



Mapping of Skills and Training Needs to Improve Accessibility in Tourism Services in Europe

Case Study 8. VisitEngland, United Kingdom

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**Case Study
VisitEngland**

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Executive Summary

The English national tourist board, VisitEngland, has been active in accessible tourism since the 1970s and is active in promoting and disseminating knowledge about accessibility in the industry. One of the key objectives of the board is to obtain a growth of 5% per year in the sector and one way of doing this is through accessible tourism. Providing accessible services means reaching out to a greater number of people, and this to achieve increased growth.

Training is provided by VisitEngland in two forms: one direct and one indirect, which are both based upon three pillars: information and promotion; customer service and disability awareness, and facilities. The direct type of training consists in an online course which has been developed in cooperation with a specialised external organisation. This course was launched and made available to businesses in 2012 against a small payment. The indirect type of training is strongly recommended by VisitEngland and consists in information material, publications of various types and audits. Through these two types of training offered, the tourist board aims to reach out to small business in the tourism industry in particular, representing about 80% of the industry. The development of skills and knowledge in order to support tourism businesses in becoming more inclusive does not always need to happen through a formal, recognised training programme. VisitEngland has produced a number of tools and resources which can assist them in improving the accessibility of their business in this indirect way.

Despite various ways of communications, such as VisitEngland's website, booklets and a specific tourism magazine, the tourist board is encountering difficulties in reaching out to the businesses. The issues seem to be related to a lack of knowledge and a lack interest, as well as to the nature of the businesses. Often small tourism businesses are family companies which consider the company as part of their lifestyle where accessibility may not be taken into consideration. Furthermore, the continuous change of staff in the tourism industry is another difficulty in regards to training. Finally, changing support from the regional structure in the country is also resulting in difficulties.

There has been some evidence of impact as a result of the training provided by VisitEngland. The online course has not reached out the number that was hoped for, however, the people having participated in the course have been satisfied. In regards to the publications and information material, businesses continue to require this material and the feedback has been positive. VisitEngland has largely benefitted from partnerships which have been made possible through their already existing network, and strongly recommends this in order to reach out to the main target.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

For many years the national tourist board for England, VisitEngland, has been supporting the development of accessible tourism. Encouraging businesses to be more accessible has its roots in more than just the obvious goal of helping businesses and visitor alike enjoy the benefits accessibility brings. This drive also comes from a clear ambition and vision to grow the tourism market in England by 5% year on year. VisitEngland recognises that focusing on improving the accessibility of tourism businesses can help them achieve this aim and make the offer in England more attractive for existing and growing numbers of people, especially the ageing population with access requirements. There is also the added benefit that accessibility is linked to the agenda of quality improvement and focus on the customer experience.

VisitEngland recognises the importance of having a trained and skilled workforce employed in the tourism sector. Particularly in the area of accessible tourism, training is vital as there are many misconceptions about the accessible tourism market. Some businesses see this market as specialized and narrow as well as expensive to address with a focus primarily on wheelchair users.

The role of VisitEngland in raising awareness and training levels is therefore to signpost businesses to relevant classroom and online training available to equip them to address barriers and better understand business opportunities. These include some of which VisitEngland have helped to develop and support. Over time, VisitEngland has also produced a range of different publications and video resources to promote both the benefits of accessible tourism and provide useful advice and guidance on how to develop an accessible business.

These resources are developed around 3 key areas to improve knowledge and skills in accessible tourism.

1. Customer Service
2. Information; and
3. Facilities.

Through these resources VisitEngland is increasing awareness, sharing knowledge and experience, often on a business-to-business basis, with extensive use of case studies to highlight the business benefits, whilst also fulfilling its ambition to mainstream messages of accessible tourism.

VisitEngland has to work within limited budgets to deliver these resources. The need to be innovative and creative is therefore important. Partnerships are vital and they work closely with key partners to produce resources for businesses based on the identified need of customers through research.

As service providers, the tourism industry in England and throughout the whole of the UK must comply with the 'Equality Act' 2010. This obliges business providers to make reasonable adjustments to their business and makes it illegal to refuse service or charge more on the grounds of disability. It is thought that whilst many businesses comply with their obligations, while many will do the bare minimum or some nothing at all, thus avoiding addressing accessibility in their business.

VisitEngland continuously look at gaps in the resources it provides and how to fill these. Their latest initiative for supporting the development and promotion of four destinations as 'Accessible' is an indication of this commitment and recognition of the importance of this market. Through such projects they will be introducing accessibility to destinations, and some businesses, educating their managers and staff by helping them to develop the necessary skills and understanding of how to serve this market and gain many benefits from it.

2.0 OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the late 1970's the national tourist board in its various forms; English Tourist Board, English Tourism Council, VisitBritain and now VisitEngland, have been promoting the benefits of Accessible Tourism.

Business support concerning accessibility is provided in a number of different ways. They administer a star quality rating for hotels and quality assurance scheme for attractions. They manage the VisitEngland Awards for Excellence, showcasing best practices. The Award scheme has an 'Access for All' category, which can serve as an example to learn from. Guidance on legislation is provided through their 'Accommodation Know How' website, which is a one-stop-shop for smaller hospitality businesses to find out all the legislation that applies to them, including the 'Equality Act 2010'.

