Guidelines for Access Auditing of the Built Environment

2005

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# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

Everyone should be able to fully participate within society, and built environment accessibility plays a crucial role in achieving this goal. An access audit is one of the first of many steps that can help to improve accessibility of the built environment.  
  
The National Disability Strategy (2004), which includes a number of sectoral plans, is a key measure taken by the Government to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in Irish society. The outline sectoral plan from the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government highlights that each Local Authority will, within six months of the approval of the plan by the Oireachtas, carry out an access audit of all public buildings, public parks, amenities and open spaces, roads and streets, pavements and pedestrian crossings, heritage sites, public libraries, polling stations and harbors within its control and identify what remedial action is necessary to make these buildings, etc. accessible for people with disabilities.  
  
Furthermore, under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness Agreement, the Government made a commitment that all public services would be made more accessible. The Excellence through Accessibility Award is a joint initiative between the National Disability Authority and the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform. To receive the award organisations will be required to regularly review and if necessary develop and improve the accessibility of their built environment. For a Government Department or Agency to apply for the award, they must ensure that management has reviewed the current accessibility of their building(s) by way of an access audit.  
  
These guidelines have been designed to provide best practice advice on how to carry out an access audit. The guidelines will be of interest to all those involved in access auditing including building surveyors, architects, building designers, facility managers, occupational therapists, building control officers, local access groups and all those who deal with the construction and use of buildings.  
  
Angela Kerins  
Chairperson   
National Disability Authority

# Glossary of Terms

* **Counter loop:**An assistive listening system (ALD) that uses electromagnetic energy for transmission of sound from the sound source to the listener.
* **Dished Kerbs:**Sloping the kerb of a path (particularly at road crossings) to facilitate wheelchair users, people with restricted mobility, people using buggies etc.
* **Egress:** Means of exit from a room, building or property.
* **Horizontal Circulation:**Movement along corridors or open plan areas within a building.
* **Induction Coupler:**A personal communicator/amplifier for people that need assistance in hearing speech.
* **Induction loop:**A simple coil wire receiver that uses electromagnetic energy for transmission of sound from the sound source to the listener.
* **Queuing Systems:**A public address system that provides both visual and auditory announcements (e.g. queuing at Social Welfare office).
* **Nosings:**Front edge of a stair tread that extends over the riser.
* **Public Access Terminal:**ATMs (Automated Teller Machines), information kiosks, ticket vending machines, card door entry systems etc.
* **TDD:**(Telephone Device for the Deaf) An assistive telephone device that allows people with hearing impairments to communicate via text.
* **Tactile paving:**Raised paving to alert people who are blind or have a visual impairment at e.g. a pedestrian crossing.
* **Usability:**A measure of how easy it is for a user to complete a task.
* **Vertical Circulation:**Movement through a building via stairs, escalators, lifts and ramps.
* **WC:** Water closet, i.e. a toilet.
* **Wayfinding:**The ability of a person to find his or her way to a given destination.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

An accessible built environment has been recognised as a core element of an inclusive society. An accessible environment provides citizens with autonomy and the means to pursue an active social and economic life (EC Expert Group on Accessibility, 2003).  
  
Many people with disabilities are faced with barriers that exclude them from participating as equal citizens. These barriers can be attitudinal and societal as well as physical and affect people with different impairments at different times of their lives.  
  
The case for making our society more accessible is a compelling one on many fronts. It is not only an issue of justice but it makes good business and social sense. In addition to contributing to the development of a more inclusive and equal society an accessible environment offers the following advantages:

* An accessible environment increases the pool of potential new workers that an employer can tap into. It also helps organisations retain existing employees who may acquire a disability;
* An accessible building enables more people with disabilities to enter the premises and/or use the services;
* Accessibility improves overall safety of buildings, which has a direct impact on the number of accidents taking place and therefore the cost of insurance premiums;
* An accessible environment gives greater customer and staff satisfaction and can improve public perception and recognition of a Department or Agency.

## 1.2 Why carry out an access audit?

An access audit is one of the first of many steps that can help to improve accessibility and provides the basis for an access improvement plan or strategy (see section 6 for other steps). According to Sawyer and Bright (2004) there are a number of reasons for carrying out an audit including: legislation; funding conditions (such as Government Departments/Offices funding through the Office of Public Works' Universal Access Programme); to gather data on buildings for comparison or analysis; to check compliance with certain standards and regulations; company policy on equal opportunities; public relations/company image; conservation by use of historic buildings; pressure from lobby groups and awareness of particular problems.  
  
