

Audits



Use **Guide 4** to understand the reasons for carrying out audits, to enable you to identify what type of audit you want and find out who you need to approach to do it.

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The Portfolio is published as a result of collaboration with a working party, which includes specialist consultants, and aims to support the elimination of discrimination in service provision. The views expressed in these guides are not necessarily those of Resource.

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Front cover:

An audit creates a route for positive change: a talking lift with raised and braille lettering and large print information, Oldham Art Gallery. Photo: Tom Miles/RNIB

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Introduction

The words 'access audit' are now almost universally used to describe a process by which a building or organisation is evaluated for its accessibility to disabled people. By commissioning an audit you create a route-map for change, with an impartial view on what your organisation already does well and where attention needs to be focused for improvement.

The *Survey of Provision for Disabled Users of Museums, Archives and Libraries*, commissioned by Resource in 2001, shows that nine out of ten 'high performers' had previously carried out an access audit. One respondent commented:

*"It's a very valuable tool for prioritisation. It brings a detached and experienced observation to practice and procedure, services and facilities, as well as to the building."*¹

Using audits effectively

An audit report will reflect the brief you have drawn up to address your specific needs. Often this will cover public spaces and staff areas, but attention is increasingly being paid to information and services, as well as to policies, practices and procedures.

Its form will depend on your own requirements and how much you can or are prepared to spend, as well as the style of the auditor. You could get anything from a two-page summary of personal experience to a well-referenced, indexed and illustrated manual with prioritised recommendations.

The audit report will be one of your main tools for change. To carry out an audit that works for your organisation, you need to have a good understanding of why you are doing one and who is likely to produce the most useful audit for you. A clear and comprehensive



A full access audit covers public spaces and staff areas, as well as information and services: a visually impaired person audits an audio guide, Birmingham City Gallery. Tom Miles/RNIB

brief is an essential starting point. Investing sufficient time and resources in the audit process and implementing its recommendations are key ingredients for success.

Throughout this Guide we use the word 'audit' to mean the range of audit processes and reports, informal and formal, with or without recommendations. This working definition also includes various kinds of consultancy work, which always results in recommendations.

1 Reasons to carry out an audit

An audit should aim to improve access by motivating change. The triggers for you to commission one could include:

Legal obligations

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) already requires organisations to review policies, practices and procedures and to make reasonable adjustments to make services accessible to disabled people. From October 2004, service providers need to understand where physical barriers to their service are, and to have made plans to remove or alleviate them.

In guidance notes from the Disability Rights Commission, it is stated:

“You are more likely to be able to comply with your duty to make adjustments to physical features if you arrange for an access audit of your premises and draw up an access plan. Acting on the results of the audit may reduce the likelihood of legal claims against you.”²

Funders' advice

When considering applications, especially where public access, customer services or building improvements are concerned, most large funders now want evidence that you have checked what access improvements are needed, using some kind of impartial external advice.

The Heritage Lottery Fund states:

“Proposals to improve physical access to historic buildings and sites should normally be based on an access audit and appropriate consultation.”³

The Arts Council of England capital lottery programme has a detailed access checklist that has to be filled in (and is assessed) and other funding schemes are following their example.

Strategy forming

If your organisation wants to develop a strategic plan, or an access policy and plan, knowing what you already do well and what needs to be improved for disabled people provides a valuable knowledge base.

To prove a point

You may already know where there are access barriers – perhaps from observing customer or staff behaviour – but are unable to persuade decision-makers of their importance. An audit provides an impartial view, which can reinforce anecdotal evidence and help staff to put their case.

To help you identify where to start

Some organisations have a willingness and commitment to improve services, but are overwhelmed by what may seem like an impossible building, insufficient resources or lack of staff time. An access audit can provide a valuable tool for prioritisation. It will also point out improvements that can be made quickly, inexpensively or by simple changes of routine and behaviour.

