

At the venue

Honesty is the best policy; there is little worse for someone with accessibility requirements than travelling to a venue and having an unpredictable and unreliable experience with different features and facilities to what was advertised.

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 visitors 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.

Transport Links

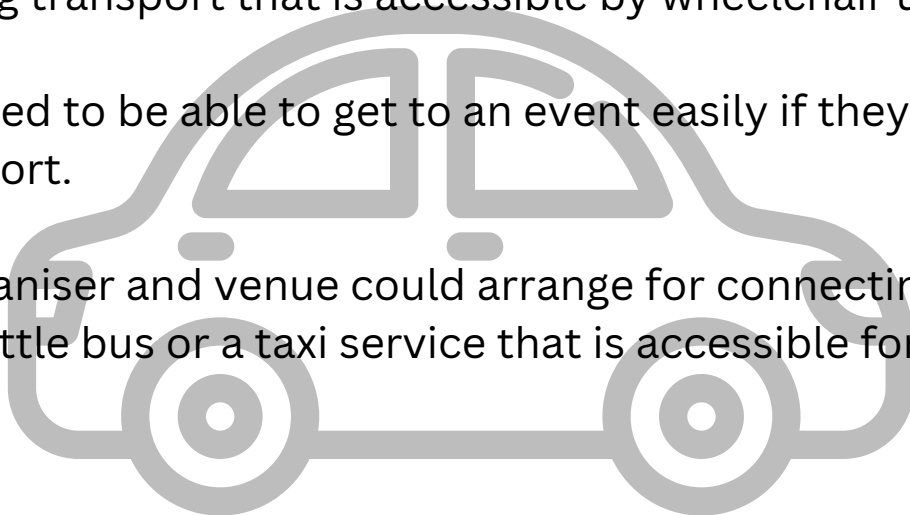
Is your venue within easy access of public transport links or there should be connecting transport that is accessible by wheelchair users?

Attendees need to be able to get to an event easily if they're arriving by public transport.

Together organiser and venue could arrange for connecting transport such as a shuttle bus or a taxi service that is accessible for wheelchair users.

Parking

Guests with additional needs must be kept in mind when looking at the parking structure at a venue. To be accessible, venues must have designated accessible parking spaces that have clear signage.



Questions that may be asked:

- Is the route clearly signed? Is the venue easy to find without the use of a smartphone?
- Are surfaces even and slip-resistant? Is the paving flush with no cracks or gaps that could trap wheelchair wheels?
- Is there accessible public transport (bus/train/underground) close to the venue?
- Is there accessible connecting transport suitable for wheelchair users (for example, taxis) from public transport links if required?
- Does the venue's postcode work in satellite navigation systems to get vehicles to the door?
- Are there accessible parking spaces on site? Are they clearly signposted? How many designated parking spaces are available, and can they be reserved?

Questions that may be asked:

- Are designated parking spaces of sufficient width to allow wheelchair users to get in and out of the vehicle, with sufficient space on either side of the car and at the rear?
- If designated parking is above or below reception level, is there an accessible lift from the car park to the entrance?
- Are there any dropping-off points? What assistance can visitors receive if they are dropped off at the entrance?
- Does the access route level have a firm, slip-resistant and reasonably smooth surface? Is the route or pathway wide enough? If a route or pathway is narrow, are there suitable passing places for wheelchair users? Are bushes trimmed back, and are low branches avoided?
- Is the car park adequately lit? Do staff members frequently check the level of lighting within the car park?

Accessing the venue entrance and moving freely

Visitors and staff with disabilities need to be able to access the venue.

Wheelchair users enter the venue the same way as other visitors? If not, is there an alternative entrance that is accessible?

If you have concerns, ask your venue to help with ways to make the entrance more accessible such as a ramp for wheelchair users to use.

- **Entry system:** Is there an entry system which involves people having to talk and hear a reply e.g. an intercom? Do people have to locate buttons and press the correct one? If so you might need someone stationed at the entrance to meet arrivals and let them in to the building.
- **Step free access:** Can lifts be accessed without having to ask for a key? Are ramps of a gentle gradient (1:20) and do they have handrails either side? If there is no ramp, could you hire one?
- **Space to move around:** Check whether there is enough room and whether the floor is suitable for wheelchairs to move around easily. Are the main circulation routes free from trip hazards and obstructions? Ideally people using wheelchairs or walking aids should be able to access all areas, not just the room where the event is happening.

