



# PROVIDING FACILITIES AND SERVICES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

This factsheet has been produced by the Wales Tourist Board to help businesses in all sectors of the tourism industry to provide appropriate facilities and services for disabled customers.

## Welcoming disabled customers

In the UK today, there are approximately nine million disabled people. They have families and friends, and usually travel with them on holidays, short breaks and day trips. This is a massive market for tourism businesses that can provide facilities and services to meet their needs.

Although there have been significant improvements in recent years, disabled people can still find it hard to access tourism facilities and services. The Wales Tourist Board is committed to enhancing accessibility to the tourism product, both in terms of the physical environment and in the service offered by individuals working in the industry.

## The Disability Discrimination Act

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) aims to reduce the discrimination that many disabled face. It gives disabled people rights in a number of areas, including access to goods, facilities and services.

Disability is defined by the Act as 'a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. This definition includes impairments covering the senses, such as sight and hearing, as well as learning disabilities and mental illness.

Since the DDA came into force in December 1996, all tourism businesses have been covered by the

## How can my business benefit?

There are a number of benefits from ensuring that your business is ready to welcome disabled customers including:

- access to a larger pool of potential customers: disabled people form a significant proportion of the population and there is a strong business case for meeting their needs;
- helping you conform with all the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act;
- satisfied disabled customers can boost repeat business and favourable word-of-mouth recommendations;
- making sure that your business achieves and maintains a good reputation for providing first class service to all your customers.

Act and have a duty not to discriminate against disabled people.

Under the DDA, discrimination occurs when:

- a disabled person is treated less favourably than someone else;
- the treatment is for a reason related to the person's disability;
- the treatment cannot be justified.

You will be discriminating against a disabled customer if you:

- refuse service or ignore a disabled customer for a reason connected with their disability;
- provide a worse service or serve the disabled person in an inferior way;
- offer terms of service that are not as good as other people obtain, including charging more or imposing extra restrictions.

Since October 1999, tourism businesses have had a duty to change their practices, policies and procedures, where these would make it unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to use a service. They should also provide auxiliary aids and services, such as large print menus or temporary ramps.

From October 2004, where a physical feature makes it difficult to use the service, businesses must take reasonable steps to remove, alter or avoid that feature in order to comply with the requirements of the DDA.

The Act recognises that, in a limited number of circumstances, it is not always possible to give disabled people exactly the same service as other people. Less favourable treatment may be provided for one of the following reasons:

- health and safety of any person, including the disabled person;
- when it would mean ruining or no longer providing the service;
- when greater expense is involved in providing a special service for a disabled customer.

### **Visually impaired customers**

Over one million people are eligible to register as blind or partially sighted. However, only a small proportion use tactile communication systems like Braille.

When communicating with visually impaired customers:

- introduce yourself and say what your role is in the business;

### **What is 'reasonable'?**

It can be hard to decide what is 'reasonable' action to take in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act as each case will be decided on its own merits.

However, the following are likely to be taken into account:

- the effectiveness of any proposal;
- the financial costs involved;
- the disruption likely to be caused;
- the amount already spent elsewhere on adjustments;
- the availability of financial assistance;
- the practicality of any adjustment.

- remember that you cannot use body language to assist with communication;
- be prepared to read information out;
- make sure that you say when you are leaving.

Information in clear, large print is very helpful to visually impaired customers and is easy to produce on a computer or by enlarging material on a photocopier. Larger organisations may wish to consider Braille versions of key materials.

Visitor attractions can consider using large print, tactile signs and audio guides, or including sensory exhibits or tactile models.

Obstacles, clutter and uneven surfaces are a hazard for visually impaired customers as well as those with a mobility impairment, as is dim lighting.

Visually impaired customers are assisted if contrasting colours are used for walls, floors, the edges doors, and around fixtures such as towel rails. It is important to ensure that all steps are distinguishable by using a highlighting edging strip of a contrasting colour.

When refurbishing, consider installing 'talking' lifts with Braille controls.

Be prepared to welcome guide dogs and to provide facilities for them. Never touch or distract a working guide dog.

## Hearing impaired customers

There are estimated to be over eight million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK, of whom nearly 700,000 are severely or profoundly deaf. About 50,000 people in the UK use British Sign Language as a first language and

consider themselves part of the deaf community.

The following aids may be helpful to hearing impaired customers.

