

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

2004

– ACCESS ALL AREAS

Clothes Shop - case study

Bringing the DDA to life for small shops

Improving access to goods and services
for disabled customers



The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The Confederation of British Industry
The Federation of Small Businesses
The British Retail Consortium

are pleased to endorse this series of booklets.

This booklet was originally prepared by the Centre for Accessible Environments for the Disability Rights Commission.

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Other booklets in this series:

Café
Hairdressing Salon
Newsagent

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) will be producing further booklets in this series.

These booklets are also available in a range of formats from ECNI (see back cover for contact details).

This booklet gives general guidance only and should not be treated as a complete or authoritative statement of the law.

Any technical specifications recommended in this booklet are the minimum statutory requirements. For comprehensive guidance on accessibility, ECNI recommends that service providers consider the specifications set out in 'British Standard BS 8300 - design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people'.

Introduction

This booklet aims to help people who run small businesses understand the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and show ways in which you can respond positively to the requirements of disabled customers.

As a small business, you need to be thinking about what you can do to make sure that – as far as possible – disabled customers are treated in the same way as non-disabled customers. The Case Study of a Clothes Shop (page 3) and Hints and Tips (page 9) give plenty of ideas about how to improve access to the goods and services you offer, many of which could be carried out at little or no cost.

What is in it for you?

Apart from the fact that you have a legal duty under the DDA to do what you reasonably can to make your services easier to use by disabled customers, there is also a strong business case. Approximately 1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland have a disability¹ - that is a lot of customers with money to spend. Taken together with their friends and families, the number of customers affected by a disability is bigger still.

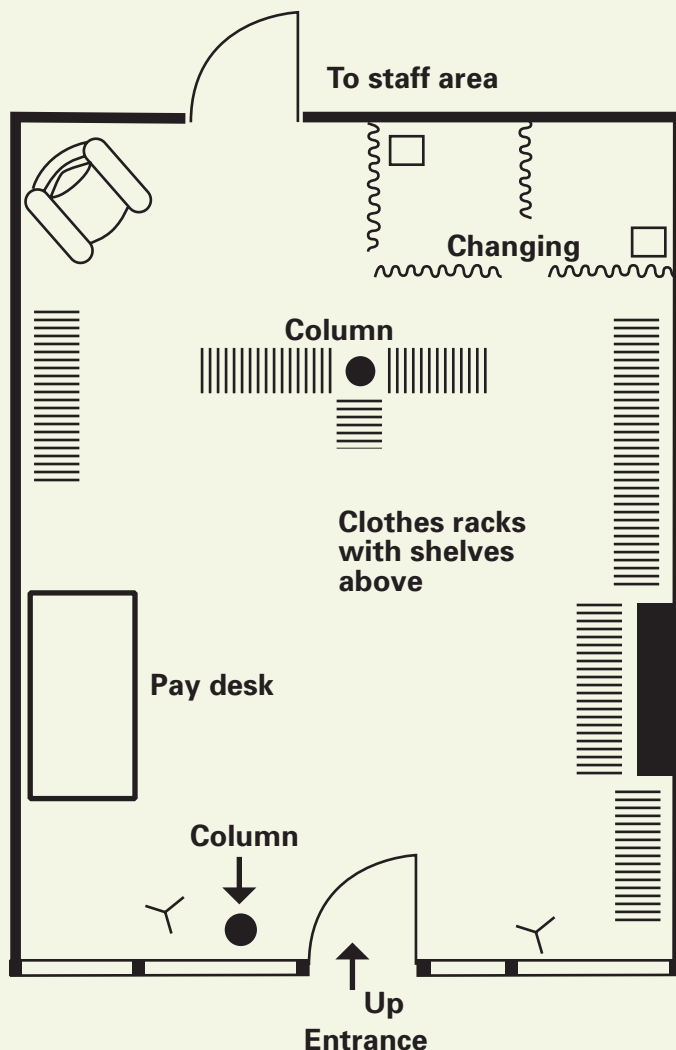
Many of the improvements suggested in this guide will also benefit other customers, such as people with pushchairs, people carrying heavy shopping and some older people who may not consider themselves disabled but for whom easier access will be a great benefit. So by meeting your requirements as a service provider under the DDA you are also likely to get more customers.

[¹ The Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey, Autumn 2002, estimates that 1 in 5 (20%) persons (207,000) of working age in Northern Ireland have a current long-term disability.]

Case Study: Clothes Shop

Helsinki is a bright, sunny clothes shop offering a range of women's designer clothing. It has been in operation for about four years and is very visible from the street having large, open windows providing good views into the interior of the shop. It has sanded wooden flooring and high skirting with attractive railing and curtained changing areas, the design of which enhances the overall look of the shop.

