the back-of-house areas as well as the public space. There's always a refurb going on somewhere.

"Ian Streets of About Access is our go-to consultant when it comes to accessibility. He helps to run our in-house access group, Access at The O2, and provides advice and training across The O2, Eventim Apollo, SSE Arena and Indigo. This is in addition to projects at The O2."

Lee Lacey, Facility Director



Access audits

As a rule of thumb, try working your way round a building using your elbow or a clenched fist rather than open hands and flexible fingers. You'll get an idea soon enough of whether office doors can be opened, toilet doors locked and lights turned on and off by someone who has difficulties with manual dexterity.

These are some of the issues we examine in our access audits, which are at the core of our business.

We take a fresh look at a building and its facilities, drawing on our experience and training with disabled people.

We approach a building from the view point of disabled people – for example noticing that someone with a hearing impairment might experience difficulties with the background noise at a reception point.

Our access audit reports are unique to each project, because computerised tick boxes cannot interpret a building's specific design features or its overall accessibility.

The reports are also free of jargon, produced with the end-user in mind, because there's no point in delivering a document that cannot be used or understood.

And because About Access don't sell any of the products that are recommended in our reports, such as induction loops, bathroom fittings and emergency evacuation equipment, you can be sure you will receive unbiased advice.



Case study

Derry-Londonderry was the first UK City of Culture in 2013 and their investment in improving facilities didn't stop when the year ended. Derry City and Strabane Council later issued a tender for multiple access audits which we won.

The task included conducting seven access audits of cultural events and locations including art galleries, live music venues, a café with a learning centre and some residential accommodation. Our client was so happy with the work that they asked us to go back and carry out access audits on another eight properties. That work was not due to go out to tender for another 12 months but, encouraged by the success of the first phase, they decided to get the work done all in one go.

“In short, the work was delivered on time, to budget and with no fuss, with clear and concise research compiled that was easily understood by the venues, enabling them to continue to work on improvements for the pan-disability community. The work that About Access completed will support significant changes within DCSDC’s culture venues and in turn ensure that we work towards an accessible society for all.”

Louise Boyce Inclusion and Access Coordinator,

Derry City & Strabane District Council



Design appraisals

A common misconception is that you will automatically comply with the disability provisions within the Equality Act by designing a building to meet with the Building Regulations or with BS 8300, which now has two parts covering external environment and buildings.

This is not the case because the Equality Act is about how people are treated, for example in the work place or a shop. The physical features of premises play only a small part in that, and the Act gives no guidance on design standard. Nor does it advise on where such guidance might be found. The Act does require that reasonable adjustments are made to overcome the discriminatory effects of any physical features of a building that place disabled people at a disadvantage.

The easiest way to avoid this is to ensure that inclusivity is achieved at the design stage, and that is our goal with our appraisals.

We study accessibility provision from the earliest stage, looking at the plans and giving our advice at a point where corrections and improvements can be easily accommodated.

We use our experience and understanding to make recommendations that will assist a design team in incorporating features to improve access, and we also help them save time and money by avoiding potentially costly corrections once construction is under way – or even complete!



Case study

We have completed a lot of projects over the years for London-based Astudio architects. It started with schools and then a youth centre in Luton which subsequently won an award for architectural design. We have also studied commercial and residential buildings as well as the refurbishment of a mixed-use building in London which combined retail, offices and residential with a build value of about £70 million.

For schools you take additional guidance from the Government in the form of Building Bulletins. Schools fall into a number of sections of the Equality Act 2010 – education obviously, but also employers when thinking about teachers and service providers in relation to school governors, parent teacher evenings and fund-raising events.

With sports facilities you find different guidance again, with Sport England a

key influence. There is no specific guidance for youth centres, but you take on board general guidance, including that mixed use can bring a requirement of different access points for different users. Another element is housing, which comes under planning regulations and building regulations relating specifically to residential. There may also be a concierge service to blocks of flats, particularly in London, which raises the question of whether the staff will be providing a 24-hour service and what sort of additional provision that requires.

