

A good practice guide  
to making reasonable  
adjustments

A hand is shown holding a red shopping bag. A yellow tag is attached to the bag with a green string, and the tag has the words "Accessible Retail" written on it in black, handwritten-style text. The background is a solid teal color.

Accessible  
Retail



every  
customer  
counts

promoting  
accessible  
services

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



**every customer counts**  
*promoting accessible services*

October 2014



# Accessible retail

## a good practice guide to making reasonable adjustments

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# About this guide

**T**his practical guide is specifically aimed at service providers in the retail sector. The legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for everyone to be able to access your goods or services is applicable to all organisations, regardless of size. Making your organisation or business more accessible means that more customers can come through your door and use your services; better access means better business.

Access does not have to be expensive - reasonable adjustments means reasonable changes relative to the size and context of your company. Changing your approach from 'Do I have to...?' to 'What can I do?' will possibly make the biggest difference of all.

Many small changes to the way you work, how you present information and your premises can have a significant impact on the number of your customers and can be carried out at little or no cost.

### **How will this help you?**

This guide provides recommendations, tips and practical advice on making your business work for more customers, including disabled and older people.

It includes case studies of where other businesses have maximised the potential of this ever growing, profitable and loyal market. Will you see the potential?

This guide will help you:

- understand your duties under the Disability Discrimination Act
- understand the issues that disabled customers face and how they can access your services
- make better decisions and reasonable adjustments to the way you provide your services
- find the technical advice, information and other help you may need.

This guide has been prepared by the Centre for Accessible Environments for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

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### **Acknowledgements:**

The Equality Commission would like to thank all the individuals and the businesses who contributed to this guide.

### **Other guides in this series include:**

- Accessible Cafe, Restaurants and Hospitality
- Accessible Goods and Services

Supporting materials available to download from [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)

- Self-Assessment Checklist
- Access Action Plan
- Inclusive Customer Service Statement & Policy

# Legislation: What does the law say?

## Does the Disability Discrimination Act affect me?

**T**he Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 is divided into a number of sections. Part III of the DDA deals with the rights of access to goods, facilities, services and premises. It places a number of key duties on businesses and organisations referred to collectively as 'service providers'.



The DDA applies to you if you are involved in any business or organisation which:

- provides a service
- offers facilities
- supplies goods to the public.

All service providers are covered by the DDA, large and small, private and public sector, whether the service is free or paid for. This includes services and facilities such as:

- Shops and restaurants
- Banks and building societies
- Doctors and dentist surgeries
- Hotels and guest houses
- Sports and leisure facilities
- Churches or other places of worship
- Tourist attractions
- Insurance companies
- Libraries and museums
- Property letting / management agencies
- Pharmacies and opticians
- Hospitals
- Bus and railway stations
- Government departments
- Broadcasting services
- Post offices
- Cinemas
- Theatres

At present, there are a small number of exemptions from Part III of the DDA.

The total exemption for transport vehicles was largely, although not completely, lifted in 2009. In many circumstances it is unlawful for transport providers to discriminate against disabled people in relation to the use of transport vehicles.

### **Public Authorities**

When they provide goods, facilities and services directly to the public, the DDA imposes on public authorities the same duties not to discriminate against disabled people as it does on private businesses. This includes the duty to make services accessible by making reasonable adjustments or by providing auxiliary aids and services.

But, more than that, these duties also apply to the whole range of functions performed by public authorities, including any regulatory, planning, community and economic development functions they may have and which may affect how both they and other people provide services to the public. For example, local councils have the power to issue shops and bars with licences to set-up pavement cafes.

The non-discrimination duties of the DDA are also supported by the equality duty under Section 75, Northern Ireland Act 1998. Together, these duties mean that when carrying-out such functions, public authorities must consider how their decisions might affect disabled people and consider how, by granting or refusing to grant licences or planning permission, for example, or by adding conditions to such grants, they can induce other people to better provide accessible services to disabled people.

**For more information about the Disability Discrimination Act, refer to ECNI guides:**

- What Service Providers need to know: DDA 1995
- Code of Practice – Rights of Access, Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises 2003

These can be downloaded at [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)

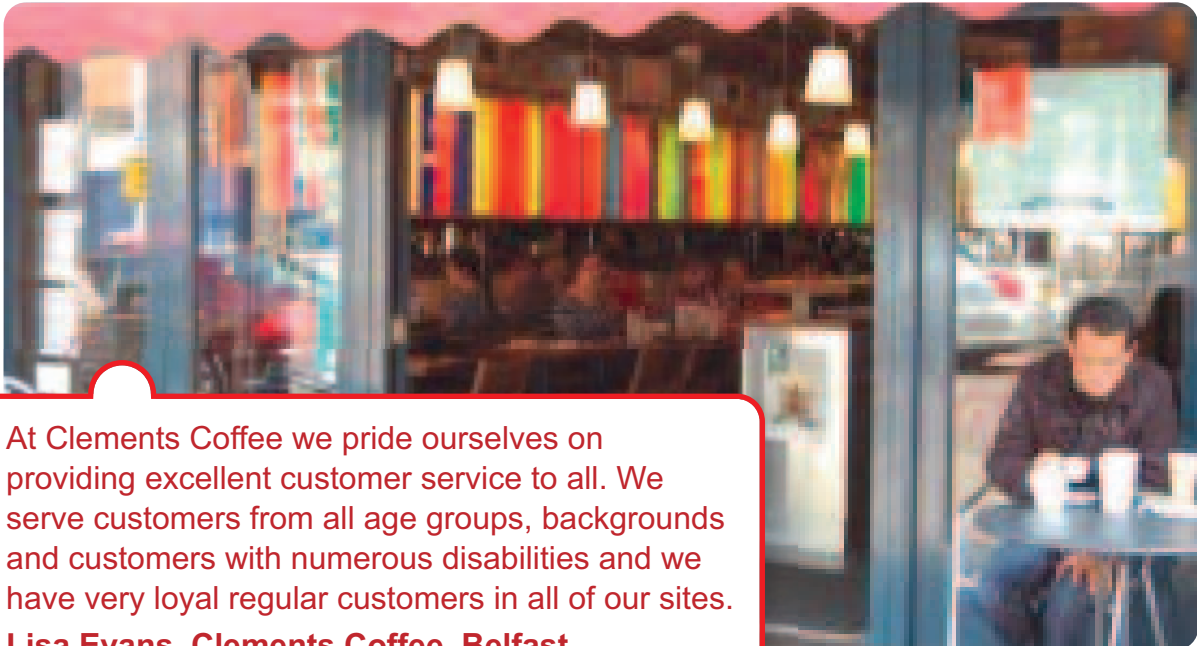
# Welcoming all customers: Open for business

