# **VisitEngland’s Accessible and inclusive tourism toolkit for businesses**

## Toolkit overview:

Accessible tourism can help businesses in many ways by tapping into under-served 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 Accessible and inclusive tourism toolkit for businesses 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, before providing guidance related to:

* Customer groups and how to remove barriers.
* How to provide an inclusive welcome with integrity and empathy at its heart.
* The availability of inclusive features and facilities (whether physical, digital or operational).
* 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 accessibility journey accountability.
* The support bodies, influencers, awards and schemes to help you best communicate and celebrate your accessibility.

This holistic toolkit consolidates and replaces a range of standalone VisitEngland guides on accessible and inclusive tourism, creating one comprehensive resource. This document is under regular review by VisitEngland and the expert authoring team, with feedback being welcomed. Should you have suggestions for content development, please email us at feedback@visitengland.org.

## Contents:

[**VisitEngland’s Accessible and inclusive tourism toolkit for businesses** 1](#_Toc148017914)

[Toolkit overview: 1](#_Toc148017915)

[Contents: 2](#_Toc148017916)

[Section 1: An introduction to this toolkit 5](#_Toc148017917)

[How can this toolkit help me? 5](#_Toc148017918)

[Welcome 5](#_Toc148017919)

[How to use this toolkit 6](#_Toc148017920)

[Contributors and supporters 6](#_Toc148017921)

[Section 2: What is accessibility? 8](#_Toc148017922)

[Section 3: The benefits of providing an inclusive experience 9](#_Toc148017923)

[Why accessibility matters 9](#_Toc148017924)

[Digital and social accessibility 9](#_Toc148017925)

[The value of the Purple Pound 10](#_Toc148017926)

[Removing barriers 11](#_Toc148017927)

[The Equality Act 2010 and your legal responsibilities 12](#_Toc148017928)

[Section 4: Know your customer 13](#_Toc148017929)

[Good practice hints and tips: Promoting inclusion for disabled customers 14](#_Toc148017930)

[The power of lived experience engagement 14](#_Toc148017931)

[Physical Impairments 15](#_Toc148017932)

[Sensory Impairments 17](#_Toc148017933)

[Customers with assistance dogs 20](#_Toc148017934)

[Neurodiversity and Non-Visible Impairments 20](#_Toc148017935)

[Customers with multiple and complex impairments 26](#_Toc148017936)

[Wider Customer Groups 26](#_Toc148017937)

[Section 5: An Inclusive Welcome 28](#_Toc148017938)

[Providing an inclusive welcome 28](#_Toc148017939)

[Inclusive communication hints and tips 29](#_Toc148017940)

[Methods of communication 30](#_Toc148017941)

[Written communication 30](#_Toc148017942)

[Face-to-Face communication 30](#_Toc148017943)

[Interpretation and translation 31](#_Toc148017944)

[Inclusive Language 31](#_Toc148017945)

[The importance of positive language 31](#_Toc148017946)

[Focusing on access requirements 32](#_Toc148017947)

[Asking appropriate questions 33](#_Toc148017948)

[Being open to education 33](#_Toc148017949)

[Supporting inclusive communication 34](#_Toc148017950)

[Staff awareness and training 34](#_Toc148017951)

[Section 6: Accessible Features and Facilities 37](#_Toc148017952)

[A focus on the built environment 38](#_Toc148017953)

[Accessible features and facilities within your business 39](#_Toc148017954)

[Evacuation 43](#_Toc148017955)

[Recommendations per business type 44](#_Toc148017956)

[Undertaking an access audit 49](#_Toc148017957)

[Accessibility Standards and Guidance 50](#_Toc148017958)

[Section 7: Marketing your Accessibility 53](#_Toc148017959)

[An introduction to inclusive marketing 53](#_Toc148017960)

[Marketing tools for inclusive business promotion 53](#_Toc148017961)

[The importance of honest marketing 55](#_Toc148017962)

[Accessibility Guides 55](#_Toc148017963)

[Ensuring digital accessibility 58](#_Toc148017964)

[Digital accessibility: actions to take 60](#_Toc148017965)

[Inclusive social media hints and tips 61](#_Toc148017966)

[The importance of disability representation 62](#_Toc148017967)

[Concessions, incentives and feedback 63](#_Toc148017968)

[The importance of feedback and added value 66](#_Toc148017969)

[Reaching out: communicating and celebrating accessibility 67](#_Toc148017970)

[Accessibility initiatives and awards 67](#_Toc148017971)

[Disability-focused shows 68](#_Toc148017972)

[Accessibility guidebooks 69](#_Toc148017973)

[Bloggers and influencers with accessibility requirements 69](#_Toc148017974)

[Online holiday listings 70](#_Toc148017975)

[Section 8: Inclusive Recruitment, Employment and Staff Training 72](#_Toc148017976)

[Looking in: an inclusive internal culture 72](#_Toc148017977)

[Inclusive culture strategies 73](#_Toc148017978)

[Inclusive recruitment 74](#_Toc148017979)

[Reasonable adjustments 75](#_Toc148017980)

[Inclusive employment resources and support 77](#_Toc148017981)

[Disabled leadership 78](#_Toc148017982)

[Section 9: Continuing your Accessibility Journey 80](#_Toc148017983)

[Next steps: developing an Access Plan 80](#_Toc148017984)

[Using actionable checklists 81](#_Toc148017985)

[Claiming and maintaining ownership 81](#_Toc148017986)

[Continual monitoring and evaluation 82](#_Toc148017987)

## Section 1: An introduction to this toolkit

### How can this toolkit help me?

* Aimed at micro, small and medium-sized tourism businesses wanting to embark on, or continue, their accessibility journey and reach the £15.3bn 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.

The toolkit focuses on the physical, digital and operational measures you can take to support those who identify as disabled or having 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.

Making tourism accessible doesn’t need to be difficult. It is about providing a warm welcome for customers, delivering a great service and offering amazing and memorable experiences for everyone. These are all elements which businesses in the tourism sector are already familiar with: the key, if we are to genuinely welcome everyone, means we just need to think a little differently about these.

This toolkit is mainly aimed at micro, small and medium-sized businesses who may have limited time, resources and budget to make infrastructure changes to their premises.

As part of this toolkit, there are downloadable business-specific **actionable checklists** for you to use to plan and prioritise improvements, as well assome more aspirational **technical design requirements** for when built environment amendments or installations are possible (due in November 2023).

### 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 section 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.

### Contributors and supporters

With thanks to the following organisations and individuals, including charities and trade associations, who kindly shared their time and expertise and/or are supporters of this toolkit:

* AccessAble;
* Access and Inclusion UK;
* Association of Event Organisers;
* Bacta;
* BALPPA;
* Barclays;
* BIAZA;
* British Institute of Innkeeping;
* Business Disability Forum;
* Caravan and Motorhome Club;
* Carol Sargent, Sargent Group Consultant;
* 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;
* 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;
* Stay in a Pub;
* The Professional Association of Self-Caterers UK;
* UKHospitality;
* UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre;
* VisitsUnlimited.

## Section 2: 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 part of a wider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion topic.**
* **Use the practical action checklists, technical design requirements and persona deck to help you move forward.**

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.

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 people with impairments and 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.

A Moment for Reflection

How have you previously defined accessibility? Has this definition changed?

## Section 3: The benefits of providing an inclusive experience

**Three Top Tips for this section:**

* **The spending power of disabled people and their households is called the Purple Pound. The annual tourism Purple Pound in England alone is worth £15.3 billion.**
* **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 Equality Act 2010. 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.

In this country almost one in four people are disabled (Department for Work and Pensions). Many of your existing customers are likely to be in that group but you may not realise this. Impairments 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. As of 2021, the average age in the UK is 40.7 years, and by 2040, nearly one in seven people are projected to be aged over 75.

### 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, ‘social access’, a positive perception of disability within your business is also 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?**

430,000 British people with an impairment did not take a domestic trip between April 2017 and March 2018 due to the lack of accessibility provision. If each one had taken a trip this would have created £116.7million in extra revenue for tourism businesses in England.

51% of people who identify as disabled did not take a holiday in England in the last 12 months that involved staying away from home for one night or more, compared to 40% of non-disabled people.

The good news for businesses wanting to target this market is that demand for accessible accommodation and activities outstrips the current supply. Disabled travellers tend to be loyal as - with fewer businesses providing accessible features and facilities - they often return to places that do. 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. Relating to annual tourism in England, the total expenditure generated by those with an impairment – travelling independently or within a group – is estimated to be £15.3 billion.

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 impairments 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 required and/or it removes the stress and effort of trying to find somewhere different.

Take a look at the [tourism data](https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/value-purple-pound) on the Purple Pound for more information.

**Case Study:** [**Hotel**](http://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/business-hub/resources/motionspot_roi_hotel_brooklyn.pdf) **Brooklyn**

Based in Manchester, Hotel Brooklyn’s investment in accessible facilities [investment in accessible facilities](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/business-hub/resources/motionspot_roi_hotel_brooklyn.pdf) delivered additional revenue of £217,000 in 2022, the hotel’s first full trading year. Whilst £132,000 of this came from accessible overnight accommodation bookings, a further £85,000 was created from accessible events bookings, from charity dinners to weddings.

**Case Study:** [**Broadgate Farm Cottages**](https://www.broadgatefarmcottages.co.uk/)

“We have a regular stream of guests who require a more accessible cottage for their holiday. They tend to be loyal guests and return; if they know that the cottages work well for them they will come back for a stress-free stay. Our number of guests with accessibility requirements has almost quadrupled over recent years.”

A Moment for Reflection

Is the accessible tourism market worth more than you thought? How might the Purple Pound benefit your business?

### Removing barriers

The physical, digital and social barriers in society can often be more disabling to people than their impairments and medical conditions. 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 people would find online hotel searches much easier and more enjoyable if all websites were accessible to screen-reader users. 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, those with 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 impairment 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 Equality Act 2010 and your legal responsibilities

Applying to all businesses, the Equality Act 2010 protects individuals with one or more of nine protected characteristics, including age, gender, race and disability. By law, customers with these protected characteristics have a right to access accommodation, restaurants and tourist attractions and be treated no less favourably to those without. In order to provide a fair and positive experience for all customers, you may have a duty to providereasonable adjustments.

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 ourinformation in the Pink Book Online relating specifically to disabled customers.

Further information and guidance on the [Equality Act](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-2010) and [reasonable adjustments](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/multipage-guide/using-service-reasonable-adjustments-disabled-people) can also be found on the Equality and Human Rights Commission website.

Did you know?

