

It's not just about ramps!

What is the first thing that comes to mind when considering disability access? Often it will be level access or a ramp. Yet we know that in reality accessibility is not just about having a ramp or level access into a building. This quick guide will take a broader look at the meaning of accessibility and how to deliver it in practice.

Universal design theory

Universal design ensures that products and buildings can be used by virtually everyone, regardless of their level of ability or disability. It means designing all products, buildings, and information so that they are usable by all people to the greatest extent possible. The theory is based on these principles:

- Disability is not a special condition of a few.
- It is ordinary and affects most of us for some part of our lives.
- If a design works well for people with disabilities, it works better for everyone.
- Usability and aesthetics are mutually compatible.



Quick facts

Fewer than 17% of local authorities in England have plans to build accessible housing (Equality and Human Rights Commission)

45.3% people with disabilities compared with 31.7% people without disabilities reported difficulty accessing services in the areas of health, benefits, tax, culture, sport and leisure (Access England 2014)

The Equality Act 2010

The UK Equality Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2010. It combines almost all previous anti-discrimination laws, including the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, in a single piece of law. The general duties of the Equality Act are to encourage service providers to consider how they can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. Equality considerations should be reflected in all policies and services, including any internal consultations and reviews.

Whatever activity you are engaged in – be it delivering a programme, consulting on a document or running a campaign – there are some minimum standards that should be upheld as part of a commitment to accessibility and inclusion. The following guidance is by no means exhaustive. And it is good practice to review each situation's accessibility considerations separately as unique circumstances may arise.

Universal design means it is:



Equitable



Flexible



Simple and intuitive



Perceptible information



Tolerance for error



Low physical effort



Size and space

Accessibility: what you need to know

- Any publicly funded entity has a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments so that their goods and services, programmes and events are accessible to anyone who uses them.
- Think about how people with disabilities might access and participate in any activity before it is designed, built, or delivered.
- Make sure you budget for accessibility. This might include paying for specific access needs, but might also be a bigger project such as carrying out an access audit of operational practice.
- Create an Accessibility Checklist as part of the planning process – the below information on accessible documents and events should be helpful for this.
- Delivering accessibility is the whole team's job not just one person's responsibility.

Making your documents accessible

- All documents should be written in plain, common sense English. Minimise the use of unnecessary jargon and acronyms. If technical terms are necessary, explain their meaning clearly.
- Use an accessible font, such as Arial, with minimum font size 12.
- As a general rule, use dark type against a light background for good colour contrast.
- Documents should be provided in accessible formats such as large print, easy read English and other agreed languages eg Welsh. They should be made digitally available both in PDF and Word and formatted for accessibility for those using screen readers. All available formats should be released together.
- It is good to allow enough time for the development of easy read English, Braille and audio versions.



Making your meetings and events accessible

The following list is by no means exhaustive, and should be seen as good practice guidance rather than a list of must dos!

- Check your venue beforehand – wherever possible you should visit the venue in advance and ensure it is accessible for all users. **Use the Accessible venue checklist** template in the Appendix and ensure you provide access details in the information sent to participants.
- All meeting and event invitations should indicate whether support such as BSL interpreting, assistive listening devices, real time captioning and personal assistance workers will be provided. Participants should be asked to indicate when they register if they would like any extra support in order to participate.
- Participants who have indicated that they require support should be contacted by phone within three working days to discuss the details of what they require.
- All materials used at meetings and events should follow the guidance above for making your documents accessible.
- For longer meetings, a room should be provided where people who need a break from chairs can lie down and rest or take a break.
- Generally, time your meetings and events to avoid any major holidays and religious events.