



WESTQUAY, SOUTHAMPTON

Case study: shopping centre

Since the first day shoppers poured through the doors, back in September 2000, accessibility for all has been a major focus at WestQuay in Southampton. It is now established as one of the leading – and largest – shopping destinations on the South Coast, having received more than 120 million visitors since opening.

The commitment to welcoming visitors with specific access needs includes the physical and capital investment you would expect from a major retail centre, plus a comprehensive staff training programme. It has been rewarded with a clutch of awards and a record of satisfied customers.

All 70 directly-employed WestQuay staff, including a large team of customer service assistants and security staff, take part in Welcome All training. The centre's strategy is to ensure support, assistance and advice are available during trading hours.

WestQuay incorporates two department stores and 100 shops and catering units on a 33-acre site, covering 800,000 sq ft across three floors. Accessibility is a corporate priority for owners Hammerson plc, a FTSE 100 company, which has been developing and managing exciting retail destinations and office buildings in Europe for more than 50 years.



Facilities and services at WestQuay include a comprehensive Shopmobility scheme with a unit in the centre, electronic way-finding for visually impaired people, induction loops for the hard of hearing throughout public mall areas, and 32 lifts around the building.

WestQuay Shopmobility manager, Debbie Mills, has 25+ years' experience in the sector and is responsible for delivering Welcome All training to all WestQuay staff. Debbie said: "We thought it was very important to develop a culture where staff at all levels were confident and equipped to help, and understand that visitors can face many more barriers than physical issues – like being a wheelchair user.

"Welcome All has been very well received, with participants acquiring practical knowledge to help customers with hearing, sight and mobility impairments, with some staff going on to develop further skills in sign language. It has also given them confidence proactively to offer support to our customers."

Success can be measured through growing visitor numbers, high customer satisfaction levels measured through 'mystery shopper' visits, and external recognition. In 2004, WestQuay received Destination Southampton's 'Services to Disability Award' and it won the Southern Daily Echo's 'Access All Areas Readers' Award' in 2006. It was named the overall winner in the British Council of Shopping Centres 'Achieving Customer Excellence Awards' in 2007.



Debbie added: "We have definitely seen improvements in our customer service for visitors with additional needs over the past decade. Welcome All has really helped people understand accessibility issues – and to see where they can make a difference."