

# Disability Rights Commission



Policy

Legal

Parliamentary

## Creating an Inclusive Environment

Change by • advice • conciliation • legal enforcement

## **The Disability Rights Commission**

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) is an independent body, established by Act of Parliament to eliminate the discrimination faced by disabled people and promote equality of opportunity. When disabled people participate – as citizens, customers and employees – everyone benefits. So we have set ourselves the goal of “a society where all disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens.”

We work with disabled people and their organisations, the business community, Government and public sector agencies to achieve practical solutions that are effective for employers, service providers and disabled people alike.

There are 8.5 million disabled people in Britain – one in seven of the population. This covers people with epilepsy, cancer, schizophrenia, Down’s syndrome and many other types of impairment.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, many legal rights and obligations affecting disabled people’s access to services and employment are already in force. Others become law in 2004.

Many people are still not aware that they have many new rights. And employers and service providers are often unsure how to implement “best practice” to make it easier for disabled people to use their services or gain employment.

The DRC has offices in England, Scotland and Wales. For further details of how we can help you, please contact our Helpline – contact details are featured on the back cover of this publication.

# Contents

Introduction	2
What is “Inclusive Design”?	3
What are the principles of Inclusive Design?	5
How can an inclusive environment be achieved?	9
Good practice guidance	11
Conclusion	16

**Draft**

# **What is “Inclusive Design” and how can it achieve a built environment to be enjoyed by everyone?**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) held a Round Table Seminar on 1 November 2001 to explore the definition of “Inclusive Design” and investigate how it can be best applied to produce an inclusive built environment.
- 1.2 Three speakers: Sarah Langton-Lockton of the Centre for Accessible Environments; Wycliffe Noble, Chair of the committee responsible for the production of British Standard 8300, “Designing buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people”; and Andrew Walker of United Kingdom Institute for Inclusive Design, were invited to make presentations on terminology, standards and performance objectives respectively (fifty experts from England, Scotland and Wales, representing a cross section from the building professions and organisations of and for disabled people were invited to discuss the terminology, minimum technical standards and performance objectives. This report, based upon the range of views expressed at the seminar, seeks to clarify “Inclusive Design”, both in practical and philosophical terms. It also seeks to initiate further debate and provoke greater thought and research into how we create an environment that can be fully used and enjoyed by everyone.
- 1.3 The principles of “Inclusive Design” have emerged from an approach to designing buildings and spaces

that are accessible to disabled people. This paper largely focuses on “Inclusive Design” from the perspective of disability. However, disabled people are not a homogenous group with identical needs, and when the principles of “Inclusive Design” are applied, the built environment will also become accessible to other users who are excluded through poor design or discriminatory attitudes.

- 1.4 An inclusive environment does not attempt to meet every single need, but by considering people's diversity, inclusive environments can break down barriers and exclusion and will often achieve superior solutions that benefit everyone. Legislation and guidance currently only relate to access provision for disabled people and has tended to result in special provision being made for disabled people rather than their needs being integrated with all other users. It is hoped that over time, through further research and guidance, the access requirements of other groups will be incorporated in future legislation, regulation and good practice guidance.

## 2 What is “Inclusive Design”?

- 2.1 Principally, it should be acknowledged that “Inclusive Design” is not a fixed set of design criteria, but a constantly evolving philosophy. The goal of creating beautiful and functional environments that can be used equally by everyone, irrespective of age, gender or disability, requires that the design process must be constantly expanding to accommodate a diverse range of users, as we develop greater understanding of their requirements, desires and expectations.

- 2.2 The term inclusive design relates as much to the design process as to the final product and just as equally to management, operation and information, bonding user experience with professional expertise and management practice. For this reason it is preferred to terms such as “Universal Design”, “Barrier Free Design”, or “Design For All” which imply a more absolutist, patriarchal approach, largely focussing on the end result, and less on achieving a participatory process.
- 2.3 The built environment encompasses all internal and external designed and managed buildings and spaces where people participate in everyday activities such as shops, offices, sports facilities, schools, hospitals, heritage sites, parks and the street.
- 2.4 It is not limited to the urban environment, but is applicable to those designed and developed areas of countryside, to which the public might expect to have access.
- 2.5 In relation to the built environment, therefore, “Inclusive Design” extends from inception, through the planning process, detailed design, construction, occupation, management and operation. Each of these stages should be fully inclusive involving disabled people and other potential consumers in their development and evaluation.
- 2.6 The creation of a truly inclusive environment, though contributed to by a range of building practitioners including surveyors, architects, planners, building control surveyors, engineers, access consultants and facilities managers, is ultimately in the hands of the developer, landlord or service provider; in short, and for the purposes of this paper, the client. They alone can ensure that their property is designed, built and operated in line with inclusive principles. It is therefore essential that these principles are set out in the project brief from the outset.