2 Your toolkit for an audit

Before commissioning your audit, you need to decide what you intend to achieve through it and address the following key factors:

Who it is intended for

An audit is commissioned by your organisation, and its recommendations will be aimed at you, so the type and focus of the audit needs to take this into account.

If the audit is designed to improve access generally, you need an audit which covers a range of issues, including service delivery, training and policies.

If it is for a funder or grant-making body, you may need to follow their own format for an audit, or find an auditor who can take into account issues fundamental to the grant application (e.g. conservation and heritage, audience development, management issues).

If it is to influence the opinion of councillors or local authority officers, you may find that personal experience of disability strengthens the case. You could carry out a self-assessment audit and seek additional comments from an access group.

If your audit has to influence decision makers, professionalism is all-important. The audit must be thorough and the audit report well presented.

If the audit is part of a larger building, refit or development plan, the auditor must be familiar with architectural and design issues. They must be able to respond to changes proposed on paper, in plan form, including those resulting from a building inspection of the existing premises.

How professional you need it to be

Do you want an auditor who says, “I wouldn’t be able to manage that door,” or one who points out existing Building Regulations, your legal obligations and guidance on door opening? Do you want a well-laid out report document or evidence of individual experience? If you decide on both, you will need input from a variety of people.

What you want to pay

For a professional consultant, whether individually contracted or through an architectural or other practice, expect to pay consultancy rates. A professional consultant may charge upwards of £300 per day (2003).

Don’t let decision makers see professional rates as an unwarranted payment. There are organisations that have wasted money on ill-advised access solutions that no disabled person uses. Good advice will save money in the long term. It should be remembered that every other contractor – from architects to plumbers – is expected to charge for their time.

Your local authority access officer may be available to you (free of charge if you are a local authority organisation, or there may be an internal charging system). Similarly, a local access group may charge low rates, if any. While these options make it easier to afford the information, they also reduce your status as a customer. You may not have as much control over the timetable or the professionalism of the outcome.

If you carry out the audit yourself, there is a cost implication – in staff time. This can be useful to remember if you have chosen that option because the only cost is a self-auditing toolkit.

3 What the audit should cover

Depending on your decisions when considering the questions above, an access audit could cover any or all of the following:

- Information and publicity
- Public spaces
- Staff areas
- Services and facilities
- Collections, exhibits, displays and stocks
- Events and activities
- Policies, practices and procedures

Information and publicity

- How your organisation publicises its services and access information to disabled people.
- Whether disability access is publicised in your general visitor leaflets.
- If you have an access leaflet or guide.
- Whether your publicity is proactive.
- If you provide information in alternative formats, and which ones.
- If your website is accessible and provides access information.

Public spaces

Professional audits of premises are very detailed, systematic and take a sequential approach covering, for example:

- Parking, entry and reception areas.
- Enquiry points, reading rooms and exhibition areas.
- Meeting rooms and cafés.
- Lavatories and emergency exits.
- Mobility around the building (including between floors and levels).
- Signage and orientation.
- Lighting, colour and texture contrasts.

- Acoustics, loops and sound systems.
- Access barriers affecting mobility, sight, hearing, communication and the need to sit and rest.

Staff areas

- All areas used by staff, including offices, meeting-rooms, staff toilets and washrooms, kitchens and canteens.
- What you would need to change to enable you to offer safe, accessible and equal employment to disabled people.

Services and facilities

- Good practice, areas for improvement and, possibly, unintentional discrimination, which could range from your current commitment to staff training to how food is served in a café or the accessibility of your ICT.
- Mobile and outreach services.
- The ways in which you vary or adjust services to create better access for disabled people.

Collections, exhibits, displays and stocks

- Design of shelving and exhibitions.
- Accessibility of displays and stocks.
- Availability of alternative forms of access (touch tours, audio description, plain English, communication support) and of materials for both loan and reference in alternative formats.