**T**here are 360,000 disabled people in Northern Ireland, who are potentially your customers; this is 20 percent of the population (source: 2011 census data). Disabled people spend £80 billion a year in the UK. Providing better access will mean that your business is more welcoming to everyone, including customers of all ages and abilities, families with pushchairs, and people whose first language is not English.

From a business perspective you cannot afford to ignore the needs of such a significant proportion of our potential customers.  
**Ladbrokes, NI**

Good business means anticipating what your customers need and want, and this includes the needs of disabled customers, and their families and friends. It is also a good idea to talk to your customers about any issues they may have when using your services, such as, parking, getting in and out of your premises, using the facilities, and any recommendations they may have to help improve access.





At Clements Coffee we pride ourselves on providing excellent customer service to all. We serve customers from all age groups, backgrounds and customers with numerous disabilities and we have very loyal regular customers in all of our sites.

**Lisa Evans, Clements Coffee, Belfast.**

Think broadly about a range of impairments too, such as:

- mobility impairments, including stick users and wheelchair users
- visual impairments
- hearing impairments
- arthritis and limited dexterity
- mental health
- learning difficulties
- learning disabilities

If you have noticed that few disabled customers use your services, this may be because your business is not known to them and their families as providing suitable access. In addition to existing customers, think about what improvements would attract new customers.

A little can go a long way in helping many disabled customers. Some of these are relatively easy, clearing circulation space, putting grabrails in a

toilet, or a handrail by a set of steps. Others, such as installing an accessible toilet, or creating a step-free main entrance can involve more work and may require technical planning, advice and finance.

### **An enjoyable shopping experience**

Imagine you are a customer - take a typical journey through your own service. Begin by checking your website, to filling baskets, paying for and getting your goods home. You want to make it as easy as possible and attractive to your customers.

It is our policy to ensure that all customers are able to shop with confidence in our stores, access our goods and services and be treated with respect by our staff.

**B&Q's commitment to customers**

# Accessible website

**Y**our website may be the first thing customers look at when making a decision about visiting and purchasing or using your services. You need to make a good first impression. It should convey a welcoming attitude towards all customers.

An insurance company saw a 90 per cent increase in its online sales after upgrading its website to make it fully accessible to disabled people.

***Growing your customer base to include disabled people*** Department for Business Innovation & Skills, Office for Disability Issues

## Website design

Things to think about include:

- **clear and accessible layout:** websites need to be easy to read, navigate and use, good size font (at least 14pt), good contrast without fussy backgrounds
- **screen readers:** ensure the website is compatible with text-to-speech converters, provide text captions and alternative text for images
- **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines:** the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provide guidelines, quick at a glance tips are available (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>)

## Pre-visit information

Before your customers or service users visit your premises, they are more than likely to have checked your website. Make it easy for your visitors to plan their trip by providing information on your opening hours, nearby transport links, and accessible facilities such as, induction loops, accessible toilets and large print resources. Make sure your website is accessible and easy to use. Providing information in advance is helpful, especially if there are particular issues your visitors might face, such as limited space, or temporary ramps so customers can better prepare for their visit.

If you have a whole range of access facilities, services, assistance and delivery options, let everyone know! A dedicated access section on your website makes it easy to find information, help advertise your services and set you apart.

## Contact us

Let visitors know when, where and who to contact by providing:

- **contact details** – contact person, address, telephone number and / or email if people have specific queries about their visit
- **opening hours** – for stores or offices and helplines
- **customer feedback** – provide a channel for feedback – use the positive comments on your website to set you apart and improve your services
- **social media elements** – provide instant information and support to customers about specific queries
- **current updates** – social media can also be useful for live updates on any access facilities available or closed for maintenance or temporarily out of action
- **photos of trained staff** – it can be reassuring to recognise faces and uniforms and know that staff have received customer service training.

I feel a lot of businesses aren't using social media enough, it's free to set up most types and it actively encourages self-promotion, there are far more benefits for businesses especially for them to be able to reach and engage with more customers.

**Michaela Hollywood**

## How to get here

Remember X marks the spot, guide people to your door by providing:

- **a map with clear directions** – include any useful directions / landmarks, how long is the walk from the train station or landmark?
- **public transport routes** – give advice on how best to get to you whether by foot or bus, train and other means
- **parking information** – do you have any designated accessible bays or drop off areas for disabled customers and are these close to the entrance?
- **a photograph of the front of the premises** – helpful for people with learning disabilities and many others such as a tourists.
- **accessible facilities** – give details, for example on accessible toilet provision, changing room, Changing Places toilet, quiet room or nearest available facility.
- **any changes in level** – ramps, lifts, steps, or a short narrow route – a photo and description can help people to make their own choices and plan their visit
- **services and equipment** – such as induction loops, large print information, wheelchairs for loan, portable ramps, sign language interpreters and staff assistance available
- **photo / video guide of main areas** – showing the route and processes can help visitors prepare for trips to larger buildings
- **sound clips of regular sounds** – visitors can prepare for and expect the sound of frequent loud announcements, bells and alarms
- **concessions / discounts** – if these are offered to older people, disabled people and students (special lunch rates, accommodation deals, loyalty discounts) – advertise these clearly.

