

Swim England Guidance

Disability Provision

Swimming is the number one activity for people with a disability, so what can you do to ensure your facility is fully inclusive?

There are over 9.4 million people with a disability living in England, which is 18% of the population

- 45 per cent are males
- 55 per cent are females
- The North East of England has the highest proportion of disabled people accounting for 22 per cent of the population Census – 2011
- The prevalence rate of disability rises with age – around 1 in 20 children are disabled, compared to around 1 in 5 working age adults, and almost 1 in 2 people over state pension age

(Office for Disability Issues updated Department for Work and Pensions estimates based on Family Resources survey 2009/10)

- Less than 8 per cent of disabled people use wheelchairs. The majority of impairments are not visible
- Disability is strongly related to age
 - 2.1 per cent of 16-19 year olds
 - 31 per cent of 50-59 years;
 - 78 per cent of people aged 85 or over
- People are more likely to become disabled if they have a low income, are out of work or have low educational qualification

(Papworth Trust disability facts and figures 2010)

Disability and Ethnicity

- There are over 1 million disabled BAME (black and Asian minority ethnic communities) people in the UK, around 1 in 10 of all disabled people, but there is little doubt that this is an underestimation due to the difficulties in measuring
- Evidence suggests that some non-white groups are less willing to report themselves as being disabled – something particularly true of Chinese groups, who have the lowest reported prevalence overall
- People from black and Asian minority ethnic communities are at greater risk of some of the leading causes of sight loss.

(Over-looked Communities, Over-due Change: how services can better support BME disabled people 2012)

Visual Impairment

- There are 1.86 million people in the UK with sight loss
- (RNIB Sight Loss UK 2012 report)**

Hearing Impairment

- 1 in 7 people in the UK (9 million) are Deaf or hard of hearing (14 per cent)
([Department of Children, Families and Schools, 2010](#))

Participation in sport or physical activity

- 17.8% of disabled people take part in sport for 30 minutes once a week compared to 39.2% of non-disabled people
- People with sensory impairments (hearing and visual impairments) have the lowest level of participation.
- 12% of people with a visual impairment and 10% of people with a hearing impairment take part in sport for 30 minutes once a week
- Participation among disabled people is significantly lower across all age groups compared to non-disabled people, but the difference is most notable between people aged between 20 to 25 years old
- Disabled men are more likely to take part in sport than disabled women. 20.1% of disabled men take part in 30 minutes of sport a week compared to 15.5% of disabled women.
- 72.1% of disabled people take part in no sport or physical activity, compared to 47.8% of non-disabled people

([Active People Survey June 2014](#))

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which came into effect in the mid-1990s, has been developed and expanded over the last few years and requires that all service providers make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that people with a disability have the same access as their able-bodied counterparts. This has now been superseded by the Equalities Act which has the same inclusivity objectives, but also covers gender, ethnicity, sexuality and other forms of discrimination.

This means that by law service providers, from local authorities and sports centres to hotels and other private facilities, must cater for all sectors of their community regardless of their physical ability.

What some people don't realise is that by making adjustments for disabled customers they will also improve the experience of other users, including parents with pushchairs, young children, and people carrying large sports bags or cumbersome equipment and the elderly. There are other aspects of facility provision for people with cognitive impairment and other illnesses that have more subtle requirements within a facility to make it easier for them to navigate and benefit from the provision on offer. Swim England has case studies and specific guidance on a number of these so please get in touch for more specific guidance.

From a financial point of view, it makes sense to provide for all potential users. With a significant spending power people with a disability represent a substantial market to provide for and are active users of facilities if they are easily accessible.

In many cases, the attitudes of staff and management can be as effective as a physical change in the facility and in all cases the combination of good design and good management will integrate all users and increase the independence of everyone using a pool.

It is important to make a distinction amongst the various disability groups to ensure that the widest possible audience is catered for.

Wheelchair users, people with a sensory or mobility impairment and those with a learning disability all have varying requirements that need to be looked at on an individual basis.

People with a physical impairment are likely to benefit most from swimming as they can move independently in water away from the restrictions of a wheelchair and without a walking aid or prosthesis.

Regular problems for wheelchair users include changes in level, inaccessible changing areas, social, shower and toilet facilities, narrow doorways and corridors and controls that are too high to reach.

When providing for people with a visual impairment, aspects to consider are, how to counter common problems such as lack of familiarity with the space, difficulty in orientating themselves due to confusing design layout, poor use of colour contrast, poor illumination, poor acoustics, and non-accessible signage and hazards that project into walkways and public areas.