Vision and Action Plan

VisitEngland's vision is to position England as one of the leading destinations on accessible tourism. 10 action plans set out VisitEngland's strategic framework, with one specifically focused on accessible tourism. This include a set of actions and objectives that demonstrate the importance that VisitEngland places on accessibility. A key objective in this plan is to ensure that staff are access aware and have the key skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of tourists with access needs.¹

¹ VisitEngland Accessible Tourism Access Action Plan:
www.visitengland.org/Images/FINALAccessibility%20Action%20Plan_tcm30-32562.pdf

Key actions, to be delivered with partners, in support of this objective are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Adapted extract from VisitEngland’s Accessibility Action Plan

Action	Partner Sign Up	Outcome or Success Measure
1. Promote uptake of face-to-face and online training programmes that match the content of the key skills and knowledge templates devised by DCMS forum e.g. WorldHost Customers with Disabilities, Welcome All, TFA training.	VisitEngland, DCMS Forum, Local Enterprise Partnerships, DMOs, People 1 st TFA	Limited number of excellent courses signposted from VE website and promoted by Partners. Number of people signed up to these courses.
2. Ensure accessibility and disability awareness is embedded within general customer service training programmes.	Tourism South East	
3. Ensure travel agents understand the requirements of disabled people and are able to provide information on accessible accommodation and attractions in England through promoting the ‘Accessible Travel Made Easy’ Online programme to travel agents.		Increased satisfaction with travel agents among disabled people Number of tool users.

Market Failure & Regional Administrative Changes

The development of Accessible Tourism is seen by VisitEngland as addressing an issue of market failure. As a tourist board it has always looked at the areas that it is prioritising and delivering in. With accessibility there is no other body delivering guidance in this area to tourism businesses. However, this was not the case until 2012 when the 9 Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were abolished. These agencies

were established in 1998 primarily to support regional economic development across the country. Many of them absorbed Regional Tourist Boards that were created under statute and had existed since 1969.

The RDAs received approximately £60m each year from central government to support tourism development. When the RDAs were abolished this funding also ceased. With it, a level of support for Accessible Tourism was also lost as some RDAs were committed to this issue, demonstrated through access training workshops online training programmes aimed at local businesses. This situation reinforces difficulties that VisitEngland faces in delivering a national tourism strategy and its aims for developing accessible tourism. A major challenge it has presented VisitEngland is the need to shift from engaging and communicating with 9 RDAs to communicating with about 140 sub-national and local tourism organisations made up Local Enterprise Partnerships and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs). Together with limited budgets, this reduces the scope that they have to ensure engagement at local level with tourism businesses throughout the country.²

Many of the DMOs that continue to operate, and used to run tourism business development training courses with RDA funding, are often no longer providing these. Where there is a shortage of funds, the kinds of support to tourism businesses, including training, will differ according to the priorities of the local DMOs. A number of them continue to have ambitions to support local skills and training development, but their partners (who contribute to funding the DMOs) see marketing as a main priority; which takes their limited resources away from skills and training.

Given this scenario, VisitEngland believes that it is now even more important that they provide guidance and support to develop accessible tourism, otherwise it would be left to very small under-resourced charity third sector operations to try and fill that gap, which in reality, they believe probably would not happen.

Partnerships

In the past VisitEngland had larger budgets available to develop their business support tools, but with reduced budgets creating new partnerships and working with others is now vital. Tools produced in the past continue to be available, but they now collaborate

² Visitor Economy Background Briefing:
http://www.visitengland.org/Images/120201%20Visitor%20Economy%20Background%20Briefing_tcm30-30508.pdf

with others to fill identified gaps, by sharing knowledge and pooling resources to develop new material which might otherwise not be produced.

Their recent publication '*Listen Up*' addressing the needs of the market of deaf and hearing-impaired customers is an example of this approach. It was developed and branded on the basis that VisitEngland understands the market, the tourism industry and the language to use to engage with them, which their partners, *Action on Hearing Loss* accepted. Whilst VisitEngland acknowledged and benefitted from their expertise in developing the content, which clearly identifies what deaf people need.

Interested stakeholders can and do change with each project. Strategically, VisitEngland works closely with the charity *Tourism for All*, which has similar ambitions to develop the accessibility of tourism. They also work hard at trying to engage with different trade organisations and agencies, the big 'umbrella' bodies that represent and oversee a large part of the industry. This offers benefits to both parties. When developing the *Access Statement Tool* (an online service for businesses), they worked with leading bodies that represent particular sectors at which the tool is aimed to develop this and make it relevant to them. This involved close collaboration with; the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) to develop a template for Nature Reserves, the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) for Pubs, the Premier League for Football clubs and the British Hospitality Association (BHA) for restaurants. This is an approach which they believe is strong because such bodies know the make-up of the businesses they represent. Partnership also adds credibility and ownership of the material for each sector. VisitEngland carries each of their partner's logos on the home page of the online *Access Tools* so that businesses from those sectors can relate to the tool by seeing their leading trade body is endorsing it.

