

A woman in a wheelchair is the central focus, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers, with a black bag on her lap. She is in a modern building with a glass and wood facade. In the background, three other people are walking. The bottom of the image is a solid yellow gradient.

About  
Access

...for an inclusive world

Making the  
built environment  
**accessible to all**



# Our clients and their customers

There are two reasons why someone should want to make their premises accessible. The first is to avoid facing allegations of discrimination under the law – the Equality Act 2010 or, in Northern Ireland, the Disability Discrimination Act – which can damage your finances and your brand. The second is that an inclusive approach adds up to good business. If you enable more people to access your premises, you improve your chances of selling more products, attracting good staff and building a good reputation.

You'll find details below of the sort of people we work with and the wide range of sectors and premises that are becoming more accessible as a result of our input.

The premises include offices of blue-chip companies, international sports venues, arenas which host some of the biggest names in entertainment, heritage sites hundreds of years old and local authority buildings that serve a wide community.

The people draw on our guidance as they strive to give their clients an edge in an increasingly competitive property market. They are highly regarded 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.

***“The people draw on our guidance as they strive to give their clients an edge in an increasingly competitive property market.”***

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.

# Introduction

Accessibility is a two-way street. People need access to your shop, museum, football club, transport interchange or whatever. You need access to them to broaden your customer base, reach a wider audience, do your job more effectively.

The following pages take you through how we work and to what effect. The aim is to give designers, developers and other stakeholders insight into the sort of legislation and guidance that influences their work, including the law and the Building Regulations. We also look at what needs to happen to ensure broader understanding and acceptance of accessibility issues, from consulting with disabled people and their representatives to sharing knowledge and best practice with employers, property owners and service providers.

We've been improving access for 20 years and we do it by keeping things simple. We are known for our straight talking and our bespoke approach to Access Consultancy, Design Appraisals, Access Audits, Strategic Planning and comprehensive training. 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.



**Ian Streets, Managing Director**

## Case studies

### The O2

Entertainment, food and drink, sport, shopping. The O2 has everything and it also showcases all of our services.

We've carried out Access Audits at The O2 and at some of parent company AEG's other major UK sites including the Eventim Apollo at Hammersmith and the SSE Arena at Wembley.

Our Design Reviews have provided guidance on how a proposed design may impact on disabled people. We are also called upon to provide general advice to inform planning for long-term projects or assisting with more pressing matters, such as operational changes.

Our training input has included working with The O2 maintenance team and we also used our experience of engagement to help rejuvenate the "Access at The O2" group, which brings together a group of disabled people. Their input inspired the creation of spares first aid kits.



# Building Regulations

Most of the work we do will include a reference somewhere to the Building Regulations, which cover construction and major alterations to properties. You'll find the relevant guidance in different sections depending on where you live and work. In England and Wales it's Approved Document M, in Scotland it's the Technical Handbook and in Northern Ireland part R of the Technical Booklet. But wherever you are the requirements are broadly similar.

The guidance is about access to and use of buildings. Generally we only get involved with the guidance for buildings other than dwellings, which is extensive.

For an idea of the sort of premises that are covered by the Building Regulations look again at the list on page two. They don't miss much out.

Then think about the various features of a building that need to be made accessible. We encourage people to take a journey around the premises, starting with arrival at the property and then proceeding in and around

the facilities before leaving. Car parks, steps, ramps and doors come into play before you go in. Width of corridors, handrails and lifts are all important and some of the most common failures occur with toilets.

***“You'll find the relevant guidance in different sections depending on where you live and work. In England and Wales it's Approved Document M, in Scotland it's the Technical Handbook and in Northern Ireland part R of the Technical Booklet. But wherever you are the requirements are broadly similar.”***

There may be times when the guidance cannot be followed and an alternative solution can be found. But cutting corners and having to remedy errors is time-consuming and can add significantly to the cost of a project, so it's better all round to get it right first time.



## Case studies

### Inaccessible toilet

The need to plan projects properly was highlighted by an access audit which we carried out at a university where an accessible WC was retro-fitted with a view to creating a Changing Places facility.