Events and activities

- Your provision of inclusive forms of access to your events, such as sign language interpreters, induction loops or audio description.
- Whether events are in accessible rooms.
- How you publicise these events.

Policies, practices and procedures

Policies, practices and procedures which impact on services and employment opportunities for disabled people and how you implement them, including:

- Health and safety and fire evacuation.
- Your disability policy and plan if you have one.
- Information, staff training and visitor services.
- Stock selection, acquisitions and exhibitions policies.
- Recruitment, retention and equal opportunities policies and practices.
- The requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (see Guide 5).
- Consultation and involvement of disabled people (see Guide 11).
- If access for disabled people is championed at senior management level.

It is clear from this overview, that the more of these areas you want to have covered in an audit, the greater the need for a multi-skilled auditor or team of auditors becomes.

4 Commissioning your audit

Having identified your audit requirements, your next step is to write the brief for circulation to potential auditors. This should cover:

Your situation

- Whether the audit feeds into the development of a disability action plan or whether you have or are applying for funding.
- Whether the building will remain as it is or is to be changed (a refit, extension, new build).
- Whether other contractors/consultants are already involved (architects, access officer, designers) and how you wish the access auditor to fit into that team.

The areas you want the audit to cover

- A physical audit only, with a review of any existing building development plans.
- An audit covering management and staff awareness issues.
- Recommendations on inexpensive changes in practice.

Your requirements

- A clear list of expected audit outcomes (e.g. a report with prioritised recommendations).
- A job description and job specification for an auditor, which spells out knowledge, skills and experience required.
- Whether you particularly welcome applications by consultants with personal experience of disability.
- Whether you require the involvement of disabled people as customers.
- Any specific need you have, e.g. to meet DDA requirements.
- For physical audits, plans of the site, number of floors and the extent of internal/external areas is helpful for costing and planning time.

Timescale processes and budget

- The consultant needs to know when their work must be finished by.
- Phases or events you can foresee, including, for example, the presentation of interim results or a presentation to the Board.
- Your budget. This can be included in the brief. Some consultants may be influenced by this (positively or negatively). You may also choose not to include it and wait to see what tenders come in. If you do this, be sure you have an idea of your planned spend and know that it is available.

Liabilities of auditors and consultants

- Where recommendations are likely to result in spending money, it is advisable to check whether the auditor has professional indemnity insurance and to ensure that the cover is adequate. Personal liability insurance is the responsibility of the auditor/consultant.
- An audit will not protect an organisation from the law but reduces the need for a case to be taken under the law. To make this clear, some auditors/consultants present a disclaimer in the event of a case being made.

5 Selecting an auditor

Access auditing is a relatively young profession; standards and approaches vary.

Access consultants or auditors

These are professional consultants, whether self-employed or part of a consultancy practice, with extensive experience of architectural and other issues connected with disabled people. Many focus on building issues, while some diversify into management concerns and good practice in areas such as recruitment, service provision, marketing and training. These consultants will always charge for their time (see What You Want to Pay on p.9). Some funders prefer the consultant to be a professional and also a disabled person.

Architects and design teams

The provisions that create a basic, *minimum* standard of access (Building Regulations, etc) are well known to architects, but few of them have in-depth knowledge about inclusive design for disabled people, as this subject hardly features in their curriculum. Some practices have an access consultant within their team, or working with them in a contractual relationship. The audit would usually be related to a new building or design project, possibly following an audit of the existing premises, and with an exclusively architectural/physical focus.

Local access officers

Most large local authorities have an access officer who provides advice on building development and planning. If this officer carries out your audit, the focus would be predominantly physical.

Other local authority professionals

Some officers who produce a report that touches on disability should not be considered as access auditors, since they may have a different and specific agenda. These include fire officers (who may well refer to emergency egress or fire regulations concerning disabled people) and health and safety officers (who may comment on issues of audience/customer safety and staff training). They do not, however, audit what is needed for disabled people.