The Equality Act 2010 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 Equality Act 2010 (or the previous Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)) as it cannot be guaranteed.

## Section 4: Know your customer

**Three Top Tips for this section:**

* **Focus on understanding how you can remove barriers to provide an accessible experience for your customer, rather than their medical condition(s).**
* **If ever you’re unsure of how to best assist someone, ask them! Disabled people are experts in their own lived experience.**
* **National charities provide great resources that can help you become more inclusive. Many of them also offer consultancy services.**

Providing an accessible and inclusive experience is largely based on how you positively welcome and cater for customers with a range of differing impairments and health conditions. The only way to do that is to understand a little more about what these requirements may be, and how they might relate to the facilities, adjustments and support you can provide.

Did you know?

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

The first thing to be aware of is that there are:

* Physical impairments that affect things like movement and reach ranges;
* Sensory impairments that affect the ability to see, hear or communicate in the way that society generally expects;
* Cognitive impairments that might affect behaviours in social situations, or the ability to learn and retain information.

But that’s not all: impairments can be visible or non-visible (it is estimated that 70 to 80% are non-visible, butboth are as valid as each other and need to be understood and appreciated as such.

Impairments can also be permanent, temporary or even situational – think about the sudden accessibility requirements a new parent with twins in a double buggy may have at a hotel or on a bus, for example. An important factor to be aware of is that, for most disabled people, energy levels can also be impacted. This should be considered for physical spaces, customer service and business operations.

Whilst it is impossible to define every impairment and accessibility requirement, we’ve worked with national charities to share the latest information and best practice guidance relating to several impairment groups.

The key here is not to develop your knowledge around medical conditions, but instead to gain confidence in communicating with and providing for different customers. Being able to identify and remove barriers to create a positive experience for all is what accessible tourism is all about and having the confidence to ask your customers: "How can we make this the best possible experience for you?". That in itself goes a long way.

Understanding more about autism, for example, will not mean you are able to predetermine exactly what an autistic customer might require. However, developing empathy and knowledge about the accessible facilities you can provide will enable you to offer an inclusive service that can be enjoyed and appreciated by all.

### 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.
* Ensure your staff members are trained in disability awareness and communication, bringing both confidence and empathy to how they cater for all customers, remove disabling barriers and make adjustments.
* Invite disabled people to visit your venue and give insight, feedback and recommendations as a way to help you improve.
* Pity is not necessary or helpful to anyone. Disabled customers are not asking for 'special' treatment or sympathy, just access to everything their non-disabled peers enjoy!
* Regardless of who your disabled customers are travelling with, always address them personally and not only their companions.
* Appreciate disabled people as the loyal, capable customers they are. Those that have a positive experience are likely to come back again and again, and tell their loved ones to do the same.

**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.

### The power of lived experience engagement

If you are looking to improve your accessibility, remember to engage with those who have lived experience of disability or other protected characteristics. However, ensure that you plan any engagement with care and take a true pan-disability approach, involving those with varying impairments and accessibility requirements.

Don’t always expect simple conversations and solutions; something that might work for a visually impaired customer is often the opposite to what would benefit a neurodivergent customer, for example (as you will find out in this section!) You will need to prioritise actions and come to an agreed compromise in some scenarios. It’ll all be worth it though for the rich insights you’ll receive in the process.

A Moment for Reflection

Think about the D/deaf and 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.

**Case Study:** [**Croft Bungalow**](https://croftbungalow.co.uk/)

*"*We seek feedback from every departing guest and ask for any insights into how we can improve. This drives our evolution more than anything. Since we started in 2016, we have now made more than 60 improvements based on guest feedback, including moving a light switch, adding extra grab rails, small bits of equipment like Parkinson's-friendly cutlery, and even buying some plastic fish for the bubble tube in the sensory room."

To support you whilst reading about differing impairment groups in this section, please refer to the **Accessibility Personas** within the downloads section of this toolkit. We have worked with individuals who have lived experience of certain impairments 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 mobility impairments that impact their walking gait and distance, reach ranges and the equipment they use to support them.
* Asif is deaf and a new dad, now navigating the tourism world with multiple requirements for both himself and his family.
* And Craig has completely lost his sight. He travels with his assistance dog, Bo, and is passionate about digital interventions that make his life easier.

### Physical Impairments

Customers with physical impairments may be wheelchair users or use other mobility equipment such as crutches or walking frames. They may be of shorter stature and regularly experience challenges relating to the heights of desks, lack of seating and limited reach ranges. They may be (but definitely won’t always be) older customers, or have sustained a temporary injury which makes navigating the built environment challenging.

**Customers with mobility impairments**

Travel, transport and tourism often does not provide an easy ride for people with mobility impairments. For example, figures published by the UK government in 2022 showed that only 20% of train stations in the UK have step-free access between the street and the platform, only 2% have level access with the train, meaning a ramp is required, and only 35% have accessible toilets.

Similarly, according to a 2022 report on the travel industry by marketing company MMGY Global, 96% of all respondents have faced a problem with accessible accommodation while travelling; 86% have faced difficulties with air travel, and 79% have also experienced transportation problems while in their destination.

**Good practice hints and tips: Providing inclusive experiences for customers with mobility impairments**

* Wherever possible, signpost and link to local accessibility information that may be relevant to your customer’s end-to-end journey. Being able to easily find out more about the accessibility features of the local train station or where the nearest free Blue Badge parking or Changing Places facility is will likely prove very helpful.
* Mobility equipment is often considered to be an extension of a disabled person’s body and a positive part of their identity. Ask permission before touching a customer's wheelchair or mobility aid.
* Think about the language you use when communicating with a customer who has a mobility impairment. Someone is a 'wheelchair user' rather than 'wheelchair bound', for example. And it is never appropriate in a professional environment to ask someone ‘what happened to them’ or similar.
* Consider your body language. In a short, transactional exchange, you usually wouldn’t need to bend down to meet the eye level of a wheelchair user or someone of shorterstature, simply step slightly further back to reduce the angle required for eye contact. If a longer discussion or help with filling forms is required, for example, try to find a quieter place to sit down with the person so that a conversation at eye level can be had in a professional manner.
* Provide level access (without steps or raised thresholds) ideally at the main entrance to your venue, or at an alternative entrance if necessary. This may include access by ramp (permanent or temporary) or lift.
* Provide lowered desks, payment options and interpretation information where possible. Inclusively designed dwell spaces, with seating that has back and armrests, are also really important to many customers with mobility impairments.

Although your customers with mobility impairments may have the most visible accessibility requirements, according to Disability Sport, less than 8% of disabled people are wheelchair users. It is therefore important to also provide an inclusive experience to customers with other impairments, as detailed in the sections below.

**Case Study:** [**The JORVIK Group**](https://www.thejorvikgroup.co.uk/)

The JORVIK group is a set of attractions that explore an archaeological discovery of the Viking Age city of Jorvik we now know as York. Whilst not all of their attractions are accessible to all, the group is working hard to provide alternative, equitable experiences where possible.

"The ride at JORVIK is not accessible to those in larger wheelchairs. To ensure everyone can access the information, we have created a 360-degree tour of the ride and the plan is to do similar for our City Walls experience. We also offer an accessible version of our City Walls walking tour."

### Sensory Impairments

A sensory impairment affects one or more of our senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste and/or spatial awareness. Someone does not need to have full loss of a sense to have a sensory impairment, and mild to moderate loss is usually more common. In this section, we focus on two types of sensory impairments: hearing and sight loss.

**Customers who are D/deaf or have hearing loss**

With more than 12 million people in the UK with some form of hearing loss, or one in five of the population, taking action to attract and retain these customers makes good commercial and legal sense. 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 ‘D/deaf’ to ensure we are representing Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) 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.

**RNID’s good practice hints and tips for communicating with customers who are D/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 lipreads 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.
* Don’t shout. It’s uncomfortable for hearing aid wearers and can look and feel aggressive.
* 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 necessary, write down what you want to say. Use pen on paper or text on device screens to get your message across, but don’t write an essay!
* As soon as is possible, ensure your staff members are trained in D/deaf awareness; more than 70% of hearing aid users would book with an organisation that has D/deaf aware staff over one that doesn’t.
* Ensure any areas that rely on communication, such as reception desks, bars, ticket offices, meeting rooms and auditoriums, have hearing loops installed and are inclusively signed. Further information on hearing loops can be found in Section 6: Accessible Features and Facilities. [insert jump link]
* 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 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.

Did you know?

If you would like to learn how to communicate useful hospitality phrases in British Sign Language, CPL Learning offers this [free,10 minute course](https://cpllearning.com/online-courses/british-sign-language-phrases-for-hospitality/) to help you to do just that.

**Blind and partially sighted customers**

There are over two million people living with sight loss in the UK, with 340,000 people being registered as blind or partially sighted (RNIB, 2021). While it is important to be aware of, and inclusively cater for, customers that have no vision, 93% of blind and partially sighted people do 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, mobility aids 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 partially sighted, 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 blind or partially sighted person, ensure they are 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.](https://www.rnib.org.uk/your-eyes/navigating-sight-loss/guiding-a-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/)

And ultimately… relax! Have general conversations just like you would with any other customer and don’t overthink the situation. It is absolutely okay to use phrases like ‘see you later’ and if you’re ever unsure of how to best assist a blind or partially sighted customer, remember they are the expert of their own lived experience and ask them.

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

* 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 void of obstacles, trip hazards and low level 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 Section 7: Marketing your Accessibility

Further information relating to communicating with blind and partially sighted people, learning how to be a sighted guide, and promoting experiences such as object handling and touch tours can be found on the [VocalEyes](https://vocaleyes.co.uk/services/resources/supporting-blind-visually-impaired-patrons/) resources page.

Did you know?

Apps that promote accessible identification and wayfinding can be particularly useful to blind and partially sighted people. These include [GoodMaps](https://www.goodmaps.com/), which provides on-demand indoor and outdoor navigation on a user’s mobile phone, and [Be My Eyes](https://www.bemyeyes.com/), which allows blind and partially sighted people to connect with a sighted volunteer over live video should they need assistance with tasks such as checking train tickets, item prices or locating a room in an unfamiliar building.

### Customers with assistance dogs

While most customers with assistance dogs will have sensory impairments, it is important to note that assistance dogs are also trained to help those with autism, epilepsy, diabetes, physical impairments and more.

Thousands of people rely on assistance dogs to help them with day-to-day activities that many others take for granted. As well as carrying out practical tasks and supporting with navigation, assistance dogs bring an all-important sense of confidence and comfort to many of 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’!).

