

Inclusive & Accessible Tourism Toolkit

TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND

About this toolkit

Accessible tourism can help businesses in many ways by tapping into underserved and growing markets, differing customer groups and local communities. Wherever you are in your accessibility journey – and however new or well-established your business is - this toolkit aims to give you the practical hints and tips, and the reassurance and confidence, to move forward inclusively.

As a best-in-class resource for the tourism industry, this toolkit introduces the legal, commercial and ethical importance of accessibility, as well as providing guidance related to:

- Customer groups and how to remove the barriers they may face.
- How to provide an inclusive welcome with integrity and empathy at its heart.
- How to provide inclusive features and facilities, and to recognise where these are already in place.
- How to market your accessibility to potential and existing customers.
- How to become a more inclusive employer and create an inclusive internal culture within your business.
- Measuring success and ensuring accountability across the accessibility journey.

How can this toolkit help me?

It is aimed at micro, small and medium-sized tourism businesses wanting to embark on, or continue, their accessibility journey and to reach the £14.6bn accessible tourism market.

It provides 'quick win' practical hints and tips, as well as longer term aspirational goals, relating to physical and digital design, and business operations.

Allowing readers to dip in and out, each section of the toolkit focuses on a different topic and provides three summary 'top tips'.



Welcome

Thank you for wanting to improve the accessible and inclusive experiences you are offering to your customers and colleagues.

This toolkit focuses on the physical, digital and operational measures you can take to support Disabled people and those who have accessibility requirements (these terms are used interchangeably throughout this document).

The tourism sector is responsible for more than 10% of jobs worldwide. With approximately 1.4 billion people travelling the world and 15% of those identifying as Disabled or having an accessibility requirement (ISO 21902:2021) the importance of removing barriers to make tourism more accessible to all is continuing to gain traction. In short, it's a social responsibility that also makes great business sense.

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit provides information and inspiration relating to accessible tourism. It allows you to learn the theory and get excited about the practice of inclusive operations, whether externally for customers or internally for colleagues.

As time and resources can be short and the 'fear factor' surrounding disability and accessibility can be high, each module of this toolkit relates to a different subject. These sections enable you to dip in and out of the content as much or as little as you please. Additionally, the 'top tips' structure at the start of each section promotes high level understanding with more detailed information available within the section itself.

There will be opportunities throughout this toolkit for you to:

- Learn something new with 'Did you know?' pointers;
- Assess your current accessibility offerings with 'A Moment for Reflection' activities;
- Take practical and positive actions to improve your inclusivity via downloadable checklists.



A note on language use

Throughout this toolkit we have used the terms 'Disabled people' and 'Disabled customers' to refer to people who identify themselves as deaf, Disabled or neurodiverse. We also use the term "people with accessibility requirements" as a broad term to refer to anyone who would benefit from accessibility provisions, regardless of whether they relate to being disabled or not.

About the author

This toolkit has been licensed from Visit England, and revised by Tourism NI and inclusive design agency Tilting the Lens.

Provider information has been sourced from publicly available information available on provider websites at the time of publication. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy; however, Tourism Northern Ireland cannot guarantee that all relevant providers or services have been identified or included.

Contributors & Supporters

- AccessAble;
- Access and Inclusion UK;
- AccessibleUK;
- Association of Event Organisers;
- Bacta;
- BALPPA;
- Barclays;
- BIAZA;
- British Institute of Innkeeping;
- Business Disability Forum;
- Caravan and Motorhome Club;
- Centre for Accessible Environments;
- Dementia Adventure;
- English Heritage;
- Euan's Guide;
- Events Industry Alliance;
- Historic Houses;
- Historic Royal Palaces;
- Inclusive Hotels Network;
- Institute of Tourist Guiding;

Contributors & Supporters

- Lead Assessor for the National Accessible Scheme, VisitEngland Assessment Services
- Leonard Cheshire
- Meetings Industry Association
- Merlin Entertainments
- Mencap
- Motionspot
- Muscular Dystrophy UK
- National Autistic Society;
- Premier Cottages;
- RNIB;
- Sense;
- Social enterprise, Sargent Group Consulting;
- Stay in a Pub;
- The Professional Association of Self-Caterers UK;
- UKHospitality;
- UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre;
- VisitsUnlimited
- Tilting the Lens

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What is Accessible Tourism?



Section 1: What is accessibility?

Three Top Tips for this section:

- Accessibility involves removing barriers to provide positive experiences for all. In the case of this toolkit, it's about ensuring that everyone can enjoy tourism.
- Accessibility is one pillar of a wider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy.
- To support your implementation of these strategies, we encourage you to use the practical checklists, technical design guidance and persona deck. These tools will ensure you move forward on this journey, but engaging with Disabled people in your organisation, in your community, and in the wider world, will ensure that your actions are meaningful and informed by lived experience and further subject-matter expertise.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is a topic being addressed by an increasing number of businesses. In summary, the term 'equality' relates to ensuring that everyone can access the same opportunities, 'diversity' means valuing the differences between people and their identifying characteristics, and 'inclusion' is a measure of how safe and welcome people feel in their environment. These are important, big-picture concepts that accessibility is embedded into.

Accessibility is a framework for designing spaces, services, cultures, and communication with dignity, ease and independence. Accessibility specifically creates opportunities for Disabled people to meaningfully engage in the tourism sector - as tourists and employees - but also has benefits for those who travel with children, those who are aging and those who may not speak English as a first language.

Simply put, accessibility is all about removing barriers (whether physical, digital, relating to information and content, or attitudinal) to promote positive and equal experiences for all. It is the 'actionable' part of ensuring that EDI is on the agenda for Disabled people in particular but can also provide great benefit to customers and colleagues who might identify differently.

For example, providing audio tours and large print versions of exhibit information at museums are a great way of removing content barriers for people who are blind or partially sighted. Ensuring staff are well trained and equipping them with useful resources can really aid the removal of attitudinal barriers for Disabled people as well as those with other protected characteristics related to age, race, and sexual orientation. Similarly, making an entrance more accessible to a wheelchair user is likely to involve the provision of step-free access and a lowered height section at a welcome desk, which would remove certain barriers within the built environment.

To truly be effective, accessible tourism should involve the delivery of accessible products, services and environments and enable Disabled people and people with accessibility requirements to have independence and autonomy over their experience.

Taking you step by step, this toolkit – and the actionable checklists, built environment technical design guidance and persona deck – will show you how to improve your accessibility offering for both your customers and staff and ensure that a great tourism experience is available to all.

Did you know?

The Sensory Trust has created the Access Chain, a tool to help organisations better understand and action an inclusive end-to-end visitor experience – from a decision to visit, to journey and arrival, to the onsite experience, and returning home.

Busting myths!

There are a lot of misconceptions that surround accessibility. Before we get any further into the toolkit, we want to address these here:

We are already accessible – we are just off the motorway!

Whilst 'accessibility' is sometimes used to mean the ease with which somewhere can be reached, it has a much broader definition. Accessibility is about offering everybody a warm welcome and equitable experiences. It's about enabling people by:

- removing physical barriers where possible;
- making service adjustments to allow a wider range of people enjoy their experience.

The main beneficiaries of an accessible environment or experience are Disabled people, older people and families.

“Accessibility feels complex and can be complicated”

It can feel complex. However, as a tourism business you probably know more than you realise and already doing lots but not recognising it.

The key is offering a warm welcome and great customer service to deliver memorable visitor experiences. At its simplest, think about four key things:

- Information – ensure you provide accessibility information on your website
- Customer – ensure that staff have relevant training to serve your customers with understanding and confidence
- Place – make low cost / no cost improvements to the built environment, amenities and services you offer.
- Employment – become a more inclusive employer

We'll go into these key areas in much more detail later in the toolkit.

"Accessibility is something that is very expensive to develop, it's all about wheelchair users and it is costly to fit lifts, ramps and handrails."

Improving accessibility need not be expensive at all. For example, you can:

- offer relevant accessibility information by providing this on your website, ideally including a Detailed Access Guide;
- offer service adjustments, such as late check-outs or implementing a 'fast-track' queueing policy.
- provide low-cost facilities such as a hearing loop or portable ramp.

A good time to think about physical accessibility is at the time of a new build or refurbishment: it is cheaper to build inclusive features into a design rather than retrofit them.

“I'm not sure what to do, or where to start to be more accessible.”

Start with the Top Tips in this toolkit, particularly:

- having a Detailed Access Guide and ensuring this can be found easily on your website;
- ensuring your website is accessible;
- providing training for all staff, to help them understand the market and have confidence in serving customers with accessibility requirements.



"We don't have any Disabled guests and there is no demand for accessible services and facilities, so why change?"

How do you know you have not had visitors or guests with accessibility requirements?

- Around 70 to 80% of Disabled people have non-visible impairments: they may, for example, have a hearing or visual impairment, or be living with dementia. Many people are also likely to have more than one impairment.
- They may not have said anything to the business or complained, but what has their experience been like, have they struggled or 'made do'?

If you aim to improve accessibility in your business you can help to enhance the quality of the customer service you offer for many existing customers, as well as helping to attract new ones.

"We have made changes to improve our accessible services and facilities and already offer these, but there is no demand for them."

Start with the Top Tips in this toolkit, particularly:

- having a Detailed Access Guide and ensuring this can be found easily on your website;
- ensuring your website is accessible;
- providing training for all staff, to help them understand the market and have confidence in serving customers with accessibility requirements.

“We operate from an historic and listed property so we can’t make any changes.”

Operating from an historic or listed property does not necessarily prevent you from making changes to the building. However, even if you cannot make physical changes you can make other aspects of your service more accessible for example having large print versions of written documents.

“As a small business with a large number of steps leading to the main door and no space for an accessible toilet we can't really be fully accessible.”

The term ‘fully accessible’ is a fallacy; it’s just not possible to create such an environment or experience.

If making structural changes is not possible, this may mean that you are not accessible to some people with a mobility disability. However, this does not mean you cannot welcome and serve other people with accessibility requirements. Every business can be accessible to somebody.

“My business is doing well, with regular and repeat customers, so why should I change anything?”

Accessibility isn't just about increasing customer numbers. Businesses which have regular and repeat customers need to ‘grow with them’: as these visitors grow older and their accessibility needs increase, the business will need to adapt to meet these needs.

However, this does not mean you should wait to make accessibility improvements. Many existing customers may well already have accessibility requirements and meeting these can help to improve the quality of their experience with a business.

“For areas of natural beauty, we would destroy the ‘sense of place’, the beauty of what people come to see, if we make adaptations”.

There is a lot of guidance which exists to support the management of areas of natural beauty. Making these areas welcoming and inclusive does not have to mean damaging the ‘spirit of place’.



Understanding Accessibility in Tourism

Accessibility is a critical pillar of EDI, focusing on removing barriers to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability or background, can enjoy positive and equitable tourism experiences. It benefits Disabled people and others, such as families with children, older individuals, and non-native English speakers.

This toolkit highlights practical steps to enhance accessibility in tourism, including removing physical and attitudinal barriers, improving services, and fostering inclusivity. It also addresses common myths about accessibility and emphasizes the importance of engaging with Disabled people to inform meaningful changes.

Familiarise yourself with examples, such as providing audio tours for visually impaired visitors, improving staff training, and offering accessible amenities. Reflect on how implementing accessibility can improve both customer and employee experiences in the tourism sector.



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The Benefits of Providing an Inclusive Experience

Section 2: The benefits of providing an inclusive experience

Three Top Tips for this section:

- The Purple Pound represents the spending power of Disabled people and is currently worth an estimated £274 billion to UK businesses per year.
- There is a collective responsibility to remove disabling barriers in society. Aim for continuous progress rather than perfection.
- All businesses have a legal duty to not discriminate against Disabled people under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Information and links to additional guidance in this section will help ensure you are getting it right.

Why accessibility matters

Ethically and morally, providing an accessible and inclusive experience is the right thing to do for any business. But it can also be financially savvy, support legal compliance and encourage positivity, ensuring you reach and engage with a diverse, interesting audience.

23% of people in Northern Ireland have a disability (this includes hearing, visual and cognitive disabilities as well as people with physical disabilities). Many of your existing customers are likely to be in that group but you may not realise this.

Disabilities such as hearing loss, arthritis, epilepsy and autism are not visible and some customers won't disclose these.

Did you know?

Your customer base is also getting older and with age comes the increasing likelihood of health conditions such as poorer eyesight and back issues. People aged 65 and over account for 17.2% of the Northern Ireland population. The NI population is projected to age at a faster rate than the rest of the UK. By mid-2028 this figure is predicted to be 20.1%, and could rise to almost two thirds (65.1%) by 2041.



Digital and social accessibility

Access and inclusion does not just refer to the built environment. As first impressions of businesses are increasingly made online, digital accessibility of websites and social media channels is just as valuable.

Whether over the phone, email or in-person, a positive perception of disability within your business is essential. For an end-to-end experience to be inclusive your physical, social and digital access must be well considered for every customer.

The scope of disability and access requirements is vast and aspirational guidance is constantly improving. Becoming comfortable and confident with accessibility is therefore a continuous learning curve. Fear not, this is not something you need to be an expert in.

Don't worry about being 'fully accessible' – it's not possible.

Two things are true of access and inclusion. Firstly, no one solution will perfectly cater for every individual's access requirements; the term 'fully accessible' is misleading as it does not exist and cannot be achieved. Therefore, every business, no matter how big or small, new or mature, should be aiming for continuous progress, rather than perfection.

Secondly, we all have a role to play in ensuring the built environment, social interactions and our websites and social media channels are as accessible and inclusive as possible for as many people as possible, be they friends and family members, customers or colleagues.

Did you know?

£249 billion pounds and rising is spent by Disabled customers in the United Kingdom each year.

In 2021,in NI just under one fifth (19%) of people aged 16 and over reported having a mobility difficulty. On average, those with a mobility difficulty made 519 journeys in 2021, 44% less than those without a mobility difficulty (929 journeys per year).

The good news for businesses wanting to target this market is that demand for accessible accommodation and activities outstrips the current supply. Disabled people when travelling tend to be loyal and they often return to places that provide accessible features and facilities, as this is often a rare find. Read on to find out more about how you can encourage these customers to choose you by valuing them and providing a confident, honest and inclusive welcome.

The value of the Purple Pound

There is a common misconception that Disabled people are not commercially valuable customers. Not only is this false, but it often prevents businesses within the tourism industry from reaching their full potential by engaging with, and catering for, a diverse customer base.

The Purple Pound represents the spending power of Disabled people and is currently worth an estimated £274 billion to UK businesses per year.

While access and inclusion is a legal responsibility and the right thing to do ethically; the Purple Pound means that it's great for business. People with health conditions and disabilities tend to take longer holiday breaks than average and therefore tend to spend more money per trip.

Additionally, one in four domestic holiday-makers with access requirements return to accommodation they have visited before, either because it has the specialist facilities they required and/or it removes the stress and effort of trying to find somewhere different.

Removing barriers

The physical, digital and social barriers in society can often be more disabling to people than their actual disabilities. A barrier can be visible or relate to the lack of a service or provision. Barriers can also be attitudinal and cause great amounts of exclusion.

For example, many Blind and partially sighted people would find online hotel searches much easier and more enjoyable if all websites were accessible to screen-readers. Similarly, if step-free access was a given on all public transport networks, many wheelchair users would be able to travel with independence and autonomy. And if hearing loops came as standard at every reception desk and all staff were trained in deaf awareness, people who are deaf or have hearing loss would likely find the arrival process at hotels, restaurants and visitor attractions much less frustrating.

Note how all these situations remove barriers and result in positive experiences for many people – without any aspect of their disability or medical condition changing. This shows us that we all have a responsibility to look at our surrounding environments, the services we offer, the ways in which we promote ourselves, and the language we use to identify barriers and, if possible, remove them.



The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and your legal responsibilities

While the DDA is focused on Disabled people it is important to consider other characteristics. For example in NI public authorities are subject to section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which protects individuals with one or more of nine protected characteristics, including age, gender, race and disability. While this is for public authorities it is a good guide for business on how to ensure that no-one is treated less favourably.

You must not discriminate against Disabled customers by refusing access to them, their companions, mobility equipment or assistance dogs as this would be considered unlawful. For more information, please visit our legal guidance for tourism businesses in NI.

Further information and guidance on the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and reasonable adjustments can also be found on the NI Direct website.

Did you know?

The DDA requires service providers to provide auxiliary aids, which can include special pieces of equipment to provide additional support, at no cost to the Disabled customer. This type of 'reasonable adjustment' is required to avoid putting Disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled.

Businesses should not state in their communications that they are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) as it cannot be guaranteed. Instead, businesses should focus on describing the steps they are taking to meet their legal obligations and commit to ongoing efforts to improve equality and accessibility.

The Impact and Potential of the Accessible Tourism Market

Before addressing this question, take time to explore the insights on accessibility and the Purple Pound discussed in the toolkit materials.

Accessibility is more than a legal or ethical obligation- it's an opportunity for businesses to unlock the significant spending power of Disabled people, worth an estimated £274 billion annually in the UK. Beyond the financial benefits, creating accessible and inclusive tourism experiences fosters loyalty, encourages repeat visits, and broadens your audience.

This section emphasizes the importance of removing barriers- physical, social, and digital- and striving for continuous progress rather than perfection. It highlights how accessibility can positively impact customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and the overall success of your business.

Review examples such as accessible amenities, inclusive digital practices, and tailored staff training to meet diverse needs. Think about how prioritizing accessibility can position your business as welcoming, innovative, and socially responsible.

When ready, consider the question and explore how embracing accessibility and the Purple Pound could benefit your business.

The Impact and Potential of the Accessible Tourism Market

Description: Explore how prioritising accessibility in your business can have ethical, legal, and financial benefits. Consider the concept of the Purple Pound and its significance in creating an inclusive and welcoming experience for Disabled customers.

Action:

- Reflect on whether the accessible tourism market is worth more than you initially thought, considering the £274 billion value of the Purple Pound and the growing demand for accessibility.
- Identify how embracing accessibility could provide your business with a competitive edge and foster customer loyalty.
- Think about specific steps you can take to create a welcoming environment that meets the diverse needs of customers, both physically and digitally.

Use this opportunity to evaluate how accessibility aligns with your business goals, enhances customer experiences, and contributes to the broader movement of inclusivity. Be practical and honest in your response.

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Know Your Customer



Section 3: Know your customer

Three Top Tips for this section:

- Focus on understanding how you can remove barriers and implement reasonable adjustments to provide an accessible and equitable experience for all your customers, regardless of age, gender, race or disability.
- Ask, don't guess: If you're unsure how to assist a Disabled person, politely ask them. Most people appreciate the consideration and will guide you on the best way to help.
- There are many resources available to help you become more inclusive, and we will guide you toward these in this toolkit.



Understanding your customers' requirements

Accessible and inclusive experiences are built through intentionality from the start. Every customer deserves to feel welcome, no matter their circumstances. A critical step in ensuring this is through education, awareness, and understanding of what access accommodations are already in place and what additional facilities, adjustments, or communication tools may be needed. By consistently considering these factors, accessibility becomes an integral part of the experience for all.

The first thing to be aware of is that there are different disability types that are both apparent and non-apparent:

- Physical disabilities affect things like movement, control and speed. This can also affect reach ranges.
- Sensory disabilities that affect sight, hearing or communication. Examples of these include:
  - Blind or low vision
  - Deaf or hearing loss
- Speech disabilities that cause challenges in communicating verbally
- Cognitive and intellectual disabilities might present thinking, processing or functioning challenges that make learning and retaining information difficult, for example if someone is recovering from a stroke or someone with Downs syndrome

Understanding your customers' requirements

- Neurodiversity refers to the different way a person's brain processes information. Examples include:
  - Dyslexia
  - Dyscalculia
  - ADHD
  - Autism
- Chronic illness is a long-term health condition that persists for a year or more. Examples include:
  - Diabetes
  - Heart conditions
  - Arthritis
  - Autoimmune conditions
  - Long Covid
- Having a mental health condition which can include:
  - Bipolar
  - Depression

Understanding your customers' requirements

- Anxiety
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Schizophrenia

But that's not all: disability can be apparent or non-apparent (it is estimated that 70 to 80% are non-apparent), but both are as valid as each other and need to be respected and understood as such.

Disabilities can be permanent, temporary, acquired, or even situational. For instance, consider someone who has broken their leg and is now using a wheelchair or crutches. Consider how they would need to reassess navigation around places and spaces.

It's also important to recognize that many individuals with disabilities may experience varying energy levels, which should be factored into the design of physical spaces, customer service practices, and business operations.

By being mindful of these diverse needs, organizations can create environments that are more accommodating for all. For instance, consider the sudden accessibility needs of a new parent with twins in a double buggy when navigating a hotel.

Accessibility can benefit everyone.



Understanding your customers' requirements

While it's impossible to address every disability and specific accessibility requirement, we have partnered with national charities and leading organisations to share the latest information and best practice guidance for supporting different disability types. This collaboration helps ensure that we remain informed and aligned with current accessibility standards.

Focusing on Inclusive Communication and Service: The focus should be on building confidence in communicating with and serving a diverse range of customers. The key to accessible tourism is identifying and removing barriers to create positive experiences for everyone. Having the confidence to ask, "How can we make this the best possible experience for you?"—rather than making assumptions—can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and inclusivity.

Building Empathy to Enhance Inclusive Service: Understanding conditions like autism, for example, won't allow you to predict exactly what every autistic customer might need. However, developing empathy and knowledge about the accessible facilities you offer will enable you to provide an inclusive service that everyone can enjoy and appreciate. This approach ensures that each customer's unique needs are met without assumptions.

Did you know?

70% of Disabled people will not return to a business after receiving poor customer service.

Good practice hints and tips: Promoting inclusion for Disabled customers

Honestly share your accessibility information far and wide, including on your website and social media. Where possible, place this information front and centre, and try to avoid the need for customers to call to ask for further information (noting that for some larger venues there may be genuine safety/ security concerns that restrict what information can be shared publicly to align with Martyn's Law, and you may need to request that individuals get in touch for specific layout or access requests).

