Written response to the recommendations from VisitScotland

1. INTRODUCTION

VisitScotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Equal Opportunities Follow-up Inquiry into the report *Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities*.

VisitScotland is committed to complying with its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and associated legislation. In 2006 we published our Disability Equality Scheme which is available on our corporate website, [www.visitscotland.org](http://www.visitscotland.org). The first annual review of this Scheme is due for publication shortly, a copy of which will be forwarded to the Committee for information. In the meantime, a copy of the existing Scheme is attached with this response.

During 2007 our approach to disability equality has developed. A major factor in raising the priority that we give to equality has been the advice and involvement that we have received from a panel of disabled people set up through the Scottish Disability Equality Forum. Disability equality has now been established as a key business topic for our internal operational plans.

In responding to this follow-up inquiry, VisitScotland has limited its response to the recommendations of particular relevance to the organisation.

2. RESPONSE TO RELEVANT RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommendation 72: The Committee recommends that VisitScotland take immediate steps to increase service provision to disabled visitors.*

As the marketing agency for Scotland, VisitScotland has responsibility for five core activities:

1. to give strategic direction to the industry;
2. to market Scotland and all of Scotland’s tourism assets to all parts of the world to attract visitors;
3. to provide information – and inspiration – to visitors and potential visitors to enable them to get the best of a visit to Scotland;
4. to provide quality assurance to visitors and quality advice to industry partners to ensure the industry delivers to meet – or exceed – visitors’ expectations; and
5. to promote partnerships with – and across – the wider industry to ensure we all reap the economic benefits of collective effort.

Bearing in mind the above core activities, VisitScotland has only a limited influence on service provision to disabled visitors. Our only direct influence is through the development of our information services, whether premises, publications or electronic media. As the Committee will be aware from our previous evidence, we have already taken a number of steps to ensure our information is more accessible, including publication of our main guide in CD-
Audio format. In respect of our premises, we are currently conducting a review of accessibility of all our Tourist Information Centres. Improved accessibility has already been achieved through new premises in Arbroath and refurbishment at Blairgowrie. We have also secured capital funding to allow major upgrading work throughout our network in 2008-09, with improvements to accessibility being a priority.

Indirectly, as part of our role in providing strategic direction and providing quality advice to industry partners, VisitScotland does strive to encourage increased service provision. As the Committee will be aware from our previous evidence, VisitScotland’s corporate website contains a dedicated section on the requirements of the DDA. In addition, we have distributed 5000 copies of the DRC Mini-Guide for serviced and self-catering tourism SMEs to businesses in Scotland. We regularly update this guidance through electronic bulletins and newsletters to businesses and through the face-to-face contact that our staff – primarily our Quality Advisers – have with businesses.

Recommendation 73: The Committee recommends that, in order to make Scotland a more accessible visitor destination and to increase participation in the Disability Access Scheme, VisitScotland should review the Scheme. This review should include the symbols used, with a view to incorporating it, or another appropriate scheme for all attraction and accommodation providers, into a revised single quality assurance scheme.

We have carried out an internal review of our scheme in consultation with the Disability Rights Commission. This review has considered the practices adopted by other national UK tourism agencies. In particular, we have considered the VisitWales scheme which places more of an onus on businesses to provide information on the measures that they have taken to provide accessibility. Our aim is to present a new approach to disability access to our Board early next year.

Recommendation 74: In order to increase provision of services to disabled people, the Committee recommends that the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport and VisitScotland should develop, as part of the tourism review, a strategy to promote Scotland as an accessible destination to potential disabled visitors both from home and abroad.

VisitScotland’s marketing activity is based on the results of extensive consumer research. As the Committee will be aware from our previous submission, this research led to the development of a product portfolio which segments our marketing activity on the basis of what there is to see and do in Scotland as follows:

- Freedom (including touring / wildlife)
- Active (including golf, cycling, walking, adventure sports)
- Cities
- Culture and heritage (including festivals, genealogy, food and drink)
- Business tourism
In 2006, VisitScotland conducted a further, extensive research study, specifically in relation to the UK market. This has allowed us to segment our activity in a more targeted way according to the age, income, lifestyle, holiday patterns and geographic locations of potential visitors.

As a result of our research, VisitScotland remains of the view that this is the most appropriate way to target potential visitors to Scotland. However, we are working with the Disability Group to explore ways in which our marketing activity can be made more accessible and relevant to disabled people. We are in the process of developing a full website accessibility standard compliant with the AA standard. This is now part of all new developments and can be seen on the most recent site http://white.visitscotland.com.

Recommendation 75: In order to ensure that disabled visitors have a positive experience in Scotland, the Committee recommends that Disability Equality Training be included in training action plans as core training to all tourist attraction and accommodation staff and the Committee notes the new tourism framework provides an opportunity for this to be achieved.

Following publication of the Equal Opportunities Committee Report Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities, VisitScotland developed an HR action plan to demonstrate its commitment to the Disability Equality Duty. This focuses on actions required to improve how VisitScotland recruits, retains and develops employees as well as increasing awareness of and commitment to disability issues across all employees in the organisation. From a training perspective, we aim to review our current provision of learning and training opportunities in relation to disability awareness with a view to introducing a more consistent approach than currently exists. In the meantime, the pre-season training for seasonal Customer Service Advisers in the Tourist Information Centres (i.e. visitor facing staff) has been revamped to include consistent information and awareness about disability issues.

In respect of training for tourism businesses, responsibility for this lies with the Enterprise Networks, not with VisitScotland. We do, however, work with both the Enterprise Networks and People 1st, the Sector Skills Council for Tourism, to influence their training programmes.

Summary

VisitScotland is committed to ensuring that disability equality issues are taken into account in all its own activity. In addition, we strive to influence both the industry and other public sector agencies with responsibility for tourism related issues where possible.

VisitScotland
7 December 2007