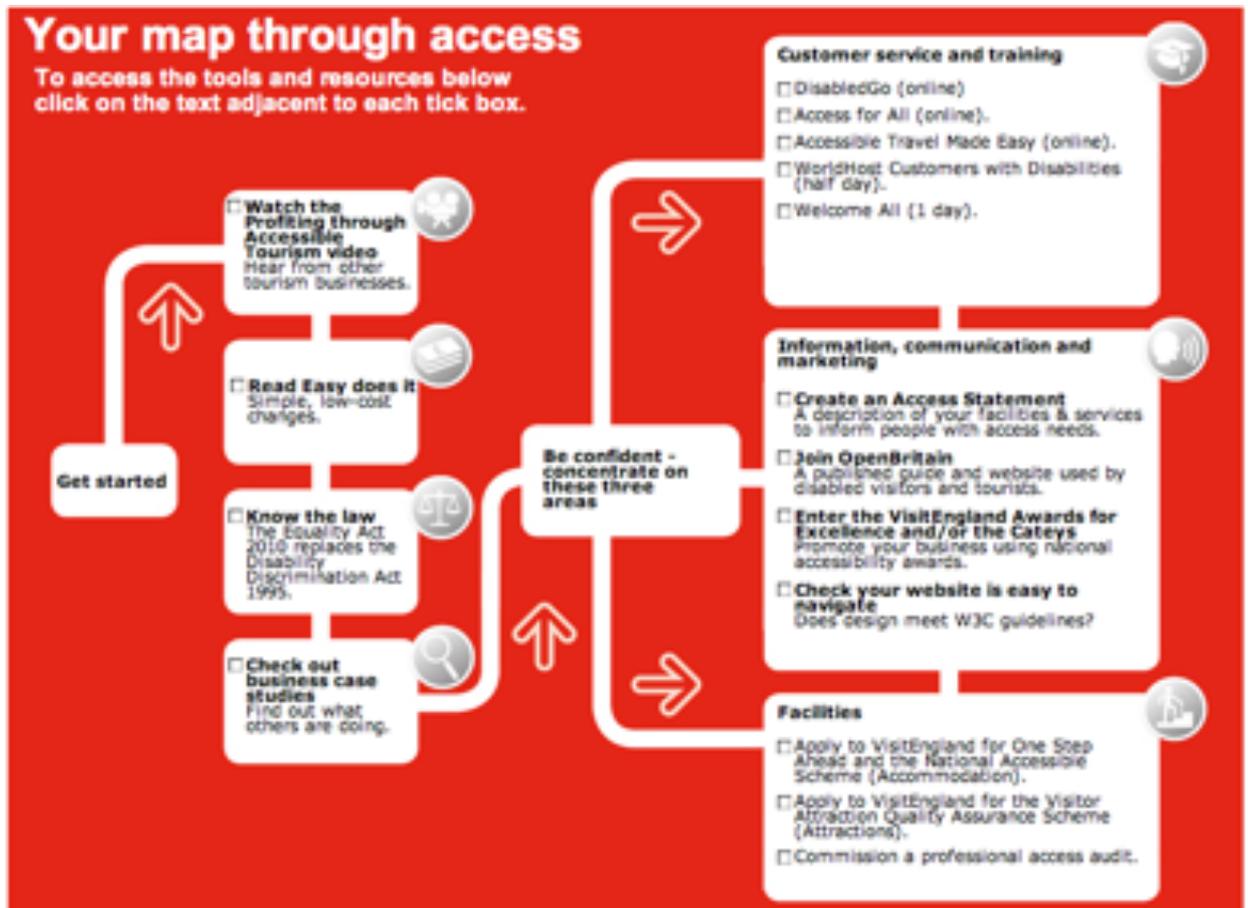
3.0 CONTENT, TRAINING MATERIAL AND AVAILABILITY

Research underpins VisitEngland's development of their business support tools. Content is therefore based on identified need and detailed evidence. VisitEngland's informal and formal trainings are based on the three pillar set out earlier:

1. Information and promotion
2. Customer service and disability awareness
3. Facilities.

Anyone wanting to use the resources can do so in whatever way they want, which means they can enter the learning process at any point. A pathway or route that a business entirely new to this topic may want to follow has also been developed to guide them through a process of learning (see figure 1). None of the guidance or the online training that they support links with vocational qualifications.

Figure 1: Access Learning Map (from VisitEngland's business support website)



Formal training resources

Customer Service is seen as a key training area for all businesses. Ross Calladine, head of business support, recognises that:

“...probably face-to-face training would always be preferred because of the level of engagement; you can do role plays, you can ask questions and you can bounce thoughts off colleagues in the room, so you can learn from each other as well as having an important networking opportunity. It can also come alive by being delivered by a person. This is probably better than just words on a screen”.

It is acknowledged however that there is a place for online training, particularly for the tourism industry, where there are many pressures on small businesses who are often hard pressed for time or in remote locations, and can't commit to going into a classroom environment.

With this in mind a need was identified to provide a new online training course to help tourism businesses deliver excellent service to disabled customers. Designed in partnership, with a disability organization, *DisabledGo*, with experience of producing online programmes for colleges and councils, the course is specifically tailored to help those working within the tourism industry. Launched in March 2012, the course costs a maximum of £15 per person, with the cost decreasing the more people a business would like trained. Initially however, 1,000 free spaces have been made available to tourism businesses in England, and each business can register up to 5 places.

The course consists of six modules, which can be completed online at the user's convenience. The whole course takes around one to two hours to complete. The training starts with an introduction to disability, and then looks at different types of impairment, before offering practical advice on providing an accessible service and acceptable language to use when communicating with disabled customers. The final section talks through the legal obligations of tourism businesses under the Equality Act (2010). There are quizzes through the course to test knowledge and progress can be saved throughout the course, allowing the user to log off and complete it over several hours or days, if necessary.

As someone progresses through the course this is automatically monitored. For each section they need to achieve a percentage pass mark, if they fail to do this they must complete that section again. Following successful completion of the course a certificate is made available for download, and each user's account remains active, allowing them to log in at a later date to refer to the course material; sections can also be printed out for every-day reference.

This training programme is essentially concerned with Service Standards. Its aim is to give staff confidence to provide good levels of service to disabled people, something which all the tools produced by VisitEngland set out to underpin. It is believed to be good at educating those who are already working in the industry.