Under the Equality Act 2010, all tourism businesses (even those with a ‘no pets’ policy) have a legal obligation to welcome assistance dogs. There is no reference in the Equality Act (or supporting Statutory Code of Practice) to ‘support animals’ – including therapy animals or comfort animals. However, it is important to note that the Act protects any person that has a physical or mental impairment which has a long term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (the Act’s definition of disability). 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. To find out more, go to VisitEngland’s Pink Book Online page relating to disabled customers.

Did you know?

Assistance dogs help those who are D/deaf or have hearing loss, too! They can sometimes be identified as hearing dogs if they wear a burgundy jacket.

### Neurodiversity and Non-Visible Impairments

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 section 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.

Autism is much more common than most people think. There are around 700,000 people in the UK on the autism spectrum – that’s more than one in 100. Together with their families, this means autism is a part of daily life for 2.8 million people. People from all nationalities and cultural, religious and social backgrounds can be autistic. Anyone can be autistic, although more men are officially diagnosed.

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.

**Autistic people can (but will not always):**

* Find it difficult to understand and use language to communicate and may interpret phrases such as ‘his head is in the clouds’ literally.
* Find it difficult to understand and use tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and the unspoken rules of language, like the give-and-take nature of conversations.
* Have difficulty recognising people’s feelings or expressing their own.
* 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.

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.

Many of the barriers experienced are due to 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.

**Case Study:** [**Birmingham Hippodrome**](https://www.birminghamhippodrome.com/)

"We offer pre-visit materials such as easy-read guides, visual stories and videos, so audience members know what the building looks like, what facilities are available and have information about the show. We offer training to our front-facing teams so they can best support audience members and learn how we can use our accessible facilities in the strongest way possible."

**The National Autistic Society’s good practice hints and tips for welcoming autistic customers:**

* Offer an opportunity for autistic customers to ‘pre-tool’ prior to visiting. This might mean offering open days, listing your accessible features and facilities in an accessibility guide or visual story like the Roman Baths have, or providing a captioned video tour of your venue that can be accessed online.
* 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 available at Eureka!
	+ Producing sensory maps that outline quieter routes and areas with dimmed lighting, as is available at the British Museum.
	+ Offering opening hours or specific sessions for autistic customers, as can be found at Glasgow Science Centre.
	+ Providing ear defenders and sensory activity packs for those who require them, like those that can be found at Seven Stories.
* 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 impairments – including autism – are not always visible. Don’t judge if a customer is overwhelmed or experiencing a meltdown.

**Case Study:** [**Leafy Fields Glamping**](https://www.leafyfieldsglamping.com/)

Leafy Fields Glamping started their business from their own lived experience and understanding of what it is like to take a glamping holiday as a neurodiverse family.

"It is not about any one specific feature or service that we might offer, such as our pre-arrival social story or allocated use of our sensory playroom. A neurotypical family staying at our site would not necessarily even notice the differences that mean the world to a neurodiverse family. It is about creating an environment where families feel unjudged and free to be themselves without having to explain or apologise… We have had families holiday with us as a whole family for the first time (previously, some of the family would stay home while the rest of the family go on holiday)."

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

According to the Alzheimer’s Society, approximately 900,000 people are living with dementia in the UK, and this will increase to 1.6 million people by 2040. To dispel a common myth, dementia is not just a disease of older adults, with 42,000 people under the age of 65 currently living with the condition.

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.
* 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 communicating with a customer who has dementia, focus on them and not their companions, remove any unnecessary distractions from the environment and be patient. Remember to also communicate non-verbally and smile.
* 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.
* Giving 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 hospitable nature are all key. Be prepared to assist customers with tasks such as filling in forms, and provide a quiet space and refreshment for those who may feel unsettled by new, unfamiliar surroundings.

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. In the UK, 40 to 50% of unpaid family carers spend 100 hours a week supporting someone with dementia, more than twice the legal working limit.

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)](https://www.dementia.stir.ac.uk/eaddat-getting-started). EADDAT can be used by businesses in all sectors 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 which can be promoted.

Did you know?

The national charity [Dementia Adventure](https://dementiaadventure.org/) works with organisations to create inclusive services so that people with dementia can engage more with nature and have regular outdoor experiences.

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.

**Case Study:** [**Beamish**](https://www.thejorvikgroup.co.uk/) **Museum**

“Beamish, The Living Museum of the North has a dedicated Health & Wellbeing Team which runs a programme of activities for people living with dementia, other long-term health conditions and cognitive impairments.

The team is also passionate about making the whole museum as Dementia friendly as possible. Every new member of staff or volunteer attends a Dementia Friends workshop, regardless of their position. This not only benefits museum visitors but also helps improve the customer experience as it highlights the importance of patience, good communication and empathy. All staff who have attended these workshops are given the Dementia Friends ‘forget-me-not’ flower badge to wear. Beamish staff in period costume have a lovely crocheted version of the badge! Thanks to the fantastic team working at the museum, the Health & Wellbeing Team has also been able to support some people living with dementia to become volunteers at the museum.”

Approximately 70 to 80% of disabled people have a non-visible impairment, and autism and dementia are just two of these. Want to learn more about non-visible impairments and neurodiversity, and how you can provide an inclusive experience via the use of schemes such as the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower? Take the ‘Introduction to Neurodiversity and Non-Visible Impairments’ training module on [Visit Birmingham’s Accessible Tourism Hub](https://visitbirmingham.com/accessible-tourism-hub/modules/module-5-an-introduction-to-neurodiversity).

###

### Customers with multiple and complex impairments

Some customers will have more than one impairment 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 impairments:**

* Basic staff knowledge of disability awareness and communication methods such as [BSL](https://www.signature.org.uk/what-is-british-sign-language-bsl/), [Makaton](https://makaton.org/TMC/About_Makaton/What_is_Makaton.aspx), and the [Deafblind Manual](https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/communication/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.
* At events and attractions, think carefully about how food and drink is prepared and presented. This includes a focus on seating areas to ensure safe and calm eating times. Time and space should be provided, as supported mealtimes can sometimes last an hour or more.
* Some individuals have 1:1, 2:1 or even 3:1 support. While you would not be expected to provide that, you should be prepared to support it and listen to those with accessibility requirements – and their support workers – as the people who best know what they require and when.
* If possible, it is really useful for all businesses to have locations where medication, foods, formulas and similar may be refrigerated.
* A clean and safe environment is key, but it doesn’t have to look clinical. Some people enjoy floor time or get sensory pleasure from putting things in their mouths. Cleanliness is therefore 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 requirements. It’s vital for safety, but also peace of mind.

### Wider Customer Groups

**Customers with age-related impairments**

It is worth noting that, due to the correlation of impairment with ageing, senior market segments will typically include more people with health conditions and impairments. Having acquired conditions later in life, these people are less likely to view themselves as disabled, but will still very much benefit from accessible features and facilities, and being able to share their requirements ahead of time. The use of language is particularly important here; find out more about the value of utilising terminology relating to accessibility rather than disability in **Section 5: An Inclusive Welcome.**

A Moment for Reflection

Is there a specific part of this section that really had an impact on you and you felt you learnt something from? Research more on the topic and share your findings in a short presentation to your colleagues. Sharing is certainly caring when it comes to knowledge!

## Section 5: An Inclusive Welcome

**Three Top Tips for this section:**

* **The key to providing an inclusive welcome is communicating inclusively with your customers and colleagues.**
* **Engaging with customers who have accessibility requirements does not have to induce the ‘fear factor’. This section includes hints and tips for both written and face-to-face communication.**
* **If you’re ever in doubt, listen 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 welcome

Ensuring your customers feel welcome, valued and have a great experience does relate partly to the design of the built environment and your digital accessibility (both of which we will come to later on in this toolkit). Ultimately, though, an inclusive welcome can be made or broken by one thing: communication. In this section, you’ll learn hints and tips relating to all communication methods and forms to help build your confidence around interacting with your customers who have accessibility requirements.

Communicating well, being kind and offering proactive assistance may be things that sound so obvious and are integral to running a successful business in general, regardless of whether customers have accessibility requirements or not. However, an inclusive welcome can be particularly important to disabled customers in terms of safety as 11,224 disability hate crimes were reported in England and Wales in 2022 (Leonard Cheshire). Knowing what to expect in terms of accessibility and being able to book with confidence can also have a hugely positive financial impact as, on average, disabled people face extra costs of £583 each month as shown in Scope’s Disability Price Tag findings in 2019.

**Case Study:** [**The Deep**](https://www.thedeep.co.uk/)

Staff training in disability awareness to support the provision of excellent customer service continues to be a focus for The Deep, an aquatic conservation centre in Hull.

"The Deep is proud of how its Crew embraces accessibility every day through a great welcome, a caring approach and good communication. This, combined with investment in the building (such as a Changing Places Facility) and the natural integration of accessibility within exhibition development, results in a memorable, successful visitor experience. Events such as adapted sleepovers, Tranquil Tuesdays and Quiet Days have proved hugely successful and further scope exists.”

This approach has resulted in positive feedback from guests that means a lot to the team. One visiting teacher shared their experience, *"...*The children had an amazing time, and every member of staff we came into contact with couldn't have been more helpful... We all agreed it was the best trip we have ever been on with the class and a particularly super special trip for our pupil who was visiting on a bed."

### Inclusive communication hints and tips

Regardless of how much experience you have communicating with customers who have accessibility requirements, it’s natural to be a bit concerned about coming across as patronising or using the incorrect terminology every now and again. In fact, in a survey conducted by disability charityScope, more than two thirds of people said that they felt uncomfortable around disabled people. Below are some hints and tips to change that and make your online and offline communication more inclusive.

Inclusive communication top tip

The trick is to always be willing to adapt and learn; 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.

**Case Study: Chichester Festival Theatre (CFT)**

“Chichester Festival Theatre’s (CFT Buddies) is a free companion service for anyone not comfortable attending the theatre on their own or needing extra support. During lockdown, people who had previously used the scheme or members of community groups helping those at risk of isolation were offered a weekly phone call from a Buddy.

“The remit has since expanded through a growing connection with Chichester District Council’s Social Prescribing Team. If someone goes to the GP presenting symptoms that are better addressed creatively than medically, for example, loneliness, the GP may refer them to the Social Prescribing Team who have a network of community and wellbeing groups to support individuals. In addition to coming to see a show or getting a phone call, individuals can now be referred to CFT Buddies for a monthly visit over tea or coffee, supporting social interaction. Buddies also now support people attending activities at another organisations or community centres anywhere across the district, on top of events at our Theatre.”

