

Pathways 5 Presentation

The Architectural Brief – Guidelines for Ensuring Physical Access

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Abstract

The University of Tasmania has developed an approach to physical access standards that incorporates the philosophy of **inclusiveness, education, and adaptation**. The Architectural Access Brief, produced by the Offices of the University Architect and the Disability Advisers, goes well beyond reference to existing standards. It incorporates the knowledge of a wide range of sources and, as a living document, will continue to be added to as new technology and processes evolve. This paper will provide a review of past and current practices, explore the reasons for a new approach and demonstrate the University of Tasmania access model.

Presentation

Background

The Building Code of Australia (BCA) defines those parts of buildings that are to be designed according to the Australian Standard AS1428.1 (Design For Access And Mobility Part 1: General Requirements). Local government, as part of the building approval process, enforce those standards.

The BCA and AS1428.1 alone are not sufficient to ensure good building access, but are:

- minimum standards and in many cases are not acceptable;
- not flexible or adaptable;
- a justification for designers and project managers to provide less than acceptable outcomes; and
- designed to cover a limited range of access problems.

As a institutions of higher learning we should:

- not accept minimum standards (AS1428.2 for instance is a more optimal set of standards);
- use our experience and post occupancy evaluations to improve on these standards;
- incorporate the expertise and experience of other organisations; and
- ensure that access issues are dealt with at the earliest design stages.

AIMS

To develop an Architectural Access Brief for all persons involved with the building procurement process from inception to occupation. The big challenge in this project is to encourage acceptance and ownership of such a brief. To this end, the following aims were kept in mind:

- Demonstrate inclusive design principles.
- Educate all persons involved.
- Ensure adaptivity and flexibility is permanent.

Inclusion

A keystone of the approach is that physical access issues should be **inclusive** and a basic part of good design; they should not be reduced to the lowest denominator represented by the Building Codes of Australia or AS1428. Aesthetics, function and maintenance can all be improved whilst ensuring appropriate access standards. By showing the advantages of inclusive design in each situation, they are more likely to be accepted and adopted.

The key principle is that good access design is not only beneficial for people with disabilities but also essential for all users in terms of OH&S, maintenance, and general building use. Some simple examples of this are:

- If a doorway isn't accessible to a wheelchair, it won't be easily accessible for someone carrying a tray, using crutches, wheeling an overhead projector or delivering furniture.
- A path cross-slope that's too steep for a wheelchair or non-accessible stairs and handrails is an OH&S problem for everyone.
- Clear visual clues and signage designed for people with visual impairments are invaluable for all users.
- Removing crevices and collision points to assist cane users also reduces rubbish collection points.

Education

By including the intent of each rule as well as references to appropriate standards and support documents for each design rule, consultants and staff are **educated** about the underlying need. Each rule provides a statement of the desired outcome in each case, rather than a design solution. Designers are then free to explore solutions based on a better understanding of the issues. Where appropriate, a University design standard is referenced.

Adaptivity

The approach taken was that the document must be **adaptive** and have an ongoing life. Part of this is achieved by creating a reference document with

performance criteria, and the planned wide publication by web. This gives us the ability to get continual feedback, review and add design rules as required and provide a repository for knowledge gained in the implementation of each rule.

It is proposed that improved design standards should be evaluated twice a year for inclusion in the Access Brief. Suggestions should come from Post Occupancy Evaluations by the University Architect, the OH&S unit, Equity Office and Property Services, users and others. An evaluation committee will be established.

SCOPE OF THE ACCESS BRIEF

The brief includes both internal and external areas and covers most issues in the Standards as well as many others that are of concern to other organisations. AS1428.2 is used as the starting point for most rules. If an issue is not explicitly covered then AS1428.1 applies. It is expected additional rules will be included after its draft release for comment. The brief is intended to be short and readable by designers and refer to, but not repeat information in Australian Standards.

In developing the brief the following texts and organisations were referred to and consulted:

References

- Building Code of Australia, 1999.
- Advisory Notes on Access to Premises, HR&EOC, 1998
- Australian standards AS1428.1-4 (1998), AS1735, AS2890.
- Building Access Outcomes Report, ABCB, 1999.
- Environmental Modifications for Visually Impaired Students, Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind
- Building Access and Mobility, Standards Australia 1993
- Building Sight, National Centre for Aging and Sensory Loss, 1996.
- Building Design for People who are Visually Impaired, RVIB.
- Science Laboratory Access Manual, VUT, 1992
- Access manual, Deakin University, 1995

Organisations

- Royal Australian Institute of Architects
- Australian Institute of Building Inspectors.
- Launceston City Council
- Royal Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

Layout of the Access Brief

The brief is a set of rules, grouped by building component. Each rule is in four parts:

1. Access Rule
2. Intention
3. Reference
4. Checklist

1. Rules

The rules describe desired outcomes for a particular building element. A rule may simply be a reference to AS1428.1 and included because it is a key design criteria and often overlooked, a performance specification, or an advisory note.

2. Intention

The intention describes why the rule is included. Generally it should include access as well as OH&S, maintenance or general usage issues to ensure it has wide acceptance. The intention also allows designers to look for innovative solutions.

3. Reference.

Where a rule is referenced it indicates where to find more information or where the underlying Australian Standard clause is to be found.

4. Checklist

The checklist is to be used at four stages:

- Design
- Construction documentation
- Building hand-over
- Post occupancy evaluation