The main focus is on mobility, hearing and visual impairments, since they know from research that these are the most common disabilities. However, it also touches on subjects such as learning difficulties, and VisitEngland has ambitions to do more on specific training on this area in the future. *DisabledGo* has ownership of the accessibility training material, while VisitEngland provided the expertise to produce a tailored tourism version, adding validity to the course. It is unlikely that this training would have been developed unless VisitEngland had approached *DisabledGo* and indicated the need in this area.

Indirect training resources

While the online training developed skills in customer service (1 of the identified pillars), VisitEngland has produced a range of free publications and resources or 'tools' to help develop their information provision and facilities. These resources stress the business case and inform the industry about the accessibility market and the benefits it offers them and their customers. Business owners, managers and staff can learn and increase their knowledge and understanding of the market through these tools by gaining an insight into what customers with access requirements are looking for and how to respond to these, through practical advice through shared experiences in the range of resources on offer. Most publications are available free of charge as a hard copy and all are available online.

The remaining part of the section describes some of these resources in further detail.

The publication 'At Your Service' is an introduction of accessibility, it sets out the business case, highlights the value of the market, looks at key statistics and its characteristics for example that disabled people are likely to stay longer, therefore spend more money per trip, and less likely to travel in peak times. This publication is useful to any business starting or considering developing their accessibility.

'Easy does it' offers simple low cost tips, some 'quick wins' for making practical improvements that will enhance their accessibility to help businesses meet the needs of disabled visitors. Focusing on facilities many suggestions are very easy to do.

Information

VisitEngland recognises how Access Statements can help address the lack of information provided to tourists with disabilities, but understands that for many businesses this will be something new and are likely to need support to make it as easy as possible to complete one. Their online Access Statement template has a number of business benefits. For many businesses, this is an introduction to accessibility and this tool offers the opportunity to not only complete the statement, but also process itself with the detailed guidance note and best practice that are provided together with many examples of completed Access Statements which they can learn from.

Research also shows that the industry is looking for help in marketing their accessibility to their target market. '**Speak Up**' is aimed at individual tourism businesses. It looks at recognised channels that disabled travellers use to find information on accessible holidays. It uses many case studies from different businesses that have actually tried these different channels and their experience of them. With this guide they can learn about their messages and different marketing channels they can use, with tips on where to promote their business to reach their target audience.

Facilities

National Accessible Scheme

The National Accessible Scheme (NAS) is a set of standards managed by VisitEngland to specifically help tourism accommodation businesses develop their business so that it meets the needs of disabled people, people with access needs. They believe that all of the tools they produce for the NAS, businesses can learn from.

The NAS standards are very detailed. To make them feel less daunting for businesses, the entry level for mobility was separated into 'One Step Ahead'; This has a checklist that can be worked through to check whether a business meets the Standard but they can also learn more about accessibility and what is required to achieve the NAS Standard.

At the beginning of the booklet for the other NAS standards, the business case for accessible tourism is established. It advises why they would want to use standards to improve their accessibility, provides information about the standards with diagrams to help develop a business, supplemented with much more information available on the VisitEngland website.

Visitor Attraction Scheme

Assessors carrying out assessments on accommodation or attractions can be a valuable source to also learn from to improve accessibility.

In partnership with Action on Hearing Loss, a new initiative has been introduced. Many attractions have a hearing loop. Assessors carrying out assessments for those attractions who are part of the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS), have been trained by to test hearing loops. They visit around 1,000 attractions a year. From this initiative the manager at the business can learn how to test their hearing loop and be signposted to further guidance. This is an example of indirect learning that is both practical and is delivering positive results through a business support initiative.

Listen up

'Listen Up' was produced with Action on Hearing Loss. It gives tips to tourism businesses on how to welcome and meet the needs of guests and visitors with hearing loss. AOHL were aware of many issues arising from complaints they received, so there was a need for such guidance. It touches on important topics such as safety and communication and highlights products that can help B&Bs with safety.

Case studies

Case studies are important business support tools. It is thought that some owners feel that the Tourist Board is often dictating to them. There is a danger that they will feel there is no reason to listen to the advice given. Case studies are a more compelling and engaging way of communicating with businesses to share knowledge and experiences, where businesses can learn from each other. Providing examples to businesses of what others have done to improve accessibility for their customers and demonstrate the benefits gained from this is important and can add value to the business case.

Video case studies

Video case studies offer a different way of communicating with businesses and a different kind of content. They can add more variety and can bring the topic of accessibility to life, making it more exciting and engaging, than words on a page can. Video also adds to the mixture of content and increases the option of resources that businesses can use and learn from. Videos are of growing importance to help educate and offers an accessible medium with the growth of Social Media websites. The VisitEnglandbiz's channel on YouTube hosts a variety of access videos aimed at different types of leisure and tourism businesses. In addition to creating their own videos VisitEngland will use third party videos and have also collaborated with the BBC TV Programme 'See Hear' for deaf people which focused on a business that has worked hard to meet the needs of guests with hearing loss and are NAS rated. This has produced a number of video case studies from deaf guests and their experiences of going to a hotel with many learning points for businesses.

Destination Access Audits (DAA)

Destination Access Audits are an important starting point for destinations that want to develop and promote accessible tourism.

A DAA offers an opportunity for collective learning and sharing of knowledge across teams managing the destination.

Winning More Visitors

Research shows that many disabled people look at destination websites to gain information about accessibility. However across England this information is patchy. Aimed at Destination Management Organisations, 'Wining More Visitors', drawing on best practice tips, was produced as a guide to; help destinations understand the demand for this information, give guidance about the relevant content they should provide and the importance of making information easily accessible, using different formats.