Carrying out an access audit will identify a number of features including:

* the current accessibility of the building/property/site;
* areas for improvement (e.g. no accessible car spaces in the car park or the door in the accessible toilet on the ground floor is incorrectly located and therefore the WC is inaccessible);
* good/bad practice in relation to facilities management that an organisation has in place; positive accessibility features (e.g. counter loop at reception, good use of lighting and colour throughout building, signage);

## 1.3 Who are these guidelines for?

This guide offers best practice advice on how to carry out an access audit. It is envisaged that these guidelines will be of interest to all those involved in access auditing including building surveyors, architects, building designers, facility managers, occupational therapists, building control officers, local access groups and all those who deal with the construction and use of buildings.  
  
The guidelines can be used in a number of different ways, according to the needs of the particular user. For example, a facilities manager may use the guidelines to commission an audit of the built environment while an architect might use the guidelines to gain further knowledge on access auditing.[[1]](#footnote-1)

## 1.4 What will these guidelines cover?

The aim of this document is to provide guidance on how to carry out an access audit and what access audits should consist of (structure and content). The document will cover:

* what is an access audit;
* the typical structure of an access audit;
* steps required to carry out an access audit;
* where to get more information (literature, relevant websites etc.).

# 2. What is an access audit?

To many, an access audit is a checklist of guidelines that need to be adhered to. However an access audit of the built environment is much more than that. Audits of the built environment need to consider the day to day running of the building, the building type, management issues, maintenance and safety as well as the checklist of building design criteria. An access audit should also encompass egress and needs to consider access and safety in emergency situations (safety zones, routes, signage, emergency equipment etc.) There are a number of definitions available for access audits. These include:

* An access audit rates an existing building against given criteria for usability and accessibility. It involves not only the issue of ready movement to and around the building, but also the use by people with sensory or intellectual disabilities of the services, which the building provides (NDA, 2002);
* The purpose of an access audit is to establish how well a particular building or environment performs in terms of access and ease of use by a wide range of potential users, including people with disabilities, and to recommend access improvements(Bright and Sawyer, 2004);
* The access audit of a building and its setting is the starting point for a planned programme of access improvements. Access auditing involves an inspection of a building or environment to appraise its accessibility - judged against predetermined criteria (http://www.cae.org.uk/access.html);
* Access audits give a snapshot of an existing building at a point in time. They are a useful starting point in assessing the current state of accessibility and usability of existing buildings (Centre for Accessible Environments, 2004).

# 3. Types of Access Audits

Along with the standard access audit discussed in section 0 above there are a number of other types of audits that could take place.

## 3.1 Walk and talk audits/Route appraisals:

A walk and talk audit/route appraisal is a simplified version of an access audit and is usually carried out accompanied by the client. As the walk and talk audit/route appraisal takes place the auditor discusses the main positive and negative accessibility features and a short report will be sent to the client after the meeting. For example; an organisation may wish to carry out a walk and talk audit/route appraisal if they are holding a seminar in a new hotel or if a small organisation (such as local shop, garden centre, hairdressers etc.) wants to investigate their accessibility.  
  
While carrying out a walk and talk audit/route appraisal the auditor should be making the client aware of general ease of use of premises; provisions in place for people with various disabilities; obstacles/hazards; means of escape provided; wayfinding systems in place; circulation (horizontal and vertical, level changes) and quality of fixtures, surfaces lighting etc.

## 3.2 Design Appraisals

A design appraisal looks at the proposed design of a building and assesses the potential usability/accessiblity of the finished building. The report should make recommendations on improvements, highlight positive accessibility features, provide information on accessibility features that may have been missed and advise on any relevant changes that need to take place.  
  
A design appraisal is only one step in the process of designing a new building. It is worth noting that professionals with accessibility experience should be involved in all stages of the design process including:

* design appraisals at all stages throughout the project;
* advising during the construction (what fixtures and fittings to use, ensuring equipment is placed in correct position, etc.);
* post-occupancy evaluation (ensuring signage in correct position, loop systems in working order, revising safety statement, etc.).

While design appraisals are beyond the scope of these guidelines further details can be obtained in section 8.2.

## 3.3 Acquisition Audit

For any organisation considering the leasing or purchase of a property an acquisition audit will identify any physical adjustments that may be required. Typically this information is useful when negotiating terms with freeholders, managing agents or sellers. (http://www.accessmatters.com/html/access\_audits.html)

# 4. What to do before the audit

This section provides information about what the client and the auditor need to consider before undertaking an access audit.

## 4.1 Client

Firstly, the client should set up an access team to manage the process. In order to engage an auditor, the client may need to go through a tendering process.[[2]](#footnote-2) An auditor should be chosen on the basis of his or her experience and expertise in terms of

* his/her understanding of relevant legislation and standards (for further information see section 8.3;
* his/her work experience in the area and an understanding of user needs (for details of a register of access auditors see section 8.4;
* any construction/design background;
* his/her qualifications or training in this area;
* whether he/she has undertaken previous audits.

