

Templeman Associates

Mechanical and Electrical Design Structural and Civil Engineering

From 1 October 2004 service providers will have to remove physical obstructions, alter them or provide other ways of letting disabled people access their services.



What changes will you have to make?

The DDA states that “**reasonable adjustments**” must be made to practices or premises to accommodate disabled people. As this is quite a vague term, it is likely that what is considered “reasonable” will be only be defined through legal action.

It is always advisable to take a ‘best practice’ approach. Try to anticipate as many potential access needs as possible. If you are unable to provide a particular service, look for the best alternative. Above all, never refuse access to a disabled person.

It is also best to check your legal position when making access improvements. For example health and safety legislation and listed building status can override the DDA. This should not be used as an excuse for poor access provision.

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Some general hints

Have a professional access audit done, if you can afford it - this will confirm any areas for concern.

Compile an access policy in consultation with staff and visitors –this will help to clarify the incremental changes you must make.

The right attitude is very important – poor customer service can be more offensive than a lack of facilities.

Explain the access options you have available and ask what the disabled visitor/staff member would prefer.

Ask disabled visitors/staff and local disabled groups for suggestions for improvement.

Less than 5% of disabled people are wheelchair users – you need to take into account a wide range of other impairments.

Remember that not all access improvements need to be hugely expensive. For instance, have you considered:

enlarging the font on your labels?

offering guided tours to visually impaired visitors?

putting your opening hours on your telephone answer service?

providing objects that can be handled (real or replica)?

improving the signage in the building?