Key features



- the proprietor (the only member of staff) has developed her skills in dealing with disabled customers through experience and appreciates that additional time may be needed when providing the service. As this is a designer clothes shop, there is always a lot of interaction with the client to determine taste, colour preference and suchlike.
- some clients with particular needs have become regular visitors, and appointments can be made when the shop is known to be quieter so that more time can be spent with clients if required.

- the shop also opens on occasion outside normal opening hours for clients with particular needs
- lighting is good throughout the shop
- mirrors in changing rooms are at a good height for both standing and seated users



- changing room layout is flexible to allow for use by people in wheelchairs
- additional labelling helps people with visual impairments.

Approaching the shop

- 1900mm from the shop front to the pavement edge
- no dropped kerb outside shop: nearest wheelchair drop-off point at the zebra crossing some 6-7m away
- difficult to see the name of the shop above from the same side of the road
- shop front (doors and windows) painted the same colour and vertical shutter rails adjacent to each side of the doorway – this could make it difficult for a visually impaired person to locate the shop and once there, identify the door.

Options

Make it clearer where the door is (eg by differentiating door frame with contrasting tone or colour).

Cost implication: minimal

Erect a perpendicular shop sign “flagging” the shop’s location to make it easier to identify.

Cost implication: low

Door

- small (50mm) threshold step
- width 700mm (recommended is 800mm for an external door) but does accommodate a double buggy
- rectangular coir mat behind the door, flush with the floor and extending 500mm behind the door
- door pressure good (ie not too heavy to open)
- door handle, although well positioned, could be a bit larger.

Options

Although not the responsibility of the shop, an approach could be made to the Department for Regional Development - Roads Service about grading the pavement to eliminate threshold step.

Cost implication: to be discussed with the Roads Service

Widen front door to 800mm – although this would require major alteration to the whole shop frontage, and may not be reasonable for a business of this size to do straight away. However the proprietor should plan and budget for this work to be done in the future.

Cost implication: major structural work required





Skirting

- skirting the same wood as the floor, extending about 300mm up the wall making it difficult for a visually impaired person to see clearly where the floor ends
- however, clothes and rails all round the room make it clear where the floor finishes and the wall starts.

Counter

- 980mm high with hooks underneath for stock (bags)
- no leg room, but customer and salesperson stand at the same side
- difficult for a wheelchair user to write out a cheque or fill in a form on the counter.

Options

Alter counter to provide leg room underneath for wheelchair user.

Cost implication: significant change to fittings, but no structural alterations required

Shelving

- 1260mm high, which means assistance is required to view the stock.

Options

Position some shelves at lower heights.

Cost implication: low

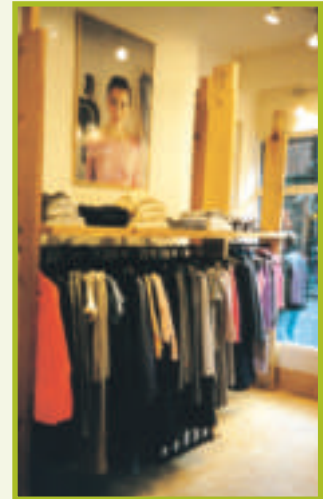
Rails

- ranging from 1260mm to 1700mm – necessary to allow garments to hang full-length and clear the floor.

Options

Proprietor to offer assistance when necessary (as at present).

Cost implications: none



Changing rooms

- curtained changing area which can be used as one (providing more than adequate space for a wheelchair user) or subdivided into two
- mirrors excellent: 230-1900mm for use by seated or standing people.

Lighting

- good lighting throughout the shop.

Action checklist

- make sure that you know what the law says and when the various different parts of the law come into effect
- consider changing the way you provide your services to make it easier for disabled customers
- make access into and around your premises easier for disabled customers
- find alternative ways of providing goods and services to disabled customers if necessary
- provide extra help or special equipment if necessary.
- make any changes that you can straight away
- come up with an action plan for the future
- when you are making changes in your premises, take the opportunity to improve access to your services for disabled customers.

Hints and tips

Consulting your disabled customers

It helps to ask customers with disabilities how they would like goods and services to be provided, particularly where, for whatever reason, there are barriers to equal access.

Can disabled people find your shop or premises?

Clear external signs help people with visual impairments or learning difficulties identify the shop.

Can disabled people get into the shop or premises?