If there is a tendering process, the client should draft a brief /specification for the project. This should address issues such as the purpose and scope of the audit; information on the buildings concerned, the deliverables required, the time frame etc. In order to compare valid tenders, the client should design a scoring sheet based on weighted criteria relating to how a tenderer addresses and proposes to perform the audit, and at what cost taking into account the tenderers experience and expertise[2](https://nda.ptools.net/publications/environment-housing/environment-publications/guidelines-for-access-auditing-of-the-built-environment.html#fn2). The client should seek tenderers, by advertising or invitation[2](https://nda.ptools.net/publications/environment-housing/environment-publications/guidelines-for-access-auditing-of-the-built-environment.html#fn2). Valid submitted tenders should then be evaluated using the scoring sheet. The client may wish to invite the most competitive tenderers to elaborate on their submissions before awarding the contract to the highest scoring tenderer.

## 4.2 Auditor

After the client has appointed an auditor, there are a number of things that need to be carried out before the audit can take place.  
  
A meeting should be organised with the client and the auditor to discuss how and when to proceed. The auditor may need extra information about carrying out the audit in the client's building(s). For further details and questions see Appendix 1.  
  
After this meeting and prior to the audit, the auditor should carry out a detailed analysis of the building plans. This will have a number of benefits as it allows the auditor to familiarise themselves with the building and will provide the auditor with information such as:

* What facilities are provided for people with disabilities;
* The various zones of the building (e.g. public, staff, maintenance, toilets, circulation etc.);
* Initial accessibility concerns (for example the plans might tell if accessible car spaces are correctly designed or whether the door in an accessible toilet is correctly located).

The final step in preparation is to ensure that the auditor has all the equipment to carry out the audit. This might include:[[3]](#footnote-3)

* Some method of recording information (A clip board or PDA);
* A measuring tape (to measure door width, risers, landings etc.);
* A digital camera;
* A Grad level or gradient measuring device (to measure slopes);
* A door pressure gauge;
* A light meter;
* An induction loop tester;
* A sound meter;
* A temperature recording device (hot water).

## 4.3 Access Plan

The access audit is only one step that should be taken to ensure an organisation is accessible, after it has been carried out an action/implementation plan or strategy is required. An access plan:

* is a strategy for improving accessibility developed from the access audit and can ensure that access is an on going concern and help identify opportunities for change;
* could incorporate planned maintenance programmes, a schedule of works that has been devised to take into account the priority and cost information in the audit, processes to allow regular updating of the audit information and links to maintenance and management procedures;
* should also set out procedures to ensure that when opportunities for access improvements arise they are recognised.

# 5. Steps to carry out an access audit

## 5.1 The audit process

To get a true reflection of how the building works the audit of the building should take place when the building is fully operational. The auditor must visit the various areas on a number of occasions at different times of the day. An audit may be a journey through the building in a logical sequence. The auditor can observe how the building works in a number of ways including:

* observing how customers/staff use the building;
* analysis of the physical design of the premises;
* consultation with users;
* monitoring day to day running (toilet cubicles free from obstruction, does maintenance impede on accessibility, etc.).

The next section will investigate what an auditor should be looking for when carrying out an audit of the physical features of the building. Please note that each bullet point below section 5.1 to 5.1.5 contains examples of the features that need to be assessed. However, it is not an exhaustive list (e.g Car parking - location, number, dimensions, signage, dished kerbs etc.). There are further features such as lighting, surface finish, distance from entrance that also need to be considered in the design of an accessible car park. As access audits should not look at the building in isolation, section 5.2 will discuss the important features to ensure an accessible service.

### 5.1.1 External environment - Approach

Getting into the building is one of the biggest obstacles faced by many users. To allow all users easy access the audit must look at:

* public transport - nearest bus stops, taxi ranks, urban transport, etc;
* approach routes - getting from gate to entrance: signage, lighting, routes free from hazard, the use of tactile paving, location of street furniture, etc;
* car parking - location, number, dimensions' signage, dished kerbs, etc;
* change of level - Ramps and Steps: gradient, step profile, continuous handrails, colour contrasting nosings, surface, lighting, etc;
* entrance - easily distinguishable from rest of building, automatic doors, vision panels, door intercoms, etc.