Empowering Staff Through Disability and Inclusion Training: Ensure all staff members receive training in disability and inclusion awareness to enhance their confidence in communication and foster empathy and understanding in serving all customers. By identifying and removing barriers through the implementation of reasonable accommodations, businesses can create a more inclusive environment for everyone.

Invite Disabled people to visit your venue and give insight, feedback and recommendations as a way to help you improve. Pay them for their time.

Disabled customers are not seeking 'special' treatment or sympathy; they are simply asking for equal access to the same opportunities and experiences that their non-disabled peers enjoy. It's about creating equity of experience, ensuring that everyone has the chance to participate fully.

Good practice hints and tips: Promoting inclusion for Disabled customers

Regardless of who your Disabled customers are traveling with, always address them directly rather than solely focusing on their companions. This approach ensures that each individual feels respected and valued in the interaction.

Treat Disabled customers with the same level of respect and courtesy as you would any other customer. A positive experience not only encourages them to return but also inspires them to recommend your services to others.

Did you know?

Dietary inclusion is also part of accessibility. Consider the inclusivity of any food and/or medication policies you have. For example, some people may need to bring their own food with them, require a quiet and private space for tube feeding, or need to know about ingredients, allergens or cross-contamination when purchasing food and drink from you. Some people may need you to blend their food.

The power of lived experience engagement

If you seek to enhance accessibility, it's important to engage with individuals wh have lived experience of disabilities or other diverse backgrounds. Be sure to approach any engagement thoughtfully, adopting a comprehensive pan-disability perspective that includes people with a variety of impairments and accessibility needs.

Be prepared for complex conversations and solutions; for instance, access accommodations for someone with sight loss may not be suitable for a neurodivergent individual (as you will discover in this module!). It's essential to prioritize actions and reach a mutually agreed compromise in certain situations However, the rich insights you gain through this process will make it all worthwhile.

Case study - Lived Experience

Consult with your customers and others with lived experience.

Mae Murray Foundation work to ensure beaches and beach-based activities are accessible to Disabled people. They have developed a number of open-source guidance documents that set out the lived experience of Disabled people using assist others to offer accessible and inclusive experiences for Disabled people to enjoy participation at the beach and at play.

Inclusive Beaches : Mae Murray Foundation



Accessibility personas

To support you whilst reading about differing impairment groups in this section, please refer to the Accessibility Personas within the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com. We have worked with individuals who have lived experience of certain disabilities and accessibility requirements to create personas based on their real-life tourism experiences:

Sarah is autistic, has neurodivergent daughters and often travels with the family's assistance dog, Bruno.

Ben and Tammy are married and both have a physical disability that impacts their walking mobility and reach ranges. They use various equipment to support them.

Craig has lost his sight. He travels with his assistance dog, Bo, and is passionate about digital interventions that make his life easier.

A moment for reflection

Think about the Disabled people you know, both personally and professionally. Search the #AccessibleTourism hashtag on LinkedIn and spend 20 minutes learning something new from one of the articles you come across.

Physical Disabilities

Customers with physical disabilities may use wheelchairs or other mobility aids, such as crutches or walking frames. They might also be individuals of shorter stature who frequently encounter challenges related to desk heights, inadequate seating, and limited reach. This can include older adults, but it also encompasses people who may have a temporary injury that makes navigating the built environment difficult.

Customers with mobility disabilities

A customer's experience of accessibility starts way before they arrive at your venue, and that experience is not always easy for people with mobility impairments. Just look at the social media account of #RightsonFlights, or read Tanni Grey-Thompson's frequent posts of her difficulty with assistance on trains for more detailed insight into the difficulties faced with transport alone.

According to the latest census almost 11% of people in Northern Ireland have 'mobility or dexterity difficulty that limits basic physical activities', others who may also experience restricted mobility include almost 12% who experience 'long term pain or discomfort' and over 10% who have 'shortness of breath or difficulty breathing'.

In Ireland 22% of the population reported having at least 'one long-lasting condition or difficulty' with 7% saying they experience difficulty with basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying. A further 9% of the population have difficulty with pain, breathing or other chronic illness.

Travel and transport can be challenging for Disabled people in NI. Accessible Travel NI includes information across a range of transport options that your customers may use.

Enabling customers of all ages and abilities to access your services could widen your customer base. A Disabled customer can often quickly become a loyal customer who may also bring their friends and family, meaning repeat business for you. We're all getting older, the market and need for accessible services and products will continue to grow in the future. Every Customer Counts includes tools to help you open your services to Disabled people.

Good practice hints and tips: Providing inclusive experiences for customers with physical disabilities

Whenever possible, provide clear signposts and links to local accessibility information that may be relevant to your customer's entire journey. Easily accessible details about the features of the local train or bus station, the nearest free Blue Badge parking, or the closest Changing Places facility can be incredibly helpful

Mobility equipment is often seen as an extension of a Disabled person's body and an important part of their identity. Always ask for permission before touching a customer's wheelchair or mobility aid.

Be mindful of the language you use when communicating with a customer who has a physical disability. For example, say 'wheelchair user' instead of 'wheelchair bound'. It is also important to avoid asking personal questions like 'what happened,' this is rude and impolite.

Be aware of your body language. In brief interactions, it's usually not necessary to bend down to meet the eye level of a wheelchair user or someone of shorter stature; instead, you can step back slightly to reduce the angle needed for eye contact.

However, if a longer conversation or assistance with forms is needed, try to find a quiet space where you can sit together and have a professional conversation at eye level.

Providing level access to your venue is crucial for ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for everyone, including those with mobility disabilities. Here's how you can achieve this:

- **No steps or thresholds**: Ensure that the main entrance to your venue is at ground level or that any existing steps or raised thresholds are removed or avoided. This provides a smooth transition from the outside to the interior space.
- **Permanent ramp**: If steps are unavoidable, install a permanent ramp with a gentle slope. Ramps should be wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and other mobility aids.

Good practice hints and tips: Providing inclusive experiences for customers with physical disabilities

- **Temporary ramp**: If a permanent ramp isn't feasible, a portable or temporary ramp may be used as a solution, but it should be readily available when needed and easy to set up.
- **Lift:** If the entrance is elevated and a ramp is not a suitable option due to space or structural limitations, a vertical platform lift or stairlift can provide access.

Where possible, provide lowered desks, accessible payment options, and information in multiple formats for better accessibility. Additionally, consider incorporating inclusive seating areas, featuring chairs at different heights and with/ without back and armrests, as these are crucial for many customers with physical disabilities.

Although your customers with mobility impairments may have the most visible accessibility requirements, it is estimated that only around 7% of Disabled people are full-time wheelchair users. Though others may use a wheelchair or mobility scooter for outdoors spaces or longer distances. It is therefore important to also provide an inclusive experience to customers with other impairments, as detailed in this module.

It may not always be possible to make physical amendments to the premises, and you should consider other ways in which you can offer the same or a similar experience.

Case study - Virtual reality

Where it is not possible to facilitate access for all, consider other ways for visitors to share the experience. For example, Marble Arch Caves, Enniskillen has developed a virtual reality (VR) tour of the caves so that visitors who cannot go below ground do not miss out on the experience.

Plan Your Visit To Marble Arch Caves, Co. Fermanagh Northern Ireland

Sensory Disabilities

A sensory disability affects one or more senses, such as sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, or spatial awareness. Sensory disabilities can range from mild to severe, and a person does not need to experience complete loss of a sense to be considered disabled—partial or moderate changes are more common. This module focuses on two types of sensory disabilities: hearing and vision.

Customers who are deaf or have hearing loss

1 in 5 adults in Northern Ireland are deaf or have hearing loss and 1 in 8 have tinnitus. The population is ageing, which means that the number of people with hearing loss is increasing, so investing in hearing support is investing in the future of your business. Your staff are just as important as your customers, so any improvements you make will also benefit members of your team with hearing loss.

Did you know?

Throughout this toolkit, we have used the term 'people who are deaf or have hearing loss' this is the preferred phrase used by RNID. In some places we may also use 'D/deaf' to ensure we are representing Deaf people who use either British Sign Language (BSL) or Irish Sign Language (ISL) as their first language and are part of the Deaf community, and deaf people who have acquired hearing loss and are more likely to use hearing aids and lipread as they identify with spoken language and the hearing community.

- Deaf (uppercase D): The 'uppercase D' Deaf is used to describe people who identify as culturally Deaf and are actively engaged with the Deaf community. Deaf with a capital D indicates a cultural identity for people with hearing loss who share a common culture and who usually have a shared sign language.

  People who identify as Deaf are often born deaf and sometimes have other family members who are deaf. However, there are many people who may have hearing parents or were not born deaf but lost their hearing later in life and have become part of the Deaf community. Deaf people often prefer to use sign language and it may be their first language.

  Deaf people have often attended schools and programs for the Deaf community, where they had the chance to immerse themselves in Deaf culture. People who are Deaf often take great pride in their Deaf identity. Some do not refer to their deafness as a disability, but others do.

- deaf (lower case d): The 'lowercase d' deaf refers to the physical condition of having hearing loss. People who identify as deaf with a lowercase 'd' don't always have a strong connection to the Deaf community and don't always use sign language. They may prefer to communicate through speech.

  There are a variety of reasons why a person identifies as deaf with a lowercase 'd'. For instance, they may have been born to hearing parents and grown up in the hearing world with little or no exposure to the Deaf community.

Did you know?

- Hearing loss: Hearing loss is the RNID preferred term to describe mild to moderate hearing loss. A person who has hearing loss often does not use sign language as their first or preferred language. This may be due to them never having the opportunity to learn a sign language, or preferring not to. Someone with mild to moderate hearing loss may identify as Deaf and be involved in Deaf culture and the Deaf community. Likewise, someone who has a very small amount of hearing or no hearing may like to identify as hard-of-hearing, rather than deaf or Deaf.

  Sometimes the term 'hearing-impaired' is used but many people find being labelled 'impaired' offensive and inaccurate. Ultimately, each individual person has their own preferred term for how they identify themselves. If you're unsure about how someone identifies themselves, it is always best to ask.

RNID's good practice hints and tips for communicating with customers who are deaf or have hearing loss:

Always face the person you're talking to and don't cover your mouth. This enables them to hear you more clearly and allows them to lipread you if they need to.

Speak clearly but not too slowly and use natural facial expressions and gestures to give context. A person who lip reads understands people best when they speak normally.

Always repeat yourself if the person hasn't understood. You could also try saying the phrase in a different way.

Use clear, concise language. Be careful not to 'waffle', or you'll be harder to follow.

Avoid shouting, as it can be uncomfortable for those who wear hearing aids and may come across as aggressive. Speak clearly and at a natural volume instead.

Find a quiet place with good lighting. You'll be easier to hear in a quiet environment and good lighting will help the person to lipread you if they need to.

If needed, write down what you want to communicate using pen and paper or text on a device screen. Keep it brief and clear to ensure your message is easily understood.

RNID's good practice hints and tips for communicating with customers who are deaf or have hearing loss:

Ensure your staff members are trained in deaf awareness, and basic sign language for example Sign Source. Provide sign language alphabet charts as a quick reference for staff.

Ensure any areas that rely on communication, such as reception desks, bars, ticket offices, meeting rooms and auditoriums have hearing loops installed. Provide signage where the loop is effective. Further information on hearing loops can be found in Module 5: Accessible Features and Facilities.

When buying telephones for guest bedrooms and public areas, ensure they have voice amplification and are hearing aid compatible. If your organisation provides guided tours, ensure that you have bookable British and Irish Sign Language tours available, and that systems are available on regular tours in which the tour guide's voice is directly transmitted to hearing aids as well as headphones.

Case study - Sign Language

Consider pre-recorded sign language versions of audible information. For example Crumlin Road Gaol, Belfast worked with a deaf translator to produce a BSL version of their self-guided tour, enabling visitors who use sign language to follow the tour across the site.

Accessibility - Crumlin Road Gaol Experience, Events, Weddings & Venue Hire

Blind and partially sighted customers

One in five people will experience sight loss in their lifetime, in NI there are 57,500 people with sight loss, with this figure expected to rise by over 25% by 2032. Every day 250 people in the UK start to lose their sight, this is equivalent to one person every six minutes. While it is important to be aware of, and inclusively cater for, customers that have no vision, 93% of Blind and partially sighted people have some vision.

Similarly, not all Blind or partially sighted people will use a cane or have an assistance dog with them, so don't rely on visual clues to understand who may benefit from your accessible features and services. The best thing you can do is ask your customers two questions. Firstly, whether they would like any help, and secondly, how you can best assist them.

When communicating with someone who is Blind or has sight loss, remember to provide some helpful visual detail. For example, a customer with sight loss might not be able to make out your uniform or name badge, so stating your name and the fact you're a member of staff or a volunteer could give them some helpful context (and a bit more trust in you if you need to share directions or guide them).

When guiding a person who is Blind or has sight loss, ask how they would prefer to be guided. Whether that is by holding onto you (by the arm or on the shoulder are two of the most preferred ways). In this way, they have the autonomy to let go if they do not feel safe, and you are not controlling the situation by grabbing onto them.

More information and helpful videos can be found in RNIB's guiding advice page.

And most importantly... relax! Engage in regular conversation, just as you would with any other customer, without overthinking it. It's perfectly fine to use common phrases like 'see you later.' If you're ever uncertain about how to best assist a Blind or partially sighted customer, remember that they are the expert in their own experience, so don't hesitate to ask them directly.

Did you know?

There are 4,500 British Sign Language users in NI and 1,500 using Irish Sign Language.

If you would like to learn how to communicate useful hospitality phrases in British Sign Language, CPL Learning offers this free, 10-minute course to help you do just that. For Irish Sign Language, this video shows some useful terms, or you can visit Sign Language Ireland for other courses.

RNIB's good practice hints and tips on creating inclusive experiences for blind and partially sighted customers:

We use the capitalised form of Blind when referring to the Blind community or individuals who identify as part of that cultural or political identity group. For example, phrases like Blind people or the Blind community reflect this recognition. However, lowercase blind is appropriate in non-identity-specific contexts, such as describing conditions or environments - for instance, "blind spots."

Ensure clear, highly contrasting wayfinding and navigation is present at the entrance to your venue, inside the building or experience itself, and on approach to the exit.

The access routes signposted should be free from of obstacles, trip hazards and other obstructions to promote a safe and stress-free experience for all.

If your attraction or experience relies on visual displays, provide audio described commentary to enhance the immersive and user experience for your Blind and partially sighted customers. We'd recommend that this is co-created with those who have lived experience of sight loss.

Providing accessibility information online can really aid preparation, but it must be able to be read by screen reader users - conduct manual testing to ensure that this is the case. For more information on digital accessibility, go to Module 6: Marketing your Accessibility.

Further information relating to communicating with Blind people and people living with sight loss, learning how to be a sighted guide, and promoting experiences such as object handling and touch tours can be found on the VocalEyes resources page.

RNIB's good practice hints and tips on creating inclusive experiences for blind and partially sighted customers:

Around 7% of people who are registered blind or partially sighted use Braille (RNIB, 2022). Companies such as All Things Dotty can help you provide key information in braille and large print.

You can get free online sighted guide training from Guide Dogs UK, who also provide top 10 tips for sighted guiding in a short video.

Apps that promote accessible identification and wayfinding can be particularly useful to people who are Blind or living with sight loss. These include GoodMaps and Wayman, which provides on-demand indoor and outdoor navigation on a user's mobile phone, and Be My Eyes, which allows people who are Blind and partially sighted to connect with a sighted volunteer over live video should they need assistance with tasks such as checking tickets, item prices or locating a room in an unfamiliar building.

Case Study: Game of Thrones Studio Tour – setting the standard for inclusive visitor experiences

The Game of Thrones Studio Tour, located in Banbridge, is more than a must-see destination for fans of the global television phenomenon - it is leading the way in inclusive visitor experiences.

By prioritising thoughtful design, assistive technology, and a trained support team, the Studio Tour aims to ensure that all guests, regardless of ability, can immerse themselves in the fantasy world of Westeros. The Studio Tour team aim to balance immersive storytelling with universal access - ensuring guests with sensory, mobility, visual, or auditory needs are equally engaged and supported.

From the moment guests arrive, the Studio Tour demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity through both physical infrastructure and staff awareness.

Mobility & Physical Accessibility

- The entire attraction is fully wheelchair accessible, featuring level pathways and adapted heights for key displays and interactive elements. Mobility scooters are welcome, and wheelchairs are available on-site (pre-booking required). Accessible toilets are located throughout, and changing facilities are available in the Lobby and Studio Café.
- Blue Badge parking is limited but available with pre-booking, and an accessible shuttle service operates from The Boulevard in Banbridge.



Case Study: Game of Thrones Studio Tour – setting the standard for inclusive visitor experiences

Support for Assistance Dogs

Registered guide dogs, hearing dogs, and medical alert dogs are welcome throughout the Studio Tour. Guests are advised to bring formal documentation.

Autism & Sensory-Friendly Design

- For visitors with autism or sensory processing needs, the Studio Tour has made targeted adjustments:
- Noise-cancelling headphones are available upon request.
- A calm Sensory Room in the Lobby provides a low-stimulus environment with soft furnishings for breaks.
- Priority queuing is available on request to avoid overwhelming crowds or long waits.
- Staff are trained to recognize Sunflower and JAM lanyards, offering additional support discreetly and respectfully.

Case Study: Game of Thrones Studio Tour – setting the standard for inclusive visitor experiences

Support for Visually Impaired Guests

- While some areas feature low lighting to preserve authenticity, assistance dogs are welcome.
- Although touch tours are not offered (to preserve original props and sets), staff assistance is available.
- Clear signage, wayfinding, and staff guidance help enhance orientation throughout the space.

Speech-to-Text Technology for Hearing Impairments

One of the standout features of the Studio Tour's inclusive offering is its speech-to-text support via the Tour app. Guests with hearing difficulties can:

- Access transcriptions of audio content directly on the app.
- Receive assistance from trained staff to set up and navigate the app if needed.

This ensures that dialogue-heavy scenes, narration, and story content are not lost to those with hearing impairments, making the entire experience accessible and engaging.

Case Study: Game of Thrones Studio Tour – setting the standard for inclusive visitor experiences

Carer Support

Guests who require assistance can request one free carer ticket per paying adult with a disability.

- These must be booked in advance through Visitor Services.

Guests may be asked to provide supporting documentation, such as a Blue Badge or Access Card, when requesting a carer ticket.

Flexible Tour Format

The Studio Tour is self-paced, typically taking 2–3 hours, with flexibility for those who may require more time or breaks. Guests are encouraged to explore the Studio Shop and Café at their own comfort level.

At the Game of Thrones Studio Tour, accessibility isn't an afterthought - it's woven into the very fabric of the experience. Whether navigating in a wheelchair, seeking a sensory break, or accessing dialogue through speech-to-text, every guest is empowered to explore the world of Westeros fully, safely, and comfortably.



Customers with assistance dogs

While most customers with assistance dogs will have a sensory disability, it is important to note that assistance dogs are also trained to help those with autism, epilepsy, diabetes, physical disabilities and more. Thousands of people depend on assistance dogs to help with daily activities that others may take for granted. Beyond performing practical tasks and aiding with navigation, these dogs provide a vital sense of confidence and comfort to their owners.

Assistance dogs are not pets and should never be approached or treated as such. Much like you should ask before touching a customer's mobility aid, check with the owner before approaching an assistance dog (and don't get defensive if they say 'no'!).

The DDA requires service providers to make "reasonable adjustments" to any of their policies, practices or procedures which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a Disabled person, compared to a person who is not disabled, to make use of the goods, facilities or services. It is likely that a service provider may be obliged to not enforce a "no dogs" policy in respect of assistance dogs. Therefore, you should attempt to accommodate the needs of someone who has a support animal for such conditions, and have a valid, justifiable reason if you refuse to allow the animal on the premises.

Did you know?

Assistance dogs may also be providing support to people with other disabilities. For more information check Assistance Dogs NI and Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.



Neurodiversity and Non-Visible Disabilities

Neurodiversity refers to the diversity of human minds, and the infinite variation in neuro-cognitive function with regards to:

- Learning;
- Social engagement;
- Mood;
- Mental functions;
- Cognitive functions;
- Sensory functions.

It is estimated that one in seven people are neurodivergent (University of Edinburgh, 2020), and while conditions such as dyslexia, ADHD and PTSD, Tourette's, Parkinson's, depression and anxiety are all also considered neurodivergent conditions, this module will focus on the neurodivergent and non-visible conditions of Autism and Dementia.

Autistic customers

Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how people see the world and interact with others. It is a spectrum condition, which means while all autistic people share certain characteristics, being autistic will affect them in different ways. Often people feel that being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

In Northern Ireland, 1 in 20 children have a diagnosis of autism. The NI Census 2021 recorded that there are 35,367 adults and children with an autism diagnosis (1.85%). The statistics suggest that there could be a huge number of undiagnosed adults, as there are many adults who do not yet have a formal diagnosis of autism. The prevalence in Ireland is suggested as 3.38%.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people, which can make it an overwhelming and isolating place. Some autistic people also have learning disabilities and/or mental health conditions. With the correct support and removal of barriers, tourism businesses can provide inclusive experiences for autistic people.

https://youtu.be/Ezv85LMFx2E

Autistic people can (but will not always):

- Find it challenging to understand and use language for communication and could interpret idiomatic expressions like "his head is in the clouds" in a literal sense.
- Find it challenging to interpret and use tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and the unspoken social cues of communication, such as the natural flow of conversations.
- Struggle to make and keep friends and maintain other social relationships.
- Find it difficult to understand and predict people's behaviour.
- Have a strong need to stick to the familiar and find change and unexpected situations stressful.
- Have sensory sensitivities, for example over-sensitivity to loud noises, certain lights and strong smells.
- Have intense special interests.



Autistic people can (but will not always):

Although almost everyone has heard of autism, only 16% of autistic people and their families think the public understand autism in a meaningful way. This lack of understanding has a daily impact on autistic people's lives and is one of the major barriers they face to engaging in education, employment and leisure activities.

