National Register of Access Consultants

Being an Access and/or Inclusive Design Consultant

Reflections on the evolution of the role

Introduction



- Accessibility and Inclusive Design Consultant;
- Over 25 years experience;
- NRAC Consultant, Chartered Building Engineer and Chartered Building Surveyor; Expert Witness and
- National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC) advisory group chair

What is the NRAC?

The UK's only independent register of accessibility and inclusive design auditors and consultants who:

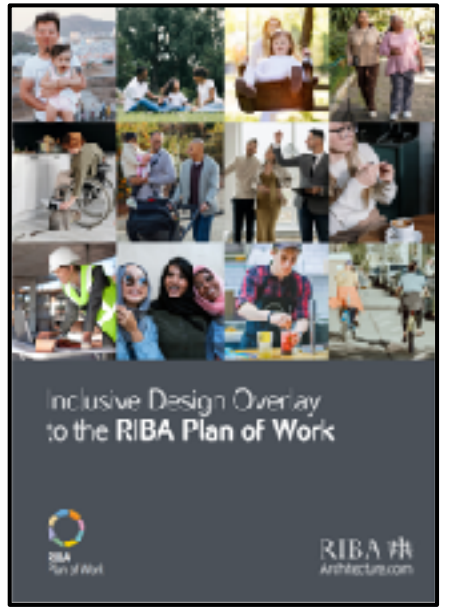
- have demonstrated by peer review that they meet the NRAC professional standards and criteria;
- adhere to a Code of Practice;
- hold professional indemnity insurance; and
- undertake annual continuous professional development

The six NRAC core competencies

- Understanding of user needs;
- Experience and ability in the access field;
- Knowledge of construction processes;
- Knowledge and understanding of good practice and standards in relation to accessibility and inclusive design;
- Legal understanding; and
- Professional understanding.

Terminology

- Access Consultant versus Inclusive Design Consultant roles;
- The Access Consultant role is a key part of being an Inclusive Design Consultant; and
- It all relates to the client scope agreed.



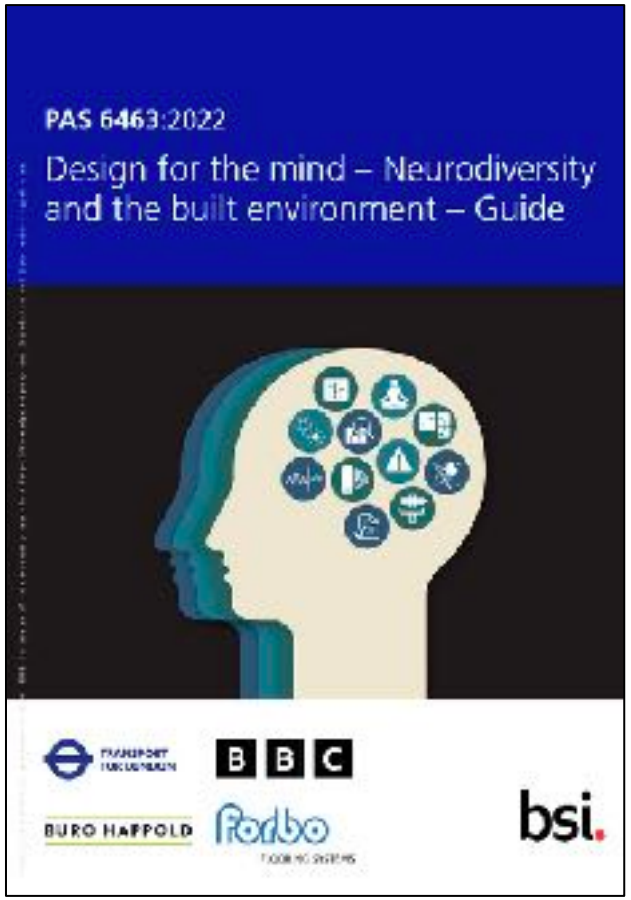
Traditional vs emerging scopes

Accessible design:

- An approach that focused on design for disabled people, aiming to minimize barriers so that features can be easily accessed and used by people with hearing, mobility, vision, speech, or cognitive impairments.

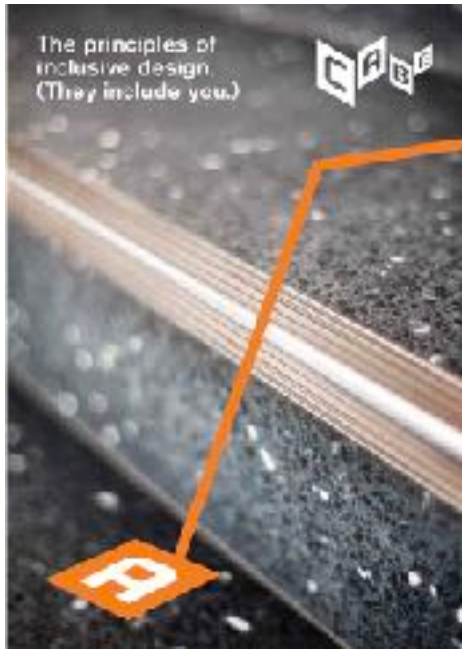
Inclusive design:

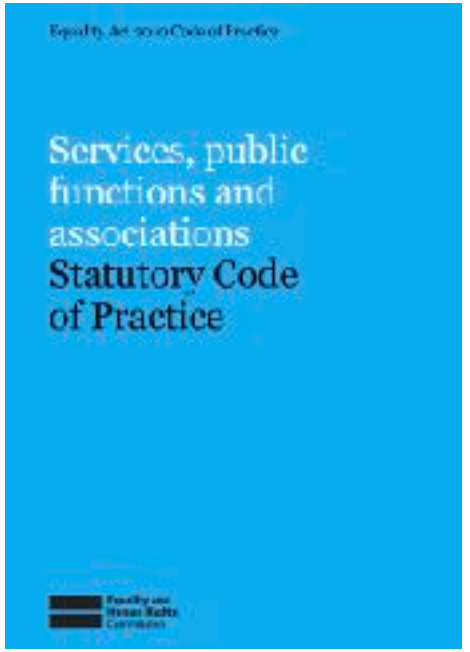
- Has a much broader scope. Inclusive design seeks to create buildings and environments that welcome everyone, regardless of their characteristics or identity.



Changes over the years…

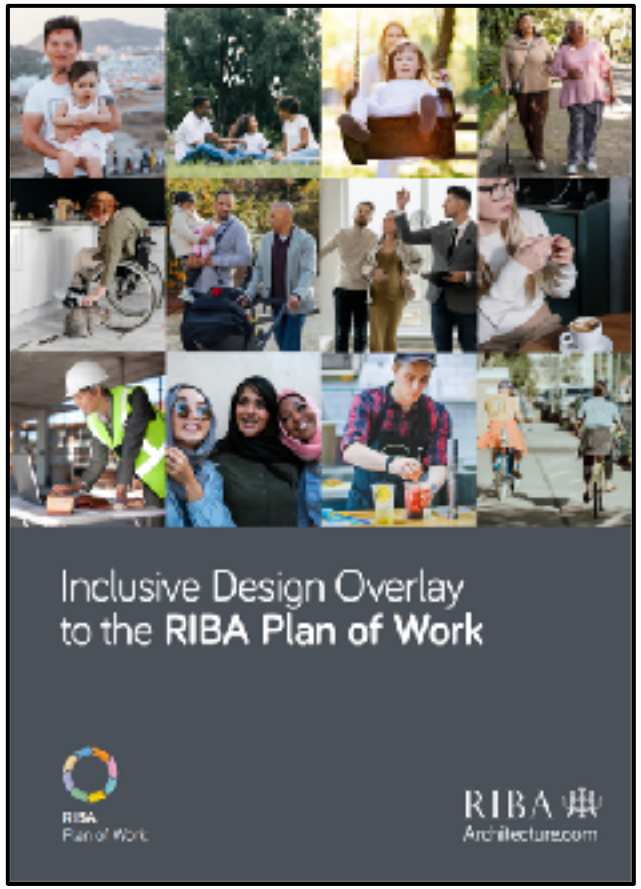
- DDA 1995 - Equality Act 2010;
- Inclusive society / inclusive environments;
- Regularly evolving ‘good’ practice;
- Improved planning policy;
- Technological developments;
- Greater engagement and co-production;
- The RIBA inclusive design overlay and
- The Building Safety Act 2022.





Benefits to working under the IDO

- The primary benefit of the RIBA Inclusive Design Overlay is to ensure the systematic creation of buildings and spaces that are welcoming and usable for everyone, regardless of their diverse human characteristics, **by embedding inclusive design principles throughout all stages of a construction project.**



The developing role

“An inclusive design consultant (sometimes called an access consultant or inclusive environment consultant) acts as a specialist **Inclusive Design Lead** on a project following the RIBA Inclusive Design Overlay, providing expert guidance at every stage from concept to post-occupancy to ensure the built environment is accessible and usable for everyone.”

“Their role involves moving beyond minimum legal requirements (like Building Regulations Part M) to embed best practices that welcome people of all abilities, genders, faiths, and other protected characteristics.”

The Building Safety Act 2022

- The Building Safety Act (BSA) 2022 significantly impacts the work of access consultants by formalising their expertise within a more rigorous, accountable, and transparent building safety framework; and
- The role is part of the wider Inclusive Design Consultant potential scope to be agreed with a client.



Conclusions

- Accessibility under the BSA is part of a wider Inclusive Design remit and provides a far more rigorous structure to work with;
- A well set out scope of works is key; and
- Input is expected now across all design stages in tandem with other key stakeholders, The RIBA overlay provides an excellent structure to help with this.