## Services and facilities

Let people know what you can offer, with information on:



### Access information on your website

- Including a list of access facilities on your general 'visit us' page will be useful for visitors.

## Find your nearest store

**Belfast - Holywood - reserve & collect**  
[Print map & store details](#)

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**Store Address:**  
 Harbour Exchange  
 Airport Road West  
 Holywood  
 Belfast  
 COUNTY DOWN  
 BT3 9DY

**Tel:** 02890 397744  
**Fax:** 02890 397010  
**Store type:** B&Q Warehouse

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**Store Opening Hours:**

Mon-Wed:	07:00 to 21:00
Thursday:	07:00 to 21:00
Friday:	07:00 to 21:00
Saturday:	07:00 to 20:00
Sunday:	13:00 to 18:00

**Information**

- [Kitchen Design Service](#)
- [Bathroom Design Service](#)
- [Bedroom Showroom Displays](#)
- [Experts Advice](#)
- [Paint Mixing](#)
- [Timber Cutting](#)
- [Carpet Cutting](#)
- [Trade Service](#)
- [Tradepoint Select Counter](#)
- [Coffee Shop](#)
- [Rug Doctor](#)
- [You Can Do It Classes](#)
- [Kids Can Do It Classes](#)

**Disabled Facilities**

- 20 Disabled Parking Bays
- 4 Manual Wheelchairs
- 1 Induction Loop at Checkout
- 1 Lowered Counter at Checkout

**Special Opening Hours:**

Good Friday (18 Apr):  
07:00 to 20:00

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**Directions**

Enter a town or postcode to find the directions to this store.

**Town or Post Code:**

If you would like to find out how to get to this store using public transport please use the transport direct door-to-door

Pre-visit information can help an individual with Autism or other disabilities prepare for their visit experience. Photos of trained staff helps visitors to recognise their uniforms and feel reassured. Ensuring that customers know that the business is disability aware can increase the numbers of individuals that use the service. **Christine English, Autism NI**



# Getting there – making it easy

**Y**ou need to make it as easy as possible for your customers to find you and get in to your premises. This can be difficult for some people who do not use the internet or have visual, hearing, mobility or cognitive impairments. It is important to provide clear signage.

## **Did you know?**

Only 37% of adults aged 75-years-and-over have ever used the internet (source ONS, May 2014).

## This way to better signage:

### Ensure your signage is in a visible location

Consider providing:

- Signs fixed to building walls rather than A-boards on footpaths. These can cause obstruction for most pedestrians and can be off-putting for your business
- Flag signs attached to exterior walls can be a good way of getting noticed from a distance
- Signs should not be too high or too low – make sure they can be seen clearly from afar or when nearby

### Provide clear information on your signage

This should:

- be simple, clear and short
- identify your business, and say what is in the building
- include a street number, a name, website and / or telephone contact



### Text and symbols overhead

Overhead signage can be visible over crowds. Visually contrasting symbols alongside large-sized text in title case are good practice

### Make sure the sign is easy to read

Good signage meets the following guidance:

- Signs should not be on glass, behind glass or on reflective surfaces – it can make them more difficult to see
- Use simple and clear 'sans serif' letters that are not italicised or underlined (this font is 'sans serif', this is not)
- Letters should be big enough to read from a distance
- Use a mix of lower and upper case lettering – this makes the text easier to recognise and therefore read
- Ensure there is a good visual contrast between the letters and your sign background.



### Clear contrast (Lyric Theatre)

Symbols with clear tonal contrast indicate lift, accessible WC and baby change facilities. Including images as well as texts can help visitors identify the facilities available

### Tactile signage (B&Q)

If tactile signs are installed, provide these at a suitable height with embossed (raised) lettering as well as Braille. Keep signs clean, visible and well maintained.



### Access information

Making an entrance easy to identify with a clear welcome sign, opening hours and symbols indicating access facilities will encourage visitors to come to your building.

At a glance you can see Ulster Bank's Belfast City Office Branch has step-free access, induction loop, facilities for people with visual impairments and welcomes assistance dogs.

Signs don't have to be expensive, if you make your own, make sure that they are a good size, clear and easy to read.



### Assistance signs

Make sure that all customers feel welcome and let them know assistance may be available. If you have an intercom – indicate which button calls staff members.

### Approach by foot

Make it easy for all customers to approach your premises, including, stick users, wheelchair users, people with assistants or guide dogs.

Footpaths should be clear of obstructions:

- Unnecessary street furniture and clutter can be removed, such as, bins or A-boards
- Surfaces should be maintained so they are firm, smooth and even
- Gradients should be gentle – they are usually 1:20
- Footpaths should have clear kerbs, and visual and tactile markings
- Good lighting will provide added security
- Planting on footpaths should be managed so it is not overgrown and not getting in anyone's way

**For help and advice about crossing points, drop off points and dropped kerbs near your business, all of which make it easier for disabled customers to visit your premises, you should contact NIDirect by telephone 0300 200 7893.**

You should then ask for:

- Article 80 – Lowering pavements
- Maintenance section – for broken or lowered pavements
- Parking bays – for accessible parking for disabled people.



### Avoid the A-Board

Streets in Northern Ireland made it into the top ten worst\* in the UK in terms of A-board barriers – advertising boards which block the pavements for everyone and create a safety risk, especially for people with visual impairments. (\*Source: Guide Dogs Street Clutter survey report.)