- **Induction loop systems:** these should be professionally installed to meet the requirements of the relevant British Standard and tested on a regular basis. Portable induction loops are also available. Where induction loops are installed, the internationally recognised hearing aid symbol and infra red symbol should be used in a clearly visible location.
- **Visual/vibrating alarm systems:** these should be tested regularly when installed in bedrooms.
- **Non-reflective glass screens:** when glass screens are installed in counter areas, the glass should be non-reflective.
- **Textphones:** information and booking services available via textphone are helpful to hearing impaired people.

## Communicating with hearing impaired customers

### Your position

- Don't put your hands in front of your face.
- Don't try and hold a conversation in an area with a lot of background noise.
- Don't stand with your back to the light.
- Stand or sit facing the customer, one to two metres away and at the same level.
- Keep your head still and stop talking if you turn away.

### Presenting information

- Don't shout as it will distort your lip patterns.
- Speak relatively slowly.
- Use phrases and sentences rather than single words.
- If you change the subject of the conversation, make sure that the customer knows.
- Check that the customer is following what you are saying.
- If the customer does not understand, rephrase your remarks.
- Write information down.

### Body language

- Avoid using exaggerated facial expressions.
- Use appropriate gestures where these are relevant.

- **Televisions with teletext and subtitles.**
- **Interpretative videos with sub-titles/sign language.**

Hearing impaired guests will also benefit from good even lighting throughout your premises and additional written information and, where appropriate, qualified sign language interpreters or lip speakers.

How employees communicate with deaf or hearing impaired customers can make all the difference to their experience.

## **Mobility impaired customers**

Mobility impairment can result from a wide range of different conditions, as well as from temporary injuries, such as a broken leg. The degree of disability can vary considerably.

Customers with a mobility impairment may use sticks, crutches, walking frames or wheelchairs to help them move around. Some wheelchair users can stand and walk a short distance.

When planning facilities and services for mobility impaired customers, it is worthwhile considering the following.

### **Parking and entrances**

- Dedicate parking spaces for Orange or Blue Badge holders. These should be wider than normal spaces and clearly marked.
- The use of these spaces should be monitored regularly to prevent misuse.
- Give the telephone number of your business on a sign readable from the disabled parking spaces.
- Ensure a level or ramped route without obstructions from the dedicated car parking spaces to the entrance.
- Whenever possible, automatic door opening facilities should be considered.
- Ramps should be available as an alternative to any steps.

### **Public rooms**

- Site furniture in public areas so that there is adequate space for movement.
- Use of magnetic door stops to aid access.
- Avoid slippery surfaces, especially on ramps, and soft pile carpets.
- Remember that wheelchair users find it more difficult to pull a door than to push it.

- Provide an area of seating with ample leg room and ensure that seats are not too low. Some mobility customers will find it easier to stand up from a chair if it has arms.
- Where a lift has one door, a mirror on the wall opposite the entrance will assist a wheelchair user to back out.

### **Bedrooms**

- Whenever possible, accessible rooms should be located on the ground floor to assist emergency evacuation.
- Zip and link beds should be considered, wherever possible. This allows a carer to travel with the disabled person without having to pay for a second room, but gives flexibility where a double bed is required.
- Consider providing interconnecting rooms, one of which can be used by a carer.
- Where feasible, beds should have adequate space on both sides for a wheelchair transfer.

### **Bathrooms**

- Wherever possible, bathroom doors should open outwards or slide with minimum effort.

- Adequate space should be allowed alongside a WC, bath and shower to enable a person to transfer from a wheelchair.
- The WC flush should be at wheelchair height.
- Provide clothes hooks at standing and seating height, and a shelf at wheelchair height.

#### Other

- Facilities should be available to store and electrically re-charge electric wheelchairs.

### Customers with learning disabilities

There are estimated to be 1.2 million people in the UK with a learning disability, of whom 200,000 have a severe disability. The term learning disability covers a broad range of people, from those capable of living independently with a little support to people who need a considerable amount of care and support.

It is important not to make generalisations about what people with learning disabilities can do or understand.

Tourism businesses can help customers with learning disabilities by:

- using straightforward language and allowing time for a response when holding a conversation;
- being understanding and positive;
- developing printed information using clear, simple language and pictures;
- being prepared to read out text;
- in visitor attractions, offering special tours where the guide uses straightforward language and which proceed at a gentle pace.