Local access groups

In many areas, groups of campaigning disabled people have formed access groups. They can be used as a source of advice on access to buildings and services on a semi-formal basis, and will carry out their own audit identifying obstacles they observe. These groups can provide real-life, personal responses to environments and their barriers, which can be persuasive when trying to alter opinions. They are also easy to contact, as they work in their home area and have an interest in improving facilities they would like to use.

The members of such groups are most unlikely, however, to be professionals or to be able to offer advice on impairments beyond their experience. They will seldom make a professional charge for their service, although expenses and transport costs, or a donation to the group, may be expected.

Disabled people as auditors

A professional consultant, whether disabled or non-disabled, should be able to cover all areas of impairment, including those in which they have no personal experience. They must be able to show that they have relevant experience in the area they propose to audit.

Disabled people often bring invaluable personal experience into the audit. They are more likely to notice access barriers that seem unimportant to non-disabled people, especially those that they have confronted personally.

Disabled individuals

Some organisations already have regular customers, trustees or councillors with disabilities who are keen to offer opinions on access. While these people provide valuable personal experience, and may well point out barriers you were unaware of, it is unlikely that they can provide you with an adequate audit unless they are also professional consultants.

When involving disabled people as auditors in a more informal capacity, you need to consider the support needs they may have in carrying out an effective audit. In this way you also contribute to skills development and capacity building. The same applies when you consult disabled people as part of an audit.

The Disability Rights Commission code of practice on the DDA 1995 states:

“In carrying out an audit, it is recommended that service providers seek the views of people with different disabilities, or those representing them, to assist in identifying barriers and developing effective solutions. Service providers can also draw on the extensive experience of local and national disability groups or organisations of disabled people.”

Auditing yourself

Self-assessment audits of the physical environment are one solution to scant resources, and, with the support of well-designed packs and guidelines, can be effective in objectively identifying physical barriers. You need to be cautious, however, if this is your only method of gathering information. Whoever carries out the audit has to be rigorous about measuring and testing, since it is easy to 'forget' a single step or heavy door you come across every day on your way to work. This approach is likely to be less professional. The significance of apparently small obstacles or of auditory, sensory or intellectual issues may not be recognised, especially if the staff member carrying out the audit is not a disabled person.

We recommend circulating the audit brief as widely as possible. In this way you are the most likely to find the most suitable and qualified auditor for your requirements.

Getting started

You may be unsure how to identify the focus of your audit and what kind of auditor to choose. The Disability Toolkit on Resource's website has been designed to help museums, archives and libraries to identify areas of good practice, as well as areas for improvement, in the provision of access for disabled people (www.resource.gov.uk/documents/distkit01.pdf). It is an easy to use self-assessment toolkit. It is not an audit, but gives a good idea of the range of issues involved in increasing access for disabled people. Where the assessment highlights areas for improvement (e.g. in access to premises, access to services or management issues), an audit could be one practical way of initiating the change process. The self-assessment toolkit should prove useful in drawing up an audit brief.

Other considerations

The following considerations will help you to select a suitable auditor:

- Cost – can you meet the required charges, and does the rate proposed match the professionalism you require?
- Experience – how important is it that the consultants have worked before in your sector, or with comparable buildings or organisations? You may ask for references.
- Presentation – does the way in which the consultants present their tender match your need for professionalism in the finished report?
- Response to the brief – did the bid take into account the needs you expressed and are you satisfied that the audit will cover what you need?

Auditors are in short supply. You may need to look outside your immediate area, and to wait for the auditor you choose to fit you into their work schedule.

Be sure that you have used the right networks to find the person you want for the job. Organisations such as Disability Arts Forums may be able to pass on your request to freelancers operating in their area. Find these organisations by contacting the British Council of Disabled People (BCODP), or National Disability Arts Forum (NDAF). Contact details below.