**Don't block your customers** – remove your A-boards and welcome more in.



### Writing on the wall

Use signs fixed to your building instead of A-boards which clutter the footpath. Flag signs attached to buildings can be seen above crowds.

This shop has an eye catching projecting flag sign and has kept A-boards off the pavements.



## Parking – how to get it right

Clearly marked accessible bays with a vertical signpost at the end of the bay. Make sure markings and signs stay clearly visible and maintained over time

Many disabled people drive or travel by car to get to where they need to go. Some may also cycle. You need to provide:

- **clear and visible signage** which will direct people to your car park, and accessible bays for disabled customers – ground markings and a vertical signpost at the end of the parking bay will help identify the correct spaces
- **a dropped kerb** - from the parking bay to the footpath and your entrance
- **accessible parking bays** - 2.4m x 4.8m with additional 1.2m hatched access zone to the side and rear for safe access
- **good management** - these bays should be available to those who might need them most



Provide accessible parking close to the entrance, remember to mark hatched safe zones to the side and rear of spaces. Make sure hatches are kept clutter free.



*Spar Loughview, Craigavon.*

# Make an entrance

**C**an customers easily see and open your door? Whether you run a small shop, public service or large business, you want as many customers as possible to be able to enter your premises.

Make sure that your entrance is easy to identify and find, ensure it stands out from the façade. A main step-free 1000mm wide entrance will allow all customers equal access to your building. Providing a canopy will shelter customers in all weathers.



*Horatio Todd's Bar and Restaurant, Belfast.*

One of the easiest things you can do is to check your door handles, and feel how heavy the door is to open.

A D-shaped handle can be opened from different heights, or an easy action lever handle at the right height can make all the difference.

Propping doors open in the summer can be useful but don't forget to think about long term management.

### **We're open: Door tips**

- D- shaped handle at 700 –1000 (lower edge) to 1300mm (top) height
- lever handle at 900mm height
- new main entrance doors should have a clear width 1000mm, 775mm minimum in an existing building
- new internal doors should be at least 800mm wide, 750mm in existing building
- easy opening
- vision panels to see other side is clear
- push / pull indication
- Is there enough space for wheelchair users in your lobby?
- Make sure door mats are flush and not worn or likely to trip someone up. Do not use coir mats – they can be wheel-traps





### **Automatic doors (B&Q, Craigavon)**

Consider installing automatic doors – these can really open up your doors for all of your customers. It also makes it easier for them to carry more shopping when they leave.



### **Go step-free**

**One small step for some, one giant obstacle for many others**

Even if you have just one step into your building, this can be a barrier to a customer accessing your goods and services.

Step-free entrances are so much more inviting. Families with buggies, wheelchair users, people with walking aids and people with luggage will all find it much easier to come in and do business with you.

Although I am a mobile disabled person, steps and stairs are virtually impossible for me and slopes are not very easy for me. Shops that have a step up into them or within them aren't ideal. In shops that have narrow aisles, I can trip easily.

**Laura Bizzey**

Always aim for completely step-free access, if customers can get to more of your products and services, they will buy more and keep coming back.

One small step can stop me and my friends going into an establishment. A portable ramp doesn't cost much but can make a huge difference to my day out. If there is no access, I just go elsewhere. Some shops are great, if they have a portable ramp, there is a bell you can call for attention.

**Michaela Hollywood**

### **Access all areas**

The Wool Shop, in Newtownards, made reasonable adjustments for their customers by removing single steps on their premises.



We're a family-run business, when we noticed customers with rollators and wheelchairs were having difficulties, we looked into what we could do. The benefits definitely outweighed the cost implications. It was really worthwhile for our loyal customers.

**Janelle McQueen, The Wool Shop**



# Can I help you?

## Getting customer service right

**M**aking sure that your staff can provide great customer service for disabled people can make a huge difference. A disability confident and well-trained staff team will provide better customer service and boost your sales. Nominating an Access Champion within your business could work wonders; they can help improve access to your services so you can reach more customers.



The Wool Shop has a very loyal customer community. Everyone is made welcome and the staff are always ready to help reach items on the higher shelves.

# 47%

said staff attitude has discouraged them from revisiting certain establishments.

Almost half of disabled customers surveyed would not go back to businesses with poor customer service.

**Source: Short-changed: The Trailblazers' High streets report.**

## **Word of Mouth – Great staff means great service**

We asked locals who they would recommend and what makes a difference. It turns out it's just what we would all expect – polite staff and good customer service.

## Staff training: Break down the barriers

Help your staff team become disability confident and they can provide a better quality of service that keeps customers coming back for more.



A small business I think is excellent is The Cookie Box - they have a number of establishments. There's one which has room to sit in - and although it is very small they're great at taking a chair away if it's needed to make space. Staff there are brilliantly trained and will talk directly to me, rather than the person with me.

**Michaela Hollywood**

Claire McRandal, owner of Cookie Box, with three branches in Belfast, describes their approach and gives some advice:

We train our staff to treat all customers as equals. Some of our younger staff may be worried about approaching someone and we reassure them that all of our customers are just the same as us, and to break down the barriers. We're not experts, we just tell our staff to think, "If you were in the customer's position, what would you appreciate?"

### Quick tips

If you are serving a deaf customer, use a pen and pencil to write something down, move chairs away for wheelchair users and families with prams - take the barriers away.

**Claire McRandal**

## Customer Service Tips

### Good manners

- Introduce yourself, let customers know you are available to help
- Always talk to the customer directly, not who they are with
- Don't be afraid to ask 'Can I help?' or 'How can I help you?'
- Be patient and ready to repeat or clarify something – your customers may present you with their JAM card
- Speak clearly and face-to-face to people who are lip-reading
- Offer to write things down
- Offer choice and dignity – don't make assumptions - not everyone wants or needs help.