“We have been using the services of About Access for a number of years and we are happy with the service that is offered.”

Nick Gazanis, Associate, Astudio



Access statements and strategies

An Access Statement produced by About Access should start at the concept stage and work its way through the development, embracing the guidance within the Building Regulations Approved Document.

It is updated as changes are made to the design or to the building, and it should be seen as a companion to documents relating to, for example, the heating and ventilation system.

It will demonstrate how your design meets with the statutory guidance, why any variations might exist and what measures have been taken to make them accessible.

The Access Statement gives you the opportunity to show your awareness and appreciation of features within

your property that might present a problem for disabled people, and to set out how you have managed to overcome or minimise the impact.

Access Strategies are not as detailed as Access Statements and were introduced to focus on why specific design features do not meet Approved Document M to the Building Regulations, and on how you intend to resolve the issues.



Case study

After having a fire risk assessment carried out, Manchester Buddhist Centre was advised to have an access audit done and to post an access statement on their website. The aim of that was purely to describe the levels of access within the building so visitors could make an informed choice as to whether it would be accessible for them.

It's not about building it up and making it sound more accessible than it is. It's about being purely factual and including photographs where possible. In this case there was a flight of steps up to the entrance, with plans to install a platform lift. The access statement was written as the premises were at the time, with a view to amending it once the platform lift was in place and in the event of any other changes.

"We found About Access, received a prompt reply to our enquiry and a favourable fee quote. Once instructed, the audit was soon conducted, and the report submitted. It was an easy-to-read report, with clear explanations and no jargon. We would definitely use Ian again for any access-related work."

Steve Hodson-Ridgway, Health Safety and Maintenance Manager,

Manchester Buddhist Centre



Strategic planning

The most effective way to approach the issue of accessibility is to build it into your organisation's long-term plan, make it part of your culture.

Paying attention to loos and lifts, ramps and emergency evacuation will make life less difficult for disabled people, but the best way to make a real difference is to start at the top. If you get the strategy right from the start, then everything else should fall into place.

At About Access we can help you frame your plans to develop your organisation with accessibility in mind. The built environment will form part of the process, but we will also show you how to think at a higher level about how you are going to provide your services.

For example, if you're buying a shop you should have an access audit done on the building. If you're buying a chain of shops you should review all of them, individually and as a group, as part of a comprehensive and cost-effective strategy for accessibility.

You might create a template or a check-list of guidelines that cover what you need now and what sort of modifications you might require in the future. It would cover buildings and people, because attitude and awareness are vital, and it would promote forward-thinking, helping to future-proof your business as legislation and facilities change.



Case study

Since about 2015 we have been delivering training on a regular basis to various departments of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar as well as to the private sector on The Rock. The audiences have included people from Town Planning and Building Control, architects and designers and general business people. We provided them with insight into how to undertake access audits, identifying barriers to people with disabilities and what is considered reasonable in terms of making adjustments. The idea is to give people a better understanding of accessibility and ensure they realise it's not just about wheelchairs.

Some of the buildings are quite large, public buildings used for sport and education, private buildings used by businesses, and there is a real mix of new and old properties. It's not necessarily the case that modern buildings will be examples of accessibility best practice, but it is generally found that historic buildings

are more likely to present problems. Gibraltarians are rightly proud of their historic buildings, and it is a case of finding the right balance to make these buildings as accessible as possible without destroying the character which makes them so attractive to visit.

"Ian (About Access) provided training on conducting access audits and understanding the issues faced by people with disabilities. This was done to support the Government's drive to promote new equality legislation."

Spokesperson for Ministry for Equality, Government of Gibraltar

Two of the delegates on the two day course wrote:

"Interesting content that gave context to some real-time issues"

Another wrote:

"It met all expectations... I feel the training was perfect"



Part of your design team

By appointing an access consultant to your design team, you can ensure you get things right from the start. The savings in time and money are such that typically the investment will pay for itself.