### 5.1.2 Vertical and Horizontal Circulation

Circulation throughout a building must be as simple as possible to allow all users navigate around a building safely and with ease. The following should be considered:

* Step and ramp design, maximum rise of flights, tactile warnings, clear headroom, open riser avoided, turning spaces, passing bays, etc;
* Lifts door opening times, visual and audible announcements, colour contrasting buttons, signage, etc;
* Corridors and open plan areas - width, handrails, protruding objects, lighting, use of colour, etc;
* Door design - Doorway planning, dimensions and features, powered doors, etc.

### 5.1.3 Facilities

Once a user enters a building and is able to circulate freely and with ease of use, the next step is to be able to independently access the facilities provided within. Everyone who uses the building must be allowed to use the facilities provided. The following areas should be investigated:

* Reception areas - location, queuing systems, counter loop, dual height counters, background noise, etc;
* Signage - consistently located, symbols, embossed, colour contrast, typeface, etc;
* Accessible WCs - layout, colour contrast fixtures and fittings, alarms, ease of use, etc;
* Telephones - location, induction couplers, telephone device for the deaf, etc.

### 5.1.4 Interior Design

It is vital that the interior design of public service areas caters for the needs of as many customers as possible as without proper detailing/interior design many buildings would simply fail to perform adequately. The interior design of a building can have a positive effect on navigation, ease of use, acoustics and safety, to name but a few. A number of considerations include:

* lighting - shadows, glare, variations in light intensity, reflections, etc;
* surface finishes - polished surfaces, matt finishes, busy patterns, etc;
* colour and luminance contrast - location, navigation, eliminating hazards, etc;
* fixtures - easy to operate, size, layout, height, location, etc.

### 5.1.5 Evacuation/Emergencies

Access and correct design are very important to a building as is access and safety in an emergency situation. No access audit would be complete without considering the needs of all users in an emergency situation and every access audit should investigate:

* emergency equipment - location, visual and auditory alarms, signage, evacuation chairs, etc;
* safety zones - clearly highlighted with signage, communication systems in place, etc.

For details on management procedures and policies regarding emergencies see section 0.

## 5.2 How to examine for an accessible service?

While the physical design of the building plays a large part in ensuring an organisation is accessible there are a number of other keys issues to be considered so that services are accessible for all. Some examples are highlighted below.

### 5.2.1 Access Team

For change to be effective it needs to permeate all levels of the organisation. To improve accessibility, the first step should be to establish an internal working team of staff across different sections, who will be responsible for all accessibility matters. If an organisation has an access team in place, the auditor should work closely with this team. A number of interviews (formal or informal) could take place with this team to explore:

* management issues of the built environment/access issues of the organisation;
* the role of team;
* the current accessibility issues;
* the consultation process with local disability/access groups.

### 5.2.2 Management of the built environment

According to the NDA (2002) 'Good management can improve the accessibility of even a badly designed building'. Management must consider access and safety in the day to day running, maintenance work and retrofitting. An organisation can do this by a number of methods but one good way is to have polices and procedures in place (to simplify this process the NDA has developed an Access Handbook Template[[4]](#footnote-4)). The auditor must investigate whether or not these policies/procedures are in place. This can be done by observation, interview or by examining documentation.  
  
It is also important that the auditor observes whether management has considered access and safety in emergency situations and has implemented sufficient plans to cover all users of the building including people with disabilities. Evidence of this may be found in the organisation's safety statement, training records, Personal Emergency Egress Plans (PEEPs) or the organisation's access handbook. Consultation with staff is another method of examination. Finally if evacuation chairs are in place it is important to investigate if staff have been trained in their use.

### 5.2.4 Information and publicity

For an organisation to be accessible need it to show that the communication needs of people with disabilities have been planned for. Evidence of this may be in the form of documented policies and procedures (communication strategy[[5]](#footnote-5)), information published in a variety of formats, or procedures in place for effective communication in consultation processes, seminars or meetings. While beyond the scope of a built environment audit, a public access terminal/website audit is important to identify if the communication needs of everyone have been met.

### 5.2.4 Policies, Practices and Procedures

Policies, practices and procedures play an important role in ensuring an organisation is accessible. Examples of how accessibility may be incorporated into an organisation's policies, practices and procedures include:

* Equality policy: These policies generally include statements on the organisation's commitment to equality/diversity across the nine equality grounds, including disability. Agencies produce these policies arising from the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000. The policies should explicitly refer to the reasonable accommodations of employees and customers with disabilities;
* Access statement: Some organisations find it helpful to outline their accessibility commitments in a stand-alone policy also. This policy will again be based around equality/disability legislation and cover all aspects of their service provision including training, customer services and information provision, and the built environment;
* Complaints procedure: It is important that the organisation has an accessible, transparent complaints procedure in place to ensure complaints from all customers can be tracked and monitored. The process should be easy to use and complaints officers should be trained to deal with customers who may feel they have been discriminated against;
* Customer Charter/Action Plan: This should detail the standards of service that a customer of an organisation can expect when accessing their services. The Charter should be based on the '12 Principles of Quality Customer Service for Customers and Clients of the Public Service' (http://www.bettergov.ie). It should include a focus on the accessibility of the service to people with disabilities.