### Practical assistance

- Offer to find or reach for items
- Can you carry or put items aside?
- Offer to describe items or help to read labels
- Do you know how to use your induction loop, portable ramp and other access equipment?

- Offer a seat to waiting customers
- Offer to rearrange furniture for people who need some space for example, wheelchair users, people with assistance dogs, buggies or mobility aids
- Turn any music down to improve communication.

### Information

- Know your facilities and services - where is the nearest accessible toilet? Can you provide home visits, carry-to-car or delivery services? Are your leaflets and information in a large and clear print?
- Toilet, changing room or lift out of action? Let customers know. Make sure that your service and facilities information is online and up-to-date so visitors can plan ahead
- Do you use social media or websites – can you offer live updates? Save customers' wasted journeys by forewarning them.

# Access all areas: experience instore

**I**t is important for customers to be able to move around freely, browse and feel comfortable within your store. Customers should be able to move around the retail area, browse and inspect goods, bring them to the cash desk and receive the same services as other customers.





Avoid loose mats and obstructions in walkways

### Routes and surfaces

Keep a clear unobstructed width of 1500mm (preferred) 1200mm (minimum) for routes from the shop entrance to service and product areas, toilets, payment counters and emergency exits.

Check your routes for trip hazards and maintenance issues such as loose mats, spills or worn carpet, and remove any obstructions. Floors should be even and non-slip. Avoid narrowing routes with temporary displays as this can create a barrier for wheelchair users, people with mobility aids and all shoppers with trolleys or baskets. It also makes it harder for staff to restock items.

### Level changes

Try to minimise the number of level changes in your premises - make them easy to negotiate:

- All public areas should be as accessible as possible to everyone
- Consider providing a ramp or a platform lift for a short internal level difference
- If not obvious, provide signs for the ramp or lift route
- Warn people of all level changes as these can be a trip hazard. Provide good visual contrast to slopes and good lighting
- All step edges (nosings) should be non-slip and visually highlighted
- Install strong handrails that are easy and comfortable to grasp both sides and extend beyond the top and bottom steps or the top and bottom of slopes. They should also have good visual contrast.

Ramps steeper than 1:20 should have handrails at both sides. Provide visual warning at the edge of the ramp to reduce the trip hazard risk.

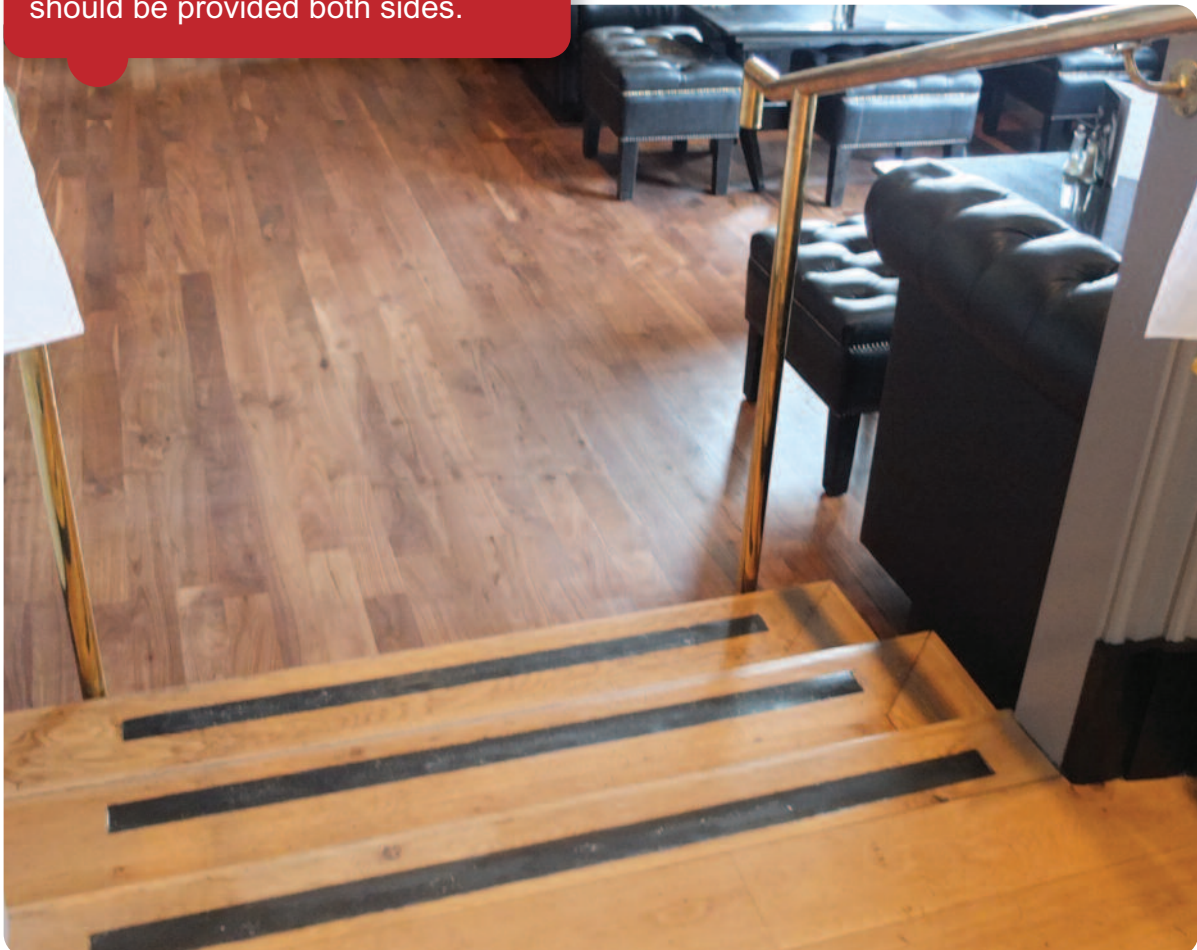
Where steps are provided as a route choice, ensure that handrails are provided to both sides and the stair nosing (edges) visually contrast with the rest of the step to help with identification and depth perception.

