

physical accessibility

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Are disabled volunteers likely to apply if they can't get into your building?

Bear in mind that physical accessibility is not only about wheelchair access, but about improving accessibility for people with a wide range of impairments.

Making your premises accessible for disabled volunteers will make it accessible for everyone – disabled clients and staff, people with mobility difficulties, parents with pushchairs.

Accessibility and the Disability Discrimination Act

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a disabled job applicant or staff member. It also makes it unlawful for a business or

organisation providing a service to treat disabled people less favourably. Schools, colleges, universities and providers of adult education and youth services are required to make sure that they do not discriminate against disabled people.

The employment provisions in the Act do not specifically cover volunteer opportunities, however as much voluntary work takes place at a premises where people work and/or that provides a service to the public, these venues should already be covered by the Act. For example, offices, charity shops and schools are all covered and should have already made reasonable adjustments to make their premises accessible.

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Think about

Width of doorways

Could an electric wheelchair get through?

Level access

Are there steps into or around your building?
If so, are there ramps or lifts to allow access?

Emergency evacuation procedures

Would your evacuation warning system effectively alert people with hearing or visual impairments? If wheelchair access to an upper floor is via a lift, do you have emergency evacuation chairs?

Toilets

Is there an accessible toilet?

Use of signage

Clear signage is important for everyone. Signs should ideally give information in symbols and Braille, as well as print.

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Lighting

Good lighting is important for people with a range of impairments.

Decoration

Distracting backgrounds can make communication more difficult for people who lip read. Plain walls and backgrounds are ideal. Colours can be used to draw attention to features such as exit routes and steps.

This is not a complete guide. Further guidance is available from the Disability Rights Commission*.

TOP TIP

Ask a group of disabled volunteers to conduct an access audit of your building. A local disability charity, Disability Action group or Access Group may be able to help. Scope* also offers accessibility auditing through it's Access Equality team.

*see contacts page 69