All the above policies should be developed in consultation with employees and/or customers with disabilities.

### 5.2.5 How staff and management deliver the service

The staff and management who deliver the service are key to making the organisation accessible. For example, a staff member who understands users' needs and knows how to meet and greet someone with a disability will make a person with a disability feel more comfortable and at ease. It is important to assess whether staff have been trained in Disability/equality training and that staff have a positive attitude towards disability and accessibility.  
  
A number of staff may be trained in accessibility training. This training would cover topics such as access issues; how to use induction loops, Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD) etc.; sign language; hearing awareness; clear lip speaking; guiding people with vision impairments etc.

## 5.3 Feedback

The final step in the access audit process is to provide feedback to the client. A number of methods can be adopted and it is important that the feedback mechanism has been discussed between all parties at the briefing stage.  
  
One method is to provide the client with a draft report of the findings and arrange a meeting to discuss further. Alternatively the client could receive a final report and an 'access audit companion' from the access auditor. The 'access audit companion' would act as a reference for the client on current best practice and standards. Another approach would be to provide a report and present the findings to all key stakeholders within an organisation. This allows for further discussion and feedback.

# 6. Structure of an access audit report

This section investigates what an access audit report should cover. It will first look at what the introduction should entail and investigate what to look for in the building design. Finally as no access audit would be complete without providing recommendations or an action plan, this section will describe how best to approach this.

## 6.1 Executive Summary

It is important to give the reader a summarized version of the access audit report, so that they can identify the key information quickly and accurately. The executive summary should be included at the beginning of the report and should highlight the main positive and negative accessibility features of the building and identify the key findings from the audit. According to Sawyer and Bright (2004) the executive summary "should also draw attention to issues of building operation and procedure and set out how the audit fits into the access improvements process. It is critical that the audit is seen in the context and as the first part of the process not the conclusion".

## 6.2 Introduction

### 6.2.1 Background

The first section of the access audit report should provide the reader with some background to access auditing. It may contain some definitions of access auditing as described in section 0 above. It will highlight the relevant legislation, standards and best practice that currently affect accessibility (Part M of the Building Regulations; Equality Legislation; Building for Everyone; etc). In general it will provide an overview and set the scene.

### 6.2.2 Aims of the Study

This section will highlight the purpose of the access audit, the scope of the audit, the approach to the study, equipment used in the audit, etc.

Example:

The purpose of this access audit is to assess the accessibility of the hospital's buildings and surroundings for all its users. The audit examined management issues, external environments, horizontal and vertical circulation, interior design, facilities, communication, and evacuation. The study aims to identify the positive and negative accessibility issues relating to the Cruz Hospital at 23 Roberts Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4.  
  
There are a number of methods of assessing the built environment. These include an access audit or an access appraisal. The difference between the two is that for an audit the assessor assesses the existing building through a site visit while appraisals are produced from the analysis of plans. This study used the principle of access auditing to assess the accessibility of the building.

### 6.2.3 Building Type

This part of the report should highlight the building type. Bright and Di Giulio (2001) describe building types in four distinct building categories/classifications of use. These are:

* complete freedom of movement;
* controlled entry/freedom of movement;
* free entry/controlled movement;
* controlled entry/ controlled movement.

These should be described to the user and the user should then be made aware of what category the building type falls into.

Example:

The building category that these offices would fall into would be free entry/controlled movement. This means the building has a main or central entrance but control is needed in order to restrict people from various parts of the building.  
  
This section should also describe the building in detail giving information on the layout, description of facilities and services offered and discussions on the main functions of the organisation.

### 6.2.4 Users of the building

It is important for both the auditor and client to understand who uses the building. This section will highlight who uses the building, what facilities people are using and at what time of the day people use the building.

Example:

Both employees and members of the public use Lee House. Approximately 65 members and 60 staff use the building on a daily basis. The building is also used for interviews, meetings, training days, seminars and meetings and, therefore, is used by a wide range of people with various abilities on a regular basis. The library-learning centre is open to all staff members but not members of the public. It was clear from the interviews that staff with disabilities and members of the public with disabilities use the building on a regular basis. The building is used between 9.00am and 5.00pm from Monday to Friday. On some occasions meetings take place in the evenings.