The fact that the room was nowhere near the minimum size should have been picked up from the start. Another obvious issue was that a disabled person would find it extremely difficult to get into the room in the first place because of the awkward position of an entrance door set at an angle of about 45 degrees to the adjacent wall.

So not only was the room unsuitable for use as a Changing Places, it would have proved inaccessible to almost everybody who uses a wheelchair.

### Hospital case

Almost by definition you'd expect a

modern healthcare building to stand as a shining example of excellence when it comes to accessibility. But one which we visited presented a catalogue of flawed design and poor process. Any person with an impairment would be likely to encounter any number of difficulties if they arrived there alone.

We'll focus on just two, both of which are among the design guidance in the Building Regulations.

The entrance doors are powered, which is helpful, but they close too quickly and therefore bring complications for people with restricted mobility who can only pass through them slowly. An auto-stop function would ease any concerns, but they don't have one.

The reception desk is at a height which makes it impossible for a wheelchair user to see if a member of staff is sitting behind it.



# Access and the law

References to the Disability Discrimination Act are common, but they are also incorrect. The DDA still exists in Northern Ireland, but in England, Scotland and Wales we work to the Equality Act, which came into force in October 2010 and covers general discrimination.

At About Access we are concerned purely with the provisions of the law that relate to disability, and we are expertly qualified to talk you through the legislation, explain how it might apply to you and show you what to do about it.

The legislation applies to clubs, associations, societies, businesses, public, voluntary and community sector organisations, education and employment.

It aims to protect anyone who has or has had a disability, who is mistakenly perceived to be disabled or who is linked or associated with a disabled

person, defined as someone who has a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial and long-term – more than 12 months – effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Discrimination can take many forms and the onus is on service providers to anticipate the requirements of disabled people and the adjustments that may have to be made for them. At work, the duty is to make reasonable adjustments to suit the specific individual employee.

Breaching the legislation can damage your business reputation and cost you money in fines, damages and expensive adjustments to buildings. We'll show you how to get it right by helping you understand what is reasonable and where action needs to be taken, and we'll help you devise a proper strategy which will help to open up your business to a huge customer base.



## Case studies

### AD Comms

If we did badges for businesses showing great awareness of accessibility issues we'd definitely pin one on AD Comms.

It wasn't just the fact that they were so proactive in booking us in to carry out an access audit of their premises, it was the way they demonstrated their commitment to staff accessibility and wellbeing as we toured the site.

We started by looking at the car park with its accessible bays and then worked through the building from the entrance, concentrating on the more populous areas of the building – offices, meeting rooms, canteen, staff toilets.

We always take the view that that even a good level of accessibility can be improved upon but the attitude of AD Comms is spot-on. They are aware that some people in their organisation have impairments, and that more could join the team at any time.

### Public Sector Equality Duty

An important aspect of the law is the public sector equality duty, which

requires organisations to anticipate accessibility issues and set measurable equality objectives.

In addition to national and local government, public sector equality duty applies to NHS bodies, schools and other education institutions and nearly 2,000 authorities covering police stations, prisons and non-governmental bodies.

A person or organisation which is not a public authority but which exercises public functions must have due regard to the public sector equality duty.

One of the historic sites which we have worked on and which is owned by a charity had to be mindful of its public sector equality duty in relocating a car park.

Their public sector equality duty obliged them to demonstrate they had considered the effect of the proposed policy on protected characteristics. Carrying out an equality impact assessment ensured the operators are in a stronger position if they ever have to defend a claim of discrimination.



# Engagement and thought leadership

Consultation is essential when it comes to planning a new development, a major refurbishment of an existing property or even just a review of accessibility. As we have found over the years, it also helps to raise awareness generally of ways in which times have changed and standards have improved.

We draw our information from direct engagement with disabled people and their representatives because we recognise that they know best which aspects of the built environment are disabling for them. Often, they'll also have some good ideas on how any problems can be avoided or overcome.

As access consultants, we take the lessons we learn from users and apply them to existing buildings to highlight the need for improvements and to new developments, hopefully being invited in at the design stage to ensure accessibility is built into a project from the start.

