

Accessibility checklist to assess the accessibility of a venue

To check the accessibility of a venue, you can:

- visit the venue yourself and use this Accessibility Checklist, or
- commission an access audit of one or more possible venues. You can obtain a list of access auditors accredited by the National Register of Access Consultants from www.nrac.org.uk

The issues to be considered are summarised below.

Transport links

- Is there accessible public transport (bus/train/subway) within 500 metres?
- Is there accessible connecting transport suitable for wheelchair users (e.g. taxis) from public transport links if required?

The venue should be within 10 minutes walking distance of public transport links or there should be a taxi service which is accessible for wheelchair users at the bus stop/train or subway station that delegates can use to take them to the venue.

Parking

- Is parking designated for disabled people available on site? Is it clearly signposted?
- How many designated parking spaces are available and can these be reserved?
- Are the designated parking spaces of sufficient width to allow wheelchair users to get in and out of the vehicle, with sufficient space either side of the car and at the rear?
- If designated parking is above or below reception level, is there a lift from the car park to reception?
- If designated parking is in front of or to the side of the hotel, is there level access to reception?
- Do the designated parking spaces and the path to reception have smooth surfaces?
- Is there a phone number that disabled drivers can ring when they get near to the venue to access the designated parking spaces?
- Are there any dropping-off points?
- Can valet parking be provided?
- What assistance can be provided to visitors with mobility impairments if they are dropped off at the entrance?

Adequate parking needs to be made available for all delegates who are expected to arrive by car, with reserved parking for visitors with mobility impairments. There needs to be a means of marking reserved parking spaces with the name of the user.

BS 8300 “*Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people*” recommends that designated parking spaces should measure 2.4m x 4.8m, with hatching 1.2m wide at the sides and rear to ensure there is sufficient space to allow the disabled person to transfer from car to wheelchair. The route from the car park to reception ideally needs to be well signposted, level and smooth. Wheelchairs cannot be propelled manually through gravel.

Entrance

- Are visitors with a disability able to enter the building by the same entrance as other visitors? If not, is there another entrance that is accessible to wheelchair users?
- If there are steps, how many are there and is there a handrail?
- If one is needed, is there a platform lift or a ramp suitable for wheelchair users?
- If there is a removable ramp, how does a wheelchair user signal that he or she needs assistance?
- If reception is above or below the entrance level, is there a lift (other than a service lift)? What alternative is available if this lift is out of service on the day of the conference?

The ideal entrance is one that is used by all delegates. However, if wheelchair users or other people with impaired mobility need to use a separate entrance, this should be acceptable so long as the entrance is a reasonable one. Using the service entrance is unlikely to be acceptable. Ideally the main entrance will have automatic sliding doors. If the main entrance has a revolving door, then there should be a large swing door on at least one side of the revolving door, which should be left unlocked during the function. A level entrance is preferable to a ramp. Ramps should not be steeper than 1:12, although 1:15 is preferable.

Reception desk

- Is the reception desk at a height suitable for people in wheelchairs? If not, can an alternative desk be used for all delegates?

The preferred height for a desk or table according to BS 8300 is 760mm with a minimum height to the underside of 700mm.

Main conference rooms

- Are syndicate rooms available? Are these on the same floor as the main conference room? Are all the syndicate rooms accessible?
- If people need to move between syndicate rooms, are they close together and on the same floor of the building?

The main conference rooms need to be as accessible as possible, i.e. not through too many corridors or heavy doors. Try to avoid a venue with only one lift. What happens if it is out of service on the day of the conference? The main conference room needs to be large enough to allow for good circulation for a wheelchair user, particularly in the aisles. At least two standard chairs have to be removed to provide space for a wheelchair. A room with echoes may cause problems for people with hearing impairments.

Accessible toilets

- Are there genuinely accessible toilets designed for people with a disability on the same floor as the main conference hall and syndicate rooms?
- If not, are there accessible toilets accessible by lift?
- Is there more than one accessible toilet?

There needs to be a minimum of one genuinely accessible toilet available to delegates at all times within convenient distance of the conference rooms. Ideally this should be on the same floor, and immediately nearby, so that delegates do not waste their time having to reach the accessible toilet. As there is always a risk that a single accessible toilet may be out of use, it is preferable for there to be a minimum of two accessible toilets available to delegates. Where a significant number of wheelchair users are expected, then there need to be more accessible toilets available. The toilets need to be genuinely accessible, not just standard toilets with a wheelchair symbol on the door.

Lifts

- Are lift doors (including lifts from the car park) wide enough for a wheelchair? Is the lift big enough for a large wheelchair and at least one other person?
- Are there controls at a height suitable for wheelchair users? Are there Braille or tactile buttons?
- Is there an audio floor indication?