## 6.3 Main Findings

This section of the report is the core element of the access audit and highlights the main findings. Section 0 above lists the main criteria that need to be examined as part of a comprehensive access audit (e.g. external environment, facilities, information and publicity etc.). Once the audit has been completed the findings are inserted into the "Main Findings" section. The results can be in tabular or narrative format. This section should include the following:

* Reference to main criteria as discussed in section 0;
* Positive and negative accessibility features;
* Supporting evidence such as plans and photographs of identified elements as appropriate;
* Future actions/methods of improvement.

## 6.4 Recommendations/Conclusion

So far the audit report should have listed the barriers that restrict people of all abilities using the building with safety, comfort and ease of use. The final part of the access audit should highlight the way forward for the client and inform them how they can overcome these barriers. This can be done in tabular or narrative format and it should contain:

* **Description of current situation/features** - the features will mainly be physical features that currently act as a barrier for users accessing the services but features such as management and information formats that affect the accessibility of a service should be highlighted.
* **Recommendations/Action** - this will describe how current features can be removed or altered. Recommendations should also consider how procedures could improve accessibility. For example, management ensuring that accessible toilets are not used as storage rooms would improve accessibility.
* **Priority Ratings** - After making the recommendation it is important to prioritise how the actions are addressed. A number of factors need to be considered here including:
  + Action required immediately due to health and safety or building legislation and if failure to implement change could be deemed highly likely to attract legal implications;
  + Action to be implemented as soon as practicable;
  + Actions to be considered in the long term;
  + Work to be included as part of maintenance programme;
  + New management policies or procedures to overcome access barriers;
* **Cost** - Provision of cost estimates in broad bands for work to be undertaken. This will give the client an idea whether cost will be low, medium or high.

For further details see examples below.

Example 1:

**Main entrance**Section A highlights the concerns that have been identified with the main entrance. These include no handrails on the steps and lack of contrast between the steps and street paving. Redesign of this entrance should be considered which would incorporate moving the reception to a location that does not block circulation and providing an automatic door, which will eliminate having to go through two sets of double doors. Building for Everyone gives examples of how to design main entrances so as they are accessible for all. For further details see page 92 Entrances, page 95 Entrance lobbies and page 95 Reception areas and waiting rooms. Immediate action is required as the entrance is currently failing to comply with Part M of the Building Regulations and it is estimated that refurbishment will cost €2000.

Example 2:

| **Reference** | **Feature** | **Action** | **Priority** | **Cost** | **Person responsible** | **Date completed** | **Checked by** | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Refer to relevant section of access audit | Correct configuration of accessible parking bays | Rearrange the accessible parking bays so that they are of the correct configuration | Immediate action - as failing to comply with legislation | €500 per accessible parking bay |  |  |  |
| Section x.x | Signage | Install accessible signage to identify the location of the Reception | Action to be implemented as soon as practicable | €45 per sign |  |  |  |
| Section x.x | Flooring in toilets | As part of building maintenance, replace the flooring with a slip-resistant surface. In the interim, provide hazard signs whenever the flooring is wet | Work to be included as part of maintenance programme | Further investigation required |  |  |  |

# 7 Conclusion

Improving accessibility and usability of buildings benefits everybody. Appropriately designed doors, adequately sized corridors, and legible signs are just some examples of how everyone can benefit when using the built environment. As highlighted in these guidelines, there are a number of social, moral, legal and commercial benefits of accessibility.  
  
These guidelines focus on access audits of the built environment. They illustrate that access audits are much more than just looking at how a wheelchair user enters and leaves a building. The guidelines highlight that a number of key features need to be considered to facilitate everyone's needs (e.g. colour and luminance contrast, loop systems, signage, level access etc.). While it is vital to audit the physical design of the building, the guidelines also highlight the importance of a fully accessible service.  
  
Finally it must be noted that an access audit is one of the first steps an organisation must take to improve their accessibility and services. The access audit should form the foundation for the continuous improvement of an organisations' accessibility and be the basis for an access plan.

# 8. Further information/Additional Resources

## 8.1 Websites

### 8.1.1 General

* The National Disability Authority
* Building Standards in the Department of Environment and Heritage and Local Government.
* Publications list from the Department of Environment and Heritage and Local Government. Publications include: Building Control Act 1990; Building Control Regulations; Technical Guidance Documents; A simple guide to understanding the planning system; A Guide To Protected Buildings; Conservation of a Protected Structure; An online guide to the Irish building control system which explains the Building Regulations and other issues such as Fire Safety Certificates.
* The Office of Public Works Homepage.
* The European Concept for Accessibility Homepage.
* http://www.socialdialogue.net/en/en\_lib\_170.htm
* EU Expert Group Report entitled 2010: A Europe Accessible for All.
* [**European Disability Forum**](http://www.edf-feph.org/)universal access website on disability issues.

