

Equality access audits

Why is an Equality Access Audit required?

An Equality Access Audit is required to make sure your building complies with the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act came into force on 1st October 2010 and brings together nine existing pieces of legislation relating to discrimination and inequality, including the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and combines them into a single act making it easier for businesses to understand and comply with.

The Act places duties on those providing goods, facilities or services to the public and those selling, letting or managing premises in the UK. The Act tries to end the discrimination that protected groups face by giving them rights in the areas of:

- Employment
- Education
- Access to goods, facilities and services, including larger private clubs and land based transport services
- Buying or renting land or property, including making it easier for disabled people to rent property and for tenants to make disability-related adaptations
- Functions of public bodies, for example issuing of licences

A great deal of the previous DDA legislation remains unchanged, however amendments have been made to UK legislation affecting disabled access and the legal rights of disabled people.

To comply with the law, employers, service providers and building owners now have a greater responsibility to ensure that their business premises incorporate suitable access arrangements for people with disabilities. This does not just include those with physical disabilities but also individuals with sensory or mental disabilities.

In some cases this may involve making physical alterations to a building and may impact on the way in which particular areas are managed and used.

What is an Equality Access Audit?

Formally referred to as a disabled access audit (DDA), an Equality Access Audit is an assessment to help make sure you take reasonably practicable steps to ensure your business premises incorporate suitable access arrangements for people with disabilities.

What is involved in carrying out an Equality Access Audit?

This involves examining your building and external approaches in terms of the accessibility arrangements for people with disabilities and identifying any barriers which may require improvement. It takes into account all aspects of the environment and service provided, the 'protective characteristics' of persons who may wish to access the premises as well as the property itself. It also covers the size and nature of your business including your financial situation. Many factors will need to be examined or confirmed and where necessary measured against recognised standards/designs during the course of the audit. These may include but not be exclusive to:

- External approach and access to the building
- Reception facilities and configuration of entrances/exits
- Car parking arrangements including location/proximity/dimensions/quantity
- Welfare facilities including toilets and shower rooms
- Information notices, way find markings and signage
- Traffic flow and circulation routes within the building
- Suitability of escape routes for use in emergency
- Visual suitability and communication aids
- Fire alarms and fire safety management including strategy for evacuation and Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs)

When should I conduct an Equality Access Audit?

Generally you will only be required to conduct an Equality Access Audit once, although a review is recommended prior to any refurbishment work taking place. It makes good commercial sense to incorporate any alterations required to meet the disabled access standards into the refurbishment programme as it can prove more costly and disruptive to conduct remedial work at a later stage. Buildings which comply with Equality law are also more attractive to tenants and are easier to sell.

How Metro SRM can help

We are able to offer a complete Equality Act Access Audit (EAA) of your properties to ensure you are made aware of any actions you may need to take to demonstrate compliance with the regulations that came into force on 1st October 2010. All our consultants are Health and Safety professionals with a wealth of experience and knowledge. They have conducted Equality Access Audits on a wide range of property types and are able to recommend and discuss the options open to you regarding any proposed remedial actions.