

# It's time to be inclusive

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**W**hen speaking to my clients about inclusive design, I request that the environment should be designed in order that everyone should be able to use it equally. I never ask for separate entrances, ramps with clinical handrails or lifts designated only for the use of people with disabilities.

However, I do request a toilet facility that is, on the surface, only for the use of disabled people. People often translate this as being for wheelchair users only.

My belief is that this whole issue goes against the ideal of inclusion. We should stop using the wheelchair symbol and instead add a new sign

including all people who need the extra space as well as a sink.

For example, a woman in an ordinary toilet attempting to hold the door of the cubicle open whilst simultaneously encouraging her eldest child to turn on the taps and also stop her younger child from sitting on the damp floor creates difficulties. How much easier it would have been in the inclusive toilet?

When access is designed into a building there tends to be a weighing up of the provision and the cost and benefit to the building. With the Approved Document M now requiring a variety of provisions, it makes sense to me that the accessible toilet is used to provide a facility for

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other groups of people.

In a smaller building where there is only space for one accessible toilet, this needs to be wider than the basic design making it suitable for more disabled people to use. This gives an added cost to the building that in my mind justifies its use by other groups.

There needs to be an ethos of ensuring that a person who cannot wait long to 'go' gets preference. However, the benefit for parents with opposite sex children are not to be overlooked ie: young boys that are too old to use the female WC but too naive to be unaccompanied when using a male WC.

There is a requirement for an accessible toilet wherever



*Inclusive design doesn't just mean separate entrances, ramps with clinical handrails or lifts designated only for the use of people with disabilities*



- ◀ there are general sanitary facilities in larger buildings. This is so that disabled people do not have to travel too far to get to the toilet.

The argument to allow other people to benefit from the provision seems to be even more sensible where there is a higher provision in the bid to provide a cost effective and inclusive environment that gives benefits to all.

The reason that wheelchair users are reticent about their facility becoming inclusive is that they fear it will not be available for their use. They

also fear that it will be dirty which can be very difficult when there is no alternative choice. Good maintenance is therefore essential when this new approach is adopted.

Other people should also be taking advantage of the expensive facilities held within that sacred door.

For instance, people with irritable bowel syndrome and other bowel conditions, some women during menstruation, women with weak bladders, pregnant women and obese and elderly people. All of these will benefit from a sink

**“WE HAVE TO START LOOKING AT THE WIDER PICTURE AND START MAKING BUILDINGS WORK IN THE INTERESTS OF EVERYONE”**

inside the room, shelves to leave their paraphernalia on, handrails to lean on and more space in which to manoeuvre.

We have to start looking at the wider picture and start making buildings work in the interests of everyone. It's time inclusive went both ways – so let's change the sign and the ethos!

For more details, telephone 01274 818899 or visit [www.qequality.co.uk](http://www.qequality.co.uk)