People with learning disabilities face similar challenges to the visually impaired and so signs should be clear and easy to understand and staff should be easily identifiable and able to assist people to find their way around the facility.

To cater for other mobility impairments, watch out for gradients, uneven ground and an inadequate clearance for walking aids.

A number of organisations can offer advice on swimming pool design and provision for disabled user groups, including Sport England, Swim England, The National Co-ordinating Committee – Swimming for People with Disabilities and the Halliwick Association of Swimming Therapy.

Assessing your Facility

An accessibility audit will allow you to assess the level of provision at your facility. An experienced architect or an access consultant can conduct a professional audit, or you may choose to undertake a provisional assessment in-house.

Sport England provides a comprehensive checklist that can be used to carry out an audit which includes details of various requirements, from finding the pool to the standard of internal facilities such as changing areas and fixtures and fittings. You may also choose to consult current disabled users for feedback on how the facility can be improved.

It should be noted that Equalities Act guidelines provide a minimum level of service and ought to be viewed as a starting point for building an inclusive facility rather than the ultimate aim. The minimum level for accessible buildings is also presented in *Part M* of the building regulations.

The following points provide some practical suggestions towards ensuring your facility is fully inclusive. For full details log onto www.sportengland.com and also consult the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) <http://www.efds.co.uk/>

Approaching and Entering

Advertising

- It is important that the information about the facility is advertised in a clear and

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effective way. Many users of a centre would be more encouraged to use a facility if it were more visible.

- A disabled user for example would benefit from a detailed facility “*walk through*” on the website so that they could see what level of accessible provision were like so they knew that it met their particular needs.
- Any advertising material and website should be available in a various formats to suit the broadest requirements, such as braille, large text, audio etc.

General Access

- The facility must be clearly signposted from the nearest main road for those arriving by car, wheelchair, bicycle, on foot and where possible on public transport
- Disabled car parking areas, the drop-off point and the main entrance should be clearly indicated.

Car Parking

- Provide disabled parking spots (two spaces or six per cent (whichever is greater)
- The bays should be as close to the entrance as possible (if the pathway is uncovered the distance to the entrance should be no more than 50m)
- The car park surface should be smooth and even and the kerb should have dropped sections at appropriate points with tactile indicator paving for the visually impaired.

Entrance Foyer

- Where the building is not level with the ground, a ramp is essential for wheelchair users. Ideally, the ramp will have handrails on both sides
- Doors should not be too heavy and should be fitted with a glass panel so wheelchair users can see through. An automatic door is the preferred option
- If turnstiles are fitted, an alternative route for those with pushchairs or wheelchairs should be provided
- The reception desk should be split-level, with a lower level for use by wheelchair users.

Signage and Corridors

- Signs should be clear and colour-coding used if appropriate
- Corridors should be wide enough for two wheelchairs to pass side by-side and gain access through doors off it.

Changing Areas

- Dedicated cubicles for disabled users should have easy access to toilet and shower facilities
- At least one unisex or family-accessible changing room, complete with disabled shower and toilet, should be available
- Sufficient space should be provided for manoeuvring wheelchairs
- Lockers should be accessible from a low level and large enough to accommodate a mobility aid, or similar
- Benches should be at least 450mm deep from front to back.

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Showers

- All shower areas should be useable by everyone and fitted with at least one drop-down seat and appropriate grab rails (the actual number is to be determined on scale of provision). Dedicated showers should be low-level
- Shower controls should be lever-operated and located at an accessible height. They must be thermostatically controlled with a maximum temperature of 41 degrees
- Floor finishes must be slip-resistant, even when wet.

Pool

- The route to the pool must not be confusing and lead directly through a shower area
- Handrails should be provided between the changing rooms and poolside, and tactile information must be placed at critical points on circulation routes
- Design and detailing at the pool edge is critical to warn swimmers they are approaching the pool
- The minimum water depth to provide sufficient buoyancy for adult disabled swimmers is 1200mm. However, learner pools should be accessible to disabled children and other groups who may prefer a shallower depth of water
- Moveable floors can be particularly useful in learner pools as they provide the deeper water necessary for adult swimmers with a lower-limb disability
- Disabled swimmers can access the pool by a variety of means. Steps and a hoist are minimum requirements while a pool access ladder, ramped entry and a portable slide and chute can also be used
- Floor finishes must be reliable and slip-resistant with a non-abrasive surface.

On completion of an audit you will be able to identify how accessible your building really is and foresee the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. An action plan that details the route to full accessibility, looking at both physical features of the facility and its management and operation, can be developed which needn't be expensive or over-complicated.