



CROWN SPORTS LOCKERS

ACCESS ALL AREAS

Disabled provision is a key element of inclusivity, says Sam Palmer, Project Manager for Crown Sports Lockers

How does the effect of equality law impact changing areas – possibly one of the trickiest aspects of provision to deliver?

For sites and venues to provide fully inclusive facilities, owners and operators have to think hard about how disabled users can most easily and appropriately access and enjoy them. Changing areas present first and last impressions for members and guests so they must create a favorable climate for disabled users too. Can wheelchair visitors easily gain access to changing rooms, for example? Do doors open automatically, are aisles sufficiently wide to take wheelchairs and are lockers designated for them.

Lockers can offer wheelchair access underneath to allow users to come up close to the doors, which then open at a convenient height for them. New build and upgraded facilities increasingly include showers for disabled users, whether wheelchair-bound or not, and for the partially sighted or blind, locker doors can carry tactile door numbering. Virtual tours of facilities, posted on a site's website, can also give ample indication of the degree to which they cater for disabled visitors.

Equality law applies to any business that provides goods, facilities or services to members of the public, including health and fitness clubs, sports clubs, swimming pools, leisure centres, golf and tennis clubs, rowing clubs and sporting venues, the Equality and Human Rights Commission states. It also governs community provision such as schools, universities, colleges and academies and covers after-school activities and out-of-hours clubs.

Regarding health and safety and disabled people, ensure that any action you take is proportionate to the risk. "Disabled people are entitled to make the same choices and to take the same risks within the same limits as others," states the Commission. Health and safety law does not require you as a service provider to remove all conceivable risk but to "ensure that risk is properly appreciated, understood and managed".

"Do not make assumptions but assess the person's situation and consider reasonable adjustments to reduce any risks, your duty not to discriminate and, where appropriate, to consider the disabled person's own views," it adds.

The key is to strike a balance between protecting against the risk and restricting disabled people from access to services. In today's burgeoning spa sector, relaxation for all is a keystone of operator strategy. The 4* Lincombe Hall Hotel, Torquay, has recently opened a £2m high-end luxury spa to create a year-round destination at the boutique hotel.

Access for wheelchair visitors is a feature of the luxury facility. "Disabled toilets and showers are available in the male and female changing areas," confirms Simon Bantock of Ashton House Design, which conceived the layout and specified all the interior surfacings and fittings – working with changing room specialists Crown Sports Lockers on the fit-out.

"Ramps allow wheelchair guests to conveniently access treatment rooms, lap and spa pools, pool loungers and changing areas, thanks to level access throughout."

Sam Palmer – Project Manager - Crown Sports Lockers