Ideally, disabled customers will be able to enter the shop independently, through the main front door, just like non-disabled customers – for example where there is level access through a wide door. But in many premises – for instance smaller ones, older buildings or buildings on awkward sites – equality of access may not be possible at reasonable cost.

In new buildings, the required minimum clear opening width for external doors is 800mm and for internal doors is 750mm. This allows easy wheelchair access and access for people pushing baby buggies. For existing premises, 750mm clear opening width for external doors is acceptable for wheelchair access.

Where full independent wheelchair access is not possible, consider other changes such as:

- providing a temporary portable ramp
- positioning door handles at an easier height
- making the door less heavy to open
- providing a call bell to alert staff when a disabled customer needs assistance to enter the premises.

Are there alternative ways of providing the service?

Examples for goods might include:

- operating a telephone mail order or local delivery scheme
- staff who will put together an order and bring the goods to the front door or the nearest easy collection point.

Examples for services might include:

- home visits to disabled customers
- providing the service in an alternative, accessible location either by appointment or perhaps on a regular basis (for example once a week).

Can disabled people access your goods and services?

Ideally, disabled customers should be able to find their way to all sales areas, browse and inspect goods, bring them to the cash desk or receive services in the same way as non-disabled people do. For people with visual impairments who have some use of sight, consider:

- clear signs and clear product labelling and pricing
- making it easier to read menus in cafés or product information displays
- providing written menus or other product information in large print versions, or having staff read information out to visually impaired customers.

Avoiding the use of awkward or dangerously placed fittings and fixtures can make independent movement easier for blind customers. Some blind people might prefer to be guided round the shop by a member of staff or to have goods brought to them.

For wheelchair users or others who cannot access display areas or reach goods on shelves, staff could provide assistance.

Can disabled customers use checkouts, counters and service desks?

The ideal height for wheelchair users is 750-800mm from floor level. There should be unobstructed space under the counter for the person's legs and the wheelchair footrest. Think about lowering a section of counter or making the whole counter a convenient height for wheelchair users.

Should you be providing toilet facilities for public use?

For many small shops, the issue of providing toilet facilities does not arise – customers do not expect to have access to toilets. However, where facilities are provided for the public (for example in cafés or in other situations where customers may be on the premises for a period of time) consider their accessibility by disabled customers – both getting to and using the facilities. If there is space available and a toilet compartment can be modified to full wheelchair-accessible standards, this could greatly benefit disabled customers.

Statutory consent for some building changes

When undertaking changes to premises, you may need to obtain consent, including planning permission, building regulations approval and listed building consent. The DDA does not override the need to obtain such consents.

Leased premises

If you do not own your premises and the terms of your lease do not allow you to make alterations, special provisions apply. The DDA enables you to make the alteration if the landlord consents, and also says that the landlord must not withhold consent “unreasonably”, but may attach “reasonable conditions” to the consent.

Guidance

For design guidance including ramps, doors, circulation space, signs and toilet facilities, see *Designing for Accessibility*, published by the Centre for Accessible Environments (details on page 15). For more general guidance for small businesses see *ECNI Practical Guide for small businesses and other small service providers* (details on page 15).

About the DDA

Duties on service providers

The DDA places duties on all service providers, including owners and operators of shops, cafés and restaurants, and establishments where services are provided to the public. These duties are being introduced in three stages and apply to service providers of all sizes:

- since December 1996, it has been unlawful for service providers to treat disabled people **less favourably** than others for a reason related to their disability
- since 1 October 1999, service providers have had to make “**reasonable adjustments**” for disabled people in the way they provide their services
- from October 2004, service providers will also have to make **reasonable adjustments to the physical features** of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access.

Several factors have a bearing on whether a change is a reasonable one to make for small businesses, particularly for physical adjustments to premises.

These include:

- type of shop or business
- size of the business and annual turnover
- cost of the adjustment
- disruption to the business while the work is being carried out
- practicability of carrying out the adjustment
- potential benefits to the customer.

Who is disabled?

The DDA protects the rights of a wide range of people with sensory, mental or physical disabilities. This can include:

- people who use wheelchairs
- blind and partially sighted people
- deaf and hearing-impaired people
- people with arthritis
- people with long-term illnesses
- people with learning disabilities
- people with hidden impairments.

People who have had disabilities in the past are also protected from discrimination. Only a court of law can make a decision about whether someone is disabled under the DDA, so it is probably best in cases of doubt to assume that someone is protected by the DDA.

Where the DDA applies

The DDA applies to the whole of the UK, but not the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, nor to goods or services provided outside the UK.

