



Leisure factsheet 4

Accessible venues

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Accessible and welcoming venues are key to your customer journey.

Understanding and removing barriers to access for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions means you can provide an inclusive experience for all.



What makes your venue accessible?

Accessible venues require proactive management and an understanding of disabled people's and people with long-term health conditions' needs. Organisations who successfully provide accessible venues have:



A positive commitment to inclusion, with clearly agreed actions for improvement.



Strong knowledge of accessibility embedded within the organisation.



Proactive auditing and removal of physical, logistical, and psychological barriers.



Widespread co-production with disabled people alongside other expert input.



Embedded measures to maintain and continually improve access standards.



An innovative workforce which is flexible and creative in overcoming challenges.



Accessibility well communicated across a range of internal and external stakeholders.



Consider how well you know your current venues and ask yourself:

- How do you identify, monitor, and improve accessibility?
- Who within your organisation has skills in this area?
- Do you actively promote access information to your workforce and customers?



Developing an accessible venue

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Venue accessibility can be achieved through a range of methods:

Get to know your venue

Proactive auditing will help you understand whether your venues are fit for purpose. Your auditing exercises should assess how accessible and welcoming your venues are. This will go beyond just the bricks and mortar of your building. You should aim to identify a range of physical, logistical, and psychological strengths and barriers to access.



Top tip: Make sure you investigate every step of your customer journey, from finding access information on your website through to visiting and taking part in activities.



Value lived experience

It is easy to assume that old buildings cannot be fully accessible or new builds automatically will be. The only way to truly know is to talk to disabled people and people with long-term health conditions, so ask yourself:

- Who can you engage to get input in this area?
- Are disabled people and people with long-term health conditions included in your customer forums?
- Do your mystery visitor programmes include disabled people and questions on accessibility and inclusion?
- Can you invite accessibility audits by local disability groups? Don't forget the needs of disabled staff too.



Top tip: Be open and honest, especially where there are access challenges. Work together with disabled people and people with long-term health conditions to find quick wins and prioritise barriers for removal.

Apply best practice guidelines

Sport England's [accessible and inclusive sports facilities design guidance](#) and audit checklists are a valuable resource to support your inclusion journey. By setting out access requirements they help designers, building owners, and operators to audit new and existing venues.

Professional access auditors or organisations like the [Centre for Accessible Environments](#) may be able to provide further guidance. The [National Register of Access Consultants](#) holds a register of accredited experts.



Top tip: Consider specialist training for your facility management teams. This could be a valuable investment to increase in-house expertise.

Strengthen existing processes

Your business planning processes and facility improvement plans should be based on local need, include access targets, and be regularly reviewed with key disability stakeholders. You can also drive good practice through auditing and preventative maintenance procedures. Ask yourself:

- Are access features included in your daily/weekly checklists?
- How can you reinforce reporting procedures for items requiring maintenance?
- Is inclusion regularly included in your asset mapping and budgets?
- Can evidence from auditing be used to unlock funding and investment for improvements?



Top tip: Consider opportunities to embed access enhancements within procurement, upgrades, and refurbishments or within new contracts.

Actively communicate

Venue-specific access information should be actively promoted to your workforce and customers. Equipping your staff with this knowledge will help them provide inclusive customer service and confidently deal with enquiries. It also provides opportunities for your workforce to suggest further improvements.

Sharing information with customers enables individuals to make informed decisions. Ask yourself:

- How useful, easy to find, and accessible is the venue information on your website?
- Does it include photographs and detailed descriptions?
- Do your virtual and physical facility tours routinely highlight features such as accessible changing rooms and communication aids?

Don't forget to promote awards or partnerships too, for example if you have a

[Changing Places toilet](#) or [Dementia Design accreditation](#).



Top tip: Remember to communicate using channels where disabled people may specifically look for access information. Can your partner and disability sector networks provide support? Have you considered specialist access websites and apps like [Euan's Guide](#) or [AccessAble](#) ?

Get creative

Accessibility is more than just physical assets. It is about attitude and mindset. When physical changes cannot be achieved immediately within the parameters of 'reasonable adjustment', alternative solutions will be needed. Think about how you can use your policies and operating procedures to maximise accessibility.

Your biggest strength here will be an open-minded and supportive workforce. Teams who think outside the box and demonstrate flexible approaches can help to overcome challenges. The results are often more accessible and welcoming environments for everyone.



Useful resources

Activity Alliance has a suite of resources and services that can support you with making your venues more accessible.

- Our [Access For All: Opening doors resource](#) supports sports clubs to improve physical access for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.
- Our [Reopening Activity: An inclusive response guidance](#) gives considerations for community sport and leisure providers on including disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.
- [Sport England's accessible and inclusive sports facilities design guidance](#) helps designers, building owners, and operators meet their design and operational obligations.



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This factsheet is part of our leisure resource.

View the full resource on our website:

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This document is available in Word format. Please contact us if you need support. Activity Alliance is the operating name for the English Federation of Disability Sport. Registered Charity no. 1075180.