Accessibility is now such a fundamental requirement of any new construction project or major refurbishment that your army of experts should include an access consultant working alongside the fire engineer, mechanical and electrical expert, landscape architect and the rest.

They are all specialists in their respective disciplines but without the expert input of an access consultant they may not necessarily anticipate the influence of their individual contributions on the wider project.

They are unlikely to foresee the financial cost or the effect on key deadlines of having to undo an element of the project late in the day and replace it with something accessible. Nor are they likely to anticipate the damaging impact of “value engineering” when, in an attempt to cut costs, a designer may decide that one lift is sufficient, the number of WCs can be reduced or a reception desk that was originally planned with two heights can make do with just one.

It is vital that when costs of a project are being reviewed there is someone on the team working to ensure that accessibility is not compromised, because failure to do that can often mean that the costs will hit the project later – and will increase.



Case study

On smaller projects we usually work directly with our own clients. Larger assignments will generally involve the input of other professionals, all experts in their own sectors, for example mechanical and electrical or fire engineers, and will undoubtedly progress more smoothly when people approach the task as a team. We often work with other access consultants who specialise in specific aspects of accessibility.

One particular project partner brought us in to look at the built environment as a member of their team, the client's design team. We worked together, each focusing on our own specialist areas, giving advice to the clients as and when necessary.

We also liaise with each other, because there are always going to be areas of crossover, and we work together to ensure we provide consistent advice and avoid awkward surprises.



Our training courses

About Access provides training in different ways, from an informal meeting with members of a trade association or professional body, to specific issues around disability or the built environment. It can be delivered to a range of businesses off-site, generating valuable interaction and enabling them to learn from each other's experience, or it can be in-house, direct to clients at their own premises.

The need for training can be prompted by fresh awareness of a gap in an organisation's service, such as amendments to regulations, a move to new premises, alterations to the layout of current premises, arrival of new staff or changing requirements of existing staff. It is relevant to employees at all levels from senior management to shop-floor and customer-facing staff.

Our courses include the following:

The Access Audit

Our Access Audit training is a two-day course that helps businesses take a proactive approach towards not discriminating against disabled people. It also helps you to understand the way in which your premises or service delivery can present barriers to disabled people.

We look at the main piece of legislation that an Access Audit is designed to address, the Equality Act. We also take into account other legislation and guidance that someone conducting an access audit might need to be aware of, for example Construction Design and Management Regulations and Occupier Liability Acts.

In addition we study practical examples of good and poor practice from the built environment, essentially helping you make sure you don't fall foul of one set of regulations by observing another.

Access Audit training is generally delivered at a client's premises as an in-house course, but it can also be done as an open course.

Delegates can draw on their own experiences and we will help them to learn from each other. It's particularly useful for surveyors who want to work on access, and it has also proved valuable for health and safety professionals.



The Equality Act

Our dedicated course on the Equality Act 2010 will give you greater insight into what the legislation demands. We don't do chapter and verse but we do make sure we cover the provisions of the Act that are relevant to you.

The Equality Act was introduced to provide protection throughout society against many forms of discrimination. At About Access we only deal with the Act from the point of view of disability. Our training looks at the terms of the Act, the definition of disability, what sort of preventative and remedial measures are considered reasonable, what the various duties are for staff, and what the impact is on local authorities and businesses. The duration of the course is flexible.



Disability Confidence

It can make a big difference when customer-facing employees and managers have the confidence to meet and work alongside disabled people.

Our course will look at areas such as appropriate language and how you should and should not act. It will include a brief synopsis of the Equality Act and will also examine the politics of disability and case studies based on specific scenarios.

The course is either full day or half a day and is usually delivered as an in-house session at a client's premises, but occasionally as an open course for anyone to join.



EASTBOURNE
Borough Council



Case study

Eastbourne Borough Council and Lewes District Council asked About Access to provide training to ensure key staff would be able to give appropriate and effective access advice internally and externally in a sustainable way.

The request was prompted by a restructuring of the two local authorities and a desire to place this responsibility clearly with one team.