Level landings between flights gives people a chance to rest.



Provide handrails on both sides of any changes in level and make sure that the area is well lit.

Any step edges (nosing) should have clear visual contrast. Handrails should be provided both sides.







Popular products should be arranged vertically so they are available at different heights

## Off the shelf

Stock should be:

- **Neatly and safely stacked** on shelves and not project beyond the front of display units where they could present a hazard
- **Within reach** of wheelchair users and people of a shorter stature. Popular goods which require a lot of shelf space could be arranged vertically so that they are available across a range of shelves and heights
- **Available with staff assistance if necessary:** some goods might be displayed beyond the reach of all customers and staff will be required to provide assistance.

## Signs: Always read the label

Signage should be clear and appropriate to help all people including those with visual impairments or learning difficulties orient themselves and locate stocked items easily.

- Provide clear product /service labelling and pricing
- Provide clear product / service information displays

Signs that work best are:

- Simple and short
- Bigger is better - good sized text, minimum 16pt font
- Easily read and understood with clear font in a mixture of lower and upper case
- Well contrasting with the background and the lettering
- Supplemented by symbols
- Not on reflective or glass backgrounds
- Not behind glass which makes them difficult to read

Large clear text is much easier to read than smaller print. Make it easy to match products with their prices (B & Q)



## Please, have a seat

Whether you are a small clothing store, bank or retail shop, chances are you want your customers to stay for longer, feel comfortable and create a great purchasing or service environment.

### Tips for seating:

- **Provide flexible seating areas** - where furniture can be moved around
- **Have a range of chairs available** - if you have chairs with back support, seats at different heights, with and without armrests, people can more easily transfer into and out of the seats
- **Clear routes (900mm minimum)** - between the tables and a choice of seating type will accommodate a wide range of users
- **Space underneath tables** - for wheelchair users to approach and fit their knees comfortably under a table and for assistance dogs.

### Provide more than one type of seating

Providing a mixture of seating, some with back support and some with and without armrests will mean more customers can sit comfortably



Photo credit:Guillermo Moratalla.

### Access to information as well as accessible information

Leaflets at Danske Bank, Belfast are available on shelves which can be reached from a seated height. They have provided chairs with good back support and arm rests. Providing some chairs without armrests in addition is also recommended.







### **Did you know?**

There are 3,000 British Sign Language users in Northern Ireland and approximately 1,000 Irish Sign Language users. Remember to build in a notice period for requesting and booking qualified interpreters.

### **Accessible counters**

Providing counters and writing surfaces at different heights will make life easier for all of your customers. A lowered section of a desk should be no more than 760mm high. A food serving or bar counter should have a section 850mm high for a length of at least 1500mm. All counters should have 700mm high knee space beneath them for wheelchair users to approach.

Face-to-face service is important for many of your visitors; some might be lip-reading or may need reassurance from a friendly staff member.

Remember, no-one really likes to fill out a form, especially if there isn't a comfortable height to work at.

### **No space for a counter? Provide a clipboard**

Perhaps your service or business is always on the move, or there's no space for a counter, you could always make sure that a clipboard is ready for use by your customers.

## Pay here

Make it easy for all your customers to make a payment:

- **lower counter section** - provide a surface no higher than 760mm from the floor level for wheelchair users and customers of shorter stature, or a single lower counter that suits everyone. There should be 700mm high knee space underneath the counter for wheelchair users to approach
- **clutter free** - do not place items in front of the counter so that people have to lean over to reach the counter
- **priority policy** - or provide a chair at the counter for people less able to stand in a queue
- **well lit counter** - so that it is easy for someone lip-reading to see the cashier's face
- **portable payment terminals** - located so they can be easily used in a comfortable position by all customers
- **induction loop** - a hearing enhancement system that assists people who wear hearing aids. Clearly indicate with signage the availability of the hearing loop and train staff how to use it.



Check your counters are easy to approach and that flexible card terminals can be reached and are operable at different heights.

Businesses should always have one machine which is portable or detachable. And now that I have a wireless payment card it's going to make my life so much easier.  
**Trailblazer, Muscular Dystrophy Campaign**

## Common sense – better lighting and communication

Make sure your building is well-lit so that signs, product labels, menus, steps, thresholds, slopes or door handles, can be easily seen. Good lighting is essential for lip-reading. If background noise and music make it difficult for customers and staff to talk to each other, turn the music down or off.

Hearing enhancements like induction loops will help support communication in meeting rooms, at counters and information points. Make sure that there are signs to show that these are available.

Managers of shops, banks and even cinemas do not seem to realise that if a hearing loop system is working well, it gives hearing aid wearers amazingly clear hearing as well as getting rid of background noise!  
**Richard Scullard, Hearing aid wearer**

‘Shopping is so much more enjoyable when staff understand how to communicate with deaf people. I lip-read, so if they know to look at me when speaking to me, rather than turning away to focus on their till, it really helps! I’m often anxious in case there’s an emergency alarm and I can’t hear it. Some businesses have flashing alarms installed so I’m not left in the dark, which is great.’  
**Trish Vallance, a lip-reader**

Being accessible is an ongoing aim – it is important to regularly check that everything is working as it should.

**Be in the loop:** The induction loop sign lets visitors know to switch their hearing aids to the T-setting. One of the Lyric Theatre’s patrons is a hearing aid user, who regularly tests their hearing enhancement equipment.



Lyric Theatre’s reception area with lower counter section, available seating and induction loop sign.

