

# Inclusive London comes of age



Twenty years since the Disability Discrimination Act was introduced Tracey Proudlock, inclusive design and disability access expert, looks at how London businesses have got to grips with inclusion and why the city now leads the way in accessibility for all.

**1**995 changed everything for disabled Londoners. After years of hard-fought lobbying and campaigning, the then Conservative government introduced a landmark piece of legislation that was to enshrine in law for the first time the rights of people in the workplace. The central premise of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was to level the playing field for disabled people and importantly, to strengthen their legal rights to hold negligent companies to account.

It proved a moveable feast which took on a number of amendments down the years, most notably once the Labour party came back to power in 1997. Indeed, with a view to further encouraging employers and service providers to make adjustments, remove more barriers and ultimately, give greater protection to more people, 2010 saw the DDA succeeded by the wide ranging Equality Act. This took individual rights further than ever before to encompass every aspect of daily life, from getting a job and renting a home to accessing transport and running a business.

## Inclusion

As both a disabled business-woman and consultant to compa-

nies looking to get to grips with inclusive design and access, I've witnessed first-hand how London has tackled the inclusion challenge. Yes, businesses took a while to understand their obligations; and yes, they broadly still have further to go; but the fact remains that London is still way ahead of the curve compared to both its national and international counterparts.

Nowhere is this more evident than in transport. We've seen year-on-year improvements to the bus network, with 100 per cent of services now offering access and operators adhering to stringent policies and procedures endeavouring to meet the diversity of need within their customer base. There are

their daily business. After all, disabled customers rightly demand to be courted and 'wowed' just as much as their able bodied counterparts. As such and with DWP figures indicating that households with a disabled person have a combined income of £212 billion, the savviest businesses have quickly realised the financial incentive in valuing and securing the loyalties of disabled customers. This mindset change has seen some of the more renowned businesses actively looking to delight disabled customers rather than merely cater to them, for example by offering tailored customer care and bespoke facilities, designed to attract them and stick (and no doubt in the hope that they will buzz, sing,

skyline, leaving an indelible impression with residential 'sky' gardens in towering blocks balanced below with multi-storey sub-surface amenities such as swimming pools and cinemas, all served with the multiple super speed lifts that we all pretty much rely on to stop the groceries from thawing whilst we navigate the endless flights of stairs to level 42.

Looking ahead, the £4 billion Brent Cross Cricklewood regeneration scheme promises to raise the bar higher still. This renowned 350 acre site, with its large retail units surrounded by surface car parking, lots of vacant or unused land and poor transport connections is some way from the ideal neighbourhood: However in the biggest construction project in the city since the Olympics, the site is now set to be transformed into a brand new town centre and the jewel in London's accessibility crown, offering a completely refurbished shopping centre, three rebuilt schools, new parks and community facilities and 7,500 new homes.



currently 67 step-free tube stations too (from the 270 in total) – and a robust plan is in place outlining where step-free service access to the tube network will next be delivered.

It's a similar picture in the leisure and tourism sector where operators have made great strides in catering for all. We now have more accessible hotel rooms across the city than ever before, with the most forward thinking hoteliers setting aside rooms which can be adapted to cater for more disabled customers in future. What's more, employee training in disability and equality is now fairly common.

## Incentive

Of course inclusion is about so much more than just removing the physical barriers that restrict disabled Londoners going about

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tweet and retweet their praises *ad infinitum*).

So far the legislation has seen thousands of day to day physical adjustments made to workplaces and public spaces across the city, but it is about so much more than providing extra ramps and handrails. Indeed, the march of inclusion is touching the London

## Comprehensive

There's further cheer in the bold and confident blueprint that is the London Plan. First launched in 2004 and now providing the overall strategic plan for London to 2036, it includes a comprehensive range of policies to promote an inclusive environment and help ensure that all London's diverse communities can contribute to the growing economy and enjoy a high quality of life, with particular emphasis on the access needs of disabled and older people. We have to hope that much of its provisions will be mirrored in the regional cities as they plan to similarly expand.

It certainly all bodes well for the future. Realistically, the sheer size, scale and unique geography of London mean it can never truly be 100 per cent accessible. Few world cities can. That said, 20 years since disability first started going mainstream, London businesses can be proud of the role they continue to play in making the city one of the most vibrant, accessible and welcoming around.

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**LBM fact:** London's underground is the oldest in the world and has 270 stations, more than any other system in the world