Questions that may be asked:

- Is there a clear view into the venue from outside? Can front-of-house staff see visitors approaching and aid if necessary?
- Is the main entrance easy to find and clearly distinguishable from the facade?
- Are disabled visitors able to enter the building by the same entrance as other visitors? If not, is there another entrance that is accessible to wheelchair users? Is there appropriate signage directing visitors to the accessible entrance?
- If there are steps, how many are there? Is there a handrail?
- Are entry systems and push pads clearly displayed and visible, and not obstructed so they can be approached and used by all users, including wheelchair users?
- Is there a platform lift or a ramp suitable for wheelchair users? If there is a removable ramp, how does a wheelchair user signal that they need assistance?
- If reception is above or below the entrance level, is there a lift (other than a service lift)?
- Is the entrance lobby and reception area well-lit?
- Are any mats on the floor flush with the floor and free of trip hazards?
- If there is a reception desk, is it at a height suitable for people in wheelchairs? If not, can an alternative desk be used for all delegates?

- Is there a section of the flooring in front of the reception desk suitably colour contrasted? This will aid people with impaired vision when attempting to locate the reception desk.
- Is seating provided in reception areas and available for people who might be less able to stand while waiting?
- Do entrance doors and lobby doors have viewing panels to alert people approaching a door to the presence of people on the other side?
- Are there automatic doors? If so, do these remain open long enough to allow a wheelchair user or someone with limited mobility to pass through? If automatic doors are operated via a push pad rather than a sensor, are these clearly seen on approach (internally and externally)?
- Are door controls at a suitable height for both standing and seated users? Are door handles clearly located, and easy to use and grip?
- Are glass doors clearly visible when closed? Are manifestations suitably colour contrasted against the background? (Manifestations are visible designs on glass doors and windows to prevent people from walking into them; they might be decals or frosted designs).

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.

Inclusive seating

To promote inclusive rest points throughout the visitor or colleague experience you should consider providing 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 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. Another example is seating provision for those of larger build.

www.thefatfriendlyseat.co.uk/about

Accessible toilets

It is important that your venue has accessible toilets for guests with disabilities.

Questions that may be asked:

- Are there accessible toilets designed for disabled people on the same floors as the event and rooms that will be used? If not, are there accessible toilets accessible by a lift? Is there more than 1 accessible toilet?
- Do outward opening accessible WC doors have a horizontal pull rail fitted to the interior face where no door closing device is fitted?
- Is the toilet free of clutter/hygiene bins around the toilet bowl?
- Is the toilet bowl accessible for an individual who transfers from the left or the right?

Alarm/cords:

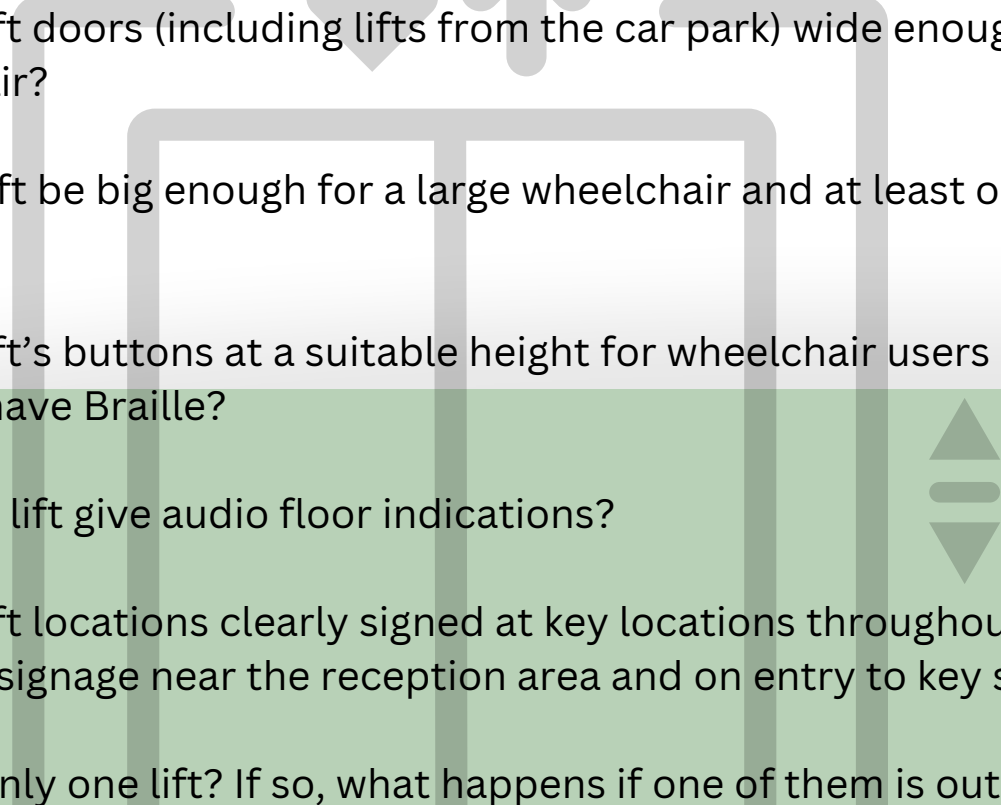
- Do the toilets have alarm cords to alert venue staff in case assistance is required?
- Do these cords reach the ground, and are they regularly checked? Emergency cords should be easily identifiable and usually red in colour.
- Each cord should have two red bangles attached to aid the person easily 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.
- It is important that staff, including cleaning staff, are trained to not tie cords up out of reach from the floor.
- Are the locations of the accessible toilet facilities suitably identified and located? Does signage have the International Symbol of Access (the wheelchair symbol)?
- If your event includes families and children, are there baby-changing facilities available to all genders?
- Are gender-neutral toilet facilities available, and if not, can some toilets be designated gender-neutral for the event? Think carefully how this will work, e.g. re-labelling the door of an already gender-neutral accessible toilet could lead to it being over-used by people who don't need facilities like extra space. Sign the doors clearly, e.g. 'Toilets (cubicles only)', or 'Toilets (cubicles and urinals).'
- Does your venue have 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?