### Methods of communication

Offer choice in how your customers communicate with you. Not everyone will be able to speak over the phone or feel comfortable doing so. Similarly, writing an email or filling in a booking form might be difficult for others. Proactively provide several contact methods and details before, during and after a visit.As well as removing the awkwardness from a customer request, this may also encourage the sharing of access requirements and better enable you to provide a welcoming, inclusive experience.

If someone contacts you and tells you that they have an impairment or health condition, ask them if the way you are communicating now suits them and if there is anything you can do to aid communication. For example, someone who is D/deaf or has hearing loss may welcome knowing that a contact email address is available, or that you’d be happy to have a video call with them. 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 (18 point) for partially sighted customers.
* 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.

### Face-to-Face communication

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

* Don’t speak too quickly, or patronisingly slowly.
* Introduce yourself at the start of the conversation. Ask your customer two important questions: if they would like assistance, and how you can help.
* Be patient, listen, and ask questions that will enable your customer to tell you what they require. Speak directly to the person requiring assistance, not other customers they may be with.
* And remember, body language gives away a lot so appear calm, warm and professional at all times using gestures to provide context, where needed.

### Interpretation and translation

Whether communicating in-person or virtually, some of your customers, particularly those who are D/deaf or have hearing loss will require interpretation and/or translation services. Take a look at suppliers such as [SignVideo](https://signvideo.co.uk/business-community/) and their Video Relay Service (VRS) for businesses, and face-to-face BSL interpretation provided by [SignSolutions](https://www.signsolutions.uk.com/face-to-face-interpreting/) 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.

Not everyone with health conditions, impairments and accessibility requirements views themselves as disabled, so won’t relate to disability-focused language. 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 perspective; it is likely that some potential customers may search for ‘wheelchair accessible lodges’ or ‘disabled-friendly hikes’, for example.

### The importance of positive language

Avoid using language that suggests having access requirements is a negative thing and encourages pity, such as ‘suffers from’, ‘is a victim of’, ‘handicapped’, ‘invalid’, ‘crippled by’ or ‘wheelchair bound’. This perpetuates harmful stereotypes and suggests that you know how a person feels about their impairment. Some people see it very much as a positive thing that has enhanced their life and therefore are offended by such language. Remember empathy is important, but sympathy shouldn’t be used. Use the table below to help you:

| **Avoid** | **Use** |
| --- | --- |
| (the) handicapped, (the) disabled | Disabled (people) |
| Afflicted by, suffers from, victim of | Has [name of condition or impairment] |
| Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound | Wheelchair user |
| Mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal | With a learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural) |
| Cripple, invalid | Disabled person |
| Able-bodied | Non-disabled |
| Mental patient, insane, mad | Person with a mental health condition |
| Deaf and dumb; deaf mute | Deaf, user of British Sign Language (BSL), person with hearing loss |
| The blind | People with visual impairments; blind people; blind and partially sighted people |
| An epileptic, diabetic, depressive, and so on | Person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression |
| Dwarf; midget | Someone with restricted growth or short stature |
| Fits, spells, attaches | seizures |

###

### Focusing on access requirements

Asking someone to ‘declare’ their impairment 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 impairment is 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 a wheelchair user and require accessible parking, toilets and step-free access.

**Case Study: Church Farm Barns**

“From the very beginning, we have been driven to ensure that Church Farm Barns is accessible to all. We are aware of the varied needs that many have and how individualised these can be, so we strive to tailor the holidays to each individual to enable them to have a comfortable stay as possible. This begins before they even arrive, with the help of an informative website and a person either on the end of a phone or an email to assist to make everything perfect.”

### 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 experience.

**Case Study: Broadgate Farm Cottages:**

“We try to listen and accept that we can always learn and improve. We are very conscious that a one size fits all solution is not appropriate, particularly as we personally don’t have any direct experience of access requirements linked to impairments such as autism or dementia. We adopt the approach of discussing each guest's needs with them and then adapting what we have to suit.”

### 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!

**Case Study: Alpacaly Ever After**

“Listen to the advice offered by those with experience in the field and any feedback offered by members of communities who you seek to include in your reach. Self-reflect on what you provide, how it is communicated and if there’s anyone who would potentially be excluded. Always aiming to improve by listening and implementing positive change should be the goal.”

### 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 images, pictograms and symbols to help users navigate text, for example a pictogram of a car or bus to indicate transport.

**Case Study: North Hayne Farm Cottages**

“We provide an online social story to help prepare our visitors with what to expect when they are on holiday with us. During their stay visual aids and daily planners are available to borrow, which can help children settle more quickly and process the changes to their usual routine. Our social stories are available to every guest who books with us and can help to educate those who do not understand autism as well as help them to develop patience through understanding more about the condition. This allows us to then have a more fully integrated site where everyone feels more relaxed and confident. Since making changes to our marketing and accessibility we have noticed between a 15 to 20% increase in visitors with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other non-visible impairments.”

### Staff awareness and training

To be able to confidently serve customers with accessibility requirements, you and your staff need to be D/deaf and 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. Please note, the following list contains only a sample of options, and other great training providers are available:

* 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.
* Access and Inclusion UK provides disability awareness training focused on creating positive change.
* Accessible UK provides Accessibility Champion training for businesses.
* The Alzheimer’s Society Dementia Friends initiative provides in-person Information Sessions, virtual Information Sessions and short online videos.
* Enhance the UK provides disability awareness training sessions, [deaf awareness training](https://disabilityawareness.training/deaf-awareness-training/) and [BSL courses](https://disabilityawareness.training/british-sign-language-training-for-organisations/) for businesses.
* Kimel Solutions provides training courses related to autism and neurodiversity.
* Mind provide training courses for businesses wanting to better understand mental health and wellbeing.
* The National Autistic Society provides online training bundles related to autistic customers.
* Purple provide free e-learning modules based on disability and customer service.
* RNID provides deaf awareness training for staff members.
* Scope provides Disability in the Workplace training.
* Tourism for All provides a suite of online training courses, including a free introductory course.
* Visit Birmingham’s Accessible Tourism Hub provides modules related to accessible tourism, neurodiversity, the Equality Act 2010, inclusive marketing and digital accessibility.
* Visits Unlimited provide bespoke classroom-style training courses in disability awareness for tourism businesses.
* Welcome to Excellence provides a one-day classroom style course called Welcoming all Customers.
* WelcoMe provides in-app accessibility and customer service training to staff.

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.

**Case Study: Westfield and Ethos Farm**

“Westfield London and Westfield Stratford City have made significant strides in their journey to become recognised as the most accessible shopping destinations in the UK. These advancements have been achieved through a comprehensive series of improvements, developed in collaboration with Ethos Farm, the managers of Westfield London and Stratford City's Guest Services and Car Park Customer Service teams.

In order to provide support for both adults and children with non-visible impairments, both centres have introduced Westfield Sensory Packs. These packs include ear defenders and sunglasses to assist with noise and light sensitivity, fidget toys to keep hands occupied and alleviate stress, and 'feeling fans' to aid in self-expression.

Additionally, both locations have implemented the innovative WelcoMe app - a UK retail first. This app allows guests with accessibility requirements, whether those needs are visible or not, to request additional assistance or simply notify the guest services teams of their presence. WelcoMe also serves as an invaluable educational tool for staff, providing them with essential information to foster a deeper understanding of various conditions and how to deliver the best possible service to all guests.”

**Case Study:** **Hull Truck Theatre**

“The continued development of staff is extremely important to Hull Truck Theatre (HTT). Our aim is to be as inclusive as possible to everyone and being able to better understand different needs and expectations will allow us to do that. HTT staff have undergone various training sessions so that we are armed with the knowledge to be able to support our customers – for example, disability awareness, sighted guide training, basic BSL and Deaf awareness, training around neurodivergence, LGBTQ+ and Trans awareness training. And we pride ourselves on our warm and inclusive welcome. A challenge for us now is to ensure that we take all colleagues with us on our inclusivity and access journey. Whilst there are specific departments (i.e. Front of House and Box Office staff) that encounter customers directly, the whole company needs to be part of the journey and understand our aims and objectives.”

A Moment for Reflection

After reading this section, write down three new ways in which you are going to ensure an inclusive welcome for your customers with accessibility requirements.

## Section 6: Accessible Features and Facilities

**Three Top Tips for this section:**

* **The built environment presents accessibility challenges for many customers with accessibility requirements, 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 section for accommodation, attraction, food and beverage and events businesses.**
* **Read the technical design requirements in the downloads section of this toolkit to learn more about the accessibility standards and guidance your business should be aspiring to.**

A Moment for Reflection

At this stage, after learning about differing impairment groups 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 organisation and venue as it is right now. What accessibility barriers and solutions are present for a wheelchair user, someone who is D/deaf or has hearing loss, someone with a visual impairment and someone who is neurodivergent, autistic or has dementia? You may wish to explore the **accessibility personas** within the downloads section of this toolkit 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 requirements** in the downloads section) will help you do just that from a physical, built environment perspective.

**Case Study: Clacton Pier**

“The improvement we are most proud of is linking the east and west sections of our pier together with a new central concourse. The entire section is undercover and weather-proof with improved flooring and ramp facilities to give access for all to an 18-hole adventure golf course, soft play area, restaurant, amusement arcades and event area. It has given everyone the opportunity to use these attractions in a way that was not fully possible previously, and more so than some of the older parts of the pier.

Our top tips to other businesses looking to improve their accessibility include:

* Find out as much as you can about relevant accessibility standards and guidance.
* Involve organisations and bodies who can give you expert advice on the best way forward.
* Involve focus groups and customers who have certain access requirements so they can provide lived experience insight.”

### 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 D/deaf and 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 are involved in every workday. You might take public transport on a regular basis, quickly nip to the local shop to grab some lunch, and arrange to meet with friends at a nearby bar for after work drinks. All of these elements are things disabled people, particularly those with mobility impairments, are unable to engage in without appropriate built environment accessibility. And that’s what we are going to be discussing in this section.

In accordance with ISO 21902:2021, any accessible tourism services that are designed 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.

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.

**Case Study: Mollett’s Farm**

"We have tried really hard to make sure that groups of people are able to book together – we want to normalise people staying together in the groups they choose rather than having to seek specialist places that tend to exclude one group or make it seem extraordinary. This should be the norm – we are all people and often it takes only small changes to make accessibility less like a hospital and more like a fun, exciting, stylish destination. It’s important to provide measurements and photos of the built environment to ensure that guests have the visual and technical information they need to make their own decisions about whether or not to visit."