### 8.1.2 Access auditing Related Websites

* Document entitled Access audits - a tool for the planned improvement of the accessibility of the built environment by Sarah Langton-Lockton Centre for Accessible Environments UK.
* [**National Register of Access Consultants**](http://www.nrac.org.uk/) in the UK

## 8.2 Relevant Literature

The National Disability Authority (NDA) has published a best practice guideline entitled Building for Everyone, which aims to promote universal access to buildings and the environment. Building for Everyone shows how to design, make and manage buildings and external environments for the inclusion, access and use of everybody. Although ideal for architects, builders and designers, Building for Everyone will prove essential reading for anyone concerned with inclusion and access in Ireland today. Contact NDA to ask for a copy of the book.  
  
Inclusive Buildings: Designing and managing an accessible environment is a CD ROM publication (Bright and Di Giulio, 2002) giving an extensive insight in how to design and manage the built environment. The CD is arranged under the following headings: user needs, building categories, functional elements, access audits and way guidance systems.  
  
Universal Design (Goldsmith, 2000) calls on designers and lawmakers to embrace access "for everyone" rather than looking at people with disabilities in isolation. Goldsmith discusses making buildings safe and convenient for all their users, including people with disabilities and provides a comprehensive list of guidelines for making these buildings accessible.  
  
Access audits has been published by the Centre for Accessible Environments (2004) as a guide and checklist for auditing the accessibility of public buildings. It provides the background data to ensure the auditor understands what details need to be considered in carrying out an audit and illustrates how to carry out an audit.  
  
Building Sight (Barker et al., 1995) is published to address the needs of people with vision impairments in the built environment. It is a handbook of building and interior design solutions to include the needs of vision impaired people and highlights their needs in a simple and practical way.  
  
The Access Manual (Bright and Sawyer, 2004) covers the design, improvement, maintenance and management of accessible environments. As a building designer or manager, it will show you how to provide and run buildings and services, and employment facilities to enable independent and convenient use by everyone.  
  
BS 8300:2001 "Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people", is the most important technical document on access yet published. BS 8300 published by the British Standards Institution in 2001 explains how the built environment can be designed to anticipate and overcome restrictions that prevent disabled people making full use of premises and their surroundings; it gives recommendations for the design of new buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people. It applies to car parking provision, setting down points and garaging, access routes to and around buildings, and entrance to and the interiors of new buildings that disabled people may use as residents, visitors or employees, spectators or participants in sports events, performances and conferences.  
  
The standard applies to domestic and non-domestic buildings including those relating to transport and industry, administration and commerce, health and welfare, refreshment, entertainment and recreation, religion, education, culture and science, together with dwellings and other residential buildings (except those designed exclusively for the use of disabled people). The Standard deals only with their use by disabled people and does not make specific recommendations relating to children.  
  
Inclusive projects  a guideline produced by the **Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee,**offers advice to those commissioning buildings on how to ensure they include the needs of people with disabilities. By looking at all stages in the design process, the guide offers best practice advice on how all participants in the development process can contribute to the delivery of a high quality inclusive environment that provides access to all members of society including people with disabilities.  
  
The list above only indicates some of the texts that are available for accessibility and the built environment. The NDA Library has an extensive range of other publications. You can view the NDA library catalogue online.

## 8.3 Disability Agenda Issue 2.1 April 2005 - Built Environment Accessibility

Accessibility of the built environment is a key factor in facilitating people with disabilities to achieve greater independence, participation and social inclusion. An inaccessible built environment affects all members of society. However, for people with disabilities, the barriers to equal participation in society due to an inaccessible environment are much greater.  
  
This edition of the NDA Research Agenda series is concerned with examining the extent and nature of how the issue of accessibility of the built environment has been addressed in the Irish context. It sets out some of the recent attempts to facilitate greater inclusion through improved accessibility of the built environment in Ireland and shows how, following the report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, the acceptance of a rights-based approach to disability has made a positive impact on broad areas of access to the built environment. The review concludes with observations on how these initiatives have impacted on built environment accessibility in Ireland.

## 8.4 Directory of access consultants

The NDA's Excellence Through Accessibility (EtA) initiative acknowledges those Government Departments and Agencies that have taken steps to make their organisations more accessible. In response to the level of interest in their Excellence through Accessibility award scheme, the NDA has developed a Directory of Accessibility Consultants.  
  