'Access for All' Growing Tourism Locally – Regional Growth Fund Programme (RGF)

VisitEngland is working on an initiative with 4 destinations in England with RGF Funding, to develop itineraries with accommodation and attractions to provide a warm welcome for all visitors with access requirements³. Each DMO is working with up to 8 tourism businesses, a mixture of hotels and attractions to improve their accessibility. The initiative focuses on developing key issues such as customer service, facilities and visitor information. This is a product development process whereby the destinations and local businesses are learning together more about this market and how to best serve these them. To assist this learning they are using a DAA and VisitEngland's accessibility resources, such as the online Access Statement tool disability awareness training. This approach provides an opportunity to develop champions and leaders at destination level, and give confidence to businesses to serve this market. This is a model that VisitEngland would like to develop nationally.

4.0 TARGET AUDIENCE, COMMUNICATIONS AND BARRIERS

This section discusses the target audience, communication and barriers that VisitEngland has been facing in disseminating their support tools.

Target Audience

Around 80% of tourism businesses in England are SMEs and the vast majority of those are micro-businesses with less than 10 people. This is the target audience for most of the business support tools produced by VisitEngland. For this reason attention is paid to the writing style and the design, to ensure the tools are really geared to that level. However, VisitEngland does not discount the importance of large business chains taking on the issue of accessibility such as hotels, but recognise that they will usually have access to greater resources. This often include their own training programmes. In recent years resources have also been focused on destinations, recognising the key role they have to play in the development of Accessible Tourism through their leadership. It is vital that they understand accessible tourism and how to create an environment in which it can thrive and what they can do to support local tourism businesses and how they can use the VisitEngland tools, which any business or destination can use to help support and develop accessible tourism

In addition, VisitEngland recognises that to encourage accessible tourism a much wider range of occupational groups than business and front-line staff should be targeted. These include those whose work focuses on designing venues and making the

³ Regional Growth Fund: www.visitengland.org/rgf/

decisions which affect the places and the spaces within which tourism businesses operate. Regrettably, at present these occupations do not always have the necessary skills to complement and enhance accessible tourism. However, it is not seen as necessarily being a realistic role for the tourist board to provide training for these occupational group.

Communications

VisitEngland's website is a particularly important communication channel with businesses, especially when linked with their email newsletter. Here the training courses are promoted and their business development tools are freely available. They are also able to communicate with businesses through assessors employed to visit businesses in connection with their *Accommodation and Attraction Quality Scheme* and the *National Accessible Scheme (NAS)*.

Wherever possible they mainstream messages of both accessibility and sustainability in a number of different ways. One approach is through their policies. It is now compulsory for participating businesses of the *Quality Assessment Schemes* to write an Access Statement. This has been very successful in introducing more businesses to the issue of accessibility by fostering greater understanding of access by placing it more in focus in their day-to-day work and signposting businesses towards the VisitEngland support tools.

Another channel of communication, where access guidance is being integrated is through the information they provide in their *Quality Standards Booklets* produced for the accommodation and attractions sector. Guidance on both access and sustainability have been introduced as standard sections. Whilst it does not affect a business's star rating if they do not take the advice about access - it is included as good practice guidance. It is available for each section or theme of the standards as an introduction about accessibility. For example, where reference is made to standards required for a bedroom it also has tips about how the bedroom can be made accessible.

A regular publication that VisitEngland produces to keep the industry up to date and informed is '*Quality Edge*'. This is freely available for anyone to download from their website, with a hard copy sent to all members of the quality schemes. This is now used to regularly carry articles about accessibility such as 'How to welcome deaf and hard of hearing customers' and 'Welcoming people with assistance dogs.'

The approach in communication is therefore is a mixture of both direct and indirect, offering specific, detailed guidance via the tools they make available to everyone, as well as mainstreaming accessibility issues within their general business messages, with the aim of promoting interest and learning. Part of this mainstreaming process is to make the message more inclusive, so that the focus is on a much wider market, addressing the needs of a range of people not solely disabled people.

Barriers to engaging with tourism businesses

Whilst there are accessible tourism training courses and a large range of other information resources on offer to businesses in the UK, there is still a sense that the target audience is still not being effectively reached.

According to different interviewees, there are a number of different reasons are given for this:

- A key difficulty is getting people's attention and making them interested in the topic.
- Some tourism businesses, mainly accommodation, are run as lifestyle businesses such as Bed & Breakfast establishments. They are being run as the owners wish, because they see it as their home and not as a business.
- From a business perspective there are many businesses that like to feel they do not need support. Some SMEs do not want to feel that anyone is questioning the way they are running their business.
- It is known from surveys that when businesses are asked what they would like more information about, then training in general is given very low priority. There are, however, differences between attractions and accommodation owners, with attractions more interested in training information. But accommodation owners, which are typically small accommodation providers, usually do not show a great interest in information about training.
- A survey of tourism businesses by VisitEngland in 2009, showed 21% of businesses who do not currently provide staff with disability awareness training stated 'nothing' would encourage them to provide this training.

In addition, it is often necessary to find different ways of telling businesses the same thing, trying to bust myths all the time. Ross Calladine, Head of Business Support, observes:

"It is important to remember that there are new people joining the industry all the time, so you will never complete your awareness in this because you have got completely new businesses that are opening up all the time that have to be educated".