## Tips for lighting and contrast

- **Avoid bright light and dark shadows**
- **Highlight hazardous areas** such as steps or other changes in level
- **Maximise light** by keeping glass clean, maintaining lamps and blinds, and replace blown bulbs quickly
- **Minimise glare from large areas of white or reflective surfaces** – this can be done by adjusting lighting
- **Use colours** to guide the way
- **Use dark and light colours** to distinguish between large features or areas, such as, doors, floors, walls and ceilings
- **Smaller fittings**, such as, light switches, handrails and door handles should also contrast well against backgrounds
- **Do not use large areas of mirrors or glazing without markings** – these may be difficult to identify and people might walk into them and injure themselves.

We provide sign language interpretation and facilities for hard-of-hearing members. We've produced publications in large print, bought magnifiers and a microphone for meetings. We've changed our website, so there is a button to enlarge the font.

**Michael Roddy, Derry Credit Union Ltd, *For Service, For All***



## Excuse me – Can I use the toilet?

**Good visual contrast** – signs, grabrails, the WC and fittings should contrast against the background, making them easier to identify.



*Spar Loughview, Craigavon*

### Tips for accessible toilets

- **Where are they?** Provide clear signage so that they are easy to find. If refurbishing make sure that accessible WCs are in a location near to entrances and activity areas
- **Outward opening doors** – space is needed inside for wheelchair users to be able to turn and use the facility
- **Easy-to-use door locks** – light action locks which can be easily operated by a closed fist and minimal dexterity requirements



- **Clear and clean** - keep the transfer space next to the WC clear of bins - wheelchair users need this space for manoeuvring
- **Emergency alarm** - Check your alarm system works and your staff are trained in appropriate response. The cord should almost reach the ground and never be tied up, so that someone on the floor could reach it in an emergency
- **Replace any difficult cross head taps** – mixer lever taps can be easy to operate with a closed fist and limited dexterity
- **Check your grabrails** – these need to be installed at the right height and location to provide sufficient support for transfer, sample layouts are freely available in Technical Booklet R
- **Visual contrast** – grabrails, WC and fittings should contrast against the background, making them easier to identify
- **Don't use them for storage** – as soon as you use the toilet as a storage room, it stops being an accessible toilet.

## Larger venues need Changing Places

Many disabled people who require assistance cannot use standard accessible WCs which are intended for independent use. Visitors may require additional space and equipment, such as, an adult-sized changing bench and hoist. Support is provided by the person's chosen assistant(s) and not expected from venue staff.

Changing Places have been installed in many towns across the UK in Westfield shopping centres, supermarkets Tesco and Asda and retail outlets like Ikea.

At the time of print, there are no Changing Places toilets in retail shopping environments in Northern Ireland.

At the IKEA Group, we believe that taking responsibility for people is a prerequisite for doing good business. The decision to install a Changing Places toilet was entirely our own, in our desire to create something to benefit our co-workers as well as our customers.

**Elizabeth Stanton IKEA,  
Edinburgh**



*Strangford Bay Lodge provides accessible and welcoming holiday accommodation. The Changing Places toilet is available for public use by request.*

Some tourist destinations have spotted the potential and Changing Places have been installed at Divis and Black Mountain, Giants Causeway and Belfast City Airport.

Changing Places offer disabled people, and their friends and family the freedom to stay out and continue to regularly shop, eat out and buy more goods and services from local businesses.

More information: Changing Places: the practical guide is available for download from [www.changing-places.org](http://www.changing-places.org)

All too often the image of disability is someone who can either be lifted or can self-transfer to a toilet. This is not the case. It is painful, and undignified to be unable to use the toilet when going out. This has got to change!

It is, without a doubt, the most urgent aspect of being disabled in Northern Ireland, which has got to be fixed not only for dignity but for health and sanitation.

**Michaela Hollywood**

## Emergency Exit

All exit routes should be as barrier-free and step-free as possible.

- **Provide clear signage** – make it easy for people to find their way out
- **Keep checking for obstructions** – walk your evacuation routes regularly, keep them clean and clear
- **Visual and audio alarm systems** – don't assume everyone can hear the alarm, install flashing beacons
- **Test the alarms** – systems should be regularly checked and maintained
- **Staff training** – staff should know correct procedures and how to provide appropriate assistance to visitors
- **Regular fire drills** – practise makes perfect, test and refresh your staff knowledge
- **Develop emergency egress plans** – which include provisions for any disabled staff and visitors.

Further information is available from the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service **Fire Safety Law: The Evacuation of Disabled People from Buildings.**





## Consultation and feedback: How did we do today?

**B&Q** Let us know how we did

**B&Q**  
**How did we do today?**  
We value your feedback!  
Please let us know how we did today.  
Whether you had a great experience, or if we let you down, your views are very important to us, so please take a few moments to let us know how you feel about your visit to B&Q.  
Answer our customer experience survey online at:  
[www.diy.com/feedback](http://www.diy.com/feedback)  
Terms and conditions apply.  
Enter your store code:  
ABC123

Please enter your store code below:  
Please enter your store code!  
Next >

**B&Q**  
B&Q XXXXXX ABC123  
01234 567890  
Manager: Smith  
45 Days Returns Policy  
See Overleaf  
SWITCH CLING £2.98  
Total 1 Items £2.98  
Cash -£3.00  
Change £0.02  
7890193241009932430376

Where to find your store code

Giving customers the chance to let you know what you are getting right and what needs improving could be the best move you make. Responding to suggestions and making positive changes for paying customers and visitors will only help your business or organisation to evolve and grow. You could welcome comments on your website with a contact phone number or email address - encourage customers to chat to you on social media or complete a five-minute online survey.

## Create your own access focus group

Having an access focus group with members of staff, local disabled visitors and disability representatives can help you to improve your services so that they are more attractive and more efficient for your employees and customers.