Understanding autism and making appropriate adjustments can make a big difference to the experiences of autistic people and their families or carers.

As their 'Too Much Information' campaign came to an end in 2018, the National Autistic Society published research that showed:

- 79% of autistic people and 70% of families said they felt socially isolated.
- 50% of autistic people and their families sometimes don't go out because of concern about people's reaction to their autism.
- 28% of autistic people have been asked to leave a public place because of behaviour associated with their autism.

For more information and training courses check out Autism NI.

Autistic people can (but will not always):

Many of the barriers experienced are due to a lack of public understanding but the nature of some environments – noisy, busy and filled with overwhelming sensory information – can also cause difficulties. Pre-visit information or supporting material can help autistic people and their families to prepare themselves properly for a visit. Investing in training helps owners and staff understand autism, enabling them to feel confident communicating with autistic people and removing any disabling barriers.

If plans or environments change prior to a visit, do your best to notify all customers in advance.

Where possible, create low arousal environments for your autistic customers. This could include:

- Providing a quiet area like the chill out room.
- Producing sensory maps that outline quieter routes and areas with dimmed lighting.
- Offering opening hours or specific sessions for autistic customers.
- Providing ear defenders and sensory activity packs for those who require them.

Autistic customers may need time to process information, so be patient after asking a question or giving instructions. You can always rephrase a statement or write it down if required.

Communicate calmly, positively and patiently with all your customers, as many disabilities – including autism – are not always visible. Be understanding if a customer appears overwhelmed or is having a difficult moment.

Case Study: Belfast Zoo's commitment being inclusive and accessible

As one of Northern Ireland's top visitor attractions, Belfast Zoo is known for its commitment to wildlife conservation and education. But beyond the animal enclosures and scenic hillside views, the Zoo has taken a leading role in creating an inclusive and supportive environment to welcome and support autistic and neurodivergent visitors.

The challenge for visitor attractions

For many autistic visitors and their families, public attractions can be overwhelming due to sensory overload, unpredictable environments, and lack of awareness from staff. Belfast Zoo aimed to break down these barriers, transforming the visitor experience through thoughtful planning, autism-specific resources, and community engagement.

Developing a solution

Through its collaboration with Autism NI, Belfast Zoo implemented a comprehensive Accessibility Action Plan that focused on staff training, environmental adjustments, and sensory support tools. As part of this plan, it implemented the following features and adjustments:



Case Study: Belfast Zoo's commitment being inclusive and accessible

Sensory support

- Sensory packs: Available at the entrance, these packs include fidget toys and tools to help with sensory regulation during the visit.
- Ear defenders: Provided to assist visitors with sound sensitivity in busier or louder areas of the zoo.
- Sensory signage & maps: Visual aids and custom maps help with orientation and transitions, easing anxiety by offering a clear guide through the space.

Staff Training & Ongoing Development

- All staff receive autism-specific training through Autism NI, ensuring they understand how to provide sensitive and informed support.
- Belfast Zoo created and follows a bespoke Accessibility Action Plan, regularly reviewed for improvements.
- Collaboration with Autism NI ensures the zoo remains up to date with best practices and community needs.

Environmental Adjustments

- Quiet dining areas: Designated calm spaces are available for families who need to take breaks in a low-stimulation setting.
- Quiet hours: Specific times are allocated for visits with reduced sensory input — including lower visitor numbers, softened lighting, and reduced noise levels.
- Clear, predictable pathways and signage help reduce stress caused by uncertainty or overstimulation.

Case Study: Belfast Zoo's commitment being inclusive and accessible

Receiving recognition

In recognition of these efforts, Belfast Zoo received the Autism NI Impact Award, validating its commitment to inclusion and its tangible efforts to support autistic visitors and staff. The award signifies more than a checklist - it reflects a culture shift within the organisation toward genuine accessibility and empathy.

Belfast Zoo's autism-friendly initiatives demonstrate how public spaces can evolve to become safe, supportive, and enriching for everyone. Through partnership, training, and intentional design, the zoo has transformed not only its facilities but also its role in the community - from a visitor attraction to a model of inclusive practice.

Case Study: Enhancing an inclusive and accessible experience at Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

Introduction

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium has made significant strides in striving to be as inclusive and accessible as possible. Recognising the diverse needs of its audience, Armagh Observatory and Planetarium introduced a comprehensive sensory map in 2023, aiming to create an inclusive environment that accommodates individuals with sensory sensitivities.

Visitor attractions can present sensory challenges due to factors like crowded spaces, and unfamiliar environments. Armagh Observatory and Planetarium identified the need to address these barriers to ensure a comfortable and engaging experience for all visitors.

Sensory map implementation

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium developed a detailed sensory map to guide visitors through the facility, highlighting areas based on sensory stimuli levels. The map categorises spaces as:

- Quieter/calmer areas
- Can get busy
- Busiest zones



Case Study: Enhancing an inclusive and accessible experience at Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

This tool enables visitors to plan their journey according to their sensory preferences, reducing anxiety and enhancing the overall experience.

Key accessibility features

- Sensory Room and Kepler Room: Designated quiet spaces equipped with interactive stations and sensory-friendly activities.
- Sensory bags: Available at reception, these include ear defenders and comfort items to assist with sensory regulation.
- Changing places facility: An accessible restroom equipped with features like a hoist, changing bench, and adjustable sink, catering to visitors with complex needs.

Commitment to inclusivity

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium's commitment to inclusivity is further demonstrated through initiatives like the Autistic Youth Forum, established in collaboration with community groups such as More Than Words and the Middletown Centre for Autism. This forum gave children an opportunity to provide honest feedback on what they need, increase their confidence and for them to see change based on their feedback and suggestions. In May 2025 we were also awarded the AutismNI Impact Award for our work on improving accessibility for our autistic visitors.

The introduction of the sensory map and associated features has significantly improved the inclusive and accessible experience. By proactively addressing sensory challenges, Armagh

Observatory and Planetarium has created a more welcoming environment, encouraging greater inclusion and participation in its educational and visitor experience.

Further Information

For more details on Armagh Observatory and Planetarium's accessibility features or to view the sensory map, visit their Accessibility Page or download the Sensory Map PDF.

Customers with dementia

Dementia is an umbrella term for several diseases that impact different parts of the brain and change the functions those parts of the brain control. Dementia may affect people in different ways, and can include: memory loss, confusion and needing help with daily tasks, problems with language and understanding and changes in behaviour.

There are many different types of dementia, but the most common type is Alzheimer's disease.

There are over 20,000 people in Northern Ireland and 64,000 people in Ireland living with dementia. There are over 200 different types of dementia.

The likelihood of developing dementia increases significantly with age. One in 14 people aged over 65 has dementia. This rises to 1 in 6 for people aged over 80.

Dementia can affect younger people too. This is often called young-onset dementia. Around 1 in 20 people with dementia are younger than 65. There are over 70,800 people in the UK who have young-onset dementia.

Dementia is progressive, and different types of dementia tend to affect people in different ways. Dementia is a non-visible impairment, and it is therefore important for businesses to provide good support and information to every customer to help remove barriers.

A person with dementia might:

- Have issues with their day-to-day memory, for example: difficulties recalling events that happened recently.
- Struggle concentrating, planning or organising, for example: difficulty with solving problems or carrying out a sequence of tasks.

Customers with dementia

- Experience difficulties with language, for example: following a conversation or finding the right word.
- Experience confusion and disorientation related to times or places, for example: losing track of the day or date, or becoming confused about where they are (even in familiar places).
- Have visual perceptual difficulties, for example: when judging distances or misinterpreting patterns and reflections.
- Have heightened senses which make certain environments challenging, for example: if too noisy, warm or busy.
- Take longer to process information, leading to the need for patience with communication, movement and decision making.
- Find that their symptoms can vary a lot from one day to another.

Common challenges faced by people affected by dementia:

- Unfamiliar and busy environments, such as information desks and service counters, which can make communication difficult and increase confusion.
- Navigating new places, as people with dementia can sometimes get lost.
- Worries about locating and using the toilet. People with dementia may also experience difficulties with continence.
- Difficulties with mobility and getting around, for example: challenges with a lack of handrails, patterned carpets, black mats or shiny surfaces. Dark or reflective elements within the built environment can be misinterpreted as holes or water, respectively, and therefore avoided by someone with dementia.
- Worries that they or their loved one with dementia will get lost or walk off at night if the room or venue is not secure.

Good practice hints and tips from the Alzheimer's Society for assisting customers with dementia:

When interacting with a customer who has dementia, direct your attention to them rather than their companions. Minimize any distractions in the environment, and practice patience throughout the conversation. Additionally, remember to use non-verbal communication, such as smiling, to create a welcoming atmosphere.

You might want to recap at points in the conversation to check understanding, and feel free to rephrase what you're trying to say if needed. Listen carefully and let your customer express themselves without judgement; don't be dismissive or make assumptions.

Provide information on the dementia-friendly facilities you have, such as quiet places, accessible toilets and inclusive signage at key decision points.

Provide information on local dementia-friendly businesses, activities, events and health care providers to allow people to plan in advance.

Provide your customers with dementia with confirmation of their booking, clearly stating the amount paid or to be paid on arrival, as well as information on your venue. You may also want to think about providing written confirmation on request, and reminders for the booking closer to the date.



Good practice hints and tips from the Alzheimer's Society for assisting customers with dementia:

Give your customers a named contact if they have any questions after their booking, before arrival or during their visit.

Use welcoming terminology when describing your customers – for example, say "living with dementia" instead of "suffering with dementia".

Ensure your staff wear name badges and make it clear they can support people with dementia – for example, by wearing the Dementia Friend badge.

Flexibility, discretion, and a welcoming attitude are essential. Be ready to help customers with tasks like filling out forms. Additionally, offer a quiet space and refreshments for those who might feel uneasy in new and unfamiliar environments.

Did you know?

Being able to provide wider understanding and support to the family members, carers and companions of someone with dementia is also key. These people can give guidance on activities and decision-making, build confidence on who to trust, confirm their loved one with dementia will enjoy something, and provide support in navigating what can sometimes be a very confusing world.

Launched in May 2023 to support people living with dementia, and those that support them, the Dementia Services Development Centre (DSDC) at the University of Stirling has launched the Environments for Ageing and Dementia Design Assessment Tool (EADDAT). EADDAT can be used by businesses to understand how their space can be more supportive for people living with dementia and, if necessary, make small adjustments that can make the environment more accommodating. It also has a self-certification scheme that can be used in marketing material.

Dementia Friends is an Alzheimer's Society initiative with aims to change perceptions of dementia by promoting awareness and education. Individuals and organisations can join the initiative and show their support by attending online or face-to-face information sessions.

Hidden, multiple and complex disabilities

Hidden disabilities

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme enables people to voluntarily share that they have a non-visible impairment and therefore may need some extra help, understanding or just a little more time. Customers may wear a sunflower lanyard, pin, wristband or present a card to staff to show that they may need support.

A similar initiative is the JAM card (or 'Just a Minute' card). A JAM Card allows people with a hidden disability or communication barrier to tell others that they need extra time and understanding in a private and easy way.

There is also the Dementia JAM Card that may be a key fob, and the JAM app for smartphone users.

Customers with multiple and complex disabilities

Some customers will have more than one disability or a complex condition that may require particular levels of assistance, awareness and flexibility. Do be aware of this and communicate openly with people to find out how you might best be able to support them.

Good practice hints and tips from the charity Sense for assisting customers with multiple and complex disabilities:

Basic staff knowledge of disability awareness and communication methods such as BSL (British Sign Language) and ISL (Irish Sign Language), Makaton, and the Deafblind Manual can be really helpful. Similarly, it is good for staff to be clear on fire safety and evacuation plans and know where medical personnel are located in case they are needed.

When planning events and attractions, pay close attention to how food and drinks are prepared and served. Ensure that seating areas are designed for safe and relaxed dining experiences. Allow enough time and space for meals, as supported mealtimes may take an hour or longer.

Some individuals may receive 1:1, 2:1, or even 3:1 support. While you are not expected to provide this level of assistance, you should be ready to support those individuals and listen to them, as well as their support workers. They are the best sources of information about their needs and timing.

If possible, it is really useful for all businesses to have locations where medication, foods, formulas and similar may be refrigerated.

Maintaining a clean and safe environment is crucial, but it doesn't need to feel sterile. Some individuals enjoy spending time on the floor or find sensory satisfaction in exploring objects with their mouths. Therefore, ensuring cleanliness is essential.

Importantly, try to ensure that customers get one point of contact who is helpful, flexible and able to communicate throughout the booking process to really learn about someone's access accommodations. It's vital for safety, but also peace of mind.

Wider Customer Groups

Older customers with age-related challenges

It's important to recognise that, due to the relationship between aging and disabilities, the senior market segment usually includes more individuals with health conditions and disabilities. Those who acquire conditions later in life may not identify as disabled, yet they can still benefit significantly from accessible features and facilities. It's helpful for them to communicate their needs in advance. Using appropriate language is crucial; refer to Section 4: An Inclusive Welcome for more information on the importance of using accessibility-related terminology rather than disability-focused language.

Customers with health vulnerabilities

Many individuals and families are still wary of visiting tourism venues – or unable to do so – due to the risk of contracting respiratory infections and illnesses. Whilst social distancing and mask mandates are no longer in operation, respecting personal choice (and ensuring your business has flexibility to suit these choices) is still important. Ensuring spaces are well-ventilated, using technology such as HEPA filtration where possible, advertising quieter visiting times, and having devices and equipment on hand to protect yourself and others when asked are all small but effective ways to provide an inclusive welcome to customers with health vulnerabilities.

A Moment for Reflection

Is there a particular part of this section that resonated with you or taught you something new? Take some time to research the topic further and prepare a brief presentation for your colleagues. Remember, sharing knowledge is a great way to support each other!



Exploring New Insights and Sharing Knowledge

In this activity, you'll reflect on the key themes and ideas presented in this section of the toolkit. Identify a concept, statistic, or practice that resonated with you or provided a new perspective.

Learning is most impactful when shared, and this task encourages collaboration and collective growth. Take time to research the topic further to deepen your understanding. Reflect on how this knowledge could benefit your workplace or community.

Your objective is to explore the topic thoroughly and communicate your findings in a way that is engaging, relevant, and practical. Sharing knowledge reinforces your own learning while fostering a supportive environment for continuous improvement.

Description: Reflect on the toolkit content and identify a concept, fact, or practice that resonated with you or taught you something new. This is your chance to deepen your understanding and explore its relevance further.

Action:

- Choose one key takeaway from the section that stood out to you or introduced a new perspective.
- Conduct additional research to expand your knowledge of the topic.
- Consider how this insight could be applied in your workplace or shared with others to promote collaboration and growth.
- Write a clear and concise summary of your chosen topic, emphasizing its significance and practical applications.
- Focus on making your response thoughtful, insightful, and relevant to the course themes of accessibility, inclusivity, and continuous improvement.

TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND

An Inclusive Welcome

Section 4: An Inclusive Welcome

Three Top Tips for this section:

- The key to providing an inclusive welcome is communicating inclusively with your customers and colleagues and offering opportunities to access information equitably.
- Engaging with customers who are Disabled or have accessibility requirements does not have to induce the 'fear factor'. This module includes hints and tips for both written and face-to-face communication.
- If you are ever in doubt, don't make assumptions - ask and learn. We're all on this journey together and being open to education and improvement is key.

A Moment for Reflection

Before starting to read this section, think about what your business currently does to provide an inclusive welcome to all customers, and particularly those with accessibility requirements.

Providing an inclusive and accessible welcome

Ensuring that your customers feel welcome, valued and have an equal experience is partly about the design of the built environment and your digital accessibility (both of which we'll look at later in this toolkit). But ultimately, an inclusive and accessible welcome can be made or broken by one thing: communication. In this module you'll find advice and tips on all methods and forms of communication to help you build confidence in what kind of communication you need to include to make that welcome fully inclusive and accessible, and how best to interact with your customers who are Disabled or have accessibility requirements.

Whether or not clients have particular accessibility needs, a successful business depends on intentional communication, empathy, kindness, and awareness. To create a space that is welcoming and inclusive for everyone, these ideas are essential.

Why do these elements promote inclusivity?

Communication: Using your communication channels to showcase your company's commitment to disability inclusion makes it evident that all your customers, including those with accessibility needs, are welcome to your business.

Provide full information about your business accessible features so they can decide if it meets their accessibility needs. Share images or videos that feature your space, provide a contact for accessibility inquiries, and publicly demonstrate your commitment to making your facility as accessible as possible. Information is key to ensuring your customers feel comfortable in your space.

Empathy, compassion, and awareness: It's essential to provide your employees with disability inclusion and accessibility training. Every customer will feel welcomed and supported if there is a team that is aware of accessibility requirements and has the compassion and knowledge to accommodate them.

Notifying customers that members of your staff have undergone accessibility training fosters confidence and helps establish your company as really inclusive and welcoming.



Inclusive communication hints and tips

In a survey conducted by disability charity Scope, more than two thirds of people affirm that they felt uncomfortable interacting with Disabled people - mainly because they were worried about seeming patronising or using the wrong terminology. Even with accessibility training, it's common to feel unsure about how to approach some situations. To help reduce this uncertainty and make your interactions more inclusive, here are some helpful hints and tips to keep in mind:

- **We don't know what we don't know:** It's fine to not always have the answers to every single situation. Disability and accessibility are broad and complex areas and you may not always have the information. The key is to accept your mistakes with humility, and a willingness to learn and improve.
- **Find comfort in the discomfort:** Learning always involves some degree of discomfort as part of the process. Use discomfort as an opportunity to grow in your learning journey. And whenever you are unsure about how to approach a situation, ask the person for their preferences.
- **Empathy, listening and advocating will be your greatest tools:** Inclusive communication starts with empathy. Be an active listener and try to understand rather than guess. Don't be afraid to advocate for the inclusion of others, whether it's a colleague, a customer or someone connected to the business - if you identify barriers or potential improvements that can be made in your business, you can advocate for them.
- **Value lived experience:** Everyone's experience of disability is unique and it is important to avoid generalisations. Those with accessibility requirements will always be experts in their own lived experience. So, where possible, take the time to listen to people's personal preferences around language and communication, and follow their lead. And, if ever you're unsure of how to refer to someone, or how to best support them – ask.

Methods of communication

- **Provide multiple communication channels:** Not everyone is comfortable or able to speak on the phone. Similarly, some may find it difficult to write an email or fill in forms. Offer multiple ways for your customers to contact you - before, during and after their visit. Clearly outline the communication channels available, while expressing your willingness to adapt to their specific needs.
- **Proactively address your customer communication preferences**: By asking about communication preferences up front, you take the awkwardness out of having to make special requests. This approach also encourages your customers to share their accessibility needs, allowing you to better accommodate them and create a welcoming, inclusive experience.
- **Check in with customers who disclose a disability or health condition**: If a customer informs you that they have a disability or health condition, ask if the current method of communication works for them or if there's anything you can do to make it more accessible. For example: A customer who is deaf or has hearing loss may prefer email or video calls. These adaptations may support them to continue their conversation with ease by, for example, lipreading if necessary.

Written communication

If you are providing written information to your customers – either online or in-person – concise and clear text is key.

Some hints and tips are provided below:

- Avoid technical terms and be personable where possible. Plain English and active verbs are key.
- Keep sentences short and clear so that they can be accessed by those with varying access requirements.
- Be consistent with terms throughout documentation so that familiarity can be built by the reader. Glossaries and supporting images can also be helpful to aid understanding.
- Use a minimum font size of 12 point and make information available in large print (at least 16 point but ideally 18 point) for people with sight loss.
- Use plain sans serif fonts such as Arial as these fonts are easier to identify without decorative features.
- Use black text on a white background for the highest contrast.
- If it is a digital document and it includes pictures make sure you include alternative text (alt text) allowing Blind and partially sighted people to engage with images and other visuals content.
- If it is a digital document and it includes videos add captions and audio descriptions.
- If your document includes colour cues, make sure that colour is not the only means of communicating information, as Blind, visually impaired or colour-blind people may miss the meaning.

Face-to-Face communication

When communicating face-to-face with customers who are Disabled or have accessibility requirements, it's important to be clear and purposeful whilst adapting to individual needs:

- Introduce yourself at the start of the conversation and announce when you leave - specifically when you interact with Blind or partially sighted customers.
- Don't speak too quickly, or patronisingly slowly.
- Do not assume that a person with an apparent disability needs assistance.
- Offering assistance in broad terms such as "Let me know if you need anything" opens the door without assumptions of capacity or lack of independence.
- Be patient, listen, and ask questions that will enable your customer to tell you what they require.
- Seek to understand their lived experience and recognize that disclosing their disability is not something anyone should be expected to do.
- Speak directly to the person requiring assistance, not other customers they may be with.

Face-to-Face communication

- Body language says a lot, so always appear calm, warm and professional, using gestures to provide context where necessary - but remember that not all customers will be able to engage with body language, so be clear with your dialogue.
- Do not touch a person's mobility equipment.
- When engaging in a conversation, select a position where you can engage comfortably and that reduces distance between you. For example if your customer is a wheelchair user or a Little Person.
- Do not pet or talk to a guide dog or service animal.
- If you do not understand what the person is saying, ask the person to repeat what they said and then repeat it back to ensure you understood.
- Do not speak for the person or attempt to finish their sentences.
- Avoid using sensorial verbs. For example: Do you see what I mean? Alternative: Do you understand what I mean?

Interpretation

Whether communicating in-person or virtually, some of your customers, particularly those who are deaf or have hearing loss will require interpretation services. Take a look at suppliers such as SignVideo and their Video Relay Service (VRS) for businesses, and face-to-face BSL/ISL interpretation provided by SignSource, SignSolutions, IRIS to find out more.

Inclusive Language

Many people and organisations who see disability as an equality issue prefer the term ‘Disabled people’. This is because they think of themselves as people who are disabled by barriers in society and not by their condition. Other people may prefer to use the term ‘person with a disability’, as person-first language resonates with them.