The Directory is an online searchable database of individuals offering services in quality customer services, the built environment and information and communication technologies. Once populated this database will be usable by all parties seeking assistance in achieving measurable and sustainable improvement in the accessibility of their services. The Directory will serve as a single source of information for potential purchasers and allow them to compare and contrast the vast array of skills and services available. The Registry can be found on NDA website.

## 8.5 NDA Library

The National Disability Authority Library is the largest library in Ireland dedicated solely to the topic of disability. The collection covers issues such as employment, education, health, accessibility, government policy and the arts. The NDA Library catalogue is available online and contains details of all books, theses, government reports, journal articles, news articles and videos held in the library.

## 8.6 Access Handbook Template

The NDA Access Handbook Template has been designed to allow managers to develop an access handbook for their organisation with simplicity and ease. An access handbook is an internal document for the use of management, maintenance personnel and new staff; and which all staff should be aware of. Its purpose is to provide a simple way of listing and explaining the features and facilities of a building, which must be maintained and/or improved in order to ensure access for everyone.  
  
The template contains an introduction to accessibility in section one which can be used or altered by the user to suit their organisation's needs. Sections in the template include:

* information on how to get to the building, the building layout, and the accessibility features of the building, and emergency equipment and evacuation;
* an overview of management responsibilities - ensuring the day-to-day accessibility of a building;
* details on maintenance audits (items that must be maintained by management); information on the design of accessible signage and highlights examples of well versus badly designed signs.

# References

* Barker, P., Barraick, J. and Wilson, R. (1995), Building Sight. Royal National Institute for the Blind, London.
* Bright, K. and Di Giulio, R. (2002),Inclusive Buildings: Designing and Managing an Accessible Environment, Blackwell Science, London.
* Bright, K. and Sawyer A. (2004), The Access Manual: auditing and managing inclusive built environments, Blackwell Publishing, London.
* BS 8300: 2001, Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people, Code of practice, British Standards Institution, UK.
* Centre for Accessible Environments (2004), Access Audits: A guide and checklists for appraising the accessibility of public buildings, Centre for Accessible Environments, United Kingdom.
* Goldsmith, S. (2000), Universal Design, Architectural Press, London.
* NDA (2002) Building for Everyone, The National Disability Authority, Dublin.
* Ormerod, M.G. (2005), Undertaking access audits and appraisals: An inclusive design approach, Journal of Building Appraisal, London: Henry Stewart Publications. Vol. 1, Number 2, June, pp 140-152.

# Appendix 1 Questions prior to audit

**Questions about carrying out the audit**

* How many buildings are to be audited?
* Can I take photographs?
* Do I need to be accompanied when auditing the building?
* Do I need security clearance?
* Any particular problems that I may need to know about?
* Will I be able to consult with staff on the day?
* Are floor plans etc., available?
* Will I be able to get access to information (safety statement, access handbook etc.)?

**Questions about building**

* How old is the building?
* What is the size of the building?
* How many staff use the building and how many members of the public would be using the building?
* Is the building a listed or protected structure?
* Who is responsible for the building?
* Is the building leased and how does this have an effect on making changes?
* Where are the nearest facilities (shops, public transport, public car parks etc.)?
* Are set down areas provided?
* What are the main functions carried out in the building?
* What are the periods of use?
* Does the building have different functions depending on the time of day (e.g. school daytime classes, night time might be used by public for meetings)?
* What are peak times (e.g. auditing a bus station at 5.00pm on a Friday)?
* Do visitors and staff use the building in the same way (free to move around, security measures, restricting areas)?
* When do deliveries arrive and where are goods stored?
* When does most of the maintenance work take place?
* Is maintenance/cleaning contracted out to a management company?
* What security measures are in place and how do these affect access?
* Is security clearance required on the day?
* Are emergency procedures for people with disabilities recorded in safety statement
* Are staff trained in using emergency equipment (evacuation chairs etc.)?
* What are the future intentions of the organisation (moving to new building, planning extensions, refurbishment)?
* Emergency services use?
* What measures for people with disabilities are currently in place (e.g. loop, accessible toilets, accessible lifts etc.)?
* Is there an access team in place?

If yes what is the role of the access team?

* Does the organisation consult with local disability groups?

1. Before carrying out an access audit it is essential that auditors/consultants have received training in access auditing. These guidelines are not intended to be a substitute for training. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Public Service organisations should refer to the Public Procurement Guidelines published by Department of Finance <http://www.fpp.ie/Green%20Book.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For further details on what equipment to carry see Ormerod 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For further details see section 8.6 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A communication strategy should outline how the organisation communicates with its customers. It should identify key customer groups and the preferred communication channel for each. In particular it should outline the organisation's policy in relation to the provision of information in alternate formats for people with disabilities. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)