The National Register of Access Consultants

The National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC) has created the first national standard for auditors and access consultants. This standard focuses on physical access. Consideration is also given to sensory and intellectual access, management, operations and staff issues. The Register helps clients to select access auditors and consultants free of charge. The NRAC is also a learning network that provides support and information to its members.

Entry to the Register is based on skills and abilities that are assessed through written submissions and an interview. The competences demonstrated to gain membership are set out on the website (www.nrac.org.uk). They concentrate on the ability to produce a satisfactory access audit and knowledge of the design requirements of people with physical disabilities.

There are two types of membership, consultant and auditor. The membership type shows the work individuals are registered to carry out. Auditors are experts in identifying physical access problems and give general advice on solutions. They have a basic knowledge of construction. Consultants are registered to make recommendations and provide solutions of a technical nature as well as identifying access problems. They possess a higher level of construction knowledge than auditors and will probably have a construction qualification, but they may have gained the knowledge by another route, such as work experience. They can be engaged as either an auditor or a consultant.

Clients give the NRAC their criteria for an access practitioner (for example, an access auditor with personal experience of disability based in Essex) and receive the contact details of all members who

fit that profile. The Register is available from the website www.nrac.org.uk or in print from the Register Manager tel: 020 7234 0434.

The NRAC will provide a helpful resource for anyone seeking a professional physical audit. Not all specialists in this field are members of the Register, however, and the standard does not cover all possible areas for audits and consultancy in museums, archives and libraries. It is therefore useful to publicise your audit brief as widely as possible.

Regional databases of disability auditors and trainers for museums, archives and libraries

From November 2003, the websites of the Regional Agencies for museums, archives and libraries will hold regional databases of disability auditors and trainers. The databases are being developed in collaboration with Resource. They will list self-declared auditors and trainers and are designed to help museums, archives and libraries meet a variety of audit requirements. Auditors can record their specific experience of museums, archives or libraries on the database. Some auditors will be highly qualified and experienced; others will give advice and consultancy on a semi-formal basis. Once you have drawn up your audit brief, you can use these databases to contact potential auditors who appear to match your requirements. There will be a link with the National Register of Access Consultants.

Conclusion

A thorough audit of your buildings, services, policies and practices, carried out by a competent auditor, is the most effective way to demonstrate your organisation's commitment to inclusive provision and full access for disabled people. Beginning with an audit will give you the information you need to plan ahead and meet your legal obligations without having to react in an ad hoc fashion to complaints about poor access. Even if you have a disability access plan in place, it is good practice to evaluate its effectiveness with an audit.

If you also want to find out what disabled people think of your building, organisation and services as a preliminary to, or in addition to, an audit, you could involve disabled people in a consultation group as a way to inform your perspective, and to develop their skills for the future. Guide 11 in this series gives further advice on consultation

Further information

Access Association

Professional association for access officers in local authorities.

Sue Fox, Honorary Secretary

c/o Access Officer

Walsall M.B.C.

Civic Centre

Darwall Stree

Walsall

WS1 1TP

Tel/Textphone: 01922 652010

Email: foxs@walsall.gov.uk

www.access-association.org.uk

British Council of Disabled People

Database of member groups, including local access groups, who are led by disabled people.

Litchurch Plaza

Litchurch Lane

Derby

DE24 8AA

Tel: 01332 295551

Fax: 01332 295580

Textphone: 01332 295581

Email: general@bcodp.org.uk

www.bcodp.org.uk

The Centre for Accessible Environments

Provide information on access to buildings and premises, publications and training.

Nutmeg House

60 Gainsford Street

London

SE1 2NY

Tel/Textphone: 020 7357 8182

Fax: 020 7357 8183

Email: info@cae.org.uk

www.cae.org.uk

Disability Rights Commission

Guidance and briefing notes on all aspects of the Disability Discrimination Act, including the provisions implemented in October 2004.