Difference between Person First Language and Identity First Language

- **Person First Language:** Puts the person before the disability, emphasising their individuality

  This approach can help remind others that people are not defined by their disabilities.

  For example, “People with disabilities."

- **Identity First Language**: Puts the disability before the person, which some people prefer as it embraces disability as an integral part of their identity.

  This approach is often used within Disabled communities to assert pride in their identity.

  For example, "Disabled person" or "Deaf person."



Inclusive Language

Key things to keep in mind:

- The global Disabled community continuously advocates for identity-first language but at the same time not everyone with a disability will refer to themselves as Disabled.
- Disabled people can identify themselves as they wish.
- Always ask individuals about their preferred language.
- When interacting directly with your customers, using terminology rooted in accessibility and inclusion, rather than disability, is a positive way to engage with more customers, regardless of how they identify.
- An important caveat to this, however, is that disability-focused language can support your business from an SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) perspective; it is likely that some potential customers may search for 'wheelchair accessible lodges' or 'disabled-friendly hikes', for example.

The importance of inclusive language

Attitudes are greatly influenced by the language we use when speaking and writing about individuals. Either way, it can strengthen negative prejudices or advance equality and understanding. As an example: Phrases such as 'suffers from', 'is a victim of', 'handicapped', 'invalid', 'crippled by', or 'wheelchair bound' are used to characterise Disabled people, which reinforces negative preconceptions and gives the impression that you understand how they feel about their condition. Many Disabled people see their lives as essential components of who they are, rather than through the lens of survival

Remember that while empathy is valuable, using sympathy is inappropriate. Use the tables below as a reference:

Inclusive Language Recommendations

Recommendations	Examples to Avoid	Actions
Always ask individuals about their preferred language	Don't make assumptions.	Integrate this practice into your interactions.
Don't just focus on the medical approach	Don't define individuals just by their medical condition. Don't focus on treatments, cures, diagnoses or medical conditions	The medical approach is not always inclusive. It often sees disabilities as something to be fixed but does not always consider the social and environmental accessibility barriers that Disabled people face.

Recommendations	Examples to Avoid	Actions
Avoid using euphemisms	Differently-abled, special needs, handicapped	Use Disabled person or person with a disability.
Avoid putting "The" before a group of Disabled people	The Disabled, The Deaf, The Blind	Instead, use "the Disabled community," "the Deaf community," or "the Blind community," which indicate belonging rather than generalization.
Avoid negative connotations	Suffers from, victim of, afflicted with. Suffering from autism, victim of cerebral palsy, confined to a wheelchair.	This language evokes pity rather than respect. Instead, say: "Living with autism," "has cerebral palsy," "uses a wheelchair."
Stay away from stereotypes	Disabled people can't do many things that able-bodied people take for granted. Disabled people need constant help and support.	This language ignores the abilities and independence of Disabled people. Many lead independent lives and may only need specific support.
Disability doesn't exist to inspire others	"You're so inspirational for getting out of bed."	This language ignores the abilities and independence of Disabled people. Many lead independent lives and may only need specific support.
Be accurate about conditions	Person with special needs.	Use "Person with intellectual disabilities" instead.

Recommended words	Words to Avoid
Disabled person with disabilities	Person with special needs Person with special abilities Differently abled Special abilities Handicapped Handicapable Unhealthy Challenged Impaired
Disability	Problem Issue Condition Disorder Handicap Invalid Impairment
Non-Disabled	Able-bodied Normal Typical Healthy

Recommended words	Words to Avoid
Support Assist	Help
Has [name of condition]	Afflicted by Suffers from Victim of
Person with a mental health condition	Mental patient, insane, mad
Deaf or hearing loss	Hearing impaired
Blind or partially sighted, or people living with sight loss	Visual impaired
Wheelchair user	Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound
Learning Disabilities	Mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal
Little person, person of short stature, person with achondroplasia	Dwarf (depending on region), midget

Recommended words	Words to Avoid
Person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression	An epileptic, diabetic, depressive, and so on
Person with Down syndrome	Mongoloid, special person, Down
Non-talking	Mute, dumb, non-verbal
Person with albinism	Albino
Seizures	Fits, spells, attacks
Accessible parking, parking reserved for Disabled persons	Handicapped parking
Accessible bathroom	Handicapped bathroom

You may find this guidance from Scope about using disability inclusive language in the workplace useful. The Business Disability Forum also has a guide to inclusive language and an A-Z of disability guide.

Focusing on access requirements

Disabled people are not expected to disclose their disability. Asking someone to 'declare' their disability can be unhelpful as there may be several reasons why they don't wish to share this information. A better approach is to ask about any access requirements that someone may have, as it is less intrusive whilst still giving you the information you need. In fact, asking about access requirements often gives you much more useful information; a customer may tell you that their disability is due to cerebral palsy, which doesn't really tell you all that much about what they require and the facilities and/or support you should provide. If you asked about their access requirements, however, they might tell you that they're wheelchair users and require accessible parking, toilets and step-free access.

Asking appropriate questions

If someone tells you that they are disabled, there is no expectation for you to be an expert and know what their access requirements are, as everyone is different. It is perfectly acceptable to ask someone what assistance you can provide. Asking guests at time of booking if they have any accessibility requirements, for example, can help you make any necessary arrangements ahead of their arrival. It will also reassure the guest that you are keen to understand their individual requirements in order to provide a great experiences.

Being Open to Education

When thinking about language, it's important to be open to education. The appropriate terminology changes frequently. If a customer corrects your language, resist the temptation to get defensive, and instead listen to alternatives to use in future. However, don't assume that the language preferred by one Disabled person will be representative of what every person likes or resonates with; ask if you're ever unsure.

Ultimately, using appropriate terminology and communicating confidently with your customers is largely about using common-sense. If you mean well, most of what you say will be taken well by those you talk to, and making a mistake with the best of intentions is better than not trying at all!

Supporting Inclusive Communication

Not everyone speaks or understands English perfectly, and the way in which you communicate should allow for this. Present material clearly and simply. Avoid words you would never use in everyday speech e.g., use 'near' instead of 'in the vicinity of'.

Use alternative ways of communication: images, pictograms and symbols can help users navigate text, for example a pictogram of a car or bus to indicate transport. Where you use images remember to add alt text.

Case study - Engage with Disabled people

It is useful to consult with Disability groups and your Disabled customers. For example, Glendun Self Catering engaged with a range of Disability organisations when designing their cottage and continue to ask their Disabled customers for feedback to improve their services. This is reflected in the wide range of accessible features available
Glendun Self Catering - Houses for Rent in Cushendall, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom – Airbnb

Case Study – Engage with Disabled

People Consult with Disabled people with a range of lived experience. For example the Grand Opera House, Belfast established a Disability Advisory Group that they consult about accessibility at the venue. https://www.goh.co.uk/yourvisit/accessibility/Providing dedicated accessible sessions and event

Providing dedicated accessible sessions and events

Although accessibility should be mainstreamed where possible, providing dedicated accessible sessions or events can help everybody to fully engage with and enjoy the experience. Access events are designed with Disabled visitors in mind, and include 'relaxed' opening hours and performances, BSL and ISL tours, and touch or audio described tours.

Offering accessible guided tours

If you offer guided tours, ensure they are accessible to all by following the useful guidance and top tips from Tourism Northern Ireland and the T-Guide accredited accessibility training for Tourist Guides.

Where possible, think about the types of access events you can provide.

- Relaxed showings are great for cinemas and theatres, which allow visitors to come and go as they please.
- BSL and ISL tours can be a standalone offer for deaf museum and gallery visitors, or one interpretation element of a wider tour.
- Family-focused exhibitions may be able to adapt activities quite easily in a way that is focused on a different sense, or alternative capability, allowing all family members to get involved, including Disabled children.
- And audio described tours can add a whole new exciting angle to the discovery of objects and artworks for those who are blind or partially sighted, so training staff in this may be particularly useful for cultural institutions.

Offering accessible guided tours

Whatever access event you decide to provide, do ensure that the availability of well-trained staff to either deliver or support the event or tour is one of your highest priorities. Secondly, it might be worth thinking about what other resources you'll need to provide to ensure things run smoothly – an accessible booking system and point of contact, a quiet area for decompression, and additional resources such as sensory maps and visual stories are all recommended.

Don't forget to promote your access events online - how else will new and existing visitors find out about such things and – just as importantly – have the confidence to book? Adding this information to an access-specific webpage on your website is a great way to start: For further information, please refer to **Module 6: Marketing your Accessibility.**

Staff awareness and training

To be able to confidently serve Disabled customers with accessibility requirements, you and your staff need to be disability aware. This training should be provided for all staff on induction and refreshed at regular intervals. Often, it's useful to provide written or recorded resources in addition to face-to-face training sessions to enable staff members to remind themselves of certain elements at their leisure.

There are several online and classroom style disability awareness training courses in addition to those mentioned elsewhere in this toolkit. The following list is not exhaustive but is indicative of some of the organisations in Northern Ireland that provide training and awareness support services to businesses and employers. Please note, Tourism NI do not and cannot endorse or recommend any of these organisations

- AbilityNet provides training and webinars focused on digital accessibility.
- AccessAble offers a range of online and face-to-face training courses targeted at all levels within an organisation. Courses aim to support staff to become more confident and comfortable in their engagement with both disabled customers and colleagues.
- ARC offer training related to people with a learning disability, autism and other support needs.
- Autism NI provide autism training for groups to build understanding of autism and how to build an inclusive approach.
- Aware NI offer a range of workplace wellbeing training programmes
- The Alzheimer's Society Dementia Friends initiative provides in-person Information Sessions, virtual Information Sessions and short online videos.
- Barnardo's Disability Awareness Training delivered by staff and young people online over video conferencing

Staff awareness and training

- Cedar offer bespoke disability awareness training co-delivered by the Cedar User Forum.
- Deafblind guidance on how to make your activities more attractive and inclusive to people who have sight and/or hearing loss.
- Disability Action provide Disability Awareness Training
- Disability Sport NI deliver the UK Disability Inclusion Training course suitable for anyone wishing to provide inclusive sports and active recreation opportunities.
- Downs Syndrome Association provide DSACTIVE Training, free, online training session is for providers of leisure, recreational and sports activity sessions.
- Epilepsy Action Northern Ireland provide support, advice and training and free online guidance videos.
- Guide Dogs Northern Ireland provide free Sighted Guide training, which covers basic guiding techniques.
- Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme has a business network membership that includes training on non-apparent disability and the sunflower scheme.

Staff awareness and training

- RNID offer CPD-accredited e-Learning courses help you and your staff communicate with deaf colleagues and customers.
- Lena by Inspire - mental health and well-being training
- Mencap offer guidance on understanding and busting myths around learning disability.
- NOW Group offer businesses inclusion and disability awareness training.
- Open Arts offer the Chatting for Change training programme to businesses and organisations across Northern Ireland.
- Purple provide free e-learning modules based on disability and customer service.
- RNID provides deaf awareness training for staff members.
- Sargent Group Consulting provide a free one hour online Dementia Tourism Workshop.
- Scope provides Disability in the Workplace training.
- Sense – offer Disability Awareness Training focusing on sight loss, hearing loss as well as hidden disabilities, such as neurodivergence and mental health conditions.
- Sign Source deliver high-quality teaching in deaf awareness and British Sign Language through in-person and web-based training, tailored for hospitality, retail, theatre, the arts and community settings.
- Tourism for All provides a suite of online training courses, including a free introductory course.

Staff awareness and training

It is also important that staff are familiar with the use and operation of all accessibility equipment such as hearing loops, emergency pull cords in toilets and hoists. Make sure your specialist equipment is regularly tested, always in working order and in good supply.

As part of induction, staff should also be made aware of schemes such as the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme (and similar initiatives such as the JAM card), so they are equipped to support customers with non-apparent disabilities if required.

Case study - Staff training

It is important that staff are offered training for example at Old Inn Crawfordsburn all staff complete disability awareness training.

Accessibility Guide (theoldinn.com)

Case Study –Deafblind friendly award

Shelleven Guest House in Bangor has become the first venue in Northern Ireland to be given a ‘Deafblind Friendly’ award by the charity Deafblind UK. This means that the establishment is deemed suitably accessible to host guests who have sight and hearing loss.

Deafblind UK rates Shelleven Guest House 'Deafblind Friendly' | Deafblind UK



Ensuring an Inclusive Welcome

Creating an inclusive environment for customers with accessibility requirements is not just about meeting legal responsibilities—it's about fostering meaningful connections and offering a welcoming experience for all. Reflecting on what you've learned in this section, now is the time to think practically about how you can implement changes that ensure every customer feels valued, respected, and included.

Description: This is your opportunity to translate the knowledge you've gained into actionable steps that enhance accessibility and inclusivity in your business. Think about how your physical space, digital platforms, and customer interactions can cater to diverse needs.

Action:

- Identify three new approaches or adjustments you can implement to create a more inclusive welcome for customers with accessibility requirements.
- Consider practical changes that align with the concepts discussed in this section, such as improving physical accessibility, enhancing communication methods, or training staff to provide empathetic and knowledgeable service.
- Reflect on how these actions will positively impact your customers and help your business stand out as a leader in accessibility and inclusion.
- Write your three actionable steps clearly and concisely, ensuring they are realistic, specific, and aligned with your business goals.

TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND

Accessible Features and Facilities



Section 5: Accessible Features and Facilities

Three Top Tips for this section:

- The built environment can include barriers to accessibility for Disabled customers, and we all have a responsibility to be aware of and remove these, where possible.
- 'Quick win' accessible features and facilities hints and tips are provided in this module for accommodation, attraction, food and beverage and events businesses.
- Read the technical design guidance in the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com to learn more about the accessibility standards and guidance your business should be aspiring to.

At this stage, after learning about different disabilities and accessibility requirements as well as what you can do to provide a more inclusive welcome to your customers, it is important to take stock. Considering only the built environment and not your website or internal culture (which we will get to later), spend a few minutes thinking about your business and venue as it is right now.

What accessibility barriers and solutions are present for a wheelchair user, someone who is deaf or has hearing loss, someone who is blind or partially sightled and someone who is neurodivergent, autistic or has dementia? You may wish to explore the accessibility personas within the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com to help with this activity.

Understanding the current state helps us to figure out exactly where we want to be, and how best to get there. This section (with support from the actionable checklists and technical design guidance in the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com) will help you do just that from a physical, built environment perspective.

A focus on the built environment

We've spent some time discussing the importance of operational accessibility so far in this toolkit. This includes an inclusive welcome and positive, empathetic communications with Disabled customers, and the availability of training resources for staff members. But still, the built environment poses many accessibility barriers for your customers and colleagues.

Consider the end-to-end journey you make every day. You might take public transport, go to the local shop to grab some lunch, or arrange to meet with friends at a nearby bar or café after work. All of these can present challenges to Disabled people, particularly those with mobility disabilities, because of access barriers in the built environment. And that's what we are going to be discussing in this section.

The International Standard for tourism and related services ISO 21902:2021 says that accessible tourism services should:

a) Take into account the various access requirements that meet the needs of tourists, including Disabled people;

b) Be provided in an equitable way or through reasonable adjustments where necessary;

c) Take into account the safety and security of users.

A focus on the built environment

Accessible tourism services should:

- Allow flexibility and choice;
- Be in sufficient supply for the number of customers (e.g. accessible menus, accessible areas in venues, hearing loops)
- Be available without surcharge, wherever reasonable.

First, it's important to look internally and figure out where the built environment may present 'stumbling blocks' within your business. We would recommend working with accessibility consultants, and people who have lived experience of Disability, whether local stakeholders or members of disability groups, to take a broad look at the end-to-end customer experience and all the touchpoints this entails. Such as:

- Arriving in the local area,
- Parking or navigating to your venue from public transport,
- Welcome, ticketing and/or check-in touchpoints,
- The experience itself and the accessibility features and facilities within it,
- To leaving, reviewing and considering whether to book again.

Where are the accessibility 'gaps' for different users at these different touchpoints in your business? Which areas should be prioritised for improvement when time, budget and business capacity are all considered?

Accessible features and facilities within your business

Did you know?

A sign saying 'No Dogs' could be seen as discriminatory under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Many Disabled people use an assistance dog, this includes guide dogs for people with sight loss, autism assistance dogs, disability assistance dogs and deaf assistance dogs.

These are typically highly trained animals, see that Assistance Dogs NI website for more information.



Accessible parking

Think about how your customers will get to your business. Disabled people may need to park or get dropped off in a safe, effective and accessible manner. It is recommended that both accessible parking and drop-off bays are positioned directly outside the accessible entrance to your venue and that these are clearly signposted. It is important to ensure that these spaces are available to Disabled people, this can be managed by making sure that only vehicles which display a Blue Badge are allowed to park in these spaces. Design guidance for parking and drop off spaces are provided within the downloads section in the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com.

Inclusive signage

Inclusive signage is a vital part of the customer journey. Your customers will feel more comfortable and welcome if they can find their way around without having to ask. Unfamiliar settings can be particularly difficult for some people, and signage and other tools can establish familiarity and comfort from arrival.

Terminology is crucial, use phrases like 'accessible toilet' and 'accessible parking'. Equally, you should not welcome ‘wheelchairs’, but ‘wheelchair users’; the people using mobility aids should be your focus, and not the aids themselves.

Refer to marketing section within the downloads section on the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com for more information on language.

Inclusive seating

Some people cannot walk a long distance without a rest, you should provide accessible seating at a maximum of every 50 metres. You'll need to carefully consider elements such as the heights of seats, that back and armrests are provided on at least half of all seating to provide additional support for those who require it.

You should also consider whether the colour of the seating contrasts with the surroundings so that it can be clearly seen.

Think about the groups of people who might be visiting or staying with you, and organise your seating to align with this. For example, a wheelchair user should be able to sit alongside their travel companions and have the option to laterally transfer onto a seat, should they wish to do so.

Accessible toilets

While design guidance for accessible toilets can be found in the technical standards within the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com, there are certain 'quick wins' that are useful to consider:

Ready for use: Accessible toilets, in the same way as facilities for non-disabled users, should always be ready for use. However short of space you may be, it is vital to ensure that accessible toilets are never used as a storage area.

Think about your signage: It is useful (and inclusive in nature) to state that accessible toilets are not just for use by those with visible impairments, such as wheelchair users. Stating that 'not all Disabilities are visible' or similar on your accessible toilet door is a way of showcasing your awareness of those who may require use of the facility just as much, for example, someone with Crohn's disease or someone with a stoma.

Red cord importance: The red cord typically found in accessible toilets and bathrooms is linked to an alarm outside of the room and is a crucial means of raising alert if someone gets into difficulty while alone.

You may have seen the Euan's Guide campaign to ensure that red alarm cords within accessible toilets hang freely to ensure that those who require them can pull them from numerous positions, especially if they have fallen onto the floor in an emergency scenario.

Good practice hints and tips from Euan's Guide also include:

- Emergency cords should be easily identifiable and usually red in colour
- Each cord should have two red bangles attached to aid the person easily pulling the alarm cord

Accessible toilets

- One of the bangles should be reachable from the floor and close to the WC
- Visual and audible indicators should alert people that the alarm has been triggered
- A means of resetting the alarm should be within the accessible toilet and easily reachable
- The alarm signal to warn staff that someone needs help should be located in a suitable location and staff trained in how to respond
- It is important that staff, including cleaning staff, are trained to not tie cords up out of reach from the floor.

Case Study: The Ebrington Hotel – Where accessibility meets luxury design

The Ebrington Hotel in Derry~Londonderry seamlessly blends comfort, heritage charm, and forward-thinking accessibility. The hotel sets a high standard in inclusive hospitality, offering deluxe accessible rooms that prioritise both functionality and style for guests with mobility needs.

At the Ebrington Hotel the aim is to provide a high-quality visitor experience that doesn't compromise on design, comfort, or mobility support — all within a listed historic site.

They offer deluxe accessible rooms, available in two distinct layouts:

- Universal access room – 33 m² of spacious, barrier-free comfort
- Ambulant accessible room – 28 m², tailored for guests with limited mobility

These rooms are equipped with accessible bathrooms designed with:

- Roll-in shower with level access
- Fixed, fold-down shower chair for safe and comfortable bathing
- Strategically placed handrails beside both the shower and toilet



Case Study: The Ebrington Hotel – Where accessibility meets luxury design

Each accessible room is built with luxury and versatility in mind:

- Super king-size bed with plush bedding
- Roll-out bed option for additional guests
- Interconnecting rooms for families, carers, or added space
- Full air conditioning, tea/coffee facilities, hairdryer, and ironing station

With a maximum occupancy of three guests per accessible room (or five when interconnecting), these accommodations are both practical and inclusive.

Design philosophy: heritage with heart

What sets The Ebrington Hotel apart is its interior design approach. Accessible rooms maintain the same modern-luxury aesthetic seen throughout the hotel, honouring the historic character of the building while delivering contemporary comfort.

Rooms are conveniently located for ease of movement and designed with wide doorways, uncluttered layouts, and smooth flooring transitions — all without compromising on style.

The Ebrington Hotel is leading by example — proving that accessibility and aesthetic appeal are not mutually exclusive. Through intuitive design, spacious planning, and empathetic hospitality, it is raising the standard for inclusive and accessible travel in Northern Ireland and beyond. For full details and availability, visit: theebringtonhotel.com/rooms/deluxe-accessible/

A Changing Places

A Changing Places Toilet (CPT) also known as a Changing Places Facility is a larger room designed for people who cannot use a standard accessible toilet.

CPT toilets are designed for people who need additional space, equipment and the assistance of a carer which is not possible within the space of a standard accessible toilet. A CPT will include a toilet, basin, hoist, adult-sized changing bench and optional shower, for use by people with complex and multiple impairments who require the help of up to two assistants. Over a quarter of a million people in the UK require the use of a Changing Places facility to be able to get out and about with confidence, comfort and dignity.

Since June 2022 the NI Building Regulations require the provision of a Changing Places Toilets in certain types or size of public buildings.

For many businesses, a Changing Places Toilet requires considerable investment that will need to be planned for in future budgets. Where it is not possible to provide a Changing Places toilet, it is highly recommended that you know where the nearest CPT is located, so that you can advertise this on your website and direct customers to it when they visit in-person, should this be required.