#### Access surveys

To help you identify ways of improving access in line with the requirements of the DDA, you could commission an access survey or audit. This can be via an access consultant, in consultation with an access group or undertaken by your business using the WTB Access Survey checklist.

### National Accessible Schemes

The national tourist boards introduced new National Accessible Schemes for serviced and self-catering accommodation in July 2002. These are designed to assist disabled travellers by providing a straightforward, easy-to-understand accessibility rating scheme,

#### Assisting a wheelchair user

- When talking to a person in a wheelchair, try whenever possible to be at their eye level.
- Use the handles to push a wheelchair: don't grab the back of the chair.
- Ensure that the person has their feet in the footrests before pushing a wheelchair.
- Look where you are going when pushing a wheelchair.
- Look out for uneven surfaces, where wheelchairs with small wheels can stop suddenly.
- If necessary, use blocks to raise the height of beds or tables.
- Back a wheelchair user into a lift so that they are facing forward.
- Remember that a wheelchair is part of someone's personal space: don't lean on a wheelchair.

which can guide them when choosing accommodation. It also helps to ensure that what they book is what they receive.

There are National Accessible standards for:

- hearing impaired people;
- mobility impaired people;
- visually impaired people.

Participating in the National Accessible Schemes is one of the most widely accepted ways of improving access and quality. It is also an excellent way of showing potential customers that your establishment has the facilities to meet their needs - and of boosting business.

### **Access statements**

Not all businesses will comply with the criteria laid down in the National Accessible Scheme, but every business can provide information. All businesses will be encouraged to draw up an honest statement about facilities provided. Guidance is available from the WTB through a standardised access statement, which can be self-completed by businesses. For further information, please contact the WTB Business Support Unit on 029 2075 5303.

## Who can help?

### Wales Tourist Board

Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Road,  
Cardiff CF24 0UY  
029 2047 5303  
[www.wtbonline.gov.uk](http://www.wtbonline.gov.uk)  
[www.visitwales.com](http://www.visitwales.com)

### Disability Discrimination Act Helpline

DDA Help, Freepost MID02164,  
Stratford-upon-Avon,  
Warwickshire CV37 9BR  
0845 622633  
[www.disability.gov.uk](http://www.disability.gov.uk)

### Disabled Living Foundation

380-384 Harrow Road,  
London W9 2HU  
020 7289 6111  
[www.dif.org.uk](http://www.dif.org.uk)

### Disability Wales

Wernddu Court, Caerphilly Business  
Park, Van Road, Caerphilly CF83 3ED  
029 2088 7325  
[www.dwac.demon.co.uk](http://www.dwac.demon.co.uk)

### Holiday Care

7th Floor, Sunley House, 4 Bedford  
Park, Croydon, Surrey CR0 2AB  
0845 1249973  
[www.holidaycare.org.uk](http://www.holidaycare.org.uk)

### Hoteliers Forum

(A disability partnership initiative)  
Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street,  
London SE1 2NY  
020 7403 9433

### MENCAP

123 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0RT  
T: 020 7454 0454  
[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

### National Register of Access Consultants

Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street,  
London SE1 2NY  
020 7234 0434  
[www.nrac.org.uk](http://www.nrac.org.uk)

### Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation

12 City Forum, 250 City Road,  
London EC1V 8AF  
020 7250 3222  
[www.radar.org.uk](http://www.radar.org.uk)

### SCOPE

6 Market Road, London N7 9PW  
020 7619 7100  
[www.scope.org.uk](http://www.scope.org.uk)

### Spinal Injuries Association

76 St James' Lane, London N10 3DF  
020 8444 2121  
[www.spinal.co.uk](http://www.spinal.co.uk)[www.ipr.org.uk](http://www.ipr.org.uk)

### Wales Council for the Blind

3rd Floor, Shand House,  
20 Newport Road, Cardiff CF24 0DB  
029 2047 3954  
[www.webnet.freereserve.co.uk](http://www.webnet.freereserve.co.uk)

### Wales Council for the Deaf

Glenview House, Courthouse Street,  
Pontypridd CF37 1JY  
01443 485687  
[www.wcdeaf.org.uk](http://www.wcdeaf.org.uk)

This factsheet is one of a series of business development and marketing factsheets produced by the Wales Tourist Board to assist businesses in all sectors of the tourism industry in Wales. For details of other titles, please contact the Business Support Unit or visit [www.wtbonline.gov.uk](http://www.wtbonline.gov.uk)

