

# Quality Assured seal for Visitor Attractions

## Guidance Notes



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## **Introduction to the Guidance Notes**

The aim of these Guidance Notes is primarily to explain in further detail the requirements to obtain the Quality Assured seal for Visitor Attractions.

At the same time, however, they also aim to serve as a guide to Best Practice for all visitor attractions aiming to provide a quality visitor experience.

The requirements of the scheme are split into 3 parts:

- i. The minimum entry requirements;
- ii. The priority areas of the Quality Criteria (3 sections); and
- iii. Other areas of the Quality Criteria (12 sections).

Each section (and each criterion therein) is explained in these Guidance Notes in terms of the key points which will be assessed during the audit and, where appropriate, a clear indication of how points are assigned is also given.

## Minimum Entry Requirements

Attractions must comply with each of the eight minimum entry requirements in order to obtain certification.

**i. The attraction must have adequate cover for third party liability.**

Some sort of documentation will be required as evidence, such as a copy of the insurance policy.

**ii. The attraction operates at minimum 20 hours per week, spread over at least 3 days.**

This will be assessed by checking the opening hours of the attraction.

**iii. The attraction has a functional website that contains at minimum the following features: General info about the attraction, Opening hours, Prices, Directions, Languages and Contact details.**

All attractions must have a website which contains this basic information.

**iv. Brochures must also contain the above-stated information OR The attraction commits to including the above-stated information in future brochures.**

Brochures, as opposed to a website, are not a compulsory item. However when these are available they must also contain the basic details as outlined above. If the attraction is not compliant at the time of the audit, it must commit to rectifying its position at the first opportunity.

**v. The website must additionally contain a detailed Access Statement.**

An Access Statement is an essential piece of information for people with a disability who are considering visiting the attraction.

The Access Statement should describe in detail to what extent the attraction is accessible, going through each stage of the visitor experience. This should start with the pre-arrival stage followed by an explanation of the different zones and facilities of the attraction. These would typically include the parking area, main entrance, indoor areas of the attraction (including details on available interpretation) and toilets; retail outlets, catering outlets, gardens and other facilities should also be included as appropriate.

It is also recommended to outline any future plans related to accessibility and, where appropriate, the expected date of completion should also be stated.

For detailed information on how to compile an Access Statement, please visit [www.mta.com.mt](http://www.mta.com.mt).

**vi. Front-line staff must be adequately trained.**

Front-line staff must be adequately trained according to their area of work. For example, cashiers and front desk staff should be trained in areas such as customer care, basic courses of foreign languages and basic information on the

attraction. In-house guides, on the other hand, will need to have in-depth knowledge of the attraction and more specific training in foreign languages.

It is recommended that records are kept listing the type of training conducted and which members of staff attended each training programme. These records may be viewed during the audit.

Knowledge of employees' qualifications and any training attended on a voluntary basis or prior to employment is also important.

**vii. The attraction collects, reviews and takes action on visitor feedback.**

There are several methods through which an attraction may collect feedback from visitors, such as written or online questionnaires, a guestbook, etc.

A system should be in place whereby the feedback is regularly reviewed and, where necessary, action taken to improve the visitor experience.

The feedback will need to be viewed as part of the audit.

**viii. Compliance with the Malta Travel and Tourism Services Act and subsidiary legislation (where applicable).**

Evidence of any operating licences should be provided.

## Quality Criteria

In each of the 15 sections of the Quality Criteria, attractions are rated used the following scale:

- 1 point for poor quality
- 2 points for acceptable quality
- 3 points for good quality
- 4 points for very good quality
- 5 points for excellent quality

Attractions must achieve the following scores in order to obtain the Quality Assured seal:

Sections 1 – 3: A minimum rating of 3 points per criterion, with the exception of 1 criterion which can be given a rating of 2 points. 1 point (poor quality) is not accepted as a sufficient level of quality for any of the criteria in sections 1 to 3.

Sections 4 – 15: A minimum rating of 1 or 2 points per criterion must be achieved. This is indicated in the criteria list by means of shaded grey cells. In addition, the attraction must obtain a minimum score of 60% of the applicable criteria in sections 4 to 15.

## **Section 1 - Quality of content**

### **1.1 Authenticity**

The content of the attraction should be authentic, especially when the nature of the attraction is educational or informative. Any exceptions (e.g. replicas) should be justified and visitors should be made aware.

### **1.2 Relevance to the type of attraction**

All content should be relevant to the theme of the attraction in order to match visitor expectations.

The range of content will vary depending on whether the theme is general in nature (e.g. history of Malta) or highly specific (e.g. pre-history of Gozo). Visitors will expect a broad range of content at a broadly-themed attraction, while a smaller range will be expected from attractions covering a more specific theme.

### **1.3 Sequence of visit**

The visitor experience should follow a logical sequence, for example a chronological sequence when explaining the history of an event, although the sequence of the visit is sometimes dictated by the building itself (e.g. churches).

If appropriate, attractions may also choose to have a non-sequential system, i.e. visitors choose their own route around the attraction (or part/s of the attraction). In this case visitors may be given indications as to how best to visit the attraction.

### **1.4 Suitability of lighting**

Effective lighting is important to ensure that the content is clearly visible and sometimes also for conservation reasons. Lighting may also be cleverly used to place focus on certain details or highlights of the attraction. Both the style and level of lighting will be determined by the nature of the attraction.