Case study – Changing Places Toilet

Consider the provision of a Changing Places Toilet, for example Giants Causeway Visitors Centre was one of the first places in NI to include a Changing Places toilet.

Giant's Causeway | Northern Ireland | National Trust



Colour and Contrast

For both blind and partially sighted people, and those who are neurodivergent, colour and contrast plays a big part in having a positive, inclusive experience. Ensuring that wall and floor colours contrast well with one another is vital for a partially sighted individual to be able to navigate your environment with safety and ease. This is also important for elements that people need to find with ease such as door handles and grab rails in accessible toilets.

For many neurodivergent people, environments that are too visually busy can be both confusing and distressing, so whilst contrast needs to be provided as mentioned above, it is recommended that too much pattern or 'loud' colour is avoided when it is not necessary.

Colour and contrast good practice hints and tips:

- Don't over decorate for the sake of it – it is not appreciated by everyone!
- If it is necessary to provide images or pattern, in particular, it is recommended that this is done out of the general eyeline height, so customers and colleagues can avoid having to look at it.
- Having two groups of people with varying, and often opposing, requirements is not easy. If you can, it would be a great idea to survey existing customers and/or engage with a pan-disability focus group so that you can receive feedback that is bespoke to your business. Bring in expert advice if you are not sure what to do.

Quiet Spaces and Sensory Rooms

A quiet space is an area where someone can go to decompress away from excessive noise, movement and activity, generally away from main thoroughfares and outside of regular environments. Quiet spaces are often designed with a neutral palette and avoid decorations or equipment that provide too much visual or audio stimulation.

Sensory rooms are purpose-built environments, often but not always for children, that are aimed at stimulating, developing and relaxing the senses. Specific stimulating equipment, such as bubble tubes, mirrors and activity walls, are installed to help develop visual processing abilities, fine and gross motor skills and encourage users to experience the pleasure of play.

Whilst you understandably may not immediately have the space or budget to provide a dedicated sensory room for your customers and colleagues, it is worth considering whether an area of your business might be able to be dedicated to quieter activities. Is there an underused space by your hotel reception, or at one end of your pub, for example, that could be furnished with comfy chairs that 'cocoon' users, have dimmed lighting, and quieter background noise or music? If you were able to provide a small amount of equipment such as ear defenders, fidget toys and weighted blankets, even better!

Consider having a relaxed service time where music is turned down.

Case Study – Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

Provide a sensory map that will help visitors to prepare for their visit. For example, Armagh Observatory and Planetarium has a sensory map that illustrates the sensorial experience of different spaces and the various shows available and how these might suit various audience requirements.

Accessibility - Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

Case Study: Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026

For events consider the accessibility support for a wide group of Disabled and older people with varying needs

Open Arts, on behalf of Belfast City Council, managed and operated an Accessibility Hub during Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026. Located in Castlecourt Shopping Centre, the hub was open daily from 2-9 August and welcomed almost 1,000 visitors over the eight-day event.

The hub provided a range of accessibility supports, including a quiet space, mindful art activities, mobility aid charging facilities, ear defenders, fidget items, a hearing loop, and access information.

Every service offered was actively used throughout the festival.

Feedback gathered through questionnaires and a visitor feedback wall highlighted the significant impact the service had on visitors' experiences.

"What a haven! A safe space for tired kids and overwhelmed parents."

"Vital space for people to decompress. We were able to stay at the Fleadh much longer after my disabled daughter had a rest here. Thank you."



Case Study: Embedding Accessibility into Derry Halloween at Guildhall

Accessibility at Guildhall, Derry~Londonderry during Derry Halloween was approached as a whole visitor experience rather than a set of standalone measures.

Alongside accessible facilities, additional supports included sensory and quiet spaces, baby-feeding and changing facilities, wellbeing sessions, and a dedicated programme for people with additional needs.

Careful scheduling and visitor flow management reduced congestion and sensory overload, creating a calmer, more inclusive festival experience.

The initiative demonstrated that accessibility extends beyond physical infrastructure to include programming, planning, staff awareness and the overall visitor journey.

Key Learning: Small operational changes, such as transition time between sessions, quiet spaces and targeted programming, can significantly improve accessibility and enhance the experience for both visitors and staff.



Hearing loops

Customer-facing points such as information desks, ticket and retail counters, reception desks and other service counters can be noisy environments, making verbal communication difficult for customers who are deaf or have hearing loss. But often these locations are key areas of customer contact. The right equipment and informed staff can make an enormous difference to your customers' first impression.

A hearing loop - also known as an induction loop - is a piece of equipment that allows people with hearing loss to hear more clearly over background noise. Even a very small amount of background noise (like the hum of a fan) can be very distracting for a hearing aid user and can mask the speaker's voice. A hearing aid will amplify all sounds, whether you want to hear them or not. A loop system works with a microphone which transmits the amplified sound wirelessly to a hearing aid, cochlear implant or loop listener that's switched to the hearing loop setting.

Since the staff member's voice is going straight from the microphone to the hearing device it reduces the impact of background noise, such as 'unwanted' speech from other conversations. This enables clearer communication, notably where there is a glass screen. Tourism businesses such as hotels, attractions and tourist information centres should have a loop system at each counter and a minimum of one loop at counters with multiple customer contact points.

A loop system will also support a hearing aid user in meetings or larger events. Some buildings will have built-in loops in meetings rooms and event spaces or you may install a portable loop for events. It is important to let attendees know that a loop is available and where it is operational and if necessary to reserve seating within that space for hearing aid users and their companions.

Where possible, an installed counter loop system is preferable to a portable loop. Ensuring correct installation and regular maintenance is also key; a hearing loop that is signed as available but out of order has a significantly negative impact on the customer experience.

Hearing loops

Hearing Loop good practice hints and tips:

- It's crucial that hearing aid users know that a loop system is installed and where it is. In the case of a reception area, for example, a sign should be positioned where the loop is effective.
- Train your staff about the need for loop systems, where they are located and how to use them, including making sure that they are turned on and linked to the microphone/ AV.
- Check loops regularly to ensure they're working properly. RNID recommend they are checked weekly, along with your fire alarm.

Back of House Areas

When considering accessible features and facilities, it is not only your customers that need to be catered for. Wherever possible, the design of and facilities in your back of house areas should mirror that of your front of house areas, so that Disabled colleagues can work effectively. More on this in Section 7: Inclusive Recruitment and Employment.

For example, if you have access or security controls in place to back of house areas, the security keypads or lock boxes should be at an appropriate height to be within reach for both standing and seated users. Buttons should be large and contrast well with their background (audio feedback would also be aspirational). Can a card swipe or remote detection system be used for those with limited dexterity who may prefer, for example, to tap a card than type in a long code.

Is there an accessible toilet or shower and changing space available for staff use?

Evacuation

One of the biggest concerns for those with accessibility requirements, is safe evacuation during an emergency. Develop a set of General Emergency Evacuation Plans (GEEPs) that will take into account the egress needs of a broad range of Disabled people. If you are an accommodation business, and for Disabled staff you should develop Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for safe evacuation of deaf and Disabled people. For hotels and B&Bs, make it part of your arrival process to ask every guest, “do you require any assistance in the event of evacuation?”. Discuss the standard options available, agreeing and recording any specific arrangements.

It is important to include Disabled people in Fire Drills and to test GEEPs and PEEPs on a regular basis.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has a series of fire safety guides, including building specific advice for example for sleeping accommodation. This includes templates to help complete a Fire Risk Assessment, and 'Fire Safety Law The evacuation of disabled people from buildings' which includes templates for GEEPs and PEEPs.

Good practice hints and tips for inclusive evacuation procedures:

- Ensure your Fire Risk Assessment addresses the evacuation needs of all Disabled guests.
- Encourage guests to make you aware of their accessibility requirements so you can discuss and agree the necessary evacuation arrangements.
- Ensure staff are comfortable supporting guests to fill in evacuation forms, if required.
- Ensure that your emergency alarm system includes flashing beacons to alert deaf guests who may not hear the alarm sound. Vibrating pager systems and other fire warning systems can be used to alert individual guests, and consideration given to how to alert deaf customers who may be sleeping.
- Door beacons can also alert guests if room service or housekeeping is at the door.
- Similarly, guests with mobility impairments may appreciate being placed in a room on the ground floor, or knowing that an evacuation chair is available for use by well-trained staff if stairs are present on the way to the exit.
- Ensure your Fire Risk Assessment addresses the evacuation needs of all Disabled guests.

Case study – Alerts for D/deaf Guests

It is important to think about guests with a range of disabilities, for example at Grand Central Hotel, Belfast deaf guests and those with hearing loss can make use of a vibrating pager that is linked to the fire alarm system and will alert someone who may not hear the fire alarm.

Accessible Rooms Belfast City Centre | Accessible Hotel | Grand Central (grandcentralhotelbelfast.com)

Outdoor and natural environments

It isn't just internal built environments that need to provide, and advertise, accessibility features and facilities; outdoor and natural environments do too. Whilst it may not always be possible to widen paths and change terrain and gradients, certain things like accessible parking provision, good lighting levels and the installation of inclusively designed seating at regular intervals are likely to be in your control.

Providing maps – both online and onsite - that show accessible routes and trails (in highly contrasting and ideally tactile ways) would be strongly recommended, as would providing visitors with additional resources and equipment such as Trampers. Trampers are robust and easy to use all-terrain mobility scooters that can be used on rough ground, mud, grass, and stones.

Case Study – All Out Trekking at Gosford Forest Park

During the summer months (July to September) the All Out Trekking programme offers guided experiences round the walking and mountain bike trails at Gosford Forest using electric all terrain buggies that are suitable for both Disabled and non-disabled riders, enabling inclusive participation. (Disability Sport NI |All Out Trekking - Disability Sport NI)



Outdoor and natural environments

Case Study – Seamus Heaney Homeplace

'The Back Yard' garden at Seamus Heaney Homeplace offers a wide range of sensory experiences including signs with Braille, a fully functioning water well and a wide range of plants and flowers. https://seamusheaneyhome.com/accessibility/

In addition visitors can book a guided tour, or explore as a self-guided experience, a series of five sites which held great significance for Seamus Heaney, each with interpretation panels that include the poems inspired by the locations.

https://seamusheaneyhome.com/open-ground/

Case Study - Inclusive Bike Hire

There are a number of Inclusive Bike Hire Schemes dotted around NI, these all have a range of bicycles such as trikes, handcycles, side by side tandems, wheelchair transporter bike and standard tandems available for hire. Schemes are available in Belfast, Craigavon and Ballymoney.

Inclusive Cycling | Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

Accessible Play

Accessible and inclusive playgrounds and spaces are a vital part of equitable childhood experiences in outdoor and natural environments. Sensory Trust offers inclusive play guidance.

The ADAPT my Play resource has been produced by PlayBoard and Mae Murray Foundation to support the development of inclusive play parks in Northern Ireland.

Case Study – Accessible Play

The Diversity and Inclusion Play park at Flowerfields Art Centre in Portstewart has been designed to enable Disabled children to play alongside non-disabled children. It includes accessible play equipment Diversity Park

Diversity Park officially opened in Portstewart | Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

Recommendations per business type

Many of the recommendations relating to the accessible features and facilities your business should be providing for customers and staff members can be found in the technical design guidance of this toolkit. In addition, below are some good practice hints and tips for you to consider to ensure those who visit, or work at, your business have an accessible and enjoyable experience.

For accommodation businesses

- Make sure your entrance and reception areas are staffed as often as possible and well-lit. Should guests need to enter via an intercom system, make sure this is at an appropriate height for standing and seated users, and provide a text number for deaf users and those with speech impairments.
- Ideally, your reception or welcome desk should offer a lowered section (with knee recess) for wheelchair users and those of shorter stature. If this is not possible, ensure your staff are trained to move to the front of the desk to serve guests, if needed, and that there is a dedicated space for these guests to sit and be able to write, in comfort.
- Ensure staff are comfortable supporting guests to fill in evacuation forms, if required.
- Make your accessible rooms bookable online by including them as a room type on your website/online travel agent listings. This provides convenience and autonomy for people requiring these rooms, and removes the need for additional phone and/or email communications. Accessible rooms should be charged at the same rate as standard rooms, regardless of whether they have extra space.

Recommendations per business type

- Provide a choice of wet rooms and baths in designated accessible bedrooms. If you only have one accessible bedroom, provide a wet room. Make sure that this information is shared at booking with a Disabled customer.
- Provide a ceiling tracked hoist in at least one room or provide a portable hoist. If you have a ceiling tracked hoist, inform the Ceiling Hoist Users Community so your venue can be listed on their website.
- If you have a ceiling track and/or portable hoist as part of your accommodation offer, make sure to provide information to customers about this. This should include the need to bring their own sling. People who need this facility will be familiar with this.
- It is possible to hire a portable hoist for short term use, identify local providers and let your customers know if this is something that you can accommodate.
- The Inclusive Hotels Network (IHN) has published guidance relating to access to hotels for people with hearing loss and the use of hoists in guest accommodation.
- Always assign guests the exact accessible room they have booked – this sbe a guaranteed process, not left to best endeavours.
- Provide accessible rooms that can accommodate families, this may be with an interconnecting door between rooms.
- Provide information about your venue, room service etc in accessible formats such as large print and braille or audio.
- Provide allergy-friendly bedrooms that are also accessible. As a minimum, these should include hypoallergenic bedding; a window; air-purification; and no smoking, animals, or carpets. Any cleaning products used should also be perfume-free.
- When you are buying or updating furniture, consider options that allow for flexibility for example zip and link beds offer more combinations for those with accessibility requirements, their partners or support workers. Freestanding furniture also offers the flexibility to be removed if required.

Recommendations per business type

- Provide grab rails and toilet seat that contrast to the walls and sanitary ware.
- Provide towels that contrast in colour to the walls and floor to assist visually impaired guests.
- Provide phones with large buttons and a contrasting colour on the numbers.
- Provide portable vibrating alarms for customers who are not able to hear an audible fire alarm.
- Have a magnifying glass or magnifying sheet handy.
- Enable subtitles on TVs in public areas and ensure TVs in bedrooms support subtitle activation.
- Provide bowls of water for assistance dogs and a toilet area, ideally within the grounds of the property or nearby.
- Provide a selection of bathroom equipment such as a support rail by the shower attachments, bath seat, toilet seat height raiser and shower chair.
- Provide quieter areas with no background noise for those with hearing loss and neurodivergent customers.
- Have lever taps in bathrooms and kitchens.

Did you know?

Colorful Earth's Disability Inclusion Playbook for the Accommodation Sector, written for hospitality company The Ascott Limited, offers excellent guidance relating to inclusive training, hiring and built environment design within the accommodation sector.

Recommendations per business type

For attractions

- Provide good signage throughout. Consider large print, contrasting and tactile signs and ensure accessible features such as parking, lifts and toilets are well-signed.
- Make sure interpretation displays can be viewed by all, including those of shorter stature and wheelchair users.
- Where information is provided this should include different formats. Consider large print and tactile interpretation, or an audio version? Where you don't have space or equipment a QR code that can be scanned by a smartphone can link to additional information in digital form.
- Fast track those unable to stand in a queue for long periods of time, provide rest areas with seating.
- Install seating, especially on steep inclines, long routes or near to children's play areas so that parents or grandparents can supervise easily.
- Provide a quiet space for neurodivergent users.
- Start to curate a collection of sensory tools and toys for customers, such as ear defenders, blankets and fidget spinners. The Life Science Centre provide a handy guide to making a sensory bag.
- BIAZA has also published advice relating to the admittance of assistance dogs which may be useful for venues such as petting farms

Recommendations per business type

For food and beverage businesses

- Step-free access may not always be possible: Providing a portable ramp (and ensuring staff know how to use it safely and effectively) is one way to ensure visitors with physical disabilities can gain entry into your café, restaurant or pub.
- Provide options and choice when it comes to seating. Think about design, height and back and armrest availability, as well as seating location. Some customers will benefit from quieter areas, and others will prefer a 'buzzy' atmosphere. If you don't have a lowered bar, for example, consider how wheelchair users and those of shorter stature can interact with staff and other customers.
- Ask wheelchair-users where they'd like to sit and if they'd like you to remove a chair.
- Ensure any accessible facilities you have such as accessible toilets, or hearing loop facilities at the bar, are well-signed and in good working order.
- Routes to accessible parking, entrances and toilets should be clear and free of clutter.
- Provide menus in different formats, such as digital, large print and easy-read versions with accompanying images. Ensure staff have the confidence to read these out, if required (finding out if the customer would like a starter, and asking if there is a type of food they'd like to eat first is preferred, rather than reading the whole menu item by item).
- A consideration of noise and light are key in pubs and restaurants. Could you provide a dwell space with lower light, reduced background noise and comfy 'lounge' chairs, for example, if visitors are overwhelmed?
- Consider providing accessible cutlery and crockery for customers with limited strength, grip or ranges of motion. For example: it might be easier for some people to hold a mug with a handle rather than cups or glasses, while bendable straws are really beneficial to some.
- If you have a beer garden or similar, it's a good idea to provide seating options close to accessible paths to avoid the need to move across grass, gravel or uneven ground.
- Be mindful of allergens and clearly label dishes that may be subject to contact with the 14 main food, also offer to blend food if required. The FSA provides guidance on allergens and labels.

downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com
the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com
the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com

Recommendations per business type

For event organisers

- When advertising your event, ensure any printed or online content provides good colour contrast (light text on a dark background, or vice versa). Online images should have alt text, and multimedia content should be captioned. More information on this in the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com.
- When answering Frequently Asked Questions and similar, provide as much detail as you can. Don't just say the event venue is accessible: describe the exact accessibility features and facilities.
- Think about the end-to-end journey of your event goers, including whether there is accessible public transport and accessible parking spaces.
- Ensure the venue you choose for your event provides step-free access throughout and has accessible toilet facilities.
- Provide or hire a Changing Places Toilet, or know where the closest facility is located and share this information.
- Aim to provide seating with backrests as a minimum; stools are inaccessible for lots of event-goers. Armrests will benefit some users, so aim to offer several seats with these, if possible.
- A well, evenly lit venue will be important for those who need to lip read. Similarly, good colour contrast between walls, doors and floors, at minimum, will help partially sighted participants to navigate the space with greater ease and confidence.
- Ask if your event venue has a hearing loop that is in good working order. If this is not the case, consider purchasing or hiring a portable one.

Recommendations per business type

- Provide signage with large, contrasting text in an accessible sans-serif font. Consider placement height for seated and standing users. Ensure evacuation routes are also accessible and clearly signed.
- Ensure that microphones and lecterns are height-adjustable for seated and standing speakers.
- Plan breaks into your event schedule, and give participants time to go to the toilet, take some quiet time for themselves or even have an 'eye break' if they have been lipreading.
- Think about 'the little extras' you might be able to provide. Arrange for a water bowl to be available for an assistance dog at your in-person event, or for live captioning on the AV and as standard at online or hybrid events.
- Oddity Events and Marketing has released an Inclusive Event Design Playbook offering best practice hints and tips for events held in both physical and virtual spaces.
- The Association of Event Organisers (AEO) hosts an online Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Hub with recommended, pooled resources for those in the events sector.
- Hirespace also has a useful article on top 8 tips for planning inclusive events.

Undertaking an access audit

Now you've read and thought about some business-specific changes you can make, it's time to learn about one of the first built environment actions that any business can take to improve their accessibility offering. An access audit is an assessment of a building, an environment or a service against best practice accessibility standards and guidance. The purpose of an access audit is to establish how well a building performs in relation to access and ease of use by a wide range of potential users, including people with mobility, cognitive and sensory disabilities.

Access audits also help businesses to identify reasonable adjustments that may be required for customers and staff members, understand more about maintenance measures and timelines, and better plan budgets related to refurbishments and new build ventures. It is highly recommended that the audit follows the sequence of the customer and staff journey through the building. This includes from arrival on foot, by car or public transport, through entry into the building, access to each of the services and facilities provided and finally to the exit route. The audit should also consider how people with accessibility requirements would leave in the event of an emergency.

As a first step in the accessibility improvement process, hiring a trained professional to undertake an access audit is a valuable way to assess where your business is now, and have actionable recommendations to follow (both prioritised 'quick wins' and longer-term goals) to help you get to where you would like to be physically, digitally and operationally.

Access audit suppliers

Many, but not all, accessibility and inclusive design consultants will be accredited members of an industry body like the National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC) and the International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP). The experience of consultants varies based on their sector and specialism. The key is to establish that their experience and knowledge is relevant.

Please note, the following list contains only a sample of options, and other great inclusive design agencies and individuals are available:

- AccessAble provides access audits and inclusive design consultancy through its NRAC accredited team
- All In Access Consultancy is a locally based consultancy providing access audits
- Mima is an inclusive, human-centred design agency that provides access consultancy focusing on the end-to-end customer and colleague experience
- Motionspot creates inclusive spaces and designs accessible products
- The Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE) provides consultancy and training relating to building design and management
- Disability Sport NI provides a Sports Facility Access service concerned with improving the quality of access for Disabled people to new and existing sports facilities in Northern Ireland.

Accessibility Standards and Guidance

The Technical Guidance in the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com, has been created to provide tourism businesses undertaking a renovation, extension or new build with the design guidance necessary to provide accessible and inclusive experiences to customers and staff members with accessibility requirements.

Other accessibility standards

Technical Booklet R 'Access to and use of buildings' provides practical guidance to help meet Part R of the Building Regulations Northern Ireland, including useful diagrams on how to show compliance with the regulations.

Other relevant technical booklets for accessibility considerations include Technical Booklets ; E, H and V.

BS 8300:2018, Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment, Parts 1 and 2 provides guidance on good practice in the design of buildings and their external approaches so that they are convenient to use by Disabled people. The guidance is complementary to that contained in the Technical Booklets but contains additional material. The documents are available to purchase from the British Standards Institution (BSI).

The Changing Places Campaign provides all the information you need to install a Changing Places facility for people with higher level accessibility needs.