But in communicating the requirements of disabled people, we

also receive feedback from designers and developers on practicalities, a process which can help everybody find innovative and effective solutions and set new standards in best practice.

We also share ideas between ourselves as members of the National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC), which is the only accredited body for access consultants in the UK. As an independent body we don't campaign and nor do we advocate but as the recognised authority on accessibility we do assist government departments and professional bodies.

To be admitted into the NRAC, members have to demonstrate a unique combination of understanding in relation to legislation, technical standards and user needs applicable to disability access and inclusive design. We do this by maintaining that commitment to detailed and thorough consultation.



## Case studies

### Informed by users

The Arts Council includes accessibility to exhibits as a recommendation in its Museum Accreditation guidance but the practicalities are not always straightforward.

It's standard procedure for us to seek the input of disabled people and our research always embraces as wide a range of impairments as possible because failure to take a pan-disability approach means you can only address some of the potential problems.

In one session a visually-impaired delegate made some particularly important contributions, noting that adjustments required to make exhibits and displays accessible to a visually-impaired person could create additional difficulties for someone who has a hearing impairment. They also noted that ramps provided for wheelchair users could become an ordeal for someone who has vertigo.

We draw on the real-life experiences of people who know first-hand what it's like to encounter discrimination.

### Sharing best practice

We use the input from disabled people to inform our own work and we share it with business groups.

At the highest level we've addressed the facilities group of the National Arenas Association, which brings together the largest indoor arenas in the UK and Ireland, and helped to set minimum standards to ensure ease of access is available across all venues and activities.

We also spend time updating regional groups, such as local associations of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) to keep property professionals informed of changes in legislation and guidance.

One of the key sectors we've worked with is hospitality, although it was disappointing after presenting to one group of hoteliers to learn that their organisation had been going more than 10 years yet had never received a presentation on accessibility.



# 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. Most recently, the training has been delivered online, with our Access Audit course adapted to support distance learning where necessary.

The Access Audit course runs across two days and helps organisations understand the way in which their premises or service delivery can present barriers to disabled people. It's particularly useful for surveyors who want to work on access, and it has also proved valuable for health and safety professionals.

Our dedicated course on the Equality Act 2010 gives clients greater insight into what the legislation demands

when it comes to accessibility. We don't do chapter and verse but we do make sure we cover the provisions of the act that are relevant to you.

We also offer Disability Confidence training because we've seen for ourselves that it can make a big difference when customer-facing employees and managers have the confidence to meet and work alongside disabled people.

Our course looks at areas such as appropriate language and how you should and should not act.

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. Our courses are relevant to employees at all levels from senior management to shop floor and customer-facing staff.



## Case studies

### Online Access Audit training

We'd worked with Derry City and Strabane District Council in the past and received a glowing testimonial for our Access Audits of cultural events and locations.

The next step was to expand our involvement to provide training for selected employees from all 11 councils in Northern Ireland to enable them to carry out their own access audits.

The plan was straightforward enough but when Covid-19 struck and with the clients in different locations across Northern Ireland we had to think again.

To overcome the problems we devised an online course and worked with the Access and Inclusion Coordinator for Derry City and Strabane District Council to distribute it to all participants.

They said: "The online training has been the best I have seen and participated in as the content was of the highest quality for us all as users. Access to the facilitator was of a high professional standard, with online opportunities to question as you train and regular zoom meetings."

### Costain

Millions of motorists might never need them, but for those whose vehicles break down in motorway roadwork zones the recovery areas are a godsend.

They are out of bounds even to the "fourth emergency service" and stranded drivers and their passengers are left to rely on the contractor to get them out of harm's way.

The role involves being able to look after a variety of vehicles and people. It is encouraging therefore that we were commissioned to spend two days delivering Access Audit training to one of the contractors.

Costain's aims were to give their staff a better understanding of the barriers people face in terms of access, not just wheelchair users but also poor manual dexterity, impaired vision or hearing and cognitive impairments and other impairments.

We delivered the two-day course in one of the site's temporary buildings and reviewed the accessibility of the recovery compound and building.

A wide range of Costain staff completed the course and feedback indicated that all the delegates found it very informative.



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