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Pareisse is an inclusive design and strategic change management specialist who over the last 10 years, has dedicated herself to advocating for designing experiences and environments that celebrate the diversity of humanity. She is a member of the London City Airport and London Legacy Development

Corporation (LLDC) accessibility panels, where she uses her lived experiences to advise on creating equitably accessible and inclusive spaces for all, with a particular focus on neurodiversity.

Pareisse project led the industry development of the Inclusive Design Overlay to the RIBA Plan of Work and is a member of the International Association of Accessibility Professionals, Access Association UK, and Neurodiversity in Planning. She is currently leading the accessibility and inclusive design advisory discipline at global engineering firm, Mott MacDonald.

EMBEDDING INCLUSIVE DESIGN INTO PROJECTS: THE IMPACT OF THE INCLUSIVE DESIGN OVERLAY TO THE RIBA PLAN OF WORK

By:

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INTRODUCTION

The design of our built environment and infrastructure has a powerful influence on the quality of people's lives. All such designs can either embrace, connect people, and foster a sense of belonging or restrict people with design failures that create boundaries, barriers, safety risks and feelings of insecurity.

As designers, we have an incredible opportunity and weighty responsibility to create built-environments that truly welcome everyone, regardless of their characteristics or identity, such as: age, disability, gender, neurodiversity, sex, health conditions, race, ethnicity, religion or belief, pregnancy, maternity or paternity status, carer status, and more. By intentionally weaving inclusive design into project delivery, stakeholders, design teams, and contractors can create spaces that celebrate the diversity of humankind.

WHAT IS THE INCLUSIVE DESIGN OVERLAY TO THE RIBA PLAN OF WORK?

The Inclusive Design Overlay to the RIBA Plan of Work (RIBA IDO) provides a robust framework that helps stakeholders integrate inclusive design at every stage of a project, and celebrated its 2-year anniversary of publication in July 2025.

This guidance is the first of its kind to define the key activities that different built-environment practitioners can take to embed inclusive design good practice activities, principles and standards into the design and construction project RIBA Work Stages. These stages are set out in the Royal Institute of British Architects Plan of Work Stages and followed by the majority built-environment professionals in the UK (see [RIBA Plan of Work](#)).

The Inclusive Design Overlay was developed over three years through research and workshops with input from over 100 professionals representing technical expertise from across 25 built-environment professions; from architects, to engineers, project managers, access and inclusive design consultants, asset managers and more, and is the first industry-coordinated technical framework for delivering inclusive design.

The guidance sets out how different project roles can play their part in delivering these activities and includes:

- **Client (commissioning entity for a project)**

- **Project Management Team** (part of the Client Team, the Project Management Team is generally involved with the overall planning and coordination of a project from inception to completion, enabling completion on time, within cost and to required quality and inclusion standards. This can include a project manager, cost consultants, contract administrators, information managers etc.)
- **Design Team** (is responsible for the design of the building, for producing the information required to manufacture and construct it. Anyone who designs, engineers or contributes advice or information will be used as part of the design process and needs to be in the Design Team).
- **Construction Team** (The contractor is the organisation traditionally responsible for the construction of the development. The Construction Team is responsible for manufacturing, assembling, or constructing a building, including the logistics and contractual relationships connected with this.
- **Asset Management Team** (The Asset Management Team, also known as the Facilities Management Team, are responsible for developing, operating, maintaining, upgrading and disposing of an asset using the most effective and efficient means).

These activities are supported by a technical Inclusive Design Lead or Inclusion Champion.

- **Inclusive Design Lead** (The Inclusive Design Consultant will typically facilitate the effective implementation of inclusive design in partnership with the wider Project Team. They will become part of the Design Team and are required to ensure

environments are designed to be accessible and usable for all people, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, gender, faith, and other protected characteristics).

- **Inclusion Champion (It is recognised that on smaller-sized projects, an Inclusion Champion might be better suited to the project budget, and can be identified from within the Client, Design Team or any of the wider project roles. The Inclusion Champion will then take on responsibility for raising standards for diversity, access, and inclusion throughout the project).**

Together, these roles comprise the Project Team.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

From the outset, for instance, the client can be involved at RIBA Work Stages 0 to 1, defining their inclusive design vision and desired outcomes in the Project Brief, and Inclusive Design Strategy. They can set aside a dedicated budget to deliver dedicated inclusive design activities and, in partnership with the Project Management Team, appoint an Inclusive Design Lead.

Working with the Inclusive Design Lead, the Client can undertake an equality impact assessment and an inclusive design audit to understand the potential impacts of the project on people and communities (such as the protected characteristics listed under the

Equality Act 2010 and beyond, such as neurodiversity) and mobilise a lived-experience user group for regular engagement.

The Project Team engages regularly with lived experience user groups throughout Stages 2-6, testing and co-creating their designs throughout the project lifecycle.