DRC Helpline

Freepost MID 02164

Stratford-upon-Avon

CV37 9BR

Tel: 0845 762 2633

Fax: 0845 777 8878

Textphone: 0845 762 2644

Email: enquiry@drc-gb.org

www.drc-gb.org

Disability – on the agenda

Website providing government guidance on legislation and current campaigns.

www.disability.gov.uk

National Disability Arts Forum

Can provide contact details for organisations run by disabled people in your region, through whom local contacts with auditors and trainers may be made.

Mea House
Ellison Place
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 8XS
Tel: 0191 261 1628
Fax: 0191 222 0573
Textphone: 0191 261 2237
Email: ndaf@ndaf.org.uk
www.ndaf.org.uk

National Register of Access Consultants

A free, searchable database listing access auditors and consultants by selected criteria. Consultants listed have had to pass selection tests.

Nutmeg House
60 Gainsford Street
London
SE1 2NY
Tel: 020 7234 0434
Fax: 020 7357 8183
Textphone: 020 7357 8182
Email: marynoble@nrac.org.uk
www.nrac.org.uk

RNIB

Information on visual impairment issues including information, signage and access to buildings and premises.

105 Judd Street

London

WC1H 9NE

Tel: 020 7388 1266

Fax: 020 7388 2034

www.rnib.org.uk

RNID

Information on communication with D/deaf and hard of hearing people and assistive technology.

19–23 Featherstone Street

London

EC1Y 8SL

Tel: 020 7296 8000

Fax: 020 7296 8199

Textphone: 020 7296 8001

Email: informationline@rnid.org.uk

www.rnid.org.uk

Publications

Access Audits

A self-auditing pack for use by disabled customers or auditors, with checklists in a removable, photocopyable format. Includes a copy of *Designing for Accessibility* and gives design and legislation guidance for public buildings. Available from the CAE (as above). Price £25.

Resource Disability Toolkit

www.resource.gov.uk/action/documents/distkit01.pdf under 'disability'.

Keeping up with the Past

A 40-minute video on access to historic buildings produced by English Heritage and the CAE. Available from the CAE (as above). Price £12.

The Disability Directory for Museums and Galleries

Resource's directory of advice on making collections, facilities and services accessible. Contains advice on access auditing and related issues. Available from Resource. Price £25 (free from the web).

Code of Practice on rights of access to goods, facilities, services and premises for disabled people

This statutory Code, agreed by Parliament, provides detailed advice on the way the law should work, together with practical examples and tips. Its status means it must be referred to for guidance in court when deciding on DDA Part III cases.

Available from The Stationery Office:

Tel: 0870 600 5522

www.thestationeryoffice.com

or through bookshops, ISBN 0-1170-2860-6. Price £13.95.

2004 – What it means for you: A guide for service providers

A downloadable short booklet outlining the most frequently asked questions. Available via the DRC website (as above). Free.

Notes

- 1 *Survey of Provision for Disabled Users of Museums, Archives and Libraries*; Resource, 2001.
- 2 *2004 – What it means for you: A guide for service providers*; Disability Rights Commission.
- 3 *Historic Buildings and Sites*; Heritage Lottery Fund.

- 1 Disability in Context
- 2 Meeting Disabled People
- 3 Training for Equality
- 4 Audits
- 5 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)
- 6 Inclusive Information
- 7 Using Technology
- 8 Access on a Shoestring
- 9 Accessible Environments
- 10 Outreach and Partnerships
- 11 Consulting Disabled People
- 12 Employment at Every Level

The **Disability Portfolio** is a collection of 12 guides on how best to meet the needs of disabled people as users and staff in museums, archives and libraries. It gives invaluable advice, information and guidance to help overcome barriers and follow good practice.

The Portfolio is available in 12 point clear print or 15 point large print formats, braille, audio cassette and on the website. Please contact 020 7273 1458 or info@resource.gov.uk

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16 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AA
Tel: 020 7273 1444
Fax: 020 7273 1404

www.resource.gov.uk