First, it’s important to look internally and figure out where the built environment ‘stumbling blocks’ are 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 charities, to take a broad look at the end-to-end customer experience and all the touchpoints this entails:

* 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, and what areas should be prioritised for improvement when time, budget and business capacity are all considered?

### Accessible features and facilities within your business

**Accessible parking**

Before entering your venue, your customers with accessibility requirements need to be able to park up (if driving) or be dropped off (if a passenger) in a safe, effective and accessible manner. It is therefore recommended that both accessible parking spaces and drop-off bays are positioned directly outside the accessible entrance to your venue and signed with the International Symbol of Accessibility (otherwise known as the wheelchair symbol). Design requirements for parking and drop off space dimensions are provided within the downloads section of this toolkit.

**Inclusive signage**

Inclusive signage is a vital part of the customer journey and often forgotten. It will help your customers to easily identify and navigate around your site. Unfamiliar settings can be particularly difficult for some people, and signage and other tools can establish familiarity and comfort from arrival. Terminology is also crucial here; you might advertise that you have a ‘disabled toilet’ or ‘disabled car parking’, but the facilities and parking spaces themselves are not disabled. Instead, these should be termed as ‘accessible’ facilities and spaces. Equally, you shouldn’t welcome ‘wheelchairs’, but ‘wheelchair users’; the people using mobility aids should be your focus, and not the aids themselves.

Did you know?

A sign saying ‘No Dogs’ could be seen as discriminatory under the Equality Act 2010. Over 7,000 disabled people in the UK have assistance dogs. They are typically highly trained animals that allow people to travel independently, so it is good practice to explicitly mention that assistance dogs are welcome.

**Inclusive seating**

To promote inclusive rest points throughout the customer or colleague experience, any tourism business should provide accessible seating at a maximum of every 50 metres. You’ll need to carefully consider elements such as seat heights and material contrast with the seat’s surroundings. Back and armrests should also be provided on at least half of all seating to provide additional support for those who require it.

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 requirements for accessible toilets can be found in the technical standards within the downloads section of this toolkit, 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 health conditions or impairments 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**

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
* 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.

**Changing Places**

A Changing Places (CP) toilet is a room with a WC, 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. The alternative to Changing Places availability is often the need to be changed on a toilet floor, risking a urinary infection or not taking a trip at all. To encourage a step change in the number of Changing Places toilets across the country, the UK Government announced a £30 million fund in the 2021 budget.

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

**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 (and this also counts for elements such as door handles and grabrails in accessible toilets, too).

For many neurodivergent people, too much ‘visual busyness’ 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 overdecorate 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 so away from general eyeline height, so customers and colleagues can choose to engage if they so wish.
* 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.

**Sensory rooms and quiet spaces**

Sensory rooms are purpose-built environments, often 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. Quiet spaces, on the other hand, are for children and adults needing to decompress 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.

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!

**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 with customers who are D/deaf or have hearing loss difficult. 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, because hearing aids amplify all sounds, whether you want to hear them or not. Loops work by staff members speaking into 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, particularly through glass screens. 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.

Where possible, an installed counter loop system is preferable to a portable loop. You can buy induction loop systems from a range of suppliers in the UK, such as Contacta Systems Ltd in partnership with RNID. 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 Loop good practice hints and tips:**

* It’s crucial that hearing aid wearers 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, and the function and use of, induction loops.
* 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 you can effectively work with disabled colleagues, too. More on this in **Section 8: Inclusive Recruitment, Employment and Staff Training.**

As an example, think about the inclusivity of your access control areas, such as security key pads or lock boxes. These should be at an appropriate height to be utilised by both standing and seated users. Buttons should be large and contrast well with their background (audio feedback would also be aspirational). And the fewer steps needed, while maintaining high levels of safety and security, the better. This would be particularly beneficial for those with limited dexterity who may prefer, for example, to tap a card than type in a long code.

### Evacuation

One of the biggest concerns for those with accessibility requirements, is safe evacuation during an emergency. Develop a set of standard Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for safe evacuation of D/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.

Go to the UK Government website for further information on how to complete a fire safety risk assessment for those with accessibility requirements.

**Good practice hints and tips for inclusive evacuation procedures:**

* Encourage guests to make you aware of their accessibility requirements so you can discuss and agree the necessary evacuation arrangements.
* Ensure you have vibrating pager systems or flashing beacons to alert D/deaf guests to a fire alarm or other emergency scenario. 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 D/deaf and disabled guests.

### 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 requirements** appendix 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 D/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. Canopy by Hilton London City provides a good benchmark of this.
* Provide room information in different formats.
* Consider the flexibility of furniture when purchasing or updating these. 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.
* 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, and vibrating alarm clocks with flashing lights.
* 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.
* 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, as well as the need to bring their own sling.
* 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.

**Case Study: Cottage in the Dales**

“Often, the perception of accessible accommodation is of something clinical, unattractive, expensive, and not feasible if within a listed building. This does not have to be the case. Our Grade II listed cottage, The Dairy, is not adapted specifically for disabled visitors, but instead follows the universal design approach in which the facilities and equipment are designed and provided for all guests, irrespective of their age or physical ability. Accompanying detailed online information and photos enable guests to make an informed decision as to whether the cottage is suitable for them. Accessible facilities are available if required and, if not, they simply disappear into the rest of the design! Marketed as ‘Accessible Luxury’, The Dairy fits alongside our ‘luxury Distinctly Dales experience’ USP and appeals to everyone visiting the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The many awards won and high returning guest occupancy show that accessibility is the best business decision we’ve ever made.”

Did you Know?

The lack of availability of accessibility-specific features such as hoists and profiling beds can be accommodation stay deal-breakers for those who require them. Hotel Brooklyn became the first hotel in Manchester to provide ceiling track hoists for guests in two of their accessible ‘Liberty’ rooms, with the recessed hoist track doubling up as a pleasant lighting feature when not in use. These rooms highlight what can be done when form marries with function to create design-led accessibility – a 360-degree room tour is also available to enable guests to pre-tool ahead of a stay.

**Case Study:** [**Marsham Court Hotel**](https://marshamcourthotel.co.uk/)

"We became the first hotel in the UK to install a Changing Places Toilet and Shower. This has given us a USP that we didn't realise when we embarked on the improvements… Our sensory room has had the biggest impact, particularly with local residents, support groups and businesses. It’s also unexpectedly been popular with nursing mothers, so has demonstrated benefits to the wider populations as well as disabled people. This was created from an underused storage cupboard and just goes to show that you don't have to have a new build to include this type of facility."

Did you Know?

To make these changes, along with many more, Marsham Court Hotel was awarded a match funded, bounce back grant by the local Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. Consider checking with your local council whether similar grants may be available to improve your own features and facilities.

**For attractions:**

* Provide good signage throughout. Consider large print, contrasting and tactile signs and ensure accessible features such as parking and toilets are well-signed.
* Make sure interpretation displays can be viewed by all, including those of shorter stature and wheelchair users.
* Provide interpretation in different formats.
* Consider large print and tactile interpretation.
* Fast track those unable to stand in a queue for long periods of time.
* 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.
* Install seating, especially on steep inclines, long routes or near to children’s play areas so that parents or grandparents can supervise easily.
* BIAZA has also published advice relating to the admittance of assistance dogs to zoos and aquariums.

**Case Study: bacta**

"Seaside amusements are part of the social and cultural fabric of British tourism. While piers and promenades can often be quite accessible from a built environment perspective, it’s also now time for us to start thinking about ‘softer elements’ of what we can do to make our amusement industry more inclusive and welcoming to all. From providing quieter spaces for decompression, to creating guides that allow visitors to prepare for what could otherwise be unpredictable and distressing lights and sounds, there are improvements that all businesses can focus on to ensure everyone makes great memories.”

**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 impairments 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 a wheelchair-using customer 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 traverse grass, gravel or uneven ground.

**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 **Section 7: Marketing your Accessibility.**
* 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 it has.
* Ensure the venue you choose for your event provides step-free access throughout, and has accessible toilet facilities.
* 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, in particular. 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 a portable one to be used at this event and future ones.
* 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 to appear on your digital meeting as standard.
* Meetings and Events Australia provides a comprehensive guide on accessible events, from planning and venue finding, to ticketing, staffing and event promotion.
* The Association of Event Organisers (AEO) hosts an online Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Hub with recommended, pooled resources for those in the events sector.

**Case Study: Wallops Wood Cottages**

"We are most proud of installing a hoist for our jacuzzi and swimming pool. It has enabled some severely disabled children to enjoy the pool and its benefits for their health, as well as enabling a lot of more elderly or mobility-restricted adults to enjoy swimming for the first time in many years. One measure of success is repeat business. We have guests who return year after year, having found somewhere that they have confidence in meeting their particular requirements."

**Case Study: North Yorkshire Moors Railway**

“Four of our rail carriages have been adapted to become accessible as part of the Yorkshire’s Magnificent Journey project, funded by Heritage Lottery. The carriages have been adapted to include an accessible toilet, accessible seating for two wheelchair users and their companions, ramps to access the carriage, and inclusive signage. We’ve also invested in staff training, and ensuring that one carer can travel free. Through gaining funding of £1000 from the North York Moors National Park Authority for items to enhance our visitors’ experiences, we now have additional hearing loops, magnifiers, toilet seat raisers, adapted beakers and cutlery, and ear defenders.”

### 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 impairments.

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 additional 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.

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 audits businesses to provide accessibility guides to disabled customers
* Access and Inclusion UK provides access auditing, consultancy and training for businesses
* Accessible UK specialises in accessibility within the tourism sector
* Direct Access provides international access consultancy to a range of businesses and sectors
* 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

**Case Study: Cromford Mills**

“We are a Grade 1 listed historic site, and are therefore very restricted about the physical changes that we can make on site. We worked closely with Accessible Derbyshire on a site audit. They opened our eyes to what could be done, initially on very limited practical measures, to make the site more inclusive to a variety of people’s needs.

All the changes that we have been able to make have been in the form of “tweaks” to what we do – but these have been successful. They have shown that many small changes can actually make a lot of difference to visitors on site. For example, our visitors can now hire out an all-terrain mobility scooter to use at Cromford Mills and along the canal towpath to High Peak Junction; a small action that has made all the difference to many!”

### Accessibility Standards and Guidance

The **VisitEngland Technical Standards** in the downloads section of this toolkit have been created to provide tourism businesses undertaking a renovation, extension or new build with the design requirements necessary to provide accessible and inclusive experiences to customers and staff members with accessibility requirements.