The Design Team and Construction Team in Stage 5 can work together alongside the Inclusive Design Lead to conduct an inclusive design audit of the environment, ensuring the environment is accessible for both end users and their teams on site, as planned.

At Work Stages 5 to 7, the Asset Management Team can develop the Building Manuals and Post Occupancy Evaluation Surveys with contributions from across the Project Team to capture the building accessibility and inclusion arrangements and features, and to gather feedback on it's success.

A review at the end of each stage allows different team members to report back to the Client on how the aims of the Inclusive Design Strategy have been addressed. This is known as the Inclusive Design Outcome Review.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF USING THE OVERLAY?

Inclusivity and accessibility should be fundamental aspects of good design, and it raises the bar by encouraging Project Teams to think

about inclusive design beyond application of minimum standards such as Building Regulations, to applying inclusive design best-practice standards and guidance informed by lived experience, research, and expertise. Applying inclusive design thinking as a practice in the spirit of the [RIBA Inclusion Charter](#), which calls for a commitment to "embedding inclusive design in all projects, contributing to the development of inclusive environments" (Action No.5 Royal Institute of British Architects, Inclusion Charter).

The inclusive design overlay puts people at the centre of the project. It brings together every Project Role to think intentionally about the project impact and design needs on the people designing, using and maintaining it.

It encourages Project Teams to integrate inclusive design as a core part of a project, in the same way we might for sustainability, health, and safety. No longer delivered in silo or as an add-on, but woven into the fabric of the project to create a good design process and positive social outcomes.

For clients, inclusive design can lead to measurably higher levels of user satisfaction and reduce the likelihood of costly adjustments post-completion.

For contractors and asset managers, adopting these principles early can streamline construction phases and prepare facilities teams with key information for incorporation into the Building Manual by pre-

empting issues related to accessibility and usability and identifying opportunities to mitigate the barriers.

For architects, the Overlay offers a structured approach to creating resilient, inclusive environments that anticipate the needs of a broader user base, emphasising when to use inclusive design, technical experts and consulting lived-experience user groups throughout.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The event marking two years since the launch of the RIBA Inclusive Design Overlay was held in July 2025 and brought together hundreds of built-environment professionals and practitioners at the conference held at the Institution of Civil Engineers and online.

The event was formed around two panel discussions focused on the implementation and impact of the inclusive design overlay in the wider built environment, and the case studies of the Inclusive Design Overlay in action. From clients, architects, developers, and inclusive design and accessibility experts, we have learned how the overlay has already played an essential role in creating inclusive designs and spaces and influencing industry change.

We heard from clients such as Transport for London, Heathrow Airport, University College London, Enfield Council, East West Rail talking about what they are doing to drive inclusive design excellence in practice and on projects. We learnt about their own

application of the inclusive design overlay guidance into their organisational ways of working, adding requirements to apply the Inclusive Design Overlay into their procurement process and project delivery. We heard from design teams and asset managers on the benefits and importance of having inclusive design specialists involved throughout the project lifecycle and much more. We reflected on how everyone can and should have a part to play in shaping inclusive and accessible environments, and the importance of bringing all team members and practitioners to the table equitably to deliver this.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

The Conference was developed by RIBA with the support of myself and the UK Built Environment Inclusive (B.E) Group represented by eight leading professional bodies, including the Chartered Institute of Building, the Institution of Civil Engineers, The Landscape Institute, Royal Institute of British Architects, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, and the Royal Town Planning Institute, The Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT) and The Chartered Institution of Civil Engineering Surveyors (CICES). This group has formed a collective commitment to advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) with all CEO's and Diversity and Inclusion Leaders of these organisations signing a new five-year memorandum of understanding.

The Diversity and Inclusion Directors and CEO's of the B.E Inclusive Group chaired roundtable discussions in-between the panels with in-

person attendees at the event, asking questions such as ‘What have you done, or seen, to promote the Inclusive Design Overlay?’, ‘What can be done to get more buy-in from clients and delivery teams at earlier stages?’, ‘What lessons learned can you share?’, ‘What could the industry do to promote this guidance as good practice?’

The ideas discussed have been taken away by the B.E. Inclusive Group to facilitate further industry-wide adoption of the inclusive design overlay and to identify opportunities to do more together to advance accessibility and inclusion in the built environment. Attendees left with personal and collective commitments to do the same.

To help the built-environment industry globally, the RIBA is capturing the case studies of projects that have applied the overlay and will be presenting these on RIBA’s website, architecture.com, in the very near future for anyone to learn from, apply and ask questions about.

For me, as a project that started out as an idea in 2019 with a key steering group member, Jenny McLaughlin from Heathrow, I couldn’t be more excited and proud of what we, with the help of the industry, have achieved to create a guidance that has enabled us all to think about inclusive and accessible design as a fundamental part of shaping sustainable and resilient environments, but also as a joyful responsibility we have the privilege to deliver, together.

You can download the [Inclusive Design Overlay to the RIBA Plan of Workhere](#), and submit any case studies you have, [here](#).