

‘View from the Chair’ article published in the Business Newsletter, 23 October 2018 by Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Executive, Equality Commission NI

Every Customer Counts – audit and improve your offering

You may well know a business that has already taken up the challenge of thinking how they will serve disabled customers and clients – there are many examples of companies such as Todds Leap in Dungannon, which offers exciting outdoor experiences to everyone, with or without a disability.

But there are still some businesses who don’t think ahead and don’t avail of the help available. If your organisation offers services to the public, the law says you must consider how you can accommodate all your service users or customers, including people with disabilities.

This is the ‘reasonable adjustment’ duty, and it means that you have to be able to demonstrate that you’ve considered how you can make your premises or services accessible to disabled and older people, and where practical and manageable – and reasonable – you’ve made an adjustment that will help them.

One of the ways you can do this quickly and methodically and keep a record of the process is to use the Equality Commission’s online [Every Customer Counts](#) three-step process, particularly the audit step. It’s simple, free and easy to use.

The audit checklist covers a wide range of access issues and it may well be that not all are relevant to your business. It looks at all the areas you would expect – starting with your website and what people can expect when they come to your premises, right through to gathering and using customer feedback.

If you find potential service gaps or areas for improvement, you can use the Every Customer Counts Access Action Plan template to prioritise, implement and evaluate any changes you decide to make.

The Every Customer Counts Good Practice Guide has other ideas and tips you can learn from and you can also get additional support and guidance by contacting the Equality Commission.

There’s a template Inclusive Customer Service Statement and Policy which you can use to tell people about the steps you’ve taken to make every customer count. It is important to show willing.

And every year we offer training in the Reasonable Adjustment Duty and what it means in practice. Details of all training are on our website www.equalityni.org/training

All too often, when we think about access issues, we think about the physical environment, doors, steps, seating, toilets etc. While all of these are important, it is

the attitude of staff and how they interact with disabled customers which can have the greatest impact.

Making sure that your staff deliver great customer service can make a huge difference to disabled people in particular. Staff who receive disability awareness training are likely to provide a better experience for your disabled customers.

Remember, access does not have to be expensive. Reasonable adjustments mean reasonable changes relative to the size and context of the business. Changing your approach from, 'Do I have to...?' to 'What can I do...?' could possibly make the biggest difference of all.

- Read more about [Every Customer Counts – promoting accessible services](#)