

ACTION ON HEARING LOSS

Access to waterborne vessels for people with hearing loss Policy statement

People with hearing loss face numerous information and communication challenges when travelling by waterborne vessel. In extreme cases people with hearing loss have been refused travel. Accessibility at ports and on board ships must be improved through the use of equipment such as hearing loops and visual information systems. Staff training in deaf awareness would help to improve communication and raise awareness of the barriers that people face.

Introduction

This policy statement outlines the main issues for people with hearing loss when travelling by waterborne vessel. It sets out our stand on the issues and suggests what actions need to be taken to improve access to waterborne vessels for people with hearing loss.¹ This policy statement covers access to all passenger waterborne vessels, including ferries, boats, ships and cruise ships.

We use the term 'people with hearing loss' to refer to people who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing throughout.

Background

The Equality Act (2010)² covers access to ports and terminals, but not on board the vessel. The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) has published voluntary guidelines, but the response from ship and ferry companies has been mixed.

European regulations on the rights of passengers when travelling by sea or inland waterway came in to force in 2012. The regulation aims to provide disabled people with the same opportunities to travel by ferry and cruise ship as they have in other transport sectors across the EU. They guarantee people rights to assistance at no extra charge, both in the port and on board, as well as the right to expect non-discriminatory treatment. The regulations include requirements relating to the carriage of recognised assistance dogs, communicating essential information in accessible formats and disability awareness training for staff.

Access to waterborne vessels is an issue for people with hearing loss. We have received several reports from people with hearing loss who have been refused a booking for a cruise because of their hearing loss. We have also received numerous letters of complaint from unhappy customers of cruises, highlighting issues such as loop systems not available or not working, evacuation procedures and other information given audibly only, and no visual emergency alarms.

¹ Please note that, like many policy documents, this statement reflects the issues relevant at the time of writing. Over time this may be subject to change, such as new legislation, and we may review and amend this document.

² Previously the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1995)

Evidence

In our 2008 annual survey we asked our members questions about transport and found that 15% of respondents had travelled by ferry in the past year. Of these:

- 10% said that it was difficult to find out information about their journey before travelling
- 24% said that it was difficult to find out information during their journey

Recommendations

In addition to the issues discussed in the general public transport policy statement, Action on Hearing Loss would like to see the following:

- An end to people with hearing loss being refused bookings for cruise ships on account of their disability.
- All staff, both on land and on water, to be disability and deaf aware.
- Real-time visual information in lobbies, waiting rooms and other relevant public areas. Information should include up-to-date journey details and notify passengers of any audible announcements.
- Hearing loop systems fitted throughout both ports and ships, which are clearly advertised, switched on and regularly tested. If broken they must be repaired as soon as reasonably possible and information displayed notifying the alternatives available.
- Glass barriers at ticket and information points create communication difficulties for people who need to lipread; if glass barriers are considered necessary, they should be non-reflective and kept clean to ensure easy lipreading.
- Good lighting for lipreading and safety.
- Visual emergency alarms throughout.
- All written information should be in plain English, including timetables, and fire and evacuation procedures.
- Written fare information, and a price display at all tills.
- Public telephones should include a volume control and an inductive coupler, and a textphone should also be available.
- All audible announcements should be spoken by someone who has been trained and is clearly understandable.
- The acceptance and acknowledgement of hearing dogs as assistance dogs.

References

Annual Survey (2008) RNID

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/membersurvey

Department for Transport

www.dft.gov.uk

Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disabled-persons-transport-advisory-committee>