

Diversity Group Conference – Access all areas
Monday 9th June 2008
Victoria & Albert Museum

Workshop 2 - Disability audits of libraries
Susan White – Access auditor

Venue – Print room, attendees 25+

Susan White is a qualified access auditor having completed the two year NVQ 4 course

When we talk about disability and access it raises a number of questions and issues about the language to use to describe it and how we identify people as disabled.

Therefore who is disabled and who will need access?

The answer is that disability access is not a minority issue but a majority issue because it has the potential to affect all of us.

What is the definition of Disability – ‘Equality of opportunity’ or limitation of opportunity?

Access audits

Access audits in libraries cover a range of areas including e.g., buildings, car parks, transport, services and procedures, ICT, staff facilities etc. Before the building is even entered there are things to be considered such as the provision of regular public transport services and car park facilities.

Some areas and issues to be considered are as follows:-

Car Parks

Width of spaces, policing of the car park

Public transport

Good local service available

When considering a physical audit one is required to look at all aspects of a building including doors, lighting levels, floors etc.

Entrances and doors

width, handles, handrails, automatic door timings, glass or solid doors, door weight obstacles such as plant pots, door furniture, steps or ramps etc.

Lighting

Type of lights, fluorescent tubes – flickering can cause epileptic seizures, also flashing plasma screens, natural light, blinds and curtains.

Floor covering

Non-slip, even/uneven surfaces, contrast between floors, walls and door frames

Stairs

Visible edges, handrails, lighting, height of treads

Acoustics

Sound levels during opening hours, induction/infra-red loops and procedures for checking these and training staff in their use

Ventilation

Dry air can be an issue for some people, regular checks and cleaning

Assistance dogs

Does your library provide facilities for these dogs such as drinking water

Baby Facilities

Ensure that these are provided separately and not located in the accessible toilets

Reception desks/areas

Counters at correct height, clearly marked, suitable lighting, wallpaper with patterns behind desks can cause problems for lip-readers, appropriate seating, adequate access for wheelchairs.

Furniture

Adjustable chairs and tables with arm rests, maximum weight for chairs, good contrast with floors and walls etc, shelf height or staff assistance provided to access shelves, also creative ways of shelving stock such as only using middle shelves etc.

Communication/Information/signage

Leaflets with appropriate print size, (RNIB offers guidelines re: clear print), be flexible and think about your audience and their needs, use plain English, SMOG test available from www.literacytrust.org.uk don't forget how useful symbols can be, availability of 'textphone' and 'typetalk'.

Alarm system

Accessible toilets with alarm systems and a designated person to respond, policies and procedures, alternative alarm systems which are visual rather than audible.

Staff facilities

Important not to forget that these must also be accessible

ICT

Accessible websites, web audits, MS Windows has readability function.

Service audit

Of policies and procedures, staff training and awareness, custom and practice, need for regular reviews. Compliance with DDA on average costs £500. MLA offers an 'Access for all' self assessment form available from their website.

Susan also provided a list of useful websites and an outline of the presentation.