The difficulty of business engagement is highlighted by the low numbers using the online training developed with Disabled Go. The course is promoted in a number of ways through their website and the business support tools they produce. They have placed a flyer in 17,000 copies of quality edge that go to those in the Quality Schemes, and have promoted it to the 15,000 people who receive their newsletter, as well as using social media and 'tweeting' to thousands of people on their network. Despite this promotional activity, only around 50% of the 1000 free places have been taken up.

One to one business support

Whilst visits by Assessors, as part of the quality assurance scheme, provide an opportunity for face-to-face engagement with accommodation providers and attraction owners, it offers a very limited time frame and therefore little opportunity to discuss accessibility in any detail. These sectors are however only part of a much wider industry that VisitEngland needs to reach.

The loss of the regional and local structures (RDAs & RTBs) where their staff could meet face-to-face and encourage business owners to go on training courses and promote accessibility has effectively meant the loss of opportunity to spend time with a business to discuss accessibility face-to-face, to help give them confidence and signpost them to training and other business tools to help them. This change has also resulted in the loss of training opportunities that once existed as result of lack of funding by DMOs or other local bodies to support workshops, which in the past the RDA would have supported. However, it can also be questioned how effective this was, as even with a considerable level of public support, not every RDAs was invested in accessibility training while others did. This meant that on this issue business engagement across England was patchy before, however the situation has been aggravated by the loss of the local support that did exist.

Misconceptions about accessibility

VisitEngland has placed emphasis on the notion that accessibility training must go hand in hand with awareness raising of the business case for accessibility in general. In this vein, businesses must be educated about the merits of accessibility before they will or want to engage in training.

Other barriers faced are reflected in comments which VisitEngland received in response to a survey of its readers of the 'Quality Edge' magazine. Some said they do want to see more articles on accessibility as they are informative. However one anonymous comment said:

"It does annoy me to see things on accessibility, because my 2 bedroom cottage is grade II listed [protected historical building] and I can't take wheelchair users, it's not practical, so it makes me feel bad every time I read the access articles because I know I can't do it in my cottage".

This comment suggests a lack of knowledge and understanding about accessibility and reinforces stereotypes that wheelchair users are the sole beneficiaries of improved access. Not being fully informed about accessibility also has the effect, as this comment suggests, that some try to negate their obligations under the Equality Act by citing other legislation i.e. listed building status, as a reason for not making changes. This creates a barrier and a possible justification for them to probably not even look at

access because of their mistaken understanding and awareness that even in such circumstances, changes can still be made which others can benefit from.

Business Risk

Ross Calladine also believes that the nature of accessibility is simply not attractive to some businesses. He believes that these can view it as being a moral crusade and about equality, which can be regarded as a risky area for a business, especially when set against a backdrop of legislation and may make no changes to their business.

Others might make some changes, but may not promote these as they do not wish to create demand from customers with access requirements who might otherwise challenge them under the legislation. The subsequent lack of demand can also reinforce their justification for not wanting to address this market. Some business will therefore implement access but avoid inclusion, which is the overall objective, as they also want to avoid complaints and possible law-suits. VisitEngland tries to overcome these beliefs by stressing the business case, but it is an indication where legislation can create a climate of change and whilst it motivates some, it can also bring with it barriers of fear and resistance to change by others.

Lack of Quality Focus

Part of the apathy that some businesses may show towards accessibility might also be related to, another issue that centres on the quality of product and service offered to tourists generally. There are some businesses, especially those located in popular tourism 'honeypots' where demand can be very high and options for visitors low. The constant level of customer demand may be such, that despite customer satisfaction possibly being low, these businesses may not be interested in any business training, even about the basics of offering quality and much less likely about accessibility.

It is thought there are probably three broad imperatives in England why tourism businesses address accessibility, these being: 1. Financial benefits, 2. Social / Moral and 3. Legislative, or a mix of these. VisitEngland believes that more research should be undertaken to better understand business motivation more clearly to help also understand in more detail how barriers could be broken.

Addressing Barriers

When thinking about breaking down barriers, VisitEngland feels that owners / managers need to see and hear from people that have gone through training and the results that being accessible has had for their business. Despite a number of case studies produced, they will not have an impact unless they are read by businesses.

This difficulty of engaging with some businesses is reinforced by the results of a disability training questionnaire undertaken by the Accessible Tourism Stakeholders Forum, which asked businesses about the likelihood of engaging in future training over

the next 12 months, 69% of respondents answered it was very unlikely or quite unlikely.

VisitEngland believes that whilst there are many businesses not open at all to accessibility training it is important to focus on those who are if there is to be change and progress. However it is hoped that those who do engage and make changes will begin to influence the rest of the business community and that there will eventually be a 'bandwagon' effect of others wanting to participate.

VisitEngland believes it is important to embed access into customer service as a means of trying to get businesses engaged with the topic. Great customer service is a message that underpins the tools they produce, yet they believe only some will only pay lip service to it. If people are to understand the benefits that come from accessibility then it is probably important to train these staff skills from early on. Disability awareness and accessibility should be seen as core knowledge in vocational courses as it is a significant market. For this you need schools, colleges and universities, anywhere that is teaching about the tourism industry to be involved. Currently accessibility is probably not represented enough at all in such courses. It is not something that is taught as routinely as sustainability, but it needs to be seen as being as important as that issue. This is a potential barrier to improving accessibility if the future workforce and managers are not informed and understand this market from the outset. It's also part of up-skilling the workforce before they go out into the industry, as then they are more likely to be meeting guest's needs if they have greater awareness of accessibility. With its limited resources, this is however not something that VisitEngland can focus on developing at present.