Other accessibility standards

* Approved Document M provides practical guidance to help meet Part M of the Building Regulations, including useful diagrams on how to show compliance with the regulations.
* 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.
* 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 Approved Document M 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** Institute of Sound, Communications & Visual Engineers **(**ISCVE) provides a list of competent assessors who can test and assess hearing loops for correct operation and performance.
* 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.
* PAS 6463:2022 offers free to download guidance for designing neuro-friendly spaces.
* The RIBA Plan of Work – Inclusive Design Overlayprovides 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.
* The Website Accessibility Initiative (WAI) and specifically the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are the definitive and internationally accepted guidelines for creating accessible websites.

Did you Know?

* There are a number of innovations aimed at making access to the built environment both easier, and a little bit more interesting! These include Sesame Access, who create beautiful lift structures hidden within staircases – perfect for historic environments where space is limited and a large amount of change cannot be made. You can see an example at the Kimpton Fitzroy Hotel. In addition, the RoomMate provides bespoke audio description of accessible toilet facilities to blind and partially sighted users, making it easier to get one’s bearings in less familiar environments.

**Case Study: Noah’s Ark Zoo Farm**

Gold winner of VisitEngland's Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Award 2023, Noah’s Ark Zoo Farm’s transformation focused on creating an inclusive day out for all visitors.

"The first stage of this was to follow visitors' feedback, and we therefore installed a Changing Places facility, accessible play facilities and enhanced accessibility further with mobility scooter availability and staff training. These changes have led to a large increase in visitors with impairments, and their feedback has been hugely rewarding. Don't be scared to invest in accessibility. Once you improve your accessibility this supports all guests, and they often become your biggest fans."

## Section 7: Marketing your Accessibility

**Three Top Tips for this section:**

* **Having an accessible website and social media presence is key to marketing your business inclusively. Digital accessibility hints and tips are provided in this section.**
* **When it comes to marketing your accessibility, honesty is ALWAYS the best policy. Don’t over-promise and under deliver, but also be confident enough to shout about and share the improvements you’ve made.**
* **Represent D/deaf and disabled customers and staff members wherever possible on and offline. Only 0.06% of UK adverts currently showcase disability.**

### An introduction to inclusive marketing

Working for a tourism business, or owning one yourself, you probably have plenty of marketing experience and know what works best for you. Do you also know how to market yourselves in an accessible way to people with health conditions, impairments and accessibility requirements, including disabled people?

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 ability.

Everyone has accessibility requirements and preferences, not just disabled people. By ensuring your business is marketed inclusively, you will automatically reach a much broader and more diverse audience, including those with health conditions and impairments.

### 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 and rush to book.

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.

**According to the Euan’s Guide Access Survey:**

* 72% of respondents have found information on a venue’s website to be misleading, confusing or inaccurate.
* 91% will try to find access information about somewhere before visiting for the first time.
* 58% say they avoid going to a venue if it has not shared its disabled access information because they assume it’s inaccessible.
* 74% have experienced a disappointing trip or have had to change plans due to poor accessibility.
* 51% said reviews from other disabled people improve their confidence when visiting new places.

**Below are some of the informative elements you should ensure are available, and easy to access, for prospective customers:**

* Accurate and up-to-date accessibility information about your venue or premises, such as anAccessibility Guide (more information on this below). This allows those with access requirements to independently assess whether your business is the right fit for them: Information within it might include:
	+ Doorway dimensions and bed height measurements;
	+ Whether parking is on or off-street, the number of accessible car parking spaces and their distance from the front entrance;
	+ The availability of facilities such as hearing loops, quiet areas orChanging Places toilets;
	+ A floorplan to allow customers to prepare for their visit. Resources such as RoomPlan can be useful;
* Information related to your operations, and what has been done internally to encourage a positive perception of disability, otherwise known as social accessibility:
	+ Perhaps your front of house staff have all attended disability awareness training;
	+ Or you have a neurodivergent colleague who proactively provides tours at certain hours to reduce customer over-stimulation.
* Information about what to see and do in the area:
	+ For example, a list of local tourist attractions that have wheelchair or tramper (all-terrain wheelchair) hire on site;
	+ Or some time-saving recommendations of activities, attractions, pubs and restaurants that have good accessibility credentials.

Whatever it may be, mention it. This will only strengthen customer confidence and allow people to gain a sense of familiarity, pre-arrival. All information you provide should be accurate, up to date and easy to find (perhaps in a specific ‘Accessibility/Access for All’ part of your website, clearly linked to from your homepage and not a link hidden in the footer).

**Case Study:** [**Church Farm Barns**](https://www.church-farm-barns.co.uk/)

“We have incorporated an accessibility tab within our website, which includes photos, facilities, floor plans, accessibility and prices. One of the most important things for us is that guests can find our website easily. We know that this is working as the majority of our guests find us by Googling ‘disabled friendly cottages’.”

### The importance of honest marketing

Honesty is the best policy; there is little worse for someone with accessibility requirements than travelling to a destination and having an unpredictable and unreliable experience with different features and facilities to what was advertised: A lack of honesty will only damage your reputation in the long run. Being honest about updates on your venue are important too: if a key accessibility feature or facility is out of order, for example: a lift or accessible toilet, you should widely communicate this to current and future customers. This provides customers with the autonomy and flexibility to make their own decisions about their visit or stay, could avoid unnecessary travel, while allowing re-booking for another time.

**Case Study: Croft Bungalow**

Croft Bungalow is celebrated as an award-winning business for its accessible sensory garden and accommodation. However, staff described one of their most significant challenges as communicating that the bungalow is genuinely accessible. "We would say one of the biggest challenges (which we have pretty much nailed now) was convincing guests with accessibility needs that we were the real thing and not just another holiday cottage with a random grab rail in the bathroom claiming they are fully accessible. Videos, a virtual tour, photos and information on the website and our strong social media presence have all contributed to this."

### Accessibility Guides

Many disabled people are put off visiting a venue if there is no access information on their website. An Accessibility Guide is produced by tourism operators to provide potential customers with accessibility information about a venue, property or service.

It 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 D/deaf or have hearing loss, have a sensory or cognitive impairment, older people, families with young children, and more.

These guides don’t just benefit those with accessibility requirements; operators often say that the process of creating a guide helps them to better understand their accessibility provision and any gaps.

An Accessibility Guide is a factual summary of what is on offer and is not a judgement on your accessibility. For example, never say ‘we are accessible’, as this means different things to different people. Simply audit your business and describe what you have.

VisitEngland and VisitScotland provide a free to use website for the easy production and publication of Accessibility Guides. You can produce a guide by answering a series of questions on your venue’s accessibility, uploading useful photos and inputting any further information. You will be given a unique URL to promote your guide, which you can add to your website and share across social media channels.

**Case Study: AccessAble**

“We've worked with more than 1,500 groups of disabled people over the last 23 years to establish a survey methodology and content approach to capture the information disabled people say is important when deciding whether or not to try somewhere new.

“We involve thousands of people each year in developing our service. AccessAble is now used by over five million people annually, making us the leading provider of detailed disabled access information in the UK.”

**Some good practice hints and tips for successful Accessibility Guide creation are as follows:**

The general accessibility information you provide should include:

* Information relating to the online booking process and prices, including concession availability
* Directions to your business, including maps and virtual tours
* Information relating to access drop off, parking and toilet facilities
* The awareness training your staff have had relating to D/deafness and disability
* Numerous methods of contact for potential and returning customers
* Any testimonials from customers with accessibility requirements, and links to review sites

**For customers with mobility impairments, include information on:**

* Areas that do and do not have 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
* Wheelchair, scooter or tramper hire, and related charging points

For customers who are blind or partially sighted, include information on:

* 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
* The visual contrast that is available around your site
* ‘Touch Tours’ or the tactile objects that may be available
* Facilities for assistance dogs, including water and relief areas

**For customers who are D/deaf or have hearing loss, include information on:**

* Hearing loop availability, including locations and types of loop used
* The provision of captions on videos and TV screens
* The availability of flashing, visual fire alarms or pagers in case of an emergency
* The availability of BSL tours

**For autistic customers, include information on:**

* 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 spinners and weighted blankets
* Familiarisation visits and the booking process for these, if applicable

**For customers with dementia, include information on:**

* 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

You can also signpost to information on the accessibility of local businesses within your Accessibility Guide or on the Accessibility page on your website. For example, if you know your local pub provides step-free access, has an accessible toilet and offers a great gluten-free menu, link to their website. 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.

It’s worth noting here that you’re 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: Kernock Cottages**

“Take the homework out of planning days out for your guests by providing accessibility information about local attractions above and beyond your own site, where possible. This is what we’ve done, and it has always been a major hit with guests, as they will know which pubs are accessible, and which ones they will struggle to access the toilets in if they are a wheelchair user, for example.

“Provide attraction addresses, websites, SatNav postcodes (for parking), and phone numbers and reinforce the view that guests are meant to be on holiday; it’s best practice to minimise the hassle factor. It's a zero cost ‘quick win’ for owners to do this (with a bit of up-front legwork) and so very useful for guests.”

### Ensuring digital accessibility

In the UK alone, 7 million people have digital access requirements, so an accessible website makes sound business sense. Inaccessible websites are having a hugely negative impact on potential business revenue. Studies show that the 4.3 million disabled online shoppers who click away from inaccessible websites have a combined spending power of £17.1 billion in the UK. 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 customers with different accessibility requirements will have differing ways of accessing your website. Some online requirements, categorised by impairment group, are listed below.

**Web accessibility barriers and solutions**

**Online requirements for D/deaf people and those who have hearing loss:**

To fully engage with all online content, D/deaf users 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 sub-headings;
* For some D/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, graphs, and other illustrations help make web content more understandable to many people. However, it is important to remember that not all people who are D/deaf know and are able to utilise sign language.

**Online requirements for people with speech impairments:**

To use websites comfortably and successfully, those with speech impairments will benefit from:

* An opportunity to contact businesses and venues via other ways than voice-based calls or chat software. Email, written forms or online text-based chat functions are often preferred.

**Online requirements for people with physical impairments:**

**To navigate websites, people with physical impairments 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.

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

* Be used by mouse, speech or keyboard only;
* 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 or 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.

**For these web browsing methods to work:**

* Clear, sans serif typefaces e.g. Arial, Trebuchet or Verdana should be available for ease of identification, with italics and capitals never being utilised within large blocks of text 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;
* Text and background colours should contrast with one another, but colour should never solely be used to convey meaning;
* Links should be descriptive rather than asking users to ‘click here’ or similar;
* 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.

