

Design Manual on Universal Accessibility

Regulations 72 and 73, the Third and Fourth Schedules of the Building (Planning) Regulations (B(P)R) set out the statutory requirements for barrier free access and facilities (collectively referred to as “barrier free access”) for persons with a disability and elderly-friendly design in private buildings. The statutory design requirements and recommended best practices for barrier free access as well as the recommended elderly-friendly design guidelines were incorporated in the Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 2008 (first published in 2008 with the latest edition published in 2025) (DMBFA).

2. Following the Consultancy Study for Enhancement of the Accessibility of Physical Environment in Hong Kong commissioned by the Labour and Welfare Bureau, which recommended the revision of the DMBFA and, where practicable, the promotion of universal design concepts, the Buildings Department (BD) commissioned a consultancy study in 2024 to undertake a holistic review of the DMBFA, with a view to enhancing the design standards to align with the latest needs and international trends, and ensuring that concepts of universal design are incorporated in a way that is feasible and pragmatic in the local context. The DMBFA has therefore been revamped and expanded to incorporate universal design concepts with the objective of creating a more inclusive and accessible built environment. This culminates in the formulation of the Design Manual on Universal Accessibility (DMUA), which aims to promote an inclusive built environment that is accessible and functional for a broader spectrum of the community.

Application

3. Authorized Persons (AP) and Registered Structural Engineers (RSE) should refer to regulations 72 and 73, the Third and Fourth Schedules of the B(P)R for the statutory requirements for barrier free access for persons with a disability and elderly-friendly design in private buildings.

4. Save for the provisions already covered by regulations 72 and 73, the Third and Fourth Schedules of the B(P)R, the requirements under the DMUA are, at present, advisory in nature. For those obligatory provisions stipulated in the DMUA that are not yet covered by regulations 72 and 73, the Third and Fourth Schedules of the B(P)R, the BD will propose inclusion of such provisions in the B(P)R through legislative amendments. In the interim, AP/RSE are encouraged to adopt the DMUA as far as practicable and to provide feedback on its application to the BD.

/Exemption ...

Exemption from or Modification of Regulations 72 and 73 of B(P)R

5. In an application for approval of plans for a new building or for the alterations and additions to an existing building, barrier free access and elderly-friendly design in compliance with regulations 72 and 73, the Third and Fourth Schedules of the B(P)R should be clearly shown on the submitted plans in accordance with regulation 8(1) of the Building (Administration) Regulations.

6. There may be occasions where a development proposal or an alteration and addition proposal cannot fully comply with the requirements stipulated under the regulations. Where it is satisfied that special circumstances exist, applications for exemption from, or modification of, such requirements will be considered by the Building Authority (BA) on the individual merits of each case. Examples of such special circumstances include situations in which the physical location or immediate surroundings of a development site render compliance impracticable, the applicant has no control over the initial access or common parts of an existing building, or where compliance would impose unjustifiable hardship on the applicant or any other person.

7. Where alteration and addition works are proposed to an existing building without barrier free access or elderly-friendly design hence not meeting the requirements stipulated under the regulations, paragraph 11.6 of the DMUA sets out practical alternatives to guide alteration and addition or improvement works in existing buildings where spatial or structural constraints are present.

Advisory Committee on Barrier Free Access and Building Committee

8. In considering applications for exemption from or modification of the regulations, the BA has established the Advisory Committee on Barrier Free Access (ACBFA) and the Building Committee (BC) to provide a forum for the deliberation of proposals related to barrier free access and elderly-friendly design respectively. The BA will take into account the advice tendered by the ACBFA and the BC when determining such applications.

Technical Committee on Design Manual on Universal Accessibility

9. With the revamp and expansion of the design manual to promote universal design concepts, the extant Technical Committee on Design Manual: Barrier Free Access will be expanded and renamed as the Technical Committee on Design Manual on Universal Accessibility to, among others, collect and consider views and feedback from the building sector, the rehabilitation sector and relevant stakeholder organisations arising from their practical experience in the use of the DMUA.

(HO Chun-hung)
Building Authority

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