# 3 What are the principles of Inclusive Design?

## 3.1 An inclusive environment will be:

- i easily used by as many people as possible without undue effort, special treatment or separation
- ii able to offer people the freedom to choose how they access and use it, and allow them to participate equally in all activities it may host
- iii able to embrace diversity and difference
- iv safe
- v legible and predictable
- vi of high quality.

### **Ease of use**

3.2 The building or space should be easy to use for everyone. No one should have to use undue effort, such as climbing steps or a ramp when level access would be easier. For everyone. To achieve this principle the access requirements of all users will have to be considered at the earliest possible stage. Fully inclusive consultation has an important role to play here. Fundamental decisions such as a building's location and orientation in relation to the surrounding topography and transport infrastructure, ie bus stops and vehicle setting down points, will directly influence detailed design decisions.

- 3.3 Similarly, early choice of materials that facilitate greater inclusion, for their colour contrast or acoustic properties for example, will avoid the need for later remedial cosmetic alterations at additional cost.
- 3.4 Where paths cross field boundaries in the countryside, gaps are most inclusive and desirable if there are no livestock present. Otherwise a gate that can be easily opened is far preferable to “kissing” gates and stiles.

### **Freedom of choice and access to mainstream activities**

- 3.5 Design, management practices or staff attitude, and awareness should not restrict access to buildings or spaces and the activities which take place within them. “Inclusive Design” should facilitate independent access for those who wish it, but should also offer support and assistance if individuals prefer it. Design and management should therefore operate in harmony to create an inclusive environment. People who require assistance should receive it on their terms and not be restricted by rigid management practices. For example, access to a building shouldn’t be solely dependent upon the availability of staff to give assistance or open the “accessible entrance”, but staff training, capacity and procedures should facilitate the provision of assistance if it is required.

### **Diversity and difference**

- 3.6 Inclusive design celebrates diversity, and although the objective is to seamlessly integrate access into the initial design, it will not always be possible. Existing buildings in particular may require the installation of specific “access” features. It is important, therefore, that these should be seen not as a necessary evil, resulting in the creation of institutional architectural prosthetics, but as design opportunities that whilst meeting the requirements of their users, are confident, beautifully designed statements about a building’s ability to evolve to accommodate an increasingly



diverse society. Embracing diversity is not, however, achieved by lumping the access needs of a diverse set of users together in a tokenistic fashion. An accessible baby changing room, for example, is highly desirable, but not if it is created by simply installing the changing facility in the accessible WC.

- 3.7 Similarly, there is often an argument that access for disabled people will detract from the environment quality of a rural setting. When done badly this can be true, however, the challenge is with landscape designers and countryside access managers to harmonise the environmental and access requirements rather than always putting the former before the latter.
- 3.8 It is also important to recognise that disabled people are not a homogenous group with identical needs. We are all different and have diverse needs which are all equally valid and may need to be met in a variety of ways.

### **Safety**

- 3.9 The environment should, of course, be safe. Although it may be designed to be safe, it must also inspire a sense of safety, and perhaps more importantly, confidence in its users. Designs that disorientate through overuse of monochrome finishes or reflective surfaces, for example can be as disabling to people with visual impairments or learning disabilities, as steps are to wheelchair users. Equally, surfaces which are perceived to be slippery, even though they are not, can for some people instil a feeling of unease and insecurity.

### **Legibility and predictability**

- 3.10 Inclusive environments should be legible to their users. The internal layout, judicious use of inclusive information, use of colour and lighting can all convey information about the building and how it should be

used. The location of toilet facilities, for example, should follow a logical system. If all provision is on the same floor it should be grouped in the same location. If the building has a large floor-plate it may be necessary to have several “cores” with sanitary provision in each to minimise travel distances. If on different floors, alternate facilities should be located in the corresponding position on the next floor. Those elements of a building or space that meet a precise design standard, for example the accessible toilet, are often preferred by a wide range of disabled people as the layout is predictable. Too much variation on the layout would tend to undermine their accessibility.

- 3.11 In the street environment, specific features are designed to a standard layout in order that they are legible and predictable. Liberalising the design of controlled road crossings, for example, would be likely to produce a rapid rise in the injuries to visually impaired pedestrians. The standard location and design of tactile surface in relation to the kerb edge and the control box conveys precise information about where and when it is safe to cross.
- 3.12 Spaces that have been designed to be legible and predictable can be compromised by injudicious management practices. For example, a reception area with seats arranged in auditorium fashion or clearly defined groups is legible and predictable for someone with a visual impairment. If the seating were distributed more randomly it would no longer be legible or predictable, but may become hazardous. Similarly, decorative use of leaflet racks and planting on circulation routes may be an interesting diversion, but they are a painful surprise if you’re not expecting them to be there.