To find out more about the DDA

If you would like to find out more about the DDA and how it affects you as a service provider, you can get further advice and information from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Contact details are on the back of this booklet.

Where to get more information

Publications

- **ECNI Practical Guide for small businesses and other small service providers**

Making access to goods and services easier for disabled customers.

- **2004 – Access All Areas**

A guide for service providers on making their goods and services accessible to disabled people.

- **2004 – Access All Areas**

A guide for disabled people on new rights to accessing goods and services.

The publications above are available free of charge from ECNI.

- **Designing for Accessibility: an essential guide for public buildings**

Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE), 1999

A guide to designing buildings which are accessible to people with a range of disabilities; also useful for adapting existing buildings.

Available price £15.00 including postage and packing from CAE.

- **Access Audits: a guide and checklists for appraising the accessibility of public buildings**

Centre for Accessible Environments, 1999

Comprising guidance notes, audit checklists and a copy of Designing for Accessibility (see above), the Access Audits pack is a useful tool for assessing the current accessibility and usability of buildings by disabled people.

Available price £20.00 including postage and packing from CAE.

- **The Disability Discrimination Act – Part III: a service providers' guide to best practice**

Customer Action File 1
Employers' Forum on Disability (EFD), 1999

Available price £13.00 from EFD,
Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford
Street, London SE1 2NY
Tel/minicom: 020 7403 3020

Organisations

Centre for Accessible Environments

Nutmeg House
60 Gainsford Street
London SE1 2NY
Tel/minicom: 020 7357 8182
Fax: 020 7357 8183
email: info@cae.org.uk
Website: www.cae.org.uk

Provides technical information, training and consultancy in making buildings accessible to disabled and older people and advice on technical aspects of implementing the requirements of the DDA.

Centre for Universal Accessibility

School of the Built Environment
University of Ulster at Jordanstown
Newtownabbey BT37 0QB
Tel: 028 90 368505
Fax: 028 90 366875

Offers education and training on the principles of accessibility, undertakes access audits and provides advice on a wide range of accessibility issues.

Disability Action (HQ)

Portside Business Park
189 Airport Road West
Belfast BT3 9ED
Tel: 028 90 297880
Textphone: 028 90 297882
Fax: 028 90 297881
Website: www.disabilityaction.org

Provides a range of services including information and advice on all aspects of the DDA and a technical advice service on access to the built environment.

Disabled Living Foundation

380-384 Harrow Road
London W9 2HU
Helpline: 0870 603 9177
Textphone: 0870 603 9176
Tel: 020 7289 6111
Fax: 020 7266 2922
email: advice@dlf.org.uk
Website: www.dlf.org.uk

Provides information on aids and equipment that help disabled people with their daily lives. It administers a comprehensive database of products that can be used by disabled people in public buildings.

Mencap in Northern Ireland

Segal House
4 Annadale Avenue
Belfast BT7 3JH
Tel: 028 90 691351
Fax: 028 90 640121
email: mencapni@mencap.org.uk

Provides information on the needs of children and adults with a learning disability.

RNIB Northern Ireland (NI)

40 Linenhall Street
Belfast
BT2 8BA
Tel: 028 90 329373
Fax: 028 90 439118

Provides a range of services in Northern Ireland including information, visual awareness training and undertakes access audits on the needs of people with a serious sight loss. RNIB NI also offers information and advice on matters relating to information provision and access technology.

RNID Northern Ireland (NI)

Wilton House
College Square North
Belfast
BT1 6AR
Tel/Textphone: 028 90 239619
Fax: 028 90 312032
Website: www.rnid.org.uk

Provides a range of services in Northern Ireland including information, advice and deaf

awareness training. RNID NI also carries out access assessments for organisations to ensure their services and premises are accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The William Keown Trust

3 Church View
Dundrum
Co. Down
BT33 0NA
Tel: 028 43 751243
Fax: 028 43 751444
email: wkeowntrust@btconnect.com
Website: www.wkeowntrust.co.uk

Actively pursues a policy of improving access in the environment and carries out access audits. The trust works with individuals and organisations from all sectors to achieve a high level of access for people with disabilities.

Local Access Groups

There are many local access groups operating throughout Northern Ireland. These groups represent the access interests of disabled people and may also be a useful source of advice and information.

It is considered good practice for organisations providing goods, facilities and services to consult with disabled people in the local area. To find out if there is a local access group in your area contact Disability Action (see organisations above)

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

How can we help?

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland can give advice and information on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 through training, telephone and textphone advice, booklets and leaflets or we can meet with you.

For further information, please contact us at:
Information and Advice Department
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Equality House
7-9 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DP



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