

Why carry out an Access Audit ?

Section 5.42 of the government Code of Practice states

“Service providers are more likely to be able to comply with their duty to make adjustments in relation to physical features if they arrange for an access audit of their premises to be conducted and then draw up an access plan or strategy. Acting on the results of such an evaluation may reduce the likelihood of legal claims against a service provider.”

The Droveyay Access Audit will identify where physical alterations are necessary or desirable by comparison of the building to current design standards applicable to new buildings. The service provider may then use the Access Audit to prioritise the items for action and to draw up their access plan or strategy, having regard to how reasonable it is to carry out the alterations, and having regard to what financial resources are available.

The Format of the Access Audit

There is no prescribed format or layout for an access audit given by the government, although many organisations have given their recommendations.

After several preliminary versions, Droveyay have now developed an Access Audit which we believe will be simple to understand and to evaluate. The report is prepared in A4 report format , illustrated with photographs, and compares the existing facilities against the following :

- Approved Document M to the current Building Regulations that would apply if the building was constructed new
- British Standard BS 8300:2001 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people - Code of Practice.
- Recommendations and good practice guidelines published by various disability organisations.

For quick reference purposes comments are marked with one of the following symbols :

- ✓ Positive comments, or where the facility is generally satisfactory.
There may still be recommendations for improvement contained in the text.
- ✗ Negative comments, or where the facility is generally unsatisfactory.
- ◇ Not applicable to this property or service provider.

Using the Access Audit

The detailed access audit covers both major and minor issues, and recommendations for action will range from large expenditure to little or no expenditure. How far it is reasonable for a service provider to undertake these actions depends upon their size and resources and particular circumstances.

It is therefore the responsibility of the service provider to evaluate the comments and recommendations within the audit and to prioritise their action according to their individual circumstances and financial resources, and to form their own program for implementing recommendations.

In some cases the audit will give recommendations for proposed building work for such items as toilets, ramps, steps, lifts etc. These recommendations are often based upon discussions with a client representative present at the audit. In some cases, client representatives will have given details of their ideas or proposals. The recommendations given in the audit will not necessarily be the only way in which a particular situation can be resolved. The client is not obliged therefore to adopt the recommendation given, but may wish to seek and consider alternative solutions.

With regard to building alterations, clients are reminded that most internal alterations, installation of sanitary fittings, alterations to doorways and means of escape, will require building regulations approval. Most alterations which affect the external appearance, including the installation of ramps, may require planning approval.

Those service providers whose buildings are leased, owned by others, owned by a trust or a separate department within their own organisation should also clarify if they are required to obtain approval of such bodies as the owners of buildings.

The date by which reasonable physical alterations to public buildings must be undertaken by law was 01 October 2004.