### **High quality**

- 3.13 As expressed in point 3, “Inclusive Design” is a statement of equality. By applying the same high

design standards to meet the access requirements of all users, the design embraces everyone on equal terms. An environment that goes no further than the minimum technical specifications can only impose a sense of inferiority to those people forced to use it.

- 3.14 It should also be noted that these principles extend to any products and communication that may occur within any space or building. If they are not considered as an integral component of an inclusive environment, items like furniture, fixtures and fittings may create barriers. For example, door handles which are small and difficult to operate can be a significant barrier to many people. Information screens and displays will be inaccessible to many people if audible alternatives are not provided.
- 3.15 Equally, it is fundamental for the transport network to be integrated and inclusive so that everyone can enjoy full participation throughout the whole environment.

## 4 How can an inclusive environment be achieved?

### **Standards and objectives**

- 4.1 It was largely agreed at the Round Table Seminar that some minimum technical standards (precise specifications usually expressed by diagrams) are necessary as they establish a base line tolerance, beneath which the environment fails to be accessible.
- 4.2 However, it was felt by many that rigid adherence to these minimum standards would not produce an inclusive environment. Slavishly following them

without understanding the performance requirements of people (how spaces and the features within them are used) tends to lead to an environment where some people are treated separately or need to use extra effort. Practitioners, therefore, whilst being informed of the minimum technical specifications, should be creating spaces that perform according to the requirements of their users.

- 4.3 An approach melding functional-based performance objectives and aesthetic considerations from the start is more likely to create an environment in which the inclusive and aesthetic elements are indistinguishable from each other.
- 4.4 For this approach to be successful, practitioners must have a detailed understanding of the performance requirements of disabled people and other consumers, and a commitment to the “Inclusive Design” philosophy.

### **Education**

- 4.5 Key to achieving a more widespread adoption of the philosophy of “Inclusive Design” is the education of building and design professionals.
- 4.6 Without the introduction of inclusive design modules into the curricula of undergraduate building and design professionals, the access requirements of disabled and other potential consumers will continue to be viewed as an adjunct and not a fundamental principle of design.
- 4.7 There has been considerable progress in terms of post-graduate courses with important work being undertaken in relation to Inclusive Environments at the Architectural Association originally, and more latterly at the Universities of Reading, Northumberland, Salford, Sheffield, The Royal College of Art and Central St Martins in the field of product design. However, very little appears to have been done to incorporate “Inclusive Design” into undergraduate courses.

- 4.8 There is also a pivotal role to be played by professional bodies in educating their members. It remains the case that very few professional organisations incorporate training on the Disability Discrimination Act into their programmes of Continued Professional Development, and far fewer an understanding of the principles of “Inclusive Design”.

## 5 Good practice guidance

### **British Standard 8300**

- 5.1 Supported by the then Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), and published by the British Standards Institute (BSI), “Designing buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people”, (British Standard 8300), is largely based on ergonomic research into how a wide range of disabled people use buildings, spaces and physical features. The document is quite comprehensive, extending across a wide range of impairments and building elements. As well as providing technical specifications it explains, by means of a commentary, the functional reasoning behind them. It has been acknowledged by BSI that further research is needed in some areas, in particular that of learning disabilities, and they have given a commitment that the standard will be regularly reviewed and updated in response to future research. It is important that BS: 8300 should become a living document, evolving in line with a growing understanding of people’s access requirements. It would seem sensible, therefore, that over time this document should become the repository

of guidance for “Inclusive Design” in its fullest sense. As well as disability, it should grow to incorporate research on other groups such as children and older people.

**Planning and access for disabled people:  
A good practice guide**

- 5.2 In response to the Planning recommendations of the Disability Rights Task Force, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has commissioned production of a good practice guide to give guidance on how the English planning system should deliver an accessible environment. As responsibility for planning issues is an area that has been devolved, parallel guidance will be published in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 5.3 Though still in production, the guide seeks to advise planners and developers on how the current planning system can be used to contribute towards delivering a genuinely inclusive environment. The guide will be published in 2003.**

**Consultation**

- 5.4 The inclusion of well informed disabled people, local access groups and other consumer groups is essential in delivering an environment that fully meets everyone’s performance requirements. Genuine consultation is not a one-off event organised for cosmetic purposes in order to ratify planning and design decisions already taken. It should be an ongoing relationship commencing at the inception of a project, extending through planning, design and onto management and operational matters.
- 5.5 Consultation should not be a substitute for professional advice or technical guidance. It should supplement such sources with additional information based on personal and practical experience, regarding such issues as access in the local context or functional

implications of proposed design solutions. Throughout the UK there are many Access Groups and panels. They are all voluntary and therefore their activities will vary according to their composition and resources, but they broadly offer advice and comment on access issues in their local areas. In Northern Ireland, Wales and England, there are also national bodies providing advice and guidance. These are Disability Action in Northern Ireland, RADAR Access Advisory Committee (RAAC) in England and Disability Wales. These organisations will also hold information on Access Groups at the local level.