Part of the plan involved Neighbourhood Advisors, working across both Eastbourne and Lewes District, responding to complaints about poor access raised by members of the public, giving advice on improving accessibility of the built environment, and distributing accessible council literature.

By training the teams, the intention was to provide a more robust access advice service, removing the dependence on one officer covering both authorities and instead enabling a team of staff to identify access issues and suggest accessible solutions.

We provided training on conducting access audits and understanding the issues faced by disabled people. This supported the drive to promote accessibility to local businesses. The training was well received, with one delegate responding: ***"Course excellent and as described."***

**NANU
SODA**

Case study

Nanu Soda are an interior design company which contacted us on the back of some training which we provided for a major pub company in the UK. The company wanted to make sure that their designers understood accessibility, so we provided half a day of training on some key points. We started off by looking at legislation and how it affects their clients and then we moved on to the issues they should be looking at when they are fitting out a building. We recognised that they do not start with a blank piece of paper – they have constraints within the building. The work may involve upgrading toilets, new furniture, upholstery, signage, all the things that an interior design company will be expected to look at.

The feedback forms from the day were very positive. We helped Nanu Soda demonstrate to their clients what was required and why.

"A mutual client asked us to attend a training session delivered by Ian. On the back of that I asked Ian to deliver training to the whole team at Nanu Soda. It was informative and created debate about accessibility, what advice we give clients and how to improve accessibility in our designs, especially around accessible WCs."

Steve Owens Design Director, Nanu Soda



None of the above?

It may be that your requirements are not a direct fit with the services which we are usually asked to provide. That's fine, because we don't take a one-size-fits-all approach. Many of our projects include at least one element which is bespoke to the requirements of that particular client.

You may need help with a tendering process, with planning the consultation around accessibility issues arising from a development, or with understanding the policy and legislation which may affect your project.

It's possible you're not certain yourself whether you need the services of an access consultant, but you do want to make sure you're doing the right thing.

That's fine. Just talk to us, because it may be that you require a bit of mix and match or a unique service. Our first contact from Punch Taverns was very much an exploratory call, and it

led to a successful project which generated measurable business benefits.

As a company, we recognise that our pubs need to be accessible. With that in mind we brought Ian in from About Access to deliver training and develop a site checklist to be used by our team of Property Managers. These assessments are then taken into account in the design brief when refurbishing our establishments. We found Ian easy to deal with and he delivered a series of engaging training events.

Steve Atkins Regional Asset Manager
Punch Taverns



~~DXSAB~~

Our clients and their customers

When disability is mentioned, most people immediately think of someone in a wheelchair, but in reality there are about 750,000 wheelchair users among a disabled population which is in the order of 11.2-million.

Many people have a hidden impairment, and there are numerous examples of conditions which are not obvious to an onlooker but which have the effect of making certain features of a building or environment inaccessible.

Our aim is to stop people being discriminated against. We work with disabled people, their representative organisations and statutory bodies to reduce the likelihood of disability

discrimination and to provide an inclusive environment.

Our advice and consultancy services are designed to assist and influence businesses and organisations, whether they are dealing with colleagues or customers. We also provide guidance for a range of business professionals including:

- Architects/designers/surveyors
- Facilities/estates managers
- Human resources for training of staff
- Health and safety companies who are asked for access audits and don't provide the service.

DIVERSITY

We operate across the UK and internationally, and we provide services to a variety of buildings and property managers including:

- Retail and shopping centres
- Education sites
- Ecclesiastical buildings
- Local and national government
- Healthcare establishments
- Elderly care facilities
- Hotels and resorts
- Car park buildings
- Airports
- Railway stations
- Sports stadiums
- Housing associations

- Travel facilities
- Industrial sites
- Tourism
- Heritage

We are known for our straight talking and our no-nonsense approach. We listen to our clients, look at the issues and then give you the options so that you can make informed choices. And we complete all our work to set deadlines and agreed budgets.

For further information on how About Access can help you and your properties please contact:

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