An ideal situation to help address barriers would also be, if it was both practical and funded, is to engage more widely with businesses on a face-to-face basis, as this has the potential have more success. This would allow people to ask questions, and a trained person can work with them and reassure them. To achieve this there could be a case for looking to identify and educate the channels of business support which tourism businesses use, e.g. banks, associations, chambers of commerce etc.

As the national tourist board, VisitEngland has a lot of open communication channels to businesses, but they are probably still not reaching some of the industry, who really need to be hearing the same messages and links to support from all of these business support touch points. It's thought that the development of a toolkit for business intermediaries could be a useful reference point, something to help business intermediaries become accessibility advocates for tourism businesses. Ross Calladine believes that *"We need champions, we need people to sell accessibility, they need to be confident and have the knowledge and understanding, but they also need to be motivated"*. He does not however, see such a development as being within the Tourist Board remit.

5.0 EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

The online training course provided by VisitEngland and Disabled Go has to date failed to attract the numbers that might be hoped for. This is mainly due to the reasons set out in Section 4.

While there is no formal monitoring of the course, to understand the effectiveness beyond the training and the difference that it actually makes to the business and customer service, there is an opportunity for businesses to provide feedback to give an indication of its impact. This feedback is monitored. An example of the positive benefits this course has had on a business is reflected in the comments by a general manager in the accommodation sector who stated:

"[I]...snapped up the free places for my staff. It opened my eyes and helped me understand more about disabled guests. We can get stuck in a tourism bubble, so this programme is definitely helpful. It is good to understand what more we can do."

The development of all the business support material and tools is prompted by evidence of need. Whilst there is no formal monitoring system in place to check the effectiveness of each tool, they do get feedback from businesses about the usefulness of the different tools, and resources as reflected in the quotes from businesses earlier in this study.

If VisitEngland were to point to one key success, they believe that improvement in information availability with the increasing number of Access Statements being produced is probably the biggest one. They are now starting to see on operator websites more Access information, and more Access Statements are being developed using their online tool. By completing this it means that businesses are having to at least look at and think about accessibility and have the opportunity to learn from the tools provided to help them undertake the completion of the Statement. However, there is no firm evidence or research to date to show that this is actually making a difference in the business and for the customer.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Helping business become aware of the benefits of accessible tourism and acquire the knowledge and skills to make their service and facilities accessible is not necessarily always achieved through formal direct learning such as online e-learning or classroom training. VisitEngland demonstrates, that learning indirectly through experience on the job supported by the wide ranging resources they provide to support the Tourism Industry in England offers other routes to learning.

The different tools they provide are informative, adding to the knowledge of a business owner or employee. This can work well for informing about tangible issues such as building design and facilities. There are, however, less tangible issues to be addressed

such as increasing staff confidence when serving customers where training will suit the purpose better than a publication alone. If staff have not received some kind of disability awareness, via specific training, they could feel uncomfortable in the presence of disabled people because they do not really know how to act or what to say. A benefit of their online training programme is that it takes the person completing it on a journey, it tests their knowledge as they go along, whereas a person might read but not necessarily 'take in' in the information or engage with a leaflet. Changing attitudes and behaviour is about trying to get people to engage to a higher degree and also requires that there is some element of testing, and that they have passed the training which is acknowledged by a certificate they receive upon completion.

VisitEngland believes there is definite value in including accessibility issues in training early on for those people who are looking to work and have a career in the tourism and hospitality sector, so that they have an understanding before going into the workplace. The question that is posed however, is how much emphasis or value would be placed on access awareness, skills and competences by a prospective employer? How would it be recognised in an interview situation or in a CV? It might be seen as something that is nice to have, but is it really appreciated and understood by managers? Unless the culture of the business is such that it is committed to and informed about accessibility and they intend to employ someone to have a particular focus to look after disabled guests, without that buy-in from the managers, whilst the staff member may have disability and access awareness it may not of itself help to progress their career and as such might be seen as something that is simply 'nice to have' unless the culture changes with most business recognising the benefits of accessibility training.

What is reinforced from their experience is that it is important to give choice to the industry of how they will learn about accessibility. They need to be able to choose their own point of entry to obtain information in ways that suits them and their circumstances via the various different sources e.g. training, specific access publications, videos, case studies, online tools, quality schemes, assessors, trade magazine etc. There is also an invaluable synergy and multiplier effect that is also created by VisitEngland making these resources freely available. Through the production of their tools they are enriching the pool of knowledge about accessibility for businesses to learn from and share with others. For example the two major classroom training courses, 'Welcome All' and World Host 'Customers with Disabilities' signpost those attending their courses to VisitEngland tools to be used to follow up and supplement the learning beyond the courses themselves.

All of their business support publication are available on-line and free of charge, so the barrier of cost is removed. Some are printed for circulation to reach the target audience. So they believe that there is a place for printed material. The publication 'Listen Up' was tucked into their 'Quality Edge' magazine. They know it has reached the business and they then have something physical that they can read anywhere and at any time and write on it if they want. Feedback from readers about 'Quality Edge' is

that they don't want the printed version stopped. This reinforces the importance of offering a range of business support resources to aid learning and making them available in different formats, to suit individual needs and circumstances.

Whilst VisitEngland is offering specific and focused guidance and training on accessibility it is also conscious of the need to include the issue in its mainstream messages and communications with businesses, this is something they attempt to do whenever possible.