Lifts

If your venue has lifts, there are a few things you can check to ensure they are even more user-friendly:

Questions that may be asked

- 
- Are the lift doors (including lifts from the car park) wide enough for a wheelchair?
 - Will the lift be big enough for a large wheelchair and at least one other person?
 - Are the lift's buttons at a suitable height for wheelchair users and do the buttons have Braille?
 - Does the lift give audio floor indications?
 - Are the lift locations clearly signed at key locations throughout the site? Is there lift signage near the reception area and on entry to key stairwells?
 - Is there only one lift? If so, what happens if one of them is out of service?

Rooms

Main conference and meeting rooms should be as accessible as possible. If rooms are through several doors or down narrow corridors, this can influence its accessibility and can make it difficult for some guests to navigate.

When laying out the room, make sure that there's enough space between aisles in your conference room(s) to allow for an easy entrance and exit for any wheelchair users.

Questions that may be asked:

- Is there easy access to the room(s)? Are there any heavy doors?
- Are the rooms large enough to allow for good circulation for a wheelchair user, particularly in any aisles?
- Do rooms have good acoustics? Echoes can cause problems for people with hearing impairments.
- Is there a quiet room or space so people can step out of the main room or rooms?
- Is there signage in the room indicating the availability of a fitted Induction Loop?
- Are the lighting levels adequate and adjustable?
- Can the lighting levels be reduced during presentations?
- Are the lighting needs able to accommodate delegates that use interpreters or lip-read?
- Are blinds available to control the natural light?

Lighting

The lighting in your venue should accommodate anybody with visual impairment.

To accommodate guests with visual impairments ensure you have considered the lighting they may need and be aware of any guests that rely on interpreters and lip readers so you can make sure that they can see them well enough.

Any transitions from dark to light need to be a gradual process. It is also a requirement that you should have warnings ahead of time for any flickering lights, strobe lighting and flash photography for anyone that has epilepsy.

Sound

Sound is an important factor in any venue accessibility checklist. There are many factors that should be considered when it comes to the sound you use.

Examples of this include:

- Making sure the sound in all rooms is a good volume
- Are there induction loops in all the rooms to aid the hearing of anyone with hearing aids?
- Are there any echoes in the room?

Catering

If catering facilities are needed, are those facilities accessible for everyone?

It's vital to check if there is sufficient space between tables for wheelchair users to move around and tables should also be a suitable height for them.

Can you cater for special diets such as halal, vegan and allergies?

How are menu's presented – colour, fonts, size, braille?

