# Frequently Asked Questions about Accessibility Guides

## Accessibility Guides – what are they and who should provide one?

### Q1. What is an Accessibility Guide and how can it help our customers?

An Accessibility Guide is produced by tourism operators to provide potential visitors with important accessibility information. Through completion of a questionnaire, a thorough yet concise description of a venue, property or service is produced for individuals with accessibility requirements. This includes not just wheelchair users but people with hearing loss, visual or mental impairment, older people, families with young children and more. The guides enable these people, their family and friends to make informed decisions as to where to stay and visit in view of their requirements.

### Q2. Which venues should have an Accessibility Guide?

Every tourism venue - including places to stay, visit and eat - should have an Accessibility Guide, regardless of the level of accessibility provided.

## Why accessibility information is important

### Q3. Why should I produce an Accessibility Guide?

1 in 5 of the UK population is disabled. That means 20% of your potential customers would like to know practical information about your venue and the new Accessibility Guide will help you be more visible and attractive to them.

54% of people with access requirements avoid going to new places if they cannot find information about accessibility (Euan’s Guide Survey); are you missing out? In fact, 63% of businesses do not promote their provisions for those with access requirements – meaning that a lot of potential business is being missed. Furthermore, with an ageing population, those with accessibility requirements are likely to represent an even larger section of your potential customer base. Between 2006 and 2015 there was a massive 31% uplift in the number of domestic trips taken by the 55+ age group, so an Accessibility Guide helps to future proof your venue.

And finally, as a service provider you have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled people are not put at a substantial disadvantage compared to people who are not disabled. An Accessibility Guide can help you to communicate your facilities and services to disabled people and other consumers who want specific accessibility information, such as older travellers and families with young children.

### Q4. How will an Accessibility Guide benefit my business?

The accessible tourism market has huge spending power, known as the Purple Pound. £12 billion in England and £1.3 billion in Scotland is spent each year by people with health conditions and impairments and their travelling companions. An Accessibility Guide can help you tap into this lucrative market.

By giving people up front, essential information you can turn potential enquiries into actual bookings and customers. Research tells us that many consumers review websites before picking up the phone to ask questions; if there is no information about the venue’s accessibility they will often look elsewhere, losing you valuable business.

Producing a guide will help you to appraise your venue’s accessibility, an area where you have legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Furthermore, a guide can also be used by staff as a handy reference document when dealing with enquiries, and even form part of your staff induction process.

### Q5. I already have information on my website; do I have to duplicate this?

The Accessibility Guide is an essential way for potential customers to see information about your venue and make an informed decision – by providing all information in one handy, easy to read guide. This, in turn, increases your ability to market yourself effectively to this huge market.

While information regarding accessibility may exist on your website, this may be more basic, spread out and difficult to compare than this new improved format.

Providing an Accessibility Guide may mean a small degree of duplication between the information on your website and the guide, including photos, but the Accessibility Guide only needs to include information regarding accessibility rather than general facilities.

### Q6. My property has lots of stairs and is not suitable for wheelchair users. Should I complete an Accessibility Guide?

Yes. Accessibility Guides cater for more than just wheelchair users. In fact, wheelchair users make up less than 8% of all disabled people in the UK; think about the other people with accessibility requirements and what information they need. These may be people with hearing loss, visual or mental impairment; older people, people with temporary injuries or families with young children – give information that will be useful to them.

Try not to make judgement calls as to who your venue is and is not suitable for. For example, some part-time wheelchair users may be able to negotiate steps and overcome a few barriers to enjoy the award winning food, excellent accommodation or unique visitor attraction you offer. So, do not state ‘we are not suitable for wheelchair users’ – simply describe any potential barriers and let the customer decide.

## Producing an Accessibility Guide

### Q7. How do I produce an Accessibility Guide?

VisitEngland and VisitScotland have formed a partnership to provide a new, free to use website for the easy production and publication of Accessibility Guides.

First you will need to register, which includes accepting the site Terms of Use. Once registered on the site, you can start the process of producing your guide in three steps:

1. **Prepare** – Review the example guides and Photo guide on the website, in order to prepare. You will also find a video where operators share the benefits of having a guide and ‘Top tips for a great guide’.
2. **Produce** – Simply answer a series of questions on your venue’s accessibility, upload useful photos and input any further information. You can then review your guide and submit it to be published in a standardised format that makes it easy for consumers to compare different guides.
3. **Promote** – It is important that you make your guide widely available and visible to potential customers. You will be given a unique URL, which you can add to your website and also share across social media channels.

Completing the guide could not be easier. Even if you need to gather information over a few days, the website allows you to complete your guide over a number of sessions. Just click ‘Save’ and close the browser, and the system will save your work – allowing you to return and continue producing your Accessibility Guide later.

### Q8. Can businesses throughout Great Britain and the UK use the Accessibility Guides website?

Operators can produce and publish Accessibility Guides for venues located in England and Scotland. VisitEngland and VisitScotland are in discussion with Visit Wales regarding their adoption and promotion of the website to operators of venues in Wales. Similarly, Tourism Northern Ireland will be invited to promote the website to their business operators.

