Incorporating accessibility and Universal Design at the Central Bank of Ireland to ensure the built environment and services are accessible to all

Liam McMunn

Central Bank of Ireland
Ireland

Universal Design in the built environment
Organisation background

The Central Bank of Ireland (the Bank) primary objectives are set out in Irish legislation and include:

- Contributing to the formulation of Eurosystem monetary policy.
- Mandating domestic and European legislation to contribute to financial stability in Ireland and at euro area and EU levels.
- As the regulator of financial service providers and markets in Ireland, the Bank has to ensure that the best interests of consumers are protected.
- Ensuring that regulated firms are financially sound and safely managed.

https://www.centralbank.ie/about/role-of-the-central-bank
Challenges

We recognized that our staff and visitors may have had difficulty accessing our buildings, services and the information that we provide.

• Existing facilities were built to old standards.

• The needs of employees and visitors needed to be considered more routinely.

• Staff awareness of Universal Design could be improved.
Opportunities

We recognised that there were a number of opportunities to improve accessibility:

• An **Access Officer** was appointed to help improve accessibility and awareness.
• **“Fusion” Programme** to design and move to new headquarters.
• **Senior management** were committed to making changes in where and how we worked.
• **Bank staff** welcomed any improvements in Universal Design and accessibility.
• **Corporate Social Responsibility** – creation of a more inclusive building and organisation.
Innovation (1 of 3)

We recognised that Universal Design needed to be addressed under three headings:

- Strategic policies and action plan – Services accessibility.
- Design, build and fit-out – Inclusive building and services.
- Operations - Events, training, facilities management.

The big question – How to address?

We did this by....
Innovation (2 of 3)

• Engaging an independent Universal Design Consultant.
• Incorporating Universal Design from early stages of the project (e.g. Universal Design Reports were prepared).
• Training all project managers in Universal Design principles to help inform more decisions.
• Involving staff members with disabilities throughout the design and construction process (e.g. focus groups).
• Ongoing reviews of different design elements throughout the construction phase to ensure good practice and Universal Design requirements were met.
Innovation (3 of 3)

• Imbedding Universal Design into the procurement process e.g. furniture, workstations and IT equipment.

• Creating awareness raising videos, Disability Awareness Training, Departmental workshops, staff meetings.

• Including Universal Design elements in Induction Manuals (e.g. Public Transport, key universal design facilities).
Impact (1 of 2)

• Significant Universal Design improvements to office design through:

  • Accessible parking and set-down areas.
  • Reception desks with split-level counters and hearing enhancement.
  • Waiting and collaboration areas to accommodate diverse users.
  • Floor and door design providing visual and tactile contrast, vision panels, easy operation and generous width.
  • Large “smart” lifts with good signage, clear controls, light floor finishes, contrasting handrails and half-height mirrors.
Impact (2 of 2)

- **Improved awareness** amongst staff and the public.
- Prompted the establishment of **BankAbility network**.
- On-going commitment to improve accessibility and Universal Design **across all services**.
- **National recognition**.
- Positive feedback from staff on usability of the new offices – “The building at North Wall Quay has removed all of the barriers to accessibility and usability, I can now navigate my workplace fully independently.”
The Next Steps

• Access Policy and Universal Design/Accessibility Action Plan.

• Consultation with end users to make additional accessibility improvements as we “live” in the new offices.

• Additional Staff Training.

• BankAbility network.

• Early engagement with Project Teams procuring equipment or developing services and websites.

• Monitoring, reporting and continuously improving accessibility and Universal Design.