



Factsheet: Complying with the DDA

What does the DDA cover?

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) uses the following definition of disability:

“A physical or mental impairment which has a;

- substantial
- long term (lasting or having lasted twelve months or the rest of a person’s life)
- adverse effect

on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

Only those who meet these criteria are covered by the Act, but it encompasses a wide range of conditions, including severe disfigurement, cancer and AIDS.

The Act has been enforced in stages:

From 1 October 1999 service providers (which includes museums and galleries) have had to

- change policies, practices and procedures to remove barriers which may make it unreasonably difficult or impossible for a disabled person to use their service
- provide auxiliary aids or services to enable disabled people to use their services.

From 1 October 2004 service providers have had to remove physical obstructions, alter them or provide other ways of letting disabled people access their services.

What changes will you have to make?

The DDA states that “reasonable adjustments” must be made to practices or premises to accommodate disabled people. As this is quite a vague term, it is likely that what is considered “reasonable” will be only be defined through legal action.

It is always advisable to take a ‘best practice’ approach. Try to anticipate as many potential access needs as possible. If you are unable to provide a particular service, look for the best alternative. Above all, never refuse access to a disabled person.

It is also best to check your legal position when making access improvements. For example health and safety legislation and listed building status can override the DDA. This should not be used as an excuse for poor access provision, however.

Some general hints

- Have a professional access audit done, if you can afford it - this will confirm any areas for concern. Full members of SMC can apply for funding to help meet the costs of an access audit. Our grants are normally 50% of the cost of the project, but we will consider applications for a higher percentage.
- Compile an access policy in consultation with staff and visitors – this will help to clarify the incremental changes you must make.
- The right attitude is very important – poor customer service can be more offensive than a lack of facilities.
- Explain the access options you have available and ask what the disabled visitor/staff member would prefer.
- Ask disabled visitors/staff and local disabled groups for suggestions for improvement.

- Less than 5% of disabled people are wheelchair users – you need to take into account a wide range of other impairments.
- Remember that not all access improvements need to be hugely expensive. For instance, have you considered:
 - enlarging the font on your labels?
 - rewriting your guidebook in Plain English?
 - offering guided tours to visually impaired visitors?
 - putting your opening hours on your telephone answer service?
 - staying open late one evening a week?
 - providing objects that can be handled (real or replica)?
 - improving the signage in the building?
 - moving your special exhibitions to the ground floor?

The following SMC checklists should also be helpful:

- Improving access for blind or visually impaired visitors
- Improving access for visitors who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Improving access for visitors who are wheelchair users or have impaired mobility
- Improving intellectual access

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