

RYA Sailability

Are your premises welcoming to disabled people?

Sailing clubs and centres should offer a welcome to everyone and encourage all people to take part in the sport of sailing, training facilities, and the social life of the club. Disabled people sometimes find that their welcome is restricted by barriers both in and outside the building and by the attitudes of some people. The aim of the Foundation scheme is to create environments that are welcoming and encouraging to people with a wide range of disabilities.

The basic aim of the scheme is that people should be able to come to a club or centre, get changed, sail, shower, use the toilets, receive training, and take part in social activities and it should not matter if some of those people do not walk, talk, see, hear, or understand in the same way as the majority.

In making an assessment of the facilities of a club or centre it is necessary to look at the ways in which people arrive at and enter the building, the internal design and circulation, ways of getting to different levels, the toilet, changing, and shower facilities, the route to the water, and the means of getting into boats. There is a very wide range of disabilities and abilities and so it is not possible to predict how any one person might use the facilities at a club or centre. In order to simplify matters RYA Sailability has identified main areas of disability, these are:

Ambulant (people who have a disability that does not greatly effect their mobility),

Partially-ambulant (people who have restricted mobility and, say, use crutches to walk),

Non-ambulant [independent] (people who use a wheelchair but are, generally, independent in their lifestyle,

Non-ambulant [assisted] (people who use a wheelchair and need assistance in the activities of daily living),

Blind (people who have little or no useful sight),

Visually-impaired (people who have difficulty in seeing),

Deaf (people who have little or no hearing and who use sign-language as their first language),

Hearing-impaired (people who have limited hearing and who may use hearing aids),

Learning-disabled (people who have limitations to their ability to understand, communicate, and retain information).

There is also a category of 'deaf-blind' (people who have little or no useful hearing or sight); deaf-blind people have highly specialised needs and are unlikely to be met in the usual course of events.

Making an assessment

The usual method of assessing some premises is to undertake a virtual journey into the building and on to the water; one then has to assess certain other aspects in relation to sensory and learning disabilities.

Arrival

It is important that mobility-impaired people should be able to arrive by car and park in reserved bays that are wide enough for car doors to be fully opened. It is insufficient to plead that there is plenty of parking space; another car may park close alongside and prevent doors being opened. A gravel surface is difficult for wheelchair and crutch users.

The route from the car park into the building should be on a firm, even, pathway that has dropped kerbs wherever necessary. Any changes of level should be by both ramps and steps,

there are specific guidelines on ramp gradients. All ramps and steps should have handrails in contrast colours on both sides. There should be visual markings on all step edges and at the top and bottom of ramps; tactile indications are valuable too. All steps and ramps should have a wide level platform at the top. The *Brief Guides* publications of RYAS give information on pathways, ramps, and steps.

Entrance doors should be at least 750mm wide. Where a double door has leaves of less than 750mm both of them should be fully unlocked when the building is in use (otherwise the door is impassable for a wheelchair). All doors in the premises should open with a gentle pull or push and have easily operated handles. All doors (except to toilets) should have glazed vision panels at the correct heights for both walkers and wheelchair-users.

Inside the building

It is important that there is plenty of free space for circulation; wheelchair and crutch-users require more space than average. Corridors should be wide enough for two wheelchairs to pass and should not have projecting obstacles (such as fire extinguishers) that might be a hazard for visually-impaired people. Doormats should be recessed to be flush with floor level or should be of thin construction. The colours of the floors, walls, and ceiling should contrast in such a way as to allow a partially-sighted person to gauge the dimensions of a room. Doors should be in contrast colours to walls. Complex patterns on floors or walls should be avoided.

Lighting should be of good quality and not create glare or areas of shadow. All signs should be in good-contrast colours; on a light coloured wall the sign background should be dark with light-coloured lettering in a sans-serif style using both capital and lower-case letters. Windows that might allow high levels of sun to shine through them should have blinds.

Counters in cafeterias, bars or in reception areas should have surfaces at two levels – one for standing customers and one for those who use wheelchairs. Written menus should be offered in large-print as well as standard. Any seating should be moveable and some seats should have arms.

All fire escapes should be wheelchair-accessible. If this is not possible or if the building has more than one storey there should be a clearly-marked refuge area which staff are trained to use.

Lifts between storeys have a complex series of requirements and further advice should be sought before making an assessment of the suitability of a lift.

Toilets

One of the greatest difficulties encountered in buildings by wheelchair-users is not being able to get into and use a toilet. It is important to have a unisex toilet in order that a person of the opposite gender may assist a disabled person. Having an accessible cubicle in the Ladies or Gents toilets is not acceptable.

There are specific standards for accessible toilet construction; these are very detailed and would take up a great deal of space in this document. For information on accessible toilet construction please see the RYAS *Brief Guides* publications.