There are however issues in respect of business engagement and uptake. Whilst they can produce a training programme and associated tools related to accessibility, the biggest question is how get businesses to look at them and use them? The RGF funding programme offers an opportunity to try in part to address this, but it is by no means a global solution at present. The funding is enabling to work in partnership with 4 destinations who in turn will be working with 8 tourism businesses. Whilst this is probably seen primarily as a marketing opportunity for these destinations, as the project has funding for promotion, there will be other key benefits. They will be supporting and developing the destination to be a champion, a catalyst for change. Businesses will have to undertake training and will be expected to use the VisitEngland tools as part of the accessibility development. This offers a possible model for the future or learning and change.

Partnerships, are very important to VisitEngland in delivering their action plans. This can be very positive in many ways because of what each party can bring to a project to make it successful. However, because of limited funding and resources, VisitEngland relies much more on partners to help them deliver their business support and all that this entails. This means that they cannot deliver a lot of their projects outside this framework. This can however also be an obstacles for VisitEngland in developing resources due to the dependence on partnerships. Setting up an access initiative can sometimes be difficult as there are financial limitations. However, they are always looking at ways that they can deliver support, which is mainly through partnerships that don't always have a cost attached to them.

As a Champion for Accessible Tourism at a national level, VisitEngland is making a difference through their training and business support tools. They are facilitating learning and sharing of knowledge and experiences in a number of different ways. Accessibility is an area of business development, which is incremental and can be slow in developing and they believe it's important to have a long-term vision for it. They are still working on Accessibility and are mid-journey. The fact that they have not achieved their goal yet doesn't mean that they would have done anything differently in the past, it is what they want to look to do in the future that is important. They have however learned along the way and understand the issues better now, which informs how they develop their building blocks to support accessible tourism and they move forward to inform and educate the industry to ultimately make a difference.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

This case study reflects the experience of a National Tourist Board that has supported Accessible Tourism for more than a decade. During this time it has built considerable resources for tourism businesses to use. Based on this experience the following recommendations are made:

- In addition to traditional forms of training e.g. classroom/online there should be an examination of other means of improving skills and knowledge within the tourism industry, that people can and will learn in different ways and from different sources. The tools that VisitEngland produce not only stand alone and can be freely accessed but are signposted as resources for continuation of learning after formal training events and are a valuable resource for trainers.
- It is important to ensure that training about accessibility is easy to understand, practical, engaging and achievable with case studies from operators giving the business to business perspective which is likely to be more effective than simple public sector messages.
- Explore how through publicly projects such as the RGF project, focusing on accessible tourism development is engaging the destinations, vital champions in the promotion of accessibility and bringing with them local businesses can be used as a model to introduce synergy into learning at a local level.
- There are a number of barriers to reaching SMEs to encourage them to engage with accessibility and to develop their knowledge and skills in this area. Without formal administrative structures such as local tourist boards offering blanket coverage of a country consideration needs to be given of looking at how to reach businesses and raise awareness through different business support channels they may use, e.g. associations, chambers of commerce etc. ensuring these are aware of and understand the access agenda. This could be achieved with a toolkit developed targeting these channels, so that they can learn and understand more about this topic.
- Seek to develop one to one business engagement, talking to businesses fact to face. This could be achieved in part through the recommendation above to look at business communication channels outside the traditional tourist boards which may or may not offer such support.
- Whilst looking at any solution to improve training and skills it needs to be acknowledged that such development would probably have to be done by each nation as it is likely that something pan-Europe may not work for everyone. There are cultural subtleties with this. A framework of resources could be produced at European level, but provision needs to be made for it to be tailored for each country, as countries and business will be at different stages with differing existing business culture and support systems within which it operates can be different from country to country.
- At national level tourist administrations e.g. Tourist Boards or Ministries should be encouraged to be seen as leaders in encouraging the development of Accessible Tourism especially by smaller businesses by developing and provide tools and

resources that can be used by and used or signposted to in formal training, ensuring a consistent message of ambition to improve accessibility and the benefits for businesses and visitors alike.

8.0 ANNEX I

Table 2: Table of criteria for best practice

Criteria	Justification	On track/off track
Innovative	VisitEngland use a range of different tools and resources and channels to try and reach their target audience, through direct online training and indirect opportunities for learning through their specialised publications, videos, case studies allowing businesses to talk to businesses, online Access Statement tool and the hands-on destination accessible development project they are undertaking. In addition they mainstream messages into their general business support at SMEs.	
Relevant	All of the business support material VE in relation to accessibility is relevant to help businesses meet their obligations under legislation as well as presenting and promoting the business case to help grow this market, which is a key objective for them. This focus also assists in supporting the improvement of the quality of customer care, through their quality schemes. The material also assists on-going learning as those attending training course are signposted to use these tools.	
Transferable	All of these different tools are transferable for use in other Member States and for other target groups.	
Efficient & Effectiveness	The tools and support that VisitEngland provides allow offer choice as to how businesses can learn, which is important. Through and online course or mainstream messages from assessors visiting businesses in the quality schemes, to publications that are free for all to read as and when. The National Accessible Scheme which helps architects and planners is invaluable to them.	
Impact	It is very hard to measure the impact that the direct online training resource and the other tools they offer has had on the industry. However, they do measure the response of disabled people as a guide to gauge improvement. VisitEngland faces barriers of business engagement, as do most working to improve accessibility, for a variety of reasons.	

Sustainable	VisitEngland view this part of the market, addressing the access needs of disabled people as one of market failure. They are supporting this agenda where the private sector has failed to address it. They choose what public funds to allocate to the issue, however, reflecting the economic climate and reduce funding partnerships are growing in importance, where VisitEngland and a relevant partner can combine experience and resources to produce tools for the tourism sector.	
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