### Q9. Why should I add photos and how do I do this?

A picture paints a thousand words. Research has also shown that photos are key to inform people with access requirements (VisitScotland and VisitEngland, December 2014). For example, photos of the main entrance and bathroom are recommended as a minimum. You only need to be able to upload photos from your computer as you create your guide. If you are unable to do this and have photos of the facilities on your website, state this in the appropriate sections of your Accessibility Guide. You can also include links to videos showcasing your accessibility, hosted on YouTube and Vimeo. For more information, see the Photography Guide that is available in the Prepare section.

## Promoting your Accessibility Guide

### Q10. What happens when I publish my Accessibility Guide?

Once you have completed your questionnaire, you will be asked to preview your guide before publishing. Upon publishing, your guide will become live. When the unique URL placed on your website is clicked, the guide will open.

### Q11. Once I have published my Accessibility Guide, what next?

You should ensure that your Accessibility Guide is made easily available to as many people as possible.

It is important that the unique URL to your Accessibility Guide is easy to find on your website and not hidden away in the footer. We strongly recommend you add it to the homepage of your website or prominently on a page that can be accessed from the main navigation e.g. ‘Visit Us’ or ‘Accessibility’. You should also include the link in email responses to enquiries, leaflets and newsletters. Print out a copy for staff to refer to when answering enquiries; make it available to customers in room folders and on request.

If your venue is listed on any Online Travel Agent or Destination Organisation websites then be sure to add the unique URL to your listing there too.

It is important that you review and update the content of your Accessibility Guide on a regular basis but in any event at least annually.

### Q12. Will VisitEngland and VisitScotland promote my guide?

Promotion of the Accessibility Guides website to consumers will begin later in 2017. There will be prominent links to the site from both VisitEngland.com and VisitScotland.com, promoting Accessibility Guides as a key source of information for people with accessibility requirements.

### Q13. What is the process of providing an Accessibility Guide as part of my National Quality Scheme membership? England Only.

Assessors for the National Quality Schemes in England, ask operators at the time of visit if they have written an Accessibility Guide and will ask to see evidence of this. This became a requirement of VisitEngland Accommodation Quality Schemes in 2007.

If an operator has not completed an Accessibility Guide the Assessor will note this on the report and signpost operators to the help and advice available.

Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme assessors in England also ask attractions to complete an Accessibility Guide.

## Access Statement vs Accessibility Guide, key differences

### Q14. Why have VisitEngland and VisitScotland decided to replace Access Statements with Accessibility Guides?

VisitEngland introduced Access Statements as the standard approach for English tourism venues to provide information on their accessibility in 2006 and the existing tool has been in operation since 2010. Advances in technology and innovation in accessibility information provision meant that the format of Access Statements and the website used to produce them needed to be updated.

In December 2014, VisitScotland and VisitEngland commissioned research to measure the effectiveness of Access Statements for consumers. Findings included:

* There remained a clear need for accessibility information from disabled people, as it addressed the practical aspects that are front of mind for this audience.
* Getting to the relevant content is key for everyone.
* Under the current format, Access Statements are typically longer, harder to compare and hard to find the relevant information.

In view of this feedback, VisitEngland and VisitScotland formed a partnership to evolve the format and procure the development of a new website.

### Q15. How is an Accessibility Guide different to an Access Statement?

Accessibility Guides are easier for both venue operators and consumers.

* The questionnaire and format of the new guides means that consistent phraseology can be used throughout, and that less writing by the venue operator and reading by the consumer is required.
* Your guide will be hosted on the Accessibility Guides website meaning that you only need to upload a unique URL to your website.
* The new system also allows for updates that you make to take effect instantly in your guide, without the need for republishing links on your website.
* Pictures can be included to enhance information for consumers to make informed decisions.
* An added ‘At a Glance’ section will also enable you and consumers to see quickly and easily some of the major accessibility selling points of your venue.
* The new Accessibility Guides website will also have a facility for consumers where they can search for published accessibility guides, filtering results based on popular accessibility features. The new site will be built to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (2.0), so consumers using assistive technologies such as screen readers will be able to use it.

### Q16. Why has the name changed from Access Statement to Accessibility Guide?

The name ‘Access Statement’ was highlighted as a potential barrier for both businesses and disabled travellers. There is the potential for confusion with a design ‘Access Statement’ and the word ‘statement’ often leads to the document being perceived simply as a compliance document.

The new name helps to reposition the Guides as important pieces of marketing collateral, and it better fits with terminology widely used in the travel and tourism industry.

### Q17. Does the new Accessibility Guide website replace the Online Access Statement Tool and is my Access Statement now obsolete?

The existing Online Access Statement Tool has now been closed to new users. Registered users are still able to access the tool to download their Access Statement if required, but VisitEngland and VisitScotland strongly recommend moving over to the new Accessibility Guide format.

There is no strict timetable for moving over, allowing you to make the switch gradually, but producing a new guide will vastly increase your visibility and appeal to this significant market, helping you to increase bookings and business.

Your existing Access Statement will be useful when producing your new Accessibility Guide as it will contain relevant content that you may need to include.