

**Consultancy Study for the Review of the
Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997**

**Meeting of Panel on Welfare Services
on 12 June 2006**

— Submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission —

Introduction

1. This paper aims to share with Members the views of the Equal Opportunities Commission (“EOC”) on the consultancy study of the Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997 (“DM 97”) and the final draft of the revised design manual (“Final Draft”).

EOC’s views

2. The EOC welcomes the review of DM97 and note the suggested improvements made therein. We urge for regular revision of the design manual in light of technological advancement, users’ feedback and expectation as well as designers’ experience.

3. The inclusion of the ‘Performance Objectives’ in the Mandatory Section provides to the manual users with clearer understanding on compliance

of obligatory requirements. Similarly, the 'Design Considerations' in the Best Practice Section provide the standard of enhanced design. This is an improvement on the DM97. While clarifying and elaborating the specific requirements in the DM97, the Final Draft also places emphasis on the safety aspects of the users / occupiers of buildings, such as standard of luminous contrast, non-slippery surface, visual fire alarm. These are essential features for the elderly and people with sensory disabilities in equal access to services and facilities. Signage requirements are helpful for people with memory disorders.

4. The EOC understands that there are still areas of concern from user groups regarding the Final Draft. In light of our operational experience and feedback from persons with disability ("PWD") carers and stakeholders, there are some key areas that the consultants may wish to look into:

- a. Toilet facilities. The minimum standard of 1500mm X 1750mm for the entire cubicle is considered as inadequate. A 1500mm X 1500mm net space is considered as by most users to be sufficient for wheelchair circulation within W.C. cubicle.
- b. Unisex disable toilets. Unisex toilets are user-friendly to PWD and children who needs assistance and attendance from carers of the opposite sex.
- c. Automatic door openers. This device is user-friendly to wheelchair

users, person with weak upper limbs and elderly people. Where possible, such installation should be made an obligatory requirement rather than enhanced design.

- d. Coverage of leisure facilities. The Final Draft does not specifically cover landscaping and leisure facilities inside a building. Although some may not consider these features as 'fixtures', the fact that more and more garden and clubhouses are now built within housing estates, barrier-free usage may be an area that should be looked into by the consultant. The inclusion of the backstage facilities in the Final Draft signifies the recognition of the rights to equal access to cultural and leisure activities, the enjoyment of club facilities should also be addressed.
- e. Escape route. The Final Draft has provisions on entrance to a building. Barrier-free escape routes for PWD are also of significance. This safety issue may not be entirely within the coverage of the Final Draft. The concerted effort of relevant authorities in ensuring safety of PWD may be required.

Other considerations

The EOC advocates for the concept of 'Design for All'. The provision of passages and facilities should not be viewed from the angle of mere

technical compliance. It is also a matter of how dignified, easy and fast it is for PWD to use the facilities. The principle of substantive equal opportunities and recognition of dignity of the individuals should be taken into consideration. Designers should look beyond technical compliance and consider the overall usability and dignity of users. Alternative access, if applies, should be no less dignified than the access which such alternative is intended to replace.

The DM97 requires access be provided from a prominent point or points on the lot boundary, which is accessible to a public street or pedestrian way, directly to at least one entrance which is commonly used by the public or to a point directly adjacent to one entrance which is commonly used by the public and to an accessible lift. Theoretically, PWD and non-PWD can have separate access and passages. Often time this gives rise to inconvenience and possible discrimination. After lengthy lobbying by concerned groups and EOC, the Building Authority spells out in the Practice Notes for Authorized Persons clearer guidelines¹. The Building Authority, as an approval body, has an important goal-keeping role to play.

Many of the complaints on accessibility received by EOC arise from mismanagement of the facilities (such as blockage of passage, locking of disable toilet, etc.) and deviation from approved plans and design. Appropriate inspection should be taken by relevant authorities to monitor non-compliance

¹ Building Department's Practice Note for Authorised Persons and Registered Structural Engineers 112--- The BA [Building Authority] will take into consideration the physical environment immediately outside the building boundaries ...where along the boundaries of the site there are points where PWD would have easy access from the street and there are point where PWD have difficulties in gaining access due to the presence of steps or steep gradient along the street, the BA will not approve the plans unless access for PWD is located within the former point.

on a regular and timely basis. EOC stands ready to investigate into disability discrimination complaints on accessibility.

Equal Opportunities Commission

5 June 2006