Why have an Access Audit?

The reasons for carrying out an access audit are to help meet the requirements of the Equality Act/DDA and improve disabled access and egress and in turn increase your custom and turnover as well as help protect you from claims of disability discrimination. It is necessary to carry out an access audit to establish what action is needed. This takes the form of an initial consultation with you to determine your business needs followed by an access audit inspection of the premises.

How an Access Consultation benefits your organisation and your customers

Why use a disability access consultant?

- It is common for service providers to think they are 'complying' with Equality Act / DDA but there is no such thing as 'compliance' because the Equality Act is a rights based law. Different people have their rights met in different ways. An Access Auditor/Consultant will help you to find ways to ensure your premises and services are accessible to a range of disabled people and help mitigate you if challenged for disability discrimination.
- The Equalities and Human Rights Commission recommends the inclusion of a disability access consultant in any scheme, large or small from the beginning. This is supported by the various codes of practice issued under the Equality Act / DDA.
- Architects and surveyors recognise the value and skills that an Access Consultant brings to any project team.
- In a sporting context, the governing bodies have issued guidance which recommends the completion of an access audit.

What are the benefits of making your service accessible to disabled people?

- Disabled people have a combined disposable income of £80 billion per year. These people want to use your services and spend their money and could be potential customers if you provide accessible services.
- Everyone, not just disabled people benefit from improved access, from parents with young children in pushchairs to the elderly who use mobility equipment.
- Accessible organisations and service providers are more open to customers and employees are more inviting, inclusive and responsive to everybody's needs.
- Many of these changes will not only benefit the 12 million disabled people in this country; they will make your services more accessible to other potential customers e.g.
  - The friends and families of disabled people accompanying them
  - Customers with pushchairs or carrying heavy shopping or luggage
  - Customers with children
  - Older customers who may not be disabled but who do appreciate easier access.
- Research proves that there is a huge amount of customer loyalty amongst this last untapped sector of the community so making your services more accessible to them can only be good for your business in the long run.

**What happens if we do nothing?**

- You could fall behind competitors and lose business and customers.
- Your business or organisation's reputation may be harmed in the long-term by having a reputation of being “inaccessible”.
- If, by not making reasonable adjustments, you are found to be in breach of the Equality Act, you might have a costly court case to fight, which you might lose and then have to spend money doing something anyway.

**What if we don't have any disabled customers?**

- You are missing out! You may have many potential customers if your organisation or business services are more accessible to disabled and non-disabled people, who can't currently use your services and facilities.
- If you don't have many disabled customers it may be because your business has a reputation of not being accessible. There is a risk that one day this may be challenged by people who may feel excluded from using your service.

**What if we can't afford to have a disability access audit?**

- The Audit cost is a one-off charge that should be considered an essential part of your legal obligations. The Level Playing Field (LPF) Audit programme has been very reasonably and competitively priced with added extras.
- If challenged in a court of law it is most likely that a Judge would call for your Access Audit and Access Plan as evidence. He or she would determine whether “reasonable provision” has been made and one of the tests for “reasonable” is finance. When compared to the club or venue’s turnover or amounts spent on items such as player wages, the costs are not likely to be considered excessive. It would most likely be considered reasonable to implement access improvements as part of your work schedule each season. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is an evolving duty and not a matter that should be visited only once.
- It is a common misconception that accessible solutions are always expensive. We can work with you to find ways affordable ways to make your service more accessible such as providing a hearing induction loop, or providing written material in large print.
- A simple change in working practice or delivering the service in a different way may mean that no adaptation is needed at all.
- If there are physical changes to be made, these costs can be spread over time, making changes at a planned time of refurbishment, cyclical maintenance or as part of your annual maintenance and review. We can help you build in these improvements changes within an access plan.

**Why have an LPF Access Audit?**
Level Playing Field (LPF) is uniquely placed to offer Access Audits specifically designed for sports stadia, venues and arenas.

Our team of auditors are all NRAC (National Register of Access Consultants) accredited who meet professional standards and criteria established by a peer review system. They are required to adhere to the NRAC Code of Practice, hold professional indemnity insurance and undergo continuing professional development.

Clients seeking reliable informed access advice need to be able to do so with confidence. An auditor who is not NRAC (National Register of Access Consultants) accredited may not possess the necessary skills to carry out access work and might not have professional indemnity insurance for access advice.

An LPF Access Audit:

- is the only sports specific audit which takes into account industry standards alongside access regulations and equality legislation;
- is competitively priced;
- is carried out by a NRAC accredited auditor;
- includes a matchday or live event audit;
- includes a full ‘point of reference’ manual of all relevant guidance;
- provides on-going advice from the auditor on all aspects of the Equality Act / DDA issues and any new legislation / guidance;
- The Auditor has full professional indemnity insurance;
- a ‘Level Playing Field Audited’ accreditation will be given as a demonstration of the club / venues commitment to improving access and inclusion standards (in line with the industries own good practice standards) at their venue; and
- there may be the opportunity to be awarded the Level Playing Field Centre of Excellence.

Please contact Level Playing Field to discuss our Access Audit Programme and how we can help you.

Our Access & Development Manager, Ruth Hopkins will be happy to discuss your requirements. Email: ruth@levelplayingfield.org.uk or call: 01244 893584

July 2013