**Online requirements for neurodivergent users:**

**Neurodivergent users often require:**

* 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 (such as 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 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 as accessible as your in-person operations, there are international web accessibility standards calledWeb Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). They are quite detailed but if you use a web designer you should ensure they follow them. TheWAVE tool is 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. People with accessibility requirements 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 D/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 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 followers with access requirements should be able to become familiar with your content and know how they can best access it.

**Add alt text and image descriptions**

For visitors to your website and social media accounts who are blind or partially sighted, 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.

**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 is king**

In terms of access and inclusion, it’s always best if you can write what you want to say, rather than portray it through emojis. Otherwise, screen readers will read out each one – making certain points disjointed and difficult to follow for those who use them.

**Making videos accessible**

One of the main accessibility barriers for people who are D/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. And be careful when sharing video content from others; captions are something that many forget to include.

Video accessibility is also important for followers who are blind or partially sighted, 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

Only 0.06% of UK adverts currently showcase disability (All Response Media, 2021). As 16% of the global population is disabled, this statistic proves huge under-representation (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 those with accessibility requirements. 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.

**Commissioning inclusive imagery**

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

* ensure that imagery reflects the broad range of impairments and accessibility requirements: although a wheelchair is the international symbol of disability, only around 8% of disabled people use a wheelchair. However, some images featuring wheelchair users are required, so consider utilising an ‘original take’
* include auxiliary aids in photographs. Around 80% of impairments are hidden, which can make it hard to represent in imagery: auxiliary aids provide a ‘visual cue’ for some impairments 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
* reach out to disabled talent agencies such as VisAble and Zebedee
* use realistic models – don’t just use what you believe to be ‘picture perfect’ models: they won’t be relatable to the average disabled person
* show ‘integration’: 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 the capacity to further ‘disable’ the disabled community
* think twice about showing disabled people on their own or isolated: this could imply a separation of disabled people from the rest of society
* choose locations/backdrops that challenge any expectations of low capability e.g. a disabled person on a zip-wire or abseiling
* 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.

**Case Study:****Alpacaly Ever After**

“In our marketing material on our website we use clear symbols and descriptions. We also have accessibility sections for each of our activities - listing the available facilities as well as full Accessibility Guides for as many of our sites as we can provide.

“We also have a monthly newsletter providing updates and features on some of the work we do, and we have introduced closed captions on our social media video posts.”

A Moment for Reflection

Write down five changes that you can make to increase your business’ digital accessibility, whether on your website or social media accounts.

### Concessions, incentives and feedback

In addition to digital accessibility, honesty in your inclusive marketing, and well-considered disability representation, there are other elements that make your business more welcoming to customers with accessibility requirements and ensure they are highly valued.

#### **Concessions**

The decision to offer pricing incentives to customers with accessibility requirements can make or break their inclusive experience. According to Scope’sDisability Price Tag report, a disabled person’s extra costs are equivalent to almost half of their income (not including housing costs).

**Case Study:****ZSL London Zoo**

“We have recently adapted our Accessible Activities and Community Access Scheme to be able to sell discounted tickets directly to people from low income households in support of the Government Help for Households Scheme.

“The biggest impact for our audiences has been that they are able to enjoy a visit to the zoo which may not have been possible without the Accessible Activities or the Community Access Scheme. 100% of participants who completed our Accessible Activities survey rated them as excellent or very good.”

There are typically two main concessions businesses can provide. Firstly, 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.

Secondly, many people with accessibility requirements physically 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 Equality Act 2010 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.

You may consider it necessary to request supporting information in relation to concessions. This information may include things such as doctors’ reports, a Blue Badge or entitlement to disability-related benefits, for example: Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance. Be aware that a person’s essential companion is not necessarily a support worker by formal profession and so wouldn’t have proof of this role to show. Staff should use discretion when implementing concession policies and remember that many impairments are not visible.

**Case Study: Minack Theatre**

“We have focussed our initiatives on creating the best possible visitor experience for all. Our site, by its nature, has significant access challenges. A recent pilot project utilised virtual reality and 360 photography to help visitors to explore the theatre without negotiating our many flights of steps. We also offer a ‘no questions’ free ticket for anyone who needs to bring a carer with them in order to access our site (as visitors or audience). We do not ask for proof or any justification for this and these tickets are not limited to specific areas of the auditorium.”

Some ‘quick wins’ relating to transparent pricing around accessibility that we suggest you follow:

* 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 Equality Act 2010. 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.

**Case Study: Mylor Sailing School**

Mylor Sailing School has established a way to structure its fees, making it equitable and welcoming for those who need specific support to participate. "We offer a range of activities from recreational, accredited courses to a more elite pathway into racing. Some of the main barriers to inclusion can be the expense of our activities, including transport and any carer or assistant fees related to this. We created a charitable arm of the business to enable us to apply for grants and funding to help with the costs of the specialist equipment whilst keeping the costs of the activities low.

#### **The Access Card**

TheAccess 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.

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

**Case Study: Paultons Park**

Paultons Park is a family theme park that includes Peppa Pig World. They have partnered with Nimbus Disability to enable guests to use their Access Card when visiting the park and booking online.

"For guests, their needs are shown clearly on their Access Card, and they can access things like concession tickets via our website. The scheme has an operational benefit too. It creates a smoother experience for the guest and provides certainty and instils confidence in our team that they are providing guests with everything they need to have the best day possible with us."

### The importance of feedback and added value

If a business falsely advertises their accessibility and this leads to a negative experience, those with access requirements 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, customers with accessibility requirements are likely to return. Not only does this add value to a business, but it also opens a whole new market of customers.

Testimonials and ‘word of mouth’ recommendations are hugely valued by many customers with access requirements. Not only do these ensure authenticity, they remove the ‘guinea pig’ feeling that accessibility in unfamiliar venues holds for many. Ask your customers with access requirements 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.

**Case Study: Westonbirt, The National Arboretum**

"The creation of a dedicated Inclusion and Equality Team, with passionate staff members leading this, has helped us to focus on making our site as accessible and inclusive as possible. Listen to feedback from current visitors, then find a way of reporting and keeping track of who is visiting – enabling prebooking helped us with this. This helps with gap analysis and finding people who don't visit. Then you can survey non-visitors to see if there is anything stopping them from visiting."

#### **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
* andDisability Horizons.
* TripAdvisor also has theTraveling with Disabilities Forum.

They are all worth keeping an eye on, if only so you get a feel for the things that travellers with accessibility requirements need and, all too often, don’t get. User-led review sites to destinations round the world are springing up rapidly: one worth focusing on, since it is largely focussed on the UK, isEuan’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 those with access requirements, below is a list of initiatives, shows, bloggers and travel companies for you to explore.

**Case Study: Mylor Sailing School**

“Build partnerships with local and national organisations and keep in touch with how they are marketing their products and activities. This includes your local council, disability organisations, other organisations relevant to your business type. The VisitEngland website and their Business Advice Hub is also very useful.”

### Accessibility initiatives and awards

[Purple Tuesday](https://purpletuesday.org.uk/). With a focus on the value of the Purple Pound, Purple Tuesday is a change programme for organisations of all sizes and from all sectors to get involved in. The annual programme concludes with a day of global celebration on the first Tuesday in November. The common goal is improving the customer experience for disabled people 365 days a year.

**Case Study:****The Roman Baths and Pump Room**

“As an organisation, we are very proud to have won Gold for the Accessible & Inclusive Tourism Award category in the VisitEngland Awards for Excellence. This award was the result of a number of years’ work and a fitting accolade for colleagues past, and present, who worked so hard to ensure we are as accessible as possible. We believe, considering the age and nature of our site, we have inspired other organisations to reconsider what they can do to ensure they are welcoming visitors, and this has also been very rewarding for the team.

In addition to the physical changes made to the site, we have been committed to welcoming visitors who may find it challenging to engage with the site and our collection. We started off by working with the National Autistic Society, we went on to work with the Alzheimer’s Society and Stroke Association and we are now looking to work with The Guide Dogs for the Blind. Our commitment to inclusivity and our drive to continue improving is something we are very proud of.”

#### **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:

VisitEngland’s Accessible & Inclusive Tourism Award: Recognises any tourism business providing a truly memorable experience for everyone, particularly those with accessibility requirements, from theatres to self-catering properties.

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 welcome disabled people as ‘first class citizens’.

Cateys Accessibility Award: This award recognises hospitality businesses that are going above and beyond the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 in accommodating and catering for disabled people.

**Case Study: North Hayne Farm Cottages**

“Changing people’s perceptions of conditions such as Autism has been achieved through positive marketing. Some families have been afraid to book holidays in the past as they worry about being judged. Celebrating our awards for inclusion, for example, has given all our visitors the confidence that they will not just be catered for but understood and made to feel welcome.”

### Disability-focused shows

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

* Disability Awareness Day, Europe’s largest ‘not for profit’ voluntary-led disability exhibition, held annually near Warrington, has holiday and leisure exhibitors.
* Disability Expo, the UK’s person-focused disability exhibition.
* Kidz to Adultz Exhibitions, dedicated to disabled children and young adults. Five a year are held around the UK.
* Naidex, the UK’s largest disability, homecare and rehabilitation event for trade and consumers.

###

### Accessibility guidebooks

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

Rough Guide top tip

If you would like to be included in a future edition, 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.

### Bloggers and influencers with accessibility requirements

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 travel blogger with accessibility requirements 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 time in addition to offering a complimentary visit/stay. Below is a sample (not an exhaustive list) of those most active at the moment:

* A Chronic Voice travel guide and blog: Sheryl Chan uses her blog to provide travel hints and tips, amongst other things, to those living with chronic illness.
* Adventure Wheels: In their travel blog, couple Karla and Stephen show that camping, caravanning and motor-homing is a great way to see the world, whether you have additional requirements or not.
* Carrie-Ann Lightley: A disabled blogger and travel writer, Carrie-Ann uses her accessible travel blog to share reviews, travel guides and travel tips for wheelchair users.
* Jennie Berry: A disabled content creator specialising in inclusive travel and everyday experiences.
* Martyn Sibley: world changing trips: Regularly voted as one of Britain’s most influential disabled people, Martyn has been on numerous adventures. He has documented his journeys as travel blogs to share with other keen explorers who have accessibility requirements.
* Pippa Stacey: Documents life with chronic illness on her blog, Life of Pippa.
* Purple Goat: A disability marketing agency that has access to a wide range of influencers.
* Ross Lannon: A Life on Wheels: Discussing all things disability and lifestyle, Ross also writes reviews on everything from dining experiences and overnight stays to theatre trips and wheelchair roller skating.
* Simply Emma: Simply Emma is a leading travel and disability blog focused on accessible travel and life experiences from a wheelchair user’s perspective.
* T-shirt Twins: An adventure blog documenting travel with sight loss by John who is deafblind and Lauren, his sighted guide.

