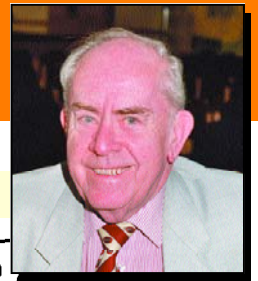


Talking of Grading...



by GEOFF WRIGHT



Since last October there have been significant changes in the law to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) this being effective from the first of that month. These changes, like many other changes in law, are not always widely published and often many of our membership may not be up to speed on what is required by them to stay within the law.

Basically these changes are covered by the excellent information which is available on the website www.disability.gov.uk/dda/employers and is freely viewable. However, not everyone has immediate access to such information so I thought that in this issue I would attempt to provide some insight into how those changes **might** affect some of you.

The website makes a simple enough statement when it says **'It's time to get your business ready'** and poses the following questions:-

Do you provide goods or services to the public? and

Do you employ fewer than fifteen people?

Should the answer to either of these questions be 'yes' then you need to know about those important changes, which came about to the DDA on the 1st October 2004. These changes **may** affect the way you treat your staff and drivers and **possibly** the way you provide goods and services to your customers.

There are two important changes that you need to know about -

Changes if you are an **employer** and

Changes if you a **provider of goods, facilities or services** and you need to start planning for these changes **now**.

It is not my intention to attempt to cover every aspect of these changes but more to remind those of you who employ fifteen or more people that you already have existing duties under the DDA but if you are unsure about these duties you should arrange to visit the **Disability Rights Commission** website at www.drc-gb.org which has many useful menu links.

The fundamental aim of the Disability Discrimination Act is to end the discrimination that disabled people face and to afford the same opportunities to them as are available to able persons. The Act gives them those important benefits so that they may enjoy equal rights of access to employment and premises as well as the everyday services that others take for granted.

From the above date all providers of goods and services (service providers) **may** have to provide these services in an alternative way or ensure physical access for disabled people.

In this industry there would appear to be very few cases where disabled **customers** require to have access to the



premises of the company who is providing the services of Private Hire since the majority of the bookings concerned with such services are usually pre-booked either by telephone, e-mail or FAX thus eliminating the need to visit the operator's premises.

Experience has taught us that the disabled fraternity are very dignified and generally make their own **private arrangements** for such transportation and in most cases are regular customers of the company providing the service in question. In such cases the Operator will have a purpose built vehicle or vehicles **which are fully equipped with the important essentials** for the related journey.

With the Graded Private Hire Companies long established **Networking Agreement** which includes companies who specialise in disabled transportation, it is usually possible for a company without such facilities to be able to recommend another Networked Company who could provide the required transportation at a similar cost.

Some of our membership do in fact engage the services of disabled persons in their workplaces and have already provided all the necessary changes to fully meet the requirements of the DDA, with particularly attention to access and toilet facilities. With regard to access for the travelling public the matter of wheelchair accessibility might prove a lot more difficult where the Operator's premises are leased or virtually impossible to modify. I am minded to think of where the operations are undertaken from basements or first floor areas. I would have to presume that some form of dispensation exemption would be granted in such circumstances.

I hope that this article will serve to prompt you to look further into the DDA to check that you are keeping within in the law when it comes to your own activities and in concluding would draw your attention to a publication which is issued free of charge by **The Public Carriage Office** entitled **"Getting it Right - A guide to disability etiquette"** their Form 4306 relates. This is a very well thought out publication and a copy should be provided to every Private Hire driver as it covers many aspects of the treatment of disabled, blind and partially sighted persons.

Geoff Wright