The Department for Transport provides guidance on Inclusive Mobility processes and the use of tactile paving surfaces.

Historic England's Easy Access to Historic Buildings and Easy Access to Historic Landscapes guides provide advice to those who own, manage or occupy historic buildings in England.

The Live Events Access Charter is an industry standard developed by Attitude is Everything to support venues, grassroots organisations, festivals and outdoor events in building disability equality into all they do.

Other accessibility standards

The National Register of Access Consultants is an online database of reputable, accredited access auditors and access consultants for those seeking advice on how to make improvements to the built environment for the benefit of customers and employees with accessibility requirements.

Paths for All and the Sensory Trust released Outdoor Accessibility Guidance in April 2023, designed to make outdoor spaces more accessible, and experiences – including children's play - more inclusive for all. By All Reasonable Means (2025) provides a useful management framework to align with the guidance.
PAS 6463:2022 offers free to download guidance for designing neuro-friendly spaces.

The RIBA Plan of Work – Inclusive Design Overlay provides recommendations to businesses, project managers and design, construction and operations teams wanting to ensure that their designs and processes are accessible and inclusive to all. It focuses on the full project lifecycle, from preparation and concept design through to detailed design, construction and when in-use.

The Sign Design Society promotes excellence in signing and wayfinding. Inclusive Symbols is also an interesting initiative you may wish to engage with if your project does not need to utilise ISO-specific pictograms.

The Website Accessibility Initiative (WAI) and specifically the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are the definitive and internationally accepted guidelines for creating accessible websites.

Reflection on Accessibility in the Built Environment

This activity focuses on assessing how the physical design and features of your business or venue affect accessibility for customers with disabilities. You will reflect on specific barriers discussed in this section and evaluate opportunities to improve accessibility. The goal is to identify challenges in your built environment, propose practical solutions, and consider the positive impact these changes could have on both your customers and your business.

Description: Consider the various barriers and solutions discussed throughout this section, such as inclusive signage, accessible parking, seating, toilets, hearing loops, and quiet spaces. Reflect on how these elements contribute to creating a more accessible and inclusive experience for all customers, particularly those with disabilities.

Action: Identify one area of your business or venue's built environment that could be improved to enhance accessibility. Describe the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in this space and propose actionable solutions to address these barriers. Reflect on how implementing these changes would benefit both customers and your business.

TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND

Marketing your Accessibility



Section 6: Marketing your Accessibility

Three Top Tips for this section:

- When it comes to marketing your accessibility, honesty is ALWAYS the best policy. Try not to over-promise and under deliver, but also be confident enough to shout about and share the improvements you've made.
- Providing an easy-to-find accessibility section on your website that highlights key accessibility features and includes essential information, such as a Detailed Access Guide, enhances the experience of Disabled individuals by offering them the tools and confidence to navigate your space or services independently.
- Making your website and social media presence accessible is key to marketing your business inclusively. Digital accessibility hints and tips are provided in this section.

An introduction to inclusive marketing

As someone working in, or owning, a tourism business, you likely have extensive marketing experience and understand what works best for your audience. But are you also aware of how to market to Disabled people, their families, friends and colleagues in an inclusive and accessible way?

Inclusive marketing considers diversity in all its forms and reflects real people in the real world. It ensures all customers – regardless of any access requirements or specific characteristics – feel welcomed to a particular business. Inclusive marketing benefits everybody, regardless of age, appearance, gender identity, ethnicity or disability.

Designing for accessibility ensures that Disabled people, as well as individuals with various access needs - such as those with temporary injuries, age-related changes, or sensory sensitivities - are included and feel represented. By marketing your business inclusively, you can reach a much broader and more diverse audience, ensuring that everyone feels valued and included.



Marketing tools for inclusive business promotion

As with any business marketing, your aim should be to grab attention and create interest and excitement in a way that makes people want to visit you.

For those with access requirements, this excitement and action only exists if they can find information on inclusivity that is both authentic and trustworthy, giving them the confidence to book. Providing comprehensive accessibility information is key to attracting Disabled people and their families and friends and ensuring that their experience is positive and repeated.

A Detailed Access Guide will enhance the experience of Disabled individuals by offering them the tools and confidence to navigate your space or services independently. This should be distinct from the accessibility tool that describes how to navigate your website.

When it comes to marketing sustainability, green-washing is the process of overstating green credentials. However, when it comes to accessibility the opposite is often the case with 'purple-hushing' commonplace – the process of not communicating accessibility credentials. A VisitEngland survey amongst serviced accommodation businesses in 2015 found that nearly two thirds (63%) of businesses which provide for accessibility needs say they do not promote the fact that they do.

Challenge yourself to follow the 'green-matching' principle, which means that wherever and whenever you talk about your green credentials you also communicate your accessibility credentials.

According to AccessAble's You and Yours Survey 2023/24:

- 95% will check accessibility in advance of going somewhere new.
- 96% say having accessibility information available in advance would make them more likely to visit somewhere.
- 77% have not visited a venue because they couldn't find out about accessibility.
- 73% have had to leave a venue as it wasn't accessible to them, with 75% of cases because facilities people were told would be available were not.

Marketing tools for inclusive business promotion

The importance of honest marketing

Honesty is essential when it comes to accessibility. Few things are more frustrating for someone with accessibility needs than arriving at a destination only to find that key features or facilities differ from what was advertised. A lack of transparency not only leads to a negative experience but can also damage your reputation in the long run. It's equally important to communicate openly about any temporary changes to accessibility. If a crucial feature, like a lift or accessible toilet, is out of service, this information should be shared widely with current and potential customers, including booking pages, social media and email.

This allows people to make informed decisions about their visit, whether that means rescheduling, adjusting their plans, or avoiding unnecessary travel. Providing clear, up-to-date information empowers customers with the autonomy to choose what's best for them. Regularly reviewing and updating your accessibility details ensures that you're consistently providing accurate, reliable information. This level of honesty builds trust and creates a more inclusive, welcoming environment for everyone.

Your website

With 87% of disabled people and carers who look for accessibility information before visiting a new place checking a venue's website (AccessAble 2023-24), it is vital that you have accurate, up to date, and easy to find information on your venue's website.

Many Disabled people are put off visiting a venue if there is no access information on a venue's website. Providing this information enables individuals with accessibility requirements, their family and friends to make informed decisions of where to stay and visit. This includes not just wheelchair users but people who are deaf or have hearing loss, have a sensory or cognitive impairment, older people, families with young children, and more.

The best way to do this is to have a specific section on your website, clearly linked to from your homepage. People expect to find accessibility information in a similar place across different websites (as they do with information about opening times or room availability), so this should be easy to locate via the main website navigation menu - not hidden in the footer or an 'about us' page. For visitor attractions, this could be under the 'Visit Us' section, or accessible by one click from the homepage. When naming this section, remember not everyone with accessibility requirements identifies with the term 'disabled' so use terminology that is more inclusive such as 'Accessibility' or 'Access for All'.

The informative elements you should ensure are available in this section for prospective customers are:

- A warm welcome
- Contact information
- Key accessibility features
- Accessibility Guide, including images of your accessible facilities
- Accessibility videos and virtual tours
- Accessibility resources
- Accessible destination highlights

A warm welcome

Open your accessibility section with a warm
welcome that underlines your commitment
providing accessible and inclusive experien
and speaks to your Disabled customers as y
would to any other visitor. Be sure to let your
business' personality shine through and do
tempted to lead with generic statements of
compliance, which can appear cold.



Contact information

Ensure that contact details for any accessibility queries are prominent with multiple ways to reach you, such as telephone and email, and don't rely solely on 'contact us' forms, as these are inaccessible to some. Remember, visitors may want to come to your venue as soon as the next day, so mailboxes should be checked regularly.

Although providing contact details is important, this should be in addition to your other accessibility information. Requiring your potential customers to go to the extra effort of contacting you to get information creates a barrier that others don't have. It may also make people feel uncomfortable if they have to disclose their requirements and/or private health conditions to a staff member. All of your customers should be able to research and plan their visit online at a time that suits them, with the additional option to contact you with any specific queries.

Case Study: Titanic Belfast – Charting a course toward inclusive visitor experiences

As one of Northern Ireland's most visited attractions by visitors from all over the world, Titanic Belfast has set out their commitment to continuous improvement in accessibility and inclusive visitor design - both on-site and online.

With comprehensive accessibility measures, inclusive programming, and a comprehensive website accessibility guide, Titanic Belfast is endeavouring to provide a visitor experience for everyone.

In creating an immersive, multi-sensory exhibition, the challenge lay in balancing the authenticity and drama of the Titanic story with the needs of a diverse audience, including individuals with mobility, sensory, and cognitive needs.

Titanic Belfast set out to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability, can experience the history, innovation, and stories throughout its exhibitions.

Designing with everyone in mind

Titanic Belfast's accessibility commitment spans physical design, sensory inclusion, digital access, and staff training. Every element is part of a cohesive strategy to break down barriers and promote dignity, comfort, and independence for all.



Case Study: Titanic Belfast – Charting a course toward inclusive visitor experiences

Digital Inclusion: Accessibility Starts Online

Understanding that a seamless visit begins long before arrival, Titanic Belfast offers a clear and user-friendly accessibility guide on its website. This digital resource:

- Details all accessibility features and services available onsite
- Helps guests plan their journey based on individual needs
- Provides downloadable sensory guides, and information on how to book accessible services.
- Includes contact information for Visitor Services, ensuring guests can speak to a real person if they need extra reassurance

The website's design follows best practices in digital accessibility, ensuring users with screen readers or cognitive disabilities can access content easily. Explore the Accessibility Guide: titanicbelfast.com/accessibility

Titanic Belfast proves that accessibility doesn't dilute the visitor experience — it deepens it. Through thoughtful design, assistive technologies, and a proactive digital approach, the attraction offers one of the most inclusive and enjoyable cultural experiences in Northern Ireland.

For bookings or to request accessible services:
www.titanicbelfast.com/accessibility

Key accessibility features

People with accessibility requirements want to easily find out what key accessibility features are available at tourism venues.

In 2024 VisitEngland led a UK and Ireland-wide project that identified the features that are most important to people with a range of accessibility requirements. The list was informed by new consumer research with 800 disabled travellers in Britain and a focus group in Ireland and is split into 'priority' and 'secondary' features. The 'priority features' comprise the most important accessibility features which inform trip-taking and are most likely to increase bookings and visits. The 'secondary features' were not identified as deal-breakers for a sufficiently large market in the research, however they were identified as important within minority impairment groups.

Access the relevant business-type checklist on MyTourismNI.com alongside the e-learning module and use it to review your accessibility information. Ensure all applicable features are included, and don't feel limited by the checklist. Add any additional services, facilities or support you provide for disabled visitors and others with accessibility requirements.



Key accessibility features

Which key accessibility feature list is best for my business?

Your business	Questionnaire type
Aparthotel / serviced apartment	Self-catering
Conference / exhibition venue	Events, festivals and shows
Entertainment / concert venue	Events, festivals and shows
Sports venue	Events, festivals and shows
Theatre	Attractions and experiences
University accommodation	If structured as apartments, then the self-catering questionnaire would be most relevant. If structured as individual bedrooms, then the serviced accommodation questionnaire could be used to cover the entire property.

Key accessibility features

While the key accessibility features research focused on specific named business types, they are still relevant to other venues. Use the above table to see which one is most relevant to your business.

Please note that questionnaires are currently in development for retail venues, tourist information centers and hostels. Hostel providers can currently use the Serviced accommodation questionnaire to cover their public toilets and dining area.

If your business is listed on any tourism listing websites (such as online travel agents and local destination websites), these companies may ask you to specify what key accessibility features you offer. This is so that they can list available features as part of your venue listing on their website and provide customers with the ability to filter venues by these features.

In addition to the key accessibility features listed in the downloadable questionnaires; you should also highlight any other useful facilities or information. This may include:

- Wi-fi availability.
- Information relating to the online booking process and prices, including concession availability.
- Directions to your business.

Key accessibility features

- Details of any dedicated access sessions and/or events that you offer with tailored support e.g. ‘quiet sessions’, sessions for children and adults with learning disabilities and dementia-friendly sessions. Add them to any ‘What’s On’ listings.
- Any firm future plans for accessibility improvements.
- Customer reviews that mention accessibility, ideally by linking to them on a site like Euan’s Guide for full transparency.
- Details of any accessibility awards you have won or schemes that you belong to (see Accessibility awards and certification programmes later in this module).

Did you know?

For attractions and experiences, information on quieter times to visit is particularly sought after—include this in your accessibility section.

You may wish to group key features that relate to each of mobility, hearing, visual, and neurodiversity.

Examples of key features for different disability types

For customers with mobility disabilities

- Areas that do and do not have step-free level access
- The availability of wheelchair accessible routes and inclusive dwell spaces
- The number and location of accessible toilets
- The nearest Changing Places facility (if not on site, provide the location of the closest one to you)
- Other relevant features e.g. wheelchair accessible viewing platforms for events
- Mobility equipment including wheelchair, scooter or tramper availability, and related charging points

Examples of key features for different disability types

For blind or partially sighted customers:

- Any audio information that is available on-site, including audio tours or guides
- Large print and Braille documentation, as well as tactile maps and signage
- 'Touch Tours' or the tactile objects that may be available
- Facilities for assistance dogs, including water and relief areas

For customers who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Hearing loops, including locations and types of loop used
- Captions on videos and TV screens
- Visual fire alarms or pagers in case of an emergency
- The availability of BSL/ ISL tours

Examples of key features for different disability types

For autistic customers or customer with sensory processing needs

- The availability of 'fast track' queue opportunities
- The availability of quiet spaces and/or sensory rooms
- The quieter times to visit, if applicable
- The availability of sensory stories and maps
- The availability of sensory equipment such as ear defenders, fidget toys and weighted blankets
- Familiarisation visits and the booking process for these, if applicable.

For customers with dementia

- The availability of dementia friendly sessions, if applicable
- Dementia friendly facilities such as inclusive signage, accessible toilets and products such as 'easy hold' cutlery, for example
- The specific awareness training your staff have received relating to dementia



TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND

Accessibility Guides and Resources

Accessibility Guides

Research by VisitEngland in 2022 reaffirmed that today's travellers want detailed and factual descriptions of venue accessibility, in the form of an Accessibility Guide, to empower them to make personal choices.

An Accessibility Guide describes all areas of a venue, giving detailed accessibility information, including measurements and photographs.

An Accessibility Guide describes and visually shows the layout of each area of the business, following the route a visitor will typically take from arrival, entering and getting around.

They are particularly useful for people with mobility impairments, but they also include accessibility features of relevance to people with a range of other access requirements. This means there will be some duplication with the key access features you list on your own website.

Accessibility videos and virtual tours

Pre-visit videos and virtual tours are great ways of relaying your accessibility information to potential customers. Early visual familiarity can significantly reduce anxiety, support routines, encourage independence, and create a greater sense of safety and control.

Accessibility videos

Showcase your accessible facilities and services by producing a video. Your video could be presented by a Disabled person.

Another option is producing a walk/wheel-through video that follows the customer journey through your venue.

Ensure all videos are correctly captioned and consider providing audio description and BSL/ISL. See 'Making videos accessible' later in this section for more information.

Interactive virtual tours

Interactive virtual tours allow people to familiarise themselves with the layout of a venue by undertaking their own walk/wheel-through virtually.

Virtual tours can also be used within a venue as an alternative way for a Disabled customer to experience part of an attraction that they may not be able to access, such as areas only accessible by stairs.

Case study – Virtual visit

Include photographs or videos to let guests see the facilities in the accessible rooms. For example, Titanic Hotel Belfast has a virtual tour on their website where customers can explore the hotel and bedroom and bathroom facilities.

Virtual tour of bedroom



Accessibility videos and virtual tours

Accessibility resources

There are a range of resources that can help customers plan and prepare for a visit/stay.

These include:

- A what3words location – to help visitors pinpoint specific locations such as an accessible entrance or accessible parking area, using a three-word reference point for a single three metre square.
- A site map - to help customers understand where key accessibility features are on site, including accessible toilets and Changing Places toilets, step-free routes.
- A floorplan - to help customers understand the layout of a building showing key accessibility features, including accessible toilets, Changing Places toilets, step-free routes, the lift.
- Sensory floor plan/map – to indicate potential sensory triggers.
- A room plan – to help customers understand the detailed layout of a designated accessible unit / bedroom / bathroom showing position of furniture, circulation space, door widths. Resources such as RoomPlan can be useful.
- A social/visual story – to help neurodivergent people familiarise themselves with your business in preparation to visit.
- Information in alternative formats such as large print, easy read, BSL/ ISL, audio and transcripts of audio.
- There may be other useful resources to offer depending on your type of business, such as information about the accessibility of specific rides at an attraction.

Accessible destination highlights

You can also signpost to information on the accessibility of local businesses, with a particular focus on those that have step-free access and an accessible toilet. For example, accommodation providers can make some time-saving recommendations of local activities, attractions, pubs and restaurants that have good accessibility credentials, linking to their websites. It's also useful to know about the availability of accessible cars at your local taxi firm, as well as the opening hours of your nearest Shopmobility scheme. Perhaps other businesses could return the favour and promote your accessible offerings, too.

You are not expected to assess other businesses or make judgement calls on their facilities. Always provide customers with contact details so they can get in touch with the business for further information and decide whether or not to visit/use their services.

Case Study – Inclusive Bike Hire

There are a number of Inclusive Bike Hire Schemes dotted around NI, these all have a range of bicycles such as trikes, handcycles, side by side tandems, wheelchair transporter bike and standard tandems available for hire. Schemes are available in Belfast, Craigavon and Ballymoney. Check out the Active Living No Limits website for other inclusive active recreation and sports opportunities that are available across Northern Ireland.

Case Study – Inclusive Play Calendar

PlayBoard is the leading charity in Northern Ireland dedicated to the development and promotion of children and young people's play. Check out their website for ideas on how to create a calendar of inclusive play ideas.

Ensuring digital accessibility

In the UK alone, 7 million people have digital access requirements, so an accessible website makes sound business sense. Inaccessible websites have a hugely negative impact on potential business revenue. Information from W3C and the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) explains the accessibility solutions that can help to remove digital barriers that exist for users with certain impairments and access requirements.

Just as many people don't navigate the built environment in the same way, your Disabled customers will have different ways of accessing your website. Some online requirements, categorised by disability, are in the next lesson

Web accessibility barriers and solutions

In addition to the requirements listed below, having an HTML-first approach to your website content – rather than using downloadable documents to provide information.

People researching venues on their phones mayvbhc7 not have strong enough WiFi to easily download and open them. Important accessibility information should be provided in a text-based format, with images and video in addition to this.

Online requirements for deaf and those who have hearing loss

To engage with all online content, deaf and those who have hearing loss are likely to require:

- Transcripts of, and captions on, audio content;
- Content written clearly and concisely in plain language;
- Content that is clearly broken up with subheadings;
- For some deaf people, sign language is their primary language, and they may not read the written language as fluently. Providing important information in sign language and using simpler text that is supplemented by images, and other illustrations help make web content more understandable to many people. However, it is important to remember that not all people who are deaf know and are able to use sign language.

Web accessibility barriers and solutions

Online requirements for people with speech impairments

Remember to include alternatives to voice-based calls or chat software like email, written forms or online text-based chat functions are often preferred.

Online requirements for people with physical disabilities

To navigate websites, people with physical disabilities often use specialised hardware and software such as:

- An ergonomic or specially designed keyboard or mouse;
- Head pointers, mouth sticks, and other aids to help with typing;
- An on-screen keyboard with trackball, joysticks, or other pointing devices;
- Switches operated by foot, shoulder, sip-and-puff, or other movements;
- Voice recognition, eye tracking, and other approaches for hands-free interaction.

Web accessibility barriers and solutions

For this equipment to work successfully, websites should be designed to:

- Be used by mouse, speech and keyboard;
- Provide users with more time to type, click, or carry out other interactions;
- Promote large, clickable areas that do not demand precision;
- Provide shortcuts to enable quick form filling;
- Provide visual indicators of current focus.

Online requirements for blind or partially sighted people:

Blind and partially sighted people typically change the presentation of web content to make it more usable for their particular requirements. For example by:

- Enlarging or reducing text size and images;
- Customising settings for fonts, colours and contrast levels, and spacing;
- Listening to text-to-speech description of the content;
- Listening to audio descriptions of multimedia;
- Reading text using refreshable Braille.

Web accessibility barriers and solutions

For these web browsing methods to work:

- Clear, sans serif typefaces e.g. Arial, Trebuchet or Verdana should be available for ease of identification, and avoid italics and text written in all-caps (EXAMPLE) as these can be particularly difficult to read;
- Images should be described using alt text and transcripts or audio description should be available for videos;
- Websites should use good colour contrast and a readable font size; for example white text over black background, or black text over white or light-colored background. Text should not be overlayed on top of an image or a textured background.
- Links should be descriptive rather than asking users to 'click here' or similar; for example "During our next festival in the Fall" instead of "To learn more about the next edition of our festival click here"
- Webpages should follow a linear, logical layout and should be built for keyboard use only;
- All elements should also be able to be identified by screen readers and other assistive technologies.

Web accessibility barriers and solutions

Online requirements for neurodivergent users:

- Simple, muted colours on websites;
- Simpler text and shorter text passages that are supported by images, graphs, and other illustrations;
- Text that is aligned to the left;
- Clearly structured content, often in bullet points or similar;
- Consistent and predictable webpage layouts;
- Clear and consistent labelling of forms and buttons;
- Content that is available in a choice of formats (text, audio and/or video);
- Different ways of navigating websites, such as hierarchical menu and search;
- Options to suppress blinking, flickering, flashing, and otherwise distracting content;
- Content that does not auto play unless the user knows this is going to happen.
- Neurodivergent customers use different types of web browsing methods, depending on their particular requirements. For example, some people use text-to-speech software to hear the information while reading it visually or use captions to read the information while hearing it. Some people use tools that resize text and spacing or customise colours to assist reading. Others use grammar and spelling tools to support writing. For these web browsing methods to work, developers need to consider web accessibility requirements which are often shared by people with hearing, physical, speech, and visual impairments.