A Moment for Reflection

Spend 15 minutes searching for a D/deaf or disabled influencer - if there is one that fits the bill, think about how you might engage with them in a way that benefits you both.

### Online holiday listings

Many travellers with access requirements are looking for mainstream accommodation and activities, and therefore use mainstream 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 England 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.

* Able Magazine Travel Guide: Published by Able Magazine, this online guide includes travel advice, listings of accommodation recommended by readers and carries adverts.
* AccessAble: Detailed pan-disability access information on over 100,000 hotels, attractions and restaurants in England. To be listed you must be audited by an AccessAble surveyor. The fee buys you a detailed report and a link from the AccessAble website. If your local authority commissions AccessAble, then your business could be included and receive a free audit.
* 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 websiteblog 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.
* Disability Holidays Guide: Information and links to accessible holidays in the UK and worldwide. You can promote your property on the website for a fee.
* 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. 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 England. 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 England.
* 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.
* 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.
* Travel Eyes: Tour operator providing independent group travel for people who are blind or partially sighted.

## Section 8: Inclusive Recruitment, Employment and Staff Training

**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 section, 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 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 7: Marketing your Accessibility** to ensure this is the case. Similarly, any built environment design feature noted in the **technical design requirements** within the downloads section of this toolkit 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.

More than 7.7 million people of working age in the UK are disabled or have a health condition. 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.

**Case Study: National Football Museum**

“We have regular volunteers from a wide range of ages and backgrounds engage on a weekly basis, supporting museum interpretation, child and family activities and workshops. Our pilot work placement scheme has been successful and a new cohort joins us in the Spring. Participants in the inaugural programme have transitioned into museum volunteers.”

### 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 and supported should their needs or requirements change. It is, however, an ongoing and detailed process so it’s no wonder that many organisations do not know where to start.

**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 suitable roles’, ‘we will survey all current employees to check whether their accessibility requirements are being met’, or ‘we will provide all staff members with a morning of disability awareness training from an external provider’. The key is to have a plan that develops as your knowledge grows and you stick to, even when times are tough. The action checklists can you give you further ideas.
2. **Appoint an accessibility champion:** 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.

Whoever you choose to become an accessibility champion, whether a disabled person themselves or an ally without lived experience, engagement with D/deaf and disabled communities is key. Achievements and aspirations, resources and progress updates should be shared externally, where possible, as well as internally.

1. **Encourage disclosure:** Many people do not disclose that they have an impairment or accessibility requirement as they are fearful that:
	1. no action will be taken,
	2. it will lead to negative judgements from others and/or
	3. 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 D/deaf and disabled people and talking openly about the availability of workplace adjustments and the positive impact of a diverse workforce.

1. **Engage with lived experience:** Who better to learn from than D/deaf and disabled people who have experience of inclusive (and not so inclusive) workplaces? Short ‘lunch and learn’ sessions can be time and cost-effective ways of learning more.
2. **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.

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

### Inclusive recruitment

**Wanting to become a more inclusive employer within the tourism industry? Follow these recruitment good practice hints and tips below:**

* 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 certain number of GCSEs or a driving licence, for example?
* Job adverts should include inclusive language and be made available on job sites people with accessibility requirements are likely to visit, such as EvenBreak.
* Job advert content should, where applicable and appropriate, actively encourage applications from disabled people and those with other protected characteristics.
* The application process should be as simple and logical as possible, and alternative formats of documents and forms should be made available upon request. Offer adjustments at every stage of the process.
* If an interview is to be held, the venue should be accessible and easy to find via public and private transport. Making requests for adjustments should be stress-free for the applicant.
* Post-interview, a supportive communications process should be in place to discuss future working patterns and workplace adjustments with successful applicants. A visually impaired employee may require certain digital software, for example. Going forward, regular meetings should be held as an opportunity to discuss the efficiency of these adjustments, and any amendments that may be required.

Scope provides disability recruitment training for businesses interested in diversifying their workforce by employing more disabled talent. Purple also recently hosted a 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.

**Case Study:** [**Durlston Country Park**](https://www.durlston.co.uk/)

“Disabled people now make up over 20% of our volunteers, contributing thousands of hours of time each year, especially as part of the ‘Everyone Needs a Shed!’ project that provides an accessible community work base, enabling people of all ages and abilities to socialise and learn new skills. This has also given the staff team access to people with lived experience to help with continuing improvements.”

### 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 Equality Act 2010.

According to the UK Government, reasonable adjustments in work could include:

* Making changes to a disabled person’s working pattern;
* Providing training or mentoring;
* Making alterations to premises;
* Ensuring that information is provided in accessible formats;
* Modifying or acquiring equipment;
* Allowing extra time during selection ‘tests’.

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, a Government grant scheme, provides 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 an impairment are usually greater than recruiting and training new staff.

**Good practice reasonable adjustments – physically and digitally - for interviews 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.

A Moment for Reflection

When you are next recruiting for a position within your business, what steps will you take to ensure accessibility in terms of the job advert content, and at interview?

**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? Will Access to Work cover this?
* Will the adjustment disrupt employee or team activities?
* What financial or other resources do we currently have as an employer? Is external assistance available?
* Is the adjustment a ‘quick win’ or a longer-term solution? Is it big or small? Can we realistically do it?

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 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 impairments and accessibility requirements can fluctuate and therefore 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. A reasonable adjustments request does not equate to a lack of performance at work.

Did you know? The disability employment rate was 52.6% in July to September 2022, compared to 82.5% for non-disabled people. There is therefore a disability employment gap of almost 30% in the UK.

### 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 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;
	+ And 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.

* To feel empowered to employ more disabled people, employers need to understand disability better as a concept, as well as the benefits employing disabled people can bring to businesses. The Disability Confident Scheme is working with employers to build this awareness, with an aim to get one million more disabled people into work by 2027. As one example, Leonard Cheshire provides training sessions for managers and recruiters that are specifically focused on the Disability Confident Scheme.
* The Department of Work and Pensions has recently released a new employer advice service, providing information and guidance on how to support with employee health and disability.

**Case Study: Grand Pier**

“We have recently completed an inclusive employer course. We have learnt a lot and broadened our knowledge on challenges our customers or employees may face. This has been hugely beneficial from an employment point of view as well as a customer point of view. We are now looking at developing multiple versions of our documents such as the staff handbook to cater to those with different needs.”

The team at Grand Pier are currently in the process of working with a third party to develop job opportunities for those who are neurodivergent and presently unemployed. In addition, they are building a quiet room for both staff and customers.

"This will be available to all customers and staff who need to take some time to themselves. We will not put any restrictions on who can use it; this is part of our plan to be wholly inclusive."

Since re-opening in 2010, the Grand Pier has welcomed team members with support workers who have flourished in their environment.

*“*We have welcomed reciprocal learning and feel that we can offer inclusive safe working in a supported setting.”

### 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 impairment, these negative perceptions often result in those with accessibility requirements being even less inclined to disclose their impairments 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 - one in which, hopefully, candidates will be enthused to apply for positions, employees will feel empowered to disclose their impairments, and all will ask for the adjustments they are entitled to.

**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 as part of the Business Disability Forum – a business membership organisation specialising in disability inclusion - that we’d highly recommend you engage with. And 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.

## Section 9: 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.
* 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.

**Case Study: The Inn on the Moor Hotel**

"Our teams' mindset has changed completely and we are now more 'accessibility minded', constantly reviewing ways in which we can ensure all of our guests and visitors from the local community can have an equal opportunity to relax and enjoy a friendly and comfortable time with us. Don't be afraid to speak to other businesses and learn what they are doing or have done in the past. Like-minded businesses with a genuine desire to be more accessible won't mind offering advice and suggestions."

### 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 four checklist documents – dedicated to accommodation, attraction, food and beverage and events businesses. 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.

There are, however, certain steps to take that will help you to feel more in control of the inclusion direction of your business, measure your own improvements and successes, and to prioritise what to do next.

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

* Sharing knowledge both internally within your business, and externally with others, is key. Accessibility is not a competition, but something we should all be striving for collectively and supporting each other to achieve.
* Utilise feedback from your customers and colleagues with accessibility requirements as a business improvement tool. Those with lived experience should be respected as the experts they are, and as an asset to your business - both ethically and financially.
* Honesty truly is everything. Even with the very best of intentions, you can have a hugely negative impact as a business if you over-promise and under-deliver. Customers and colleagues will appreciate honesty regarding where you are now, as well as positive aspirations for the future.
* And ultimately, strive for progress, not perfection. ‘Full accessibility’ for everyone is impossible to achieve, but constant improvement (and enjoyment whilst doing it!) is not.

**Case Study: GHOSTnortheast**

“A lot of changes we made weren’t necessarily challenging, but just required us to think in a different way, and that mindset shift was a representation of success to us. We had a number of potential visitors who wanted to join our events but thought it wasn’t possible. With the involvement of a BSL interpreter and rewriting and rerouting of our ghost walks to exclude steps and unnecessary kerbs, and include spaces to sit, we now welcome visitors who were previously unable to enjoy our events and activities.”

### 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.
* The ability to inclusively create and post job adverts, and recruit those with additional requirements (more on this in **Section 8: Inclusive Recruitment, Employment and Staff Training**).
* 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 your actions align with your intentions, gather the views of customers with accessibility requirements to help you provide inclusive tourism experiences. You could add a question on accessibility to any customer surveys, invite a local access group to visit or for larger attractions set up an Access Panel of people with different accessibility requirements. Importantly, make sure that, wherever possible, you act on the feedback you receive; however small these actions may need to be at first, continuous progression and communication is at the heart of inclusivity as a service.

**Case Study: The Caravan and Motorhome Club**

“Our top tip for success in accessibility would be to ask your customers what they want or need; visitors like the ability to make their own decisions!

“Think beyond the physical to include those with non-visible disabilities (installing a ramp does not suddenly make something accessible!) Similarly, think beyond the immediate experience you are offering to provide inclusive information on the end-to-end journey, including arrival, exit and what other activities are available in the area.

“Allow your customer to decide if something will be accessible to them based on good information and imagery. If they have a great time then you have evidence that you can positively shout about! We are currently working with member feedback to help us design more accessible caravan pitches, as well as improving our sites from a number of different angles.”

**Thank you**

Thank you again for engaging with this toolkit and showing interest in physical, digital and operational improvements in accessible tourism. We wish you the very best of luck with your own inclusivity journey!