For example, Lyric Theatre has appointed a staff access officer and dedicated Access Group, which provides disability awareness training to the staff. One of their patrons with a hearing impairment regularly tests their hearing enhancement equipment. They have made a number of changes to the facilities as a result of consultation with the group, including better signage.



**The customer is always right:** Consulting with user groups can only make your products and services better and more popular.

## Impress your customers - play the Loyalty Card

If we receive excellent service as customers, we are more likely to reward businesses with our loyalty. If we're getting a better deal, we spend more on other services and products and keep coming back for more.

## Prioritise the customer experience



**Inclusive facilities:** B&Q offers all customers equal access to a trolley that will work for them, including integrated toddler seats, and wheelchair and scooter compatible options.

Wheelchairs are also available for loan

**Discounts:** Customers aged over-60 are eligible for a 10 per cent Diamond Discount card. Favourable discounts for older and disabled customers are encouraged.

## Next steps - Talk to the Equality Commission

This Good Practice Guide is part of the Every Customer Counts suite of documents designed to support service providers seeking to ensure that their services are accessible to disabled customers. Other documents include:

- **Self-Assessment Checklist** - designed to help traders review how accessible their business premises / services currently are.
- **Access Action Plan** - will assist traders who have completed a self-assessment to plan, prioritise, implement and evaluate any changes they decide to make.
- **Inclusive Customer Service Statement & Policy** - template documents which can be used to communicate your commitment to accessible services and show your customers the steps you have taken to make every customer welcome.

This guide and all documents can be downloaded at [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)

**Contact the Every Customer Counts team:** If you would like to discuss your assessment or action plan. **Tel: 028 90500600.**

## Further Help and Technical Advice:

### Disability Action

Disability Action provides a range of services and projects for disabled people, their families and carers [www.disabilityaction.org](http://www.disabilityaction.org)

### Building Regulations

Design guidance is available in the *Building Regulations Technical Booklet R* available to download for free from: [www.dfpni.gov.uk/tbr\\_online\\_version.pdf](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/tbr_online_version.pdf)

### Fire Safety Risk Assessment

*Means of Escape for Disabled People* and other relevant guidance booklets and are available to download for free from: [www.nifrs.org/firesafe/guidance.php](http://www.nifrs.org/firesafe/guidance.php)

### Registered Access Auditors

Registered access auditors are available to undertake independent access audit audits and provide assessments and advice on making reasonable adjustments. More information available from:

- National Register of Access Consultants [www.nrac.org.uk](http://www.nrac.org.uk)
- National Disability Authority [www.nda.ie](http://www.nda.ie)

### Promoting Accessible Business & Services

DisabledGo work in partnership with local authorities, universities, colleges, NHS Trusts and private sector business and publish access information to places of interest across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. [www.disabledgo.com](http://www.disabledgo.com)



## **Organisations and resources**

### **Useful organisations**

#### **Equality Commission Northern Ireland**

<http://www.equalityni.org/everycustomercounts>

#### **Centre for Accessible Environments**

[www.cae.org.uk](http://www.cae.org.uk)

#### **National Register of Access Consultants**

[www.nrac.org.uk](http://www.nrac.org.uk)

#### **Action on Hearing Loss**

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/about-us/northern-ireland.aspx>

#### **AutismNI**

<http://www.autismni.org/>

#### **Changing Places**

<http://www.changing-places.org/>

#### **Mencap**

<http://www.mencap.org.uk/northern-ireland/about-mencap-northern-ireland>

#### **Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service**

<http://www.nifrs.org/firesafe/guidance.php>

#### **Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (NIAMH)**

<http://www.niamhwellbeing.org/>

#### **RNIB Northern Ireland**

RNIB NI provides a range of support services and information for visually impaired people <http://www.rnib.org.uk/northern-ireland>

## Resources

*Access to High Streets – Short-changed*, Trailblazers, Muscular Dystrophy campaign January 2014

[http://www.mdctrailblazers.org/assets/0000/9720/Trailblazers\\_highstreets\\_Shortchanged\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.mdctrailblazers.org/assets/0000/9720/Trailblazers_highstreets_Shortchanged_WEB.pdf)

Action on Hearing Loss Guides

*Hearing loops: a guide for services*

*Access tips for high street services, and how we can help*

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/access-to-everyday-services/information-leaflets-for-service-providers.aspx>

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) guidelines, quick at a glance tips

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG20/glance/>

*Changing Places: the practical guide*, Changing Places Consortium

<http://www.changing-places.org/>

Street Clutter survey 2012, Guide Dogs

[http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/supportus/campaigns/streets-ahead/information-forlocal-campaigners/street-clutter-survey-2012#.U4SiJ\\_IdWIV](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/supportus/campaigns/streets-ahead/information-forlocal-campaigners/street-clutter-survey-2012#.U4SiJ_IdWIV)

*At your service*, Visit England

<http://www.visitengland.org/busdev/bussupport/access/buscase/index.aspx>

*The Facts Booklet*, AutismNI

<http://www.autismni.org/facts-.html>

*How to help people with dementia: A guide for customer-facing staff*, Alzheimers Society

[http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/download\\_info.php?fileID=2061](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?fileID=2061)

*2012 legacy for disabled people: Inclusive and Accessible business*

Department for Business Innovation & Skills, Office for Disability Issues  
[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

JAM Card initiative

<http://efdni.org/JAM.htm>



Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

# every customer counts

*promoting accessible services*

## Further information and advice

For further information and advice on any equality issues or if you would like to find out more about the Equality Commission and its work, contact us at:

Telephone: **028 90 500 600**  
Fax: **028 90 238 039**  
Textphone: **028 90 500 589**  
E-mail: **information@equalityni.org**  
Website: **www.equalityni.org**

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