Dietary requirements

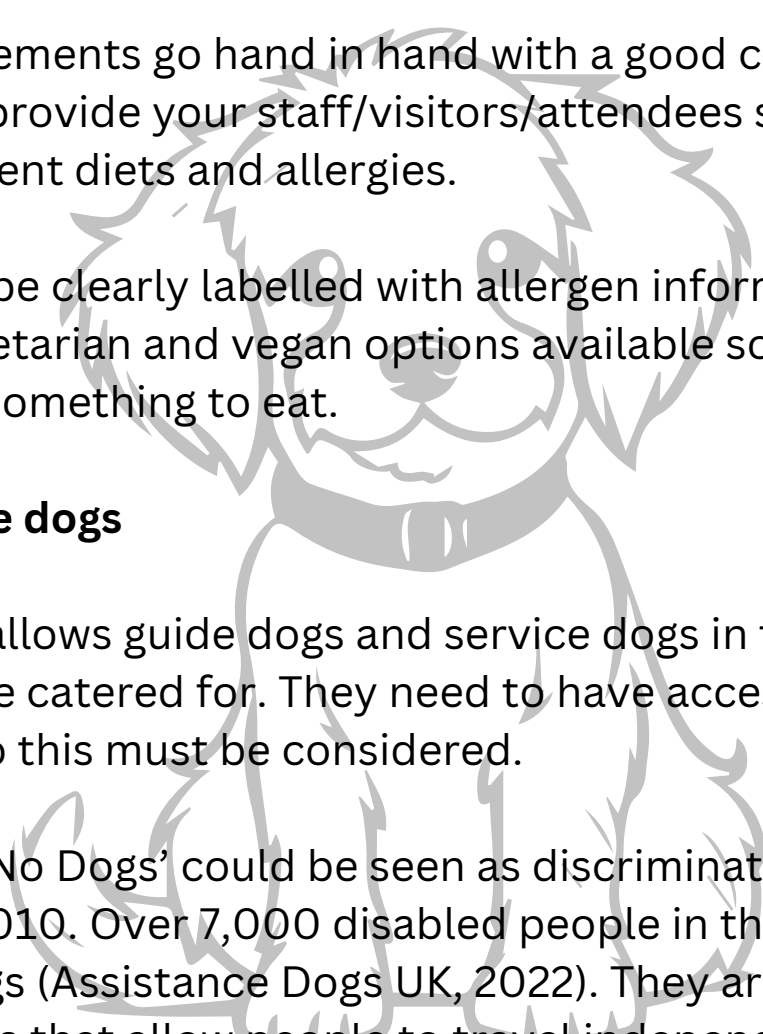
Dietary requirements go hand in hand with a good catering experience. The food you provide your staff/visitors/attendees should cater for a range of different diets and allergies.

Foods should be clearly labelled with allergen information and there should be vegetarian and vegan options available so that all guests have the choice of something to eat.

Guide / service dogs

If your venue allows guide dogs and service dogs in the venue, the dogs also need to be catered for. They need to have access to water and open space, so this must be considered.

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 (Assistance Dogs UK, 2022). 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.



Environmental factors

Its not only the built environment that needs to be considered but environmental factors need to be factored into the accessibility of your venue.

Questions that may be asked:

- **Is the lighting (daylight and artificial) easily controllable?** If not, could you make the light temporarily more controllable, for example by making blinds from draping? For some people bright light, flickers, glare and reflections make it hard to read or concentrate and can trigger headaches or migraines. Flickering lights or strobes can also trigger seizures for people with photosensitive epilepsy.
- **Temperature control: Is it warm enough? Or too warm?** If not, do you give permission for organisers to alter the settings or bring portable heaters/fans?
- **Is there excessive noise at the venue?** For example, from the road, building works or noisy groups in adjoining rooms?
- **Allergens / asthma triggers: Is your venue likely to trigger hay fever, asthma attacks or aggravate allergies?** Common things that cause a problem are smoke (including from smoke/fog machines), dust, animals, newly cut or flowering grass, hay and strawbales.
- **Will anyone else be using the venue at the same time?** Does this have any impact on accessibility? E.g. users such as a silent meditation group may not be compatible with a high input room or crèche.

Backgrounds: If you are hosting a workshop or presentation, try to limit the visual distractions within people's field of vision. For example, can you temporarily take down posters that aren't related to your event on the wall behind where you are speaking?

If there are extra rooms at the venue, it can be helpful to set some aside for specific uses including:

1. A prayer room
2. A quiet break out space for group discussions. This is really helpful for people who find it hard to hear / focus when there is background noise.
3. A 'low input' room. This is a place where there is no talking, low lights, no noise, and no moving lights, images, or objects. This can be helpful for many people, e.g. some autistic people or people with chronic fatigue.
4. A 'high input' area, somewhere people can be energetic and make as much noise/move around as much as they need to in order to give themselves enough stimulation or release energy.

How child-friendly is your venue?

Even if your event is aimed at adults, the venue may need to be accessible to children, to enable parents and guardians to come. Look for:

Baby feeding: Is breast feeding welcome and are there signs and policies welcoming breast feeding in all areas of the venue? Are there facilities to heat up milk / baby food? Is there a private baby feeding area for those that require it? Are there high chairs?

Baby changing area: Is it gender neutral and accessible to everyone who might need to use it?

Child friendly toilets: Are child steps, toilet inserts, potties and baby wipes provided?

Play area: Is there a low hazard play area with toys for different age groups? If the venue doesn't provide one, can you make one?

A quiet area for small children to eat / be fed and to rest.

Prams and buggies: Is there somewhere to store prams and buggies?

Safety issues: Are there safety issues, such as unlocked doors that open onto busy roads, or stairs with no stair-gates? Can you address them?