It is vital that an accessible toilet is used just for that purpose and not as a handy store. The space alongside the toilet pan is left free in order that a wheelchair may be placed there so the occupant can transfer sideways onto the toilet seat; it is vital that bins or other items do not obstruct this space.

Accessible toilets are often isolated rooms without windows; as such it is important that help can be called in an emergency. All accessible toilets should have an alarm with a

red pull-cord that reaches right down to the floor (in order that it can be used by someone who has fallen). There must be a system for response to the alarm and the managers of the building must ensure that there is someone on duty who knows about the alarm whenever the building is in use.

It is important that the toilet is properly signposted from the main areas of the building.

Changing rooms

Some sailing clubs will provide a unisex changing area for disabled people who need assistance; others will expect everyone to change in the same room. All changing areas should have space for wheelchairs to circulate and have some benches with wide seats and backrests for those who change their clothes whilst sitting. Coat hooks at the right level for a wheelchair-user are important as are larger-sized lockers that can be used to store medical equipment such as artificial limbs.

As with all other areas, lighting in a changing room should be of good quality and glare-free.

Showers

It is important to provide showering facilities for people with disabilities. Ideally there should be a unisex shower room that has space for parking a wheelchair beyond the shower curtain. The shower fitting should have a flexible hose to permit showering whilst seated. A seat or shower wheelchair should be provided; any fixed seat should be at 90 degrees to the shower controls and have a backrest. Two drop-down handrails should be fitted at 90 degrees to each other in order to give good support. Full details of a shower are given in the *Brief Guides*.

Even if the club does not have an accessible shower it is useful to have a seat with arms in the showers for those who need to shower whilst seated.

Getting onto the water

The route from the building to the waterside should be a pathway with a firm surface and no steep gradients. There should be no projecting objects which might present a tripping hazard to a visually-impaired person. Where there are ramps or steps these should have handrails and be built to the standards given in the *Brief Guides*.

At the water's edge there should be a contrast colour marking to highlight the end of the land. All projections, such as cleats, should be highlighted.

Any jetty or pontoon should have contrast-colour markings at its edges and a ramp from the land side. All ramps should be fitted with handrails.

To assist disabled people who are unable to transfer into a boat by themselves a mechanical hoist may be installed. Only a hoist and slings of approved design may be used. Everyone who uses a hoist must be trained so to do and, wherever possible, the person who is being hoisted must direct the operation. All clubs must have a policy of never lifting or moving a person without mechanical assistance.

Visual impairment

In order to meet the needs of people with partial sight it is important to offer all written material in a range of forms; these include large-print (16-point sans-serif type in black on lemon-yellow paper), by audio means (tape, compact disc, or minidisk), or by electronic means (on floppy disc, by e-mail, or on website so that the information may be read on a talking computer). Very few people today use Braille as their main means of reading. When teaching is being given and visual aids are used it is important to audio-describe any images that are projected on a screen. When giving information one should not point or gesture to impart vital information but describe the information.

Uniformity of lighting is important to a person with partial sight; shadow and glare can both be very disconcerting. Patterned walls or floors and high-gloss surfaces can cause considerable confusion. Contrasts in colour between floor, walls, and ceiling can be very helpful in assessing the size of a room.

Large areas of glass can, in some lighting conditions be difficult to see and so should always have clear markings at average eye levels.

Hearing impairment

In places where information is given (training rooms, reception areas, etc.) there should always be an induction-loop for the benefit of hearing-aid users. Everyone who gives information should be required to use the system.

All fire alarm systems should have both an audible sounders and visual flashing lights.

All clubs should know how to obtain the services of a sign-language interpreter for profoundly-deaf people.

Learning disabilities

There are, in general, no special building adaptations or items of equipment for people with learning disabilities (unless individuals have another form of disability in addition). However, there are often difficulties with the attitudes of some people towards those with learning disabilities. It is important that a club has a welcoming and understanding approach to people with learning disabilities.

It is important to remember that although someone with learning disabilities may perform in a manner that is reminiscent of a child the person is an adult (unless he is a child) and he should be treated as an adult.

Often it is necessary to repeat and reinforce information that is given to a person with learning disabilities and understanding and retention may be limited.

General matters

It is important that all clubs take advantage of disability awareness training, which helps to extend the knowledge of disability and the equipment that is used by disabled people.

Disabled sailors depend very heavily on the services and goodwill of volunteers and it is important that clubs take advantage of volunteer management training, which aims to assist in the recruitment and retention of voluntary help.

Clubs should be aware of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and have completed an audit of their facilities and practices with regard to disabled people.

A club that has a disability programme should have adequate representation of disabled people on the main club management committee.

Rescue boat crews should be trained in rescuing disabled people.

Some disabled people are vulnerable to unwanted attention from others and so clubs should have a vulnerable peoples' protection policy.

Information in these guidelines is based on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, British Standard 8300, and the Building Regulations Approved Document M 2004.