Accessibility toolbars

Website accessibility widgets and toolbars, such as Recite Me, accessiBe and Texthelp, act as overlays with the goal of enhancing accessibility. They are typically embedded from a third-party source and allow users to adapt the presentation and operation of the website.

It is important to understand that they cannot provide an “instant fix” to a website’s accessibility nor be used as a substitute for implementing technical, visual, and content measures to make a website accessible.

However, as long as it can be ensured that the widget does not disrupt a user’s ability to access and navigate a site properly or conflict with the assistive technology a user may already have, you may consider it to be a useful addition to your website.

Digital accessibility: actions to take

To ensure your online presence is accessible, there are international web accessibility standards called Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). They are quite detailed but if you use a web designer you should ensure they follow them. This checklist from the A11y Project will also support you on your WCAG journey.

Similarly, both the WAVE tool, Microsoft Accessibility Insights and the Digital Accessibility Maturity Model toolkit are particularly helpful if you're wanting to assess the accessibility of your current website and find areas for improvement. To ensure the accessibility of documents such as PDFs, check out the advice from Adobe.

Once your website is accessible, it is a good idea to also produce guidance on website accessibility in the form of a 'Website accessibility statement' with a link to it from the website footer. And remember, visitors to your website should be able to contact you via a variety of methods to get the information they require, be this by phone, email or an online chat function.

Inclusive social media hints and tips

Digital accessibility doesn't just involve your website; social media is often where potential customers will get their first impression of you. Disabled people use social media for travel research, peer reviews and to ask providers questions.

It’s great to nurture customer relations, give relevant information and improve from feedback. Just make sure you're using the relevant keywords and hashtags like #AccessibleTourism, following and engaging with deaf and Disabled influencers, and joining relevant forums and groups, some of which can be found later in this section.

Social media changes are often ‘quick wins’; there is usually very little that needs to be altered in order to make an account on X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, TikTok or Instagram accessible.

Users will often have their own assistive technologies, such as screen readers, magnification tools and Braille displays. But the one thing that is vital is consistency; your Disabled followers should be able to become familiar with your content and know how they can best access it.



Inclusive social media hints and tips

Add alt text and image descriptions

For blind and partially sighted visitors to your website and social media accounts, image descriptions (known as alternative text) allow them to engage with content by visualising what a sighted person is seeing.

If you are posting an image that is of a quote, statistic or other text, make sure you also add the text itself into the image description.

“For example, ‘pink background with the well-known travel phrase: “Not all those who wander are lost” in a white speech bubble.’

Alt text should be descriptive but concise and ideally fit into one or two sentences, if possible. Don't overdo it and mention irrelevant features. You are building a general mental image. Use this decision tree to choose the right alt-text.

Further information relating to audio description, how to provide it and the impact it has can be found on the RNIB website.

Inclusive social media hints and tips

Capitalising hashtags

This is a perfect example of a 'quick win' that will simply become second nature after a while. Hashtags are a great way of getting involved in conversations and boosting your engagement on social media but can be very difficult to identify and read for some. When using hashtags, capitalise the first letter of every word (otherwise known as using CamelCase). For example, #traveltuesday, is much more accessible if written as #TravelTuesday.

Text over Emojis

It is always best to write what you want to say, rather than portray it through emojis. Screen readers read out each one – making certain points disjointed and difficult to follow for those who use them. If you must use emojis keep it to a single one at the end of the text.

Inclusive social media hints and tips

Making videos accessible

One of the main accessibility barriers for people who are deaf or have hearing loss is when videos are not captioned. When posting video content on your online channels, captions should run as standard (this can often be managed within the 'settings' system of your chosen social platform).

If you are using video hosting platforms like YouTube that create captions automatically, don't forget to review and update them as they typically contain errors. Be mindful when sharing video content from others as captions are sometimes not included.

Video accessibility is also important for blind or partially sighted followers, especially if the video has picture but no sound to describe what is happening. When a video doesn't send the same message both audibly and visually, a text description of what is happening in the video should be added in the caption, or the video itself should include audio description. Further information relating to audio description, how to provide it and the impact it has can be found on the RNIB website.

The importance of disability representation

As 16% of the global population is disabled, remember to reflect this in your marketing (World Health Organisation, 2023).

Whether on your social media or website, disability representation should be at the heart of how you choose to promote your business to the Disabled community.

Reading that a restaurant entrance has step-free access, or that a hotel has a lowered reception desk and hearing loops is one thing (and great in itself); seeing Disabled people and those with accessibility requirements using these facilities is another thing entirely and highly likely to build customer confidence and engagement in your offering. Using these images across all of your marketing content – not just within your 'accessibility' section or related social posts – demonstrates that you are a truly inclusive business.

Commissioning inclusive imagery

Ensuring that the imagery on your website reflects the diversity of your potential visitors will help everyone feel welcome. When commissioning a photoshoot for your website or any campaigns, the following guidance may be helpful:

- Ensure imagery reflects the broad range of disabilities: although a wheelchair is the international symbol of disability, only around 7% of Disabled people use a wheelchair.
- Include aids in photographs, they are a 'visual cue' for some disabilities e.g. hearing aid, assistance dog, walking stick/frame, cane
- Ensure that representation is authentic – never cast a non-disabled person in the role of a Disabled person
- Show Disabled people interacting with non-disabled people in a non-disabled-specific context
- Limit hero and celebrity images - constant depictions of disabled high achievers have may to further tokenize/isolate/stigmatize the Disabled community?
- Reflect everyday situations where you would expect to find a family or group of friends, including a Disabled person, enjoying a meal or drink together don't forget to obtain the relevant signed model release forms confirming that you can use the images commercially.
- Don't forget to obtain the relevant signed model release forms confirming that you can use the images commercially.

For further information and support, please refer to this thorough disability-smart image guidance from the Business Disability Forum.

Concessions, incentives and feedback

The decision to offer **pricing incentives** to Disabled customers can make or break their inclusive experience. According to Scope's Disability Price Tag report, a Disabled person's extra costs are equivalent to almost half of their income (not including housing costs).

Main concessions businesses can provide

- A venue may choose to offer a concessionary rate for Disabled customers – sometimes in recognition of the extra costs Disabled people face day to day or physical barriers at the venue, which may prevent them from enjoying the same experience as non-disabled people. Minimise queuing by allowing these tickets to be booked online and promote fast-track entry on your website.
- Many Disabled people require support from a friend, relative or support worker to be able to access tourist attractions, accommodation, and the transport required to reach them. The DDA 1995 does not place any specific requirement on service providers to provide free entry for someone supporting a Disabled person. However, tourism providers must amend policies where Disabled people would be at a 'substantial disadvantage'. Attraction operators may feel it appropriate to amend the admission policy to provide free essential companion entry. This would ensure Disabled people who require the support of someone else (sometimes two people) to visit the attraction are not put at a substantial disadvantage.

Quick wins for transparent pricing

- Make sure prices are easy to locate on your website (within two or three clicks).
- Be clear about what is included and excluded.
- Don't charge extra for accessible facilities and services, as this could be considered as discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. For example, you can't charge for a Braille menu or a premium rate to stay in an accessible room.
- Consider flexible family tickets that allow for different numbers of adults and children, including grandparents.
- Promote any free essential companion policies and concessions for Disabled customers.

The Access Card

The Access Card works as a kind of 'disability passport'. It explains the owner's access requirements in a discreet manner to help businesses understand their entitlement for discounted entry, or similar. As Martin Austin MBE, Managing Director of Nimbus Disability who created the Access Card, states the ultimate purpose of the card's creation was to remove frustrations: "for Disabled people, the frustration was in repeatedly sending in personal documents which bore no direct relation to the needs of the individual. For the venues, it was frustration in interpreting these documents and the additional admin burden it placed on their staff."

In effect, the Access Card has become a one-stop shop for both parties; Disabled people have to send evidence in only once, and this documentation is checked by a qualified team so that staff at tourism and other venues do not have to.

Another alternative is the National Disability Card, created by Social Enterprise for Good.

Do bear in mind, though, that only some Disabled people own these cards. Offering Disabled customers numerous ways in which to provide evidence and supporting information would therefore be recommended.

Case Study – Grand Opera House

The Access for All scheme has been designed to ensure that everyone can access and enjoy all aspects of the Grand Opera House.

GOH set up the scheme to better know their customers and their specific support requirements to help provide the best service.

Membership of the Access for All scheme is open to all customers with access needs and is free to join.

Access For All Scheme | Grand Opera House



The Importance of Feedback and Added Value

If a business falsely advertises the accessibility of their business and this leads to a negative experience, Disabled visitors will naturally dissuade their friends and colleagues from visiting. However, should a business promote their inclusion journey with honesty (note: this does not have to mean perfection) and be prepared to operate with proactivity and empathy, Disabled customers are likely to return.

Testimonials and 'word of mouth' recommendations are hugely valued by many Disabled customers. Not only do these ensure authenticity, but they also remove the 'guinea pig' feeling that accessibility in unfamiliar venues holds for many. Ask your Disabled customers for their honest review, and hints and tips on how to improve your offering. Whether it relates to physical, digital, or operational accessibility, all of these elements must be considered for a truly inclusive experience.

Review Sites and Forums

There are several popular forums where people with accessibility requirements exchange ideas on holidays and accommodation. Facebook is particularly good for this, with popular pages and groups such as:

- Accessible Travel Club
- Accessible Holidays and Day Trips
- Accessible, Adapted or Disabled Holiday Lets, Places to Visit & Days Out UK
- Disability Horizons

TripAdvisor also has the Traveling with Disabilities Forum.

They are all worth keeping an eye on, if only to get a feel for the things that travellers with accessibility requirements need and, all too often, don't get. User-led review sites for destinations around the world are springing up rapidly: one worth focusing on, since it is largely UK-based, is Euan's Guide.

Reaching Out: Communicating and Celebrating Accessibility

There are numerous specific marketing channels, influencers, and initiatives you might wish to engage with on your inclusivity journey. Whether you are looking for business support, ways to reach diverse audiences, or an opportunity to communicate your accessibility credentials to the Disabled community, in the next lesson is a list of initiatives, shows, bloggers, and travel companies for you to explore.

Accessibility awareness days and initiatives

Awareness days and events surrounding disability, diversity, accessibility and inclusion can also be really beneficial to you and your organisation. Getting involved is a great way to show your visitors, customers and staff members that you care (but bear in mind that this awareness and empathy should not be reserved for one day, week or month in the year!)

Whilst days like International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPWD), months like #DisabilityPrideMonth and the Disability Pride Flag should never be used to disingenuously generate business, they are opportunities to celebrate inclusivity of workforce, leadership, features and facilities, where appropriate.

There are a number of sources to find out more about other awareness days, including the following:

- The Diversity and Inclusion Calendar | Inclusive Employers
- Business Disability Forum's list of disability awareness dates
- AbilityNet's Disability and accessibility-related events calendar



Accessibility Awards and Certification Programmes

The process of applying for an accessibility award is a useful exercise as the application process helps you step back, reflect on your business and identify areas for future development. Should you be recognised, an accessibility award can provide a mark of reassurance and a useful source of publicity to build customer confidence in your business and its reputation.

Below are some to get acquainted with:

The Autism NI Autism Impact Award is your mark of excellence - showing that your business is committed to inclusion and actively supports our neurodiverse community.

The Autism Friendly Award: Certification programme has been created by the National Autistic Society and recognises businesses and venues that are committed to improving autistic people's access to their sites and services.

Blue Badge Access Awards: Focusing on 'stylish accessibility' across hotels, restaurants and other venues, these awards celebrate exceptional venues that

Museums and Heritage Visitor Accessibility Award: This award, new for 2025, aims to highlight exemplary initiatives undertaken by organisations to implement a comprehensive approach to visitor accessibility.

Blue Badge Access Awards for exceptional venues, organisations & people that have created beyond ordinary access for all,

The NI Hummingbird Awards are a celebration of organisations and individuals championing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

National Learning Disability Awards Shine Across Northern Ireland recognise outstanding individuals, teams, and organisations who go above and beyond to make a real difference in the lives of people with a learning disability.

Employers for Disability NI is the only NI employer organisation promoting Disability Positive practice by supporting employers and disabled people.

Inclusive Tourism Awards part of the Embrace the Inclusive Spirit programme

Keep up with the latest award schemes available in Northern Ireland.

Disability-Focused Shows

Most exhibitors at these shows are disability equipment suppliers, but there are also leisure, sports, and holiday stands to explore.

- Disability Awareness Day – Europe's largest 'not for profit' voluntary-led disability exhibition, held annually near Warrington, featuring holiday and leisure exhibitors.
- Disability Expo – The UK's person-focused disability exhibition.
- Kidz to Adultz Exhibitions – Dedicated to disabled children and young adults, with five annual events held across the UK.
- Naidex– The UK's largest disability, homecare, and rehabilitation event, catering to trade and consumers alike.
- Motability Live - The Motability Scheme Live events offer an opportunity for Disabled people to view a wide range of vehicles, scooters and powered wheelchairs, take a test drive, speak to one of their advisors, meet their Motability Scheme partners and much more.

Disability-Focused Publications

There are many national and international magazines focused on sharing news, stories, and advice for audiences with accessibility requirements.

- Disability Review Magazine – Shares informative articles, engaging stories, and life-improvement solutions.
- Enable Magazine – Named Consumer Publication of the Year 2022, this bi-monthly title is one of the UK's leading disability and lifestyle magazines.
- Easy News – The first news magazine designed for people with learning disabilities, encouraging discussion and keeping readers informed about global news.
- Motability's Lifestyle Magazine – Offers up-to-date information for disabled drivers, including news about the Motability Scheme and mobility advice.
- New Mobility – Based in the US, this publication by the United Spinal Association empowers wheelchair users to lead successful and fulfilling lives.

Accessibility Guidebooks

There is one comprehensive guidebook to accessible holidays in Britain. The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain (including Northern Ireland), produced by Motability, is available online or in hard copy. It contains advice and guidance plus listings of attractions, days out, travel and accommodation.

If you would like to be included in a future edition of Rough Guide, email mail@roughguides.com outlining your accessible facilities and services. If accepted, one of the team of authors will visit you to make a more detailed assessment.

Disabled Bloggers and Influencers

A large part of building a community (and often one of the best ways to build customer confidence in your business and its offerings) is to engage with bloggers and influencers who have lived experience and a solid reputation in the travel and tourism sector. Well-known bloggers can attract many thousands of readers.

You could reach out to a Disabled travel blogger and discuss how they may be able to authentically market your business to their audience, via written or recorded review. Remember to pay for their work in addition to offering a complimentary visit/stay.

Online Holiday Listings

Many Disabled travellers are looking for general accommodation and activities and therefore use general websites to book a holiday or work trip. Accessibility search fields are increasingly appearing on accommodation websites such as Booking.com, Expedia, Premier Cottages and Farm Stay.

However, users often still have to visit the owner websites for accurate, specific information making the planning stage of their trip time consuming and tiresome.

Below is a list of online specialist listings and guides. They range widely in their scope and style but each of them lists accessible holiday accommodation, attractions and activities in Northern Ireland and could be a useful marketing platform for you.

Many of them offer you the chance to upload your own information for a fee and update with special offers as the season goes on, requiring you to 'self-certify' that you are accessible. Listing charges range from free to over £100 per year. Some charge a commission on bookings made.

Some websites only review or list personally chosen and audited venues so you would need to contact them and see if you can arrange for them to visit you.

Online Holiday Listings

- Able Magazine Travel Guide: Published by Able Magazine, this online guide includes travel advice, listings of accommodation recommended by readers and carries adverts.
- Accessible Holiday Escapes: This multi award-winning and family run website clearly lists both general features and all internal and external accessibility features for each property. The website blog also allows customers to read reviews and get to know property owners.
- Airbnb: Hosts can select from a list of around 13 common mobility-related accessibility features to display on their listing. Properties adapted with the intention to host wheelchair users that meet set criteria can join over 1,000 properties that make up the 'Adapted accommodation' category and receive a free 3D property scan. Accessible experiences are now also listed.
- Blue Badge Style: Information site listing pre-approved and audited 'stylish' accessible venues, including hotels, bars and events.
- Pantou: A register of accessible tourism suppliers in Europe. Free listing to businesses who belong to a certified accessibility audit scheme or who complete a site access statement. Managed by ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism) and supported by the European Commission.
- RightRooms: A website where each hotel listed displays up to 800 features across niches like sustainability, wellness, accessibility and family friendliness.
- Tourism for All Travel Planner: A charity-run website with online listings of accessible accommodation in the UK, including Northern Ireland. All members of Tourism for All are listed automatically.

Review-Based Websites and Mobile Applications

- Access Rating: A mobile application where restaurants, pubs and hotels are rated from 1 to 5.
- Euan's Guide: A disabled access review site where disabled people, their family, friends and carers can find and share reviews on the accessibility of venues around the UK and beyond.
- Snowball: Mobile application where accessibility reviews are produced for a range of different venues open to the public.
- Sociability: Community-led mobile application that helps disabled people to find accessible places by encouraging reviews and information upload from everyone.

Accessible Travel Companies

Specialist travel companies organise package holidays, or act as agents for accessible accommodation in Northern Ireland. Some of these may accept an offer of a familiarisation visit.

- Altogether Travel: The UK's first registered Care Inspectorate travel company. Providing supported holidays and accessible travel, they plan, book and provide care and support throughout accessible adventures.
- Disabled Access Holidays: Specialist overseas travel agent also has a listing of accessible holiday accommodation in UK.
- DisabilityDestinations.com mobility-friendly and accessible holiday properties worldwide.
- DisabledHolidays.com accessible holiday specialist for Accessible Holidays & Wheelchair Friendly Travel
- Enable Holidays: An agency that specialises in accessible travel for wheelchair users.
- Limitless Travel: An agency and operator organising bespoke holidays in the UK and Europe and has a listing of about 500 personally verified accommodations.
- Options Holidays: A tour operator that runs supported holidays for adults with learning disabilities.
- Responsible Travel: Large international operator with a focus on supporting local communities. Their site has some UK holidays and a 'wheelchair accessible' holiday type option.
- Seable: Private, tailored and chaperoned holidays for visually impaired people and their sighted family or friends.
- Tourism for All are a registered charity dedicated to helping those with additional needs find disabled friendly destinations and places to stay across the UK
- Travel Eyes: Tour operator providing independent group travel for people who are blind or partially sighted.

Enhancing Digital Accessibility for Your Business

Digital accessibility ensures that all individuals, including those with disabilities, can fully engage with your website, social media platforms, and marketing materials. This invites you to evaluate your business's current digital presence and identify ways to make it more accessible and inclusive. By reflecting on the principles of accessibility and inclusive marketing, you will explore actionable steps to improve customer experiences, build trust, and broaden your reach.

Description: Reflect on the concepts of digital accessibility and inclusive marketing discussed in this section. Consider strategies like providing an accessibility section on your website, using authentic communication about accessibility features, and avoiding "purple-hushing" by openly sharing your accessibility credentials. Inclusive marketing ensures that individuals of all abilities feel represented and welcomed, and transparency in accessibility information can empower customers to make informed decisions about engaging with your business.

Action:

Identify five specific actions you can take to enhance your business's digital accessibility and inclusive marketing efforts. These actions might include changes to your website, social media content, marketing strategies, or on-site information. For each action, explain:

- How it addresses accessibility challenges or barriers.
- Its impact on creating a more inclusive and trustworthy digital presence for your audience.
- As you craft your response, consider the importance of providing accurate and visible accessibility information, fostering trust through honest communication, and designing for a diverse range of customer needs.



TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND

Inclusive Recruitment and Employment

Section 7: Inclusive Recruitment and Employment

Three Top Tips for this section:

- Your staff members and volunteers should be able to have the same positive, accessible experience that is available to your customers; it's important to 'practise what you preach'.
- The visibility of job adverts and availability of workplace adjustments is key to forming an inclusive workplace. In this toolkit, learn more about the importance of inclusive recruitment and retention processes, and how to implement them.
- Disability inclusion in business can bring many benefits, not least heightening diversity in viewpoints and decision-making, but also helping to foster a culture of belonging.

Looking in: an inclusive internal culture

As well as focusing on your external reputation for access and inclusion, you may wish to think about how you could become a more inclusive employer.

Numerous studies show that diverse and inclusive businesses are more productive, and a business that represents disability internally by employing those with lived experience is usually one that can be trusted in terms of accessibility and carefully considered operations. In addition, reports show that Disability Inclusion Leaders enjoy greater financial benefits and earn 1.6 times more revenue than their peers.

In terms of digital accessibility, staff members should be able to experience the same inclusivity on any websites and apps they need to use as your customers can expect on your front-facing sites.

Follow the recommendations in Section 6: Marketing your Accessibility to ensure this is the case. Similarly, any built environment design feature noted in the technical design guidance within the downloads section of the e-learning module on MyTourismNI.com should apply to back-of-house as well as customer areas, wherever relevant and practicable.

In this section, you'll learn about the operational strategies and supportive schemes that are available to ensure you practise what you preach when it comes to accessibility and inclusion for customers and colleagues alike.

Looking in: an inclusive internal culture

In accordance with the Government's official employment statistics, nearly one in four of the UK working-age population were classed as disabled in 2025 (10.4 million).

Encouraging applications from disabled people is good for business. It can help you to:

- Increase the number of high-quality applicants available;
- Create a workforce that reflects the diverse range of customers it serves and the community in which it is based;
- Bring additional skills to the business, such as the ability to use BSL, which could result in large savings;
- Gain access to an untapped talent pool that shouldn't be overlooked.
- Improve your ability to respond to and support Disabled customers more effectively with guidance framed by the lived experience of your Disabled employees.

Inclusive culture strategies

Most businesses (and the people who work there) want an inclusive internal culture in which everyone feels safe, and able to bring their whole selves to work, as well as feel supported should their needs or requirements change. It is, however, an ongoing and detailed process, and many organisations do not know where to start.