Building regulations recommend the following minimum dimensions: – width 1,100mm; depth 1,400mm; door opening 800mm; controls 900–1,200mm above floor level, both within and outside the lift car.

Seating

- Are the chairs comfortable for sitting for extended periods, and do at least some of the chairs have arms?
- Can a sofa be provided for people who need to lie down?
- Ideally the conference venue should have some chairs with arms and some without, as people's preferences vary.

Sound

- Are the acoustics in the main conference rooms reasonably good?
- Is there an induction loop in the main conference room? Are there induction loops in syndicate rooms?
- If an infra-red sound improvement system is to be used, have arrangements been made for the handing out and collection of neck stethoscopes from users?

A room with echoes may cause problems for people with hearing impairments. If there are no induction loops, you may be able to hire them. Check who will pay the cost of these. Take advice if using a number of induction loops in close proximity, as sound can sometimes be relayed from one loop to another.

Lighting

- Is the level of lighting in the main conference hall and/or syndicate rooms adequate and adjustable?
- If the level of lighting is to be reduced during presentations, have alternative arrangements been made for people who rely on interpreters and lip readers?
- Are there flickering light bulbs?

If the lighting is not adjustable, you may need to arrange extra or alternative lighting. Transitions from dark to light need to be gradual for people with visual impairments, so lights should be dimmed slowly and never turned completely off. Flickering lights, strobe lighting and flash photography can cause problems for people with epilepsy.

Air quality

- Is the air quality good in the main conference hall and syndicate rooms?
- Is there air conditioning and can it be adjusted on the day if necessary? What arrangements can be made to make people more comfortable when necessary where there is no air conditioning?

People's perceptions of the ideal temperature will vary but a stuffy atmosphere can cause asthma attacks. If the atmosphere becomes too stuffy and there is no air conditioning, the venue may be able to provide fans, or arrange for windows to be opened.

Catering facilities

- Is the room where meals will be served accessible? Are there any steps to this room?
- Is it large enough for several servery points to avoid long queues?
- Is it large enough for people to move around when all delegates are in the room?
- Is there sufficient room between tables for wheelchair users to move around?
- Are the tables of a suitable height for wheelchair users?
- If relevant, can the room where lunch will be served accommodate some chairs and tables for people who cannot eat standing up? Or can a separate seating area be provided?

The preferred height for a desk or table according to BS 8300 is 760mm with a minimum height to the underside of 700mm.

Dietary requirements

- Can the venue cater for people on special diets?
- Can all food be labelled?
- Can ingredients be labelled to meet the needs of people with allergies?
- Is there a reasonable choice of different types of food?

Some people may prefer food they can eat with their fingers rather than with cutlery. Straws should be available where drinks are served.

Emergency evacuation procedures

- Are there procedures in place for evacuating disabled people, including wheelchair users, in an emergency? Ask for a copy of the procedures in advance of the conference.
- Are there fire alarms that are audible/visible to all?
- Will venue staff be available to help evacuate disabled delegates and facilitators, and has the staff had appropriate training?

It is vital to ensure that there are procedures in place for the evacuation of people with mobility impairments, including wheelchair users. These arrangements need to be explained at the start of the conference. Where evacuation of wheelchair users relies on Evac Chairs, there need to be enough for the expected number of wheelchair users. If any deaf person is likely to be on their own for any length of time, arrangements need to be made to ensure that their safety is taken into account should there be an emergency.

Overnight accommodation

- Are there accessible bedrooms for delegates or facilitators who need to stay overnight before or after an event? You should ask to see an accessible bedroom and check the bathroom facilities, space around the room and emergency contact arrangements, as some accessible bedrooms do not meet the required standard.

If the venue offers its own accommodation, then the organiser will need to check that it offers some accommodation for wheelchair users. If separate accommodation is being used, arrangements need to be made to transport delegates between the conference and the accommodation, and sufficient time for this must be built into the schedule.

Guide/Assistance dogs

- Are guide dogs or other assistance dogs accepted, including in the restaurant, if this is to be used?
- Can they have access to water?
- Is there an open space for them to exercise?

It is no longer acceptable for guide dogs and assistance dogs to be barred from restaurants, but the practice is still encountered.

Further information about accessibility can be obtained from:

Centre for Accessible Environments Commission

Tel: 020 7357 8182

Textphone: 020 7357 8182

Website: www.cae.org.uk

Enquiries: info@cae.org.uk

This guide was developed with the assistance of Lynn Waddell, Equality and Diversity Manager & Gender Based Violence Operational Lead, NHS Forth Valley.