### **The legislative and regulatory framework**

- 5.6 The 1990 Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA)
- 5.7 Section 76 of the TCPA requires planning authorities to inform developers of the 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (CSDP), on the grant of planning approval.
- 5.8 The Disability Rights Task Force recommended that Section 76 be revised, to reference the DDA. It also needs to apply much earlier in the planning process, placing a duty on authorities to ensure developers are designing inclusively, and to demonstrate how their schemes will meet DDA requirements.
- 5.9 It is possible, as should be demonstrated in the ODPM's good practice guide, "Planning and access for disabled people", for developers and planners to deliver inclusive buildings and spaces, by consulting with disabled people, access groups, and access officers and building Control Surveyors, at the earliest possible stage.

## **Building Regulations**

5.10 For many years, Building Regulations were the only form of statutory obligation on developers and building owners to consider the access requirements of disabled people when designing buildings. With regard to delivering an inclusive environment, however, they are extremely limited. By definition they cannot extend to features outside the curtilage of the building, or to any feature which is not an integral element of the building, such as furniture and finishes.

## **The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)**

- 5.11 The DDA places a duty on employers and service providers to make reasonable adjustments to facilitate access for disabled people.
- 5.12 The Act itself carries no technical standard or guidance by which performance can be measured or monitored. Although a link has been created between DDA and Building Regulations in England, Scotland and Wales. The DDA, however, applies to the whole service, facility premises, or work place. It is likely, therefore, to encompass physical features that fall outside the scope of Building Regulations.
- 5.13 To be more confident that they are meeting their DDA duties, the DRC recommends that when considering a new building or making adjustments to existing premises, the Client adopts the inclusive approach.
- 5.14 The Act, as well as applying to physical features, already applies to management and operational issues, ie how a service is provided. The client, therefore, should not only ensure the design is inclusive, but should also consider policy and practice issues when determining in the project brief how the building or space should be managed and operated, in order that it remains inclusive.



## **Access statements**

- 5.15 The Round Table was very supportive of the use of access statements by the client, to demonstrate how their development will be accessible. Preparation of an access statement would commence at the project brief stage as an expression of intent, but as the project develops, the statement could be expanded to encompass planning, design, management and maintenance requirements.
- 5.16 By stating their intention and objectives to make their building inclusive and accessible, stating their objectives and intentions to make their developments accessible, the client will be easing the passage of their project through the various statutory control mechanisms and compiling a body of evidence about how they have sought to ensure their premises will be accessible to disabled people and all other users. The access statement will be of particular significance in relation to alterations to existing buildings. It will, of course, be extremely difficult in some situations due to structural or historic constraints, to design a fully inclusive environment. By preparing an access statement, the building owner or service provider will demonstrate that they have fully considered the access requirements of disabled people and have described how they intend to meet them.
- 5.17 It is of crucial importance, if access statements are to be meaningful, that the client should fully understand their legal obligations, and what they should rightly expect from their consultants and contractors delivering the project, on their behalf, in order that they comply with those legal duties.

# 6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The Round Table agreed that “Inclusive Design” is a continuum that demands consistency of approach throughout a range of apparently disparate elements, which contribute to the creation of any buildings or spaces.
- 6.2 An approach is required that recognises this continuum, establishes clear objectives, and through genuine consultation with disabled people and other users, introduces monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure consistency and continuity of performance throughout the life of the building or space.
- 6.3 The introduction of access monitoring mechanisms can only act as a safeguard to ensure that a certain level of performance is achieved. A general and fundamental shift in approach is essential if “Inclusive Design” is to become common practice.
- 6.4 It is time, therefore, to encourage a renaissance which implies rebirth of the way we plan, design and manage our environment; placing people at the centre of the development process, ending the practice of designing to a perceived norm and adopting instead an approach that celebrates that difference is “the norm”.




**Andrew Shipley**  
**18 July 2002**

You can contact the DRC Helpline by voice, text, fax, post or email. You can speak to an operator at any time between 08:00 and 20:00, Monday to Friday.

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language please contact the Helpline to discuss your needs. It is also available on the DRC website: [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)

**FOCUS7**

**January 2003**

-  **Telephone** 08457 622 633
-  **Textphone** 08457 622 644
- Fax** 08457 778 878
- Email** [enquiry@drc-gb.org](mailto:enquiry@drc-gb.org)
-  **Post** DRC Helpline  
FREEPOST  
MID 02164  
Stratford upon Avon  
CV37 9BR
- Website** [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Community  
Legal Service