Onvero is a not-for-profit organisation that helps employers build and maintain diverse teams and inclusive cultures.

Five useful steps towards inclusive culture strategies, are:

1. **Make a plan:** Where do you want your business to be both in terms of inclusive recruitment and diverse leadership, and how are you going to get there? Start small - goals could be as simple as 'we will actively encourage Disabled people to apply for advertised roles, and we will widen our job vacancy distribution to include Disability Employment Services', 'we will survey all current employees to check whether they have any accessibility requirements and / or if these are being met', 'we will implement Self-ID passports for all staff, which will allow the organisation to be aware of how to best support its employees in different settings' or 'we will provide all staff members with disability awareness training from an external provider, especially those with management responsibilities'. The key is to have a roadmap that develops as your knowledge grows and you stick to, even when times are tough. The action checklists can you give you further ideas.

Inclusive culture strategies

2. **Appoint an accessibility champion / disability liaison officer / employee resource group:** To oversee inclusive improvements, ensure your business is moving in the right, accessible direction and share regular updates with management and the rest of the team. This may be part of one person's role or split between two or more people – for example, a senior manager or director might be responsible for strategic planning and the oversight of day-to-day tasks might fall to another member of staff. It's important to note, however, that accessibility related work should not only fall onto the shoulders of a few; it's something everyone should have awareness of. To ensure this happens, engage accessibility ambassadors across the organisation to help embed inclusive practices and ensure everyone is aware of the support and guidance available.

3. **Encourage disclosure:** Many people do not disclose that they have a disability or accessibility requirement as they are fearful that:
    - no action will be taken,
    - it will lead to negative judgements from others and/or
    - they may be deemed incapable of fulfilling their role.

    One of the best things you can do is turn this on its head by actively encouraging applications from Disabled people and talking openly about the availability of workplace adjustments and the positive impact of a diverse workforce.

Inclusive culture strategies

4. Engage with lived experience: Who better to learn from than Disabled people who have experience of inclusive (and not so inclusive) workplaces? Short 'lunch and learn' sessions, newsletter contributions etc. can be time and cost-effective ways of learning more.

5. Train, and train again: While your business may benefit from an accessibility champion, everyone in the organisation needs to have a basic awareness of what it means to recruit inclusively, the kinds of workplace adjustments that are available and your business' inclusive culture aims and aspirations. Training for line managers and HR staff is especially crucial in knowing how to handle reasonable adjustment requests and also using the proper language when approaching a Disabled colleague.

You can find a list of training providers in Section 4: An inclusive welcome.

For further practical hints and tips on inclusive hiring and employment, please refer to the action checklists that accompany this toolkit.

Did you know?

The term 'ally' can also be thought of as a useful acronym:

• Acknowledge – Recognise and respect the diverse abilities, perspectives and experiences of colleagues and customers.

• Learn – Actively seek knowledge and understanding of different requirements.

• Leverage – Apply what you learn to improve services, environments and opportunities.

Yield – Create positive impact for individuals, your organisation and the wider community by yielding the floor to disabled people to help identify and eliminate barriers.

Inclusive recruitment

Job Descriptions

When writing job descriptions, really consider what you are asking for and whether certain elements might be unnecessarily exclusive. Do you really need someone with a certain number of years' experience, a specific education or a driving licence, for example?

Use your job description to focus on the responsibilities of the role, and any must-have skills an applicant should possess or learn to achieve success if hired.

LinkedIn data and research show that job advertisements that focus on responsibilities rather than requirements receive 14% more applications per view.

Consideration must also be given to how life skills could compensate for academic achievement, as LinkedIn data shows that skills-based hiring improves retention, and employees without a traditional four-year degree stay 34% longer than employees with such a degree.

Job Adverts

Job adverts should include inclusive language and be made available on job sites that people with accessibility requirements are likely to visit, such as EvenBreak.

Job advert content should ideally always contain a diversity statement and actively encourage applications from Disabled people and those with other protected characteristics.

Inclusive recruitment

Almost 80% of Disabled jobseekers have said that a major issue with recruitment processes is the lack of information in job advertisements regarding available adjustments. Each job description should therefore, at a minimum, include information on:

- Number of hours required
- Preferred location of role and if the role can be done remotely - if the role is expected to be performed on-site, provide information on the accessibility of the office space
- Details on sick leave / disability leave / health benefits
- If flexible working arrangements are available - including home working or flexible hours

Inclusive recruitment

Application

The application process should be as simple and logical as possible, and alternative formats of documents and forms should be made available upon request, e.g. audio format, easy-read, braille etc. Offer adjustments at every stage of the process.

Interviews

Offer both virtual and in-person interviews, and provide interview questions in advance of the interview to allow candidates to prepare thoughtful responses, reducing anxiety and enabling them to showcase their qualifications and problem-solving abilities more effectively.

For Disabled people, having questions beforehand can be especially beneficial, as it offers the necessary time to accommodate specific needs, ensuring a more equitable opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities. If an interview is to be held in person, provide information on the accessibility of the venue, for example

- whether there is a step-free entrance,
- lift access to all floors,
- accessible bathrooms,
- accessible parking etc.

Use testing as part of the interview phase only when absolutely necessary. Tests often fail to account for diverse learning and communication styles, cultural backgrounds, and disabilities, and potentially disadvantage candidates who might excel in the actual work environment but do not test well in standardised formats.

Inclusive recruitment

Post-interview

A supportive communications process should be in place to discuss future working patterns and workplace adjustments with successful applicants.

For example, a Blind or partially sighted employee may require certain digital software. Going forward, regular meetings should be held as an opportunity to discuss the efficiency of these adjustments, and any amendments that may be required.

Also ensure that all onboarding material that is supplied is also made available in alternative formats, e.g. Easy Read / Plain English or audio.

More guidance on inclusive recruitment

- Scope provides disability recruitment training for businesses interested in diversifying their workforce by employing more disabled talent.
- Purple has a recorded webinar focused on employing and empowering neurodiverse talent.
- Leonard Cheshire's Change 100 Programme works with employers to provide paid summer work placements, professional development and mentoring to disabled students and graduates.
- The Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative (RIDI) support businesses to build disability confidence into recruitment and employment strategies, through education and practical advice that enables accessible, equitable employment opportunities for disabled people.
- WorkFit is a programme connecting employers and job-seekers with Down Syndrome.
- There are a range of employment support services in NI that can assist both the employer and Disabled employees, these include Disability Action, Downs Syndrome Association NI, the Now Group and Usel.

Reasonable Adjustments

You must make reasonable adjustments to support Disabled job applicants and employees. This means ensuring Disabled people can overcome any substantial disadvantages they may have doing their jobs and progressing in work, as stated in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

The right to reasonable adjustments extends to all work-related activities, from the job application process through termination. It also extends to working conditions and fringe benefits. Adjustments take the following form:

- Changing the way things are done: This could be a formal or informal policy, a rule or a practice. It could also be a one-off decision. Examples include changing someone's work pattern, making information available in accessible formats or changing a 'no animals' policy to allow service animals.
- Changing a physical feature: This could be changing steps and stairs, toilets, lighting, the size of a premises, a desk or seating choice.
- Provide extra aids or services: This could be specific equipment, a BSL or ISL interpreter, extra time, or assistance.

When it comes to reasonable adjustments, employers may worry about the cost implications of employing a Disabled person. Actually, the costs of making reasonable adjustments are often low. And help is out there: in many cases, Access to Work is a Government grant scheme, providing financial and practical support to ensure an employer is not at a disadvantage by recruiting inclusively. Additionally, the benefits of retaining an experienced, skilled employee who has a disability are usually greater than recruiting and training new staff.

Reasonable Adjustments

Good practice reasonable adjustments

Physically and digitally, for interviews, good practice may include:

- Providing interviewees with access to interview questions prior to the interview itself
- Offering access to a range of online meeting platforms for candidates to choose from
- Posting interview questions in the chat feature (if hosting the interview online) as well as asking them verbally
- Ensuring appropriate sightlines for lipreading on both online and offline interviews
- Turning on online captioning features, and/or hiring a BSL interpreter
- Ensuring the interview venue offers step-free access and accessible toilet facilities, at minimum.

It might be necessary (and reasonable) to also provide flexibility on whether the interview is to be held virtually or in-person, and be empathetic to requests you receive. Virtual interviews are preferred by many candidates with accessibility requirements as they eliminate travel-related stressors, allow interviewees to be in the comfort of their own environment, and provide assistive technologies such as live captioning.

Reasonable Adjustments

What is reasonable?

Before agreeing to, or setting up a reasonable adjustment, it can be a good idea to consider the following questions:

- Will the adjustment reduce or remove disadvantages faced by a Disabled employee?
- What are the financial costs of making the adjustment? Is external assistance available?
- Does the adjustment pose any health and safety risks to the rest of the organisation?
- Do we have the resources to action this? Can we plan toward this?

An adjustment is not reasonable if it will impose a disproportionate burden on you as an employer. But, if an adjustment is reasonable and you do not act, your employee may be entitled to make a claim at an employment tribunal. If successful, the tribunal may order compensation or make an appropriate recommendation.

Some good practice hints and tips for providing reasonable adjustments:

- Normalise conversations surrounding reasonable adjustments; they shouldn't be awkward or taboo but instead easy to ask for and to access.
- Give colleagues options of who they discuss reasonable adjustments with; not everyone will feel comfortable speaking to their line manager about personal matters.
- Remember that disabilities and accessibility requirements can fluctuate and therefore the reasonable adjustments needed may change. Check in with your colleagues at interview, when onboarding and on a quarterly basis at work and ask whether their needs have altered.
- Be supportive of colleagues that ask for reasonable adjustments and open to conversations surrounding them.

Reasonable Adjustments

Did you know?

Northern Ireland has the lowest rate of employment for people with disabilities in the UK. Just over a third of Disabled people in Northern Ireland are in work, compared with over half in the rest of the UK, and compared to 80% of non-disabled people.

That means there is a disability employment gap in Northern Ireland of 44%.

Almost a quarter of a million (243,000) working-age adults in Northern Ireland are disabled. That is just over one-fifth of the working-age population, meaning that there is a vast untapped resource of potential employees.

Inclusive employment resources and support

To learn more about the support available to you when recruiting and retaining Disabled employees, take a look at the following schemes:

Access to Work (NI) is a publicly funded employment support grant scheme that aims to support Disabled people start or stay in work by providing:

- Aids and equipment;
- Money for extra transport costs;
- Adaptations to the premises, training, support workers and interpreters, amongst other things.

It can provide practical and financial support for people who have a disability or long-term physical or mental health condition. An Access to Work grant can pay for practical support to enable your employee to start or stay in work, or to support you if you are self-employed.

NIbusinessinfo.co.uk has useful information and guidance for employers in NI who wish to employ Disabled people.

The Recruitment & Employment Confederation have produced a series of videos to guide businesses through inclusive recruitment practice, including how to use the appropriate language and top tips.

There are a range of employment support services in NI that can assist both the employer and Disabled employees, these include Disability Action, Downs Syndrome Association NI, the Now Group and Usel.

Did you know?

Autistica advises employers on how to participate in the Neurodiversity Employers Index (NDEI). Their website includes upcoming and past webinars, for example: https://youtu.be/eUZC9BdKxZw

Disabled leadership

You can, however, go one step further than employing Disabled people. Where applicable, you should be advocating for more Disabled people and those with accessibility requirements to be in leadership positions, just as there are rightly similar campaigns for more women, people from ethnic minorities and those who identify as LGBTQIA+ to be in senior roles.

You've likely heard all the misconceptions surrounding disability: in 2021, the BBC reported that 1 in 3 people see Disabled people as less productive than their non-disabled peers and therefore unable to contribute as much to society.

With 17% of Disabled adults having had a job offer withdrawn as a result of their disability, these negative perceptions often result in those with accessibility requirements being even less inclined to disclose their disabilities or conditions, as mentioned earlier in this section.

Promoting Disabled people into leadership positions, however, can turn this on its head. It shows a strong internal commitment to accessibility and inclusion; ensures lived experience viewpoints are included at the centre of decision-making processes and not as an afterthought and fosters a culture of belonging where candidates will be enthusiastic about applying for positions; will leave employees feeling empowered to disclose their disabilities, and to ask for the support that they need.

Learning from one another

Don't forget to discuss your internal improvements with your business peers, just as much as you would share your external, customer-facing successes. Change often happens from the inside out, so learning from each other when it comes to recruitment processes and workplace cultures should be integral to your accessibility improvement journey.

It might even be a good idea to partner or 'twin' with those at a similar stage to you.

Further support

To ensure that you continue to stay up to date with inclusive learning and development within the workplace, there are numerous resources and networks.

The Business Disability Forum is a business membership organisation specialising in disability inclusion. If you'd like to engage with access and inclusion as a business movement on a global scale, look up the Valuable 500, a business collective of 500 companies, innovating together for disability inclusion. Employers for Disability NI is a local network of employers working to promote training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities as employees and customers.

Did you know?

The Barriers to Employment: What Disabled Candidates Say 2020 research found:

- The most significant issue reported by Disabled job seekers when seeking work is identifying employers that they feel confident to apply to.
- 82% of respondents reported that the most pressing problem to them was finding a truly disability-friendly employer.
- 15% of respondents say they exclusively apply to those employers known to be disability-friendly.

A major issue within the recruitment process appears to be the lack of information in job advertisements regarding available adjustments for the applicant, or workplace policies regarding Disabled employees. Almost 80% of respondents said this occurred regularly or always.

Ensuring Accessibility in Recruitment

Recruiting with accessibility in mind is a vital step toward fostering an inclusive workplace. By removing barriers in your recruitment processes, you not only open opportunities to individuals with diverse abilities but also strengthen your organization by attracting and retaining talent from a wide range of backgrounds. From crafting accessible job adverts to creating equitable interview experiences, inclusive recruitment practices reflect your commitment to accessibility and diversity.

Description: Reflect on the importance of accessibility as discussed in this section. Think about how you can structure job adverts with clear, inclusive language and provide information on accessibility accommodations. Consider steps to make the application process user-friendly for everyone, as well as measures to ensure interviews are inclusive and respectful of candidates' needs. By prioritizing accessibility, you can create a positive and equitable experience for all applicants, setting the foundation for a diverse and welcoming workplace culture.

Action: Identify five specific steps you will take to ensure accessibility in your recruitment process. These could include:

- **Job Adverts:** Ensuring they are written in plain language, include accessibility statements, and are available in multiple formats (e.g., digital, audio).
- **Application Process:** Using accessible platforms or offering alternative methods for candidates to apply.
- **Interview Accommodations:** Providing flexible options such as virtual interviews, sign language interpreters, or accessible interview venues.
- **Communication:** Proactively informing candidates about the availability of accommodations throughout the process.
- **Feedback:** Gathering feedback from candidates about their experience to identify areas for improvement.

For each step, explain:

- The specific accessibility barrier it addresses.
- How it creates a more inclusive and welcoming experience for candidates with disabilities.



TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND

Continuing your Accessibility Journey

Section 8: Continuing your Accessibility Journey

Thank you for reading this Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Toolkit for Businesses.

Wherever you are and however much time, space and resources are available to you, there are many quick wins and longer-term actions you can take to ensure that both your customers and colleagues with accessibility requirements are able to experience inclusive online spaces, built environments and social operations as part of their visit to, or work day at, your business.

Next Steps: Developing an Access Plan

As a tourism business that wants to welcome everyone and provide equitable experiences, your organisation should implement accessibility considerations and measures into your strategic and regular action plans. So, what can you get started with?

Developing an access plan is a good way of internally sharing with colleagues the actions you aim to take to further your accessibility journey, how you will get there and the positive impact you hope these actions will have. Access plans are a great way to 'get started' when it comes to accessibility. Your plan should also note where consultation with those who have lived experience of disability will take place.

Your access plan should establish:

- Your short and longer term aims in terms of accessibility, and how you will prioritise these – both in terms of planning and acting.
- The solutions you propose to any current accessibility barriers faced by customers and/or staff members.
- Ways in which you aim to comply or align with related accessibility standards and guidance, and where you can go beyond compliance to achieve true equity of experience for all.
- Your intended timeframe for getting there, and who will 'own' and record the work, ensuring it continues to progress as an important cornerstone of your business.
- To maintain accountability and integrity, your access plan should also detail who is going to be responsible for task sign off, and when progress and/or updates are expected.

Using actionable checklists

Further 'next step' actions for all tourism businesses to take in terms of accessibility and inclusion can be found in the accompanying actionable checklists.

We appreciate that a lot of information is provided in this document, so we have pulled together all the elements that you and your team can start acting on now, and placed them into six checklist documents – dedicated to self-catering accommodation, serviced accommodation, visitor attractions, food & beverage, businesses events venues and business events organisers.

However, mature your business is, and wherever you are on your accessibility journey, we guarantee there will be something for you to identify, prioritise and starting working on within those checklists.



Claiming and maintaining ownership

Accessibility and inclusion is an ongoing journey. It can never really be ‘completed’, so the aim should be to enjoy the process, be as aspirational as possible within your limits, and see where it takes you.

However, there are specific steps you can take to gain greater control over your business’s inclusion strategy. These steps will help you measure progress, track successes, and prioritize your next actions, ensuring continuous improvement in fostering a more inclusive environment.

To ensure that you continue to own the accessible and inclusive tourism space as one of priority, remember the following:

Share Knowledge, Both Internally and Externally

Promoting accessibility starts with sharing knowledge, both within your organisation and beyond. Encourage open discussions and continuous learning among your teams to raise awareness and embed accessibility into your business culture. Externally, share your insights and best practices with industry peers and communities to foster collaboration.

Accessibility is not a competitive space - it's a shared responsibility. By collectively supporting each other, we can create a more inclusive world where businesses of all kinds help raise the bar for accessibility.

Claiming and maintaining ownership

Leverage Feedback from Those with Lived Experience

Feedback from customers and employees with accessibility needs is one of the most valuable resources your business can access. Treat these individuals as subject matter experts, and see their insights as not only ethical but also a practical asset to your business's success. People with lived experiences offer firsthand perspectives that can highlight barriers you might otherwise overlook. Engaging them in your improvement process ensures your efforts are not only inclusive but also grounded in real-world practicality. This contributes to both customer loyalty and better business outcomes.

Embrace Transparency: Honesty is Everything

While good intentions are essential, transparency is key when it comes to your accessibility efforts. Over-promising and under-delivering can have a damaging impact on trust, even if the intention was to do good. Be open with your customers and employees about where you currently stand on your accessibility journey. Acknowledge the areas where work is still needed, and share your positive aspirations for the future. Honest communication builds credibility, and your commitment to continuous improvement will resonate more deeply when paired with transparency.

Focus on Progress, Not Perfection

Accessibility is an evolving journey, not a one-time goal. The concept of "full accessibility" for every possible need is an ideal that can be pursued but never truly perfected, given the diverse and dynamic nature of people's needs. Instead of striving for unattainable perfection, focus on making consistent progress. Each improvement you make, no matter how small, brings your business closer to creating a more inclusive environment. And don't forget to enjoy the process- celebrate the milestones along the way, and keep pushing for meaningful change.

Continual monitoring and evaluation

In order to continually progress on your accessibility journey, continual monitoring of your progress is required. It's a good idea to ensure that you have the following measures in place:

- The ability to be agile and continuously monitor, revise and update your access plan based on auditing information and feedback from those with lived experience of disability.
- The ability to communicate well with your customers - both online and offline - to manage queries, bookings and complaints.
- Whether through social media, email, or face-to-face interactions, establishing open channels of communication can help address customer needs promptly and efficiently. Providing accessible communication options- such as chatbots, video calls with sign language interpreters, or dedicated support lines-can enhance the customer experience for individuals with varying accessibility requirements.
- The ability to inclusively create and post job adverts, and recruit those with access requirements (more on this in Section 7: Inclusive Recruitment and Employment).
- A process is which you can ensure your 'finger is on the pulse' when it comes to an awareness of new and existing information and data surrounding accessible tourism and the related schemes and awards for businesses. Setting up a LinkedIn profile and following accessibility experts is a great way to engage with updated knowledge, new documentation and free events.
- A network with other businesses, whether local or national, in the same or differing sectors, to call upon for support and advice. If you can be mentored by those who are slightly more mature in their accessibility offering, and provide support to those who are just starting out, even better.

And... always ask!

To ensure that your actions align with your intentions, it's essential to gather insights from customers with accessibility requirements. This will enable you to create truly inclusive tourism experiences.

Consider incorporating a question about accessibility in your customer surveys to gain valuable feedback. You might also invite a local access group to visit your establishment or, for larger attractions, establish an Access Panel comprised of individuals with various accessibility needs.

Importantly, it's crucial to act on the feedback you receive, even if your initial actions are small. Continuous progression and open communication are vital components of providing inclusivity as a service.

By making a commitment to improve based on feedback, you can demonstrate your dedication to fostering an environment that accommodates everyone.

Thank you!

Developing Your Business Accessibility Journey

Accessibility is an ongoing commitment that enhances the experiences of customers and employees alike. This encourages you to reflect on how your business can embed accessibility into its strategy and operations. By evaluating current practices and identifying areas for improvement, you will develop a set of actionable steps to foster inclusion, equity, and positive engagement.

Description: Reflect on the importance of creating an Access Plan to prioritize accessibility in your business. Use this as a strategic tool to outline your goals, actions, and timeframes for improvement. Consider how to address accessibility barriers, align with standards, and incorporate feedback from those with lived experience. Use resources such as actionable checklists to identify and act on areas for growth. Emphasize collaboration, transparency, and continual evaluation to ensure your accessibility journey remains dynamic and impactful.

Action: Identify five specific actions you will take to advance accessibility in your business. These actions could include:

- Developing and implementing an Access Plan with short- and long-term goals.
- Using actionable checklists to identify and prioritize improvements in key areas such as accommodation, attractions, food and beverage, and events.
- Collaborating with individuals with lived experience to gather feedback and inform your strategy.
- Ensuring clear and transparent communication with customers and employees about accessibility initiatives.
- Regularly monitoring and updating your Access Plan based on audits and feedback.

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Thank you!