## **Section 2 - Quality of interpretation**

### **2.1 Suitability of interpretation methods** *(This criterion does not apply to attractions consisting purely of an audio-visual show.)*

Attractions may choose from a variety of interpretation methods. This will depend on several factors (such as the nature of the attraction and the target audience), however the trend is towards more interactive tools. Active participation by visitors is particularly effective in engaging visitors and providing a long-lasting memory of the experience.

### **2.2 Clarity**

Printed material (whether hand-held or on panels) should be easy to read with suitable font, size and colour. Attention should also be paid to design and the quality of materials used. Other visual tools, such as models, should also be of high quality.

All audio interpretation (audio-visuals, audio-guides, fixed point recordings, live commentary, etc.) should have clear sound. Attention should also be paid to volume. The visual element of audio-visual shows should also be of high quality.

### **2.3 Ease of use**

Attention should be given to the way information is presented in order for the interpretation to be most effective. Examples are the effective positioning of information panels in relation to the relevant exhibit, consistency in format and the use of a numbered system.

Printed material containing signs and symbols should be complemented by an explanation of their meanings, either on the same brochure / panel or through separate means.

### **2.4 Interpretation adapted for different users** *(This criterion does not apply to attractions consisting purely of an audio-visual show.)*

Different visitors have different levels of knowledge on specific themes, as well as different levels of interest. Quality attractions should seek to address this by offering different levels of interpretation for visitors to choose from, ranging from basic for the general public, to more detailed for an enthusiast, and in-depth for specialists in the field. It may be feasible for the latter to be available only by request. Staff should be aware of the different levels of interpretation available.

When dealing with non-specialist audiences, it may also be useful to link the information given to experiences or themes familiar to visitors (e.g. 'as big as a football ground') and to point out any links between different parts of the attraction. This makes the adaptation more meaningful for different users.

In addition to different levels of detail, the interpretation may also be offered in different mediums, particularly when targeting young visitors.

#### Indicators:

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Good quality      | - interpretation offered in 2 different ways |
| Very good quality | - interpretation offered in 3 different ways |
| Excellent         | - interpretation offered in more than 3 ways |

### **Section 3 - Value for money**

#### **3.1 The perceived value of the overall visitor experience in relation to its cost**

Value for money takes into account both the financial cost incurred by visitors and the quality of the experience they receive in return.

The more engaging and memorable the experience, the more value visitors will attach to the attraction. Higher entrance fees may therefore be justified and are often also commensurate with the length of visit, any gifts or other materials/services included in the price, etc.

When assessing this criterion, the auditor will also consider any relevant guest feedback.

## **Section 4 - Quality of promotion**

### **4.1 Brochure**

The quality of brochures is determined by several factors, including the intrinsic quality of the paper used, the use of images and the quality of print among other factors. A good quality brochure is one that satisfies all these requirements such that the overall result is an attractive brochure which is at the same time informative.

'Very good' and 'excellent' quality can be achieved by adding variety, for example providing multi-lingual brochures and/or a range of brochures aimed at different segments (such as different age groups).

### **4.2 Website**

A good website is one that is visually attractive and easy to navigate.

'Very good' and 'excellent' quality can be achieved through added features such as virtual tours, videos and multi-lingual websites.

Multi-lingual websites have the advantage of engaging users more deeply, especially those who find difficulty reading a foreign language, while at the same time attracting more potential visitors by tapping into new source markets.

### **4.3 Information at attraction entrance**

The exterior and/or entrance of the attraction (as appropriate) can play a role in attracting passers-by. Hence there should be sufficient information about the attraction available (e.g. general info, prices, available languages, facilities, etc.). The information should be presented in an attractive manner.

## **Section 5 - Accessibility**

### **5.1 Directions**

Road signage is essential for visitors having their own private transport and every effort should be made to provide sufficient directions to the attraction. Road signs are particularly important for attractions located outside the main tourist hubs.

Lack of road signage may be compensated for by providing other assistance to help visitors arrive to the attraction, such as a shuttle service or helpline.

### **5.2 Ease of parking**

Where possible, parking should be available within reasonable distance both for cars and coaches. A 10-15 minute walk from the parking area to the attraction is considered acceptable, while excellent quality refers to a parking area right outside or adjacent to the attraction.

In addition to distance from the attraction, the parking area will also be assessed in terms of adequate provision.

### **5.3 Access by public transport**

Vicinity to a bus stop (i.e. walking distance) will increase the accessibility of the attraction, especially for attractions located outside the main tourist zones. A 10-15 minute walk from a bus stop to the attraction is considered acceptable, while excellent quality refers to a bus stop right outside the attraction.

In addition to distance from the attraction, access by public transport will also be assessed in terms of frequency and links to the main tourist accommodation zones.

### **5.4 Opening hours / days**

More extensive opening hours represent a better quality service as this allows for greater flexibility. Evening tours and extended weekend operations are particularly beneficial both for individual visitors and organised group visits.

### **5.5 Range of languages**

#### Indicators:

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Poor       | - Interpretation offered only in English   |
| Acceptable | - Full interpretation offered only in English complemented by a simpler or reduced version in additional languages |
| Good       | - Full interpretation in 3 foreign languages (i.e. excluding English and Maltese)                                  |
| Very good  | - Full interpretation in 4 foreign languages   |
| Excellent  | - Full interpretation in 5 or more foreign languages   |

In the case of attractions consisting purely of an audio-visual show, a wider range of languages is expected due to the nature of the attraction.

## **Section 6 - Accessibility for disabled people**

### **6.1 Physical Accessibility**

The attraction will be assessed in terms of physical accessibility into all buildings and areas that are part of the attraction, and all the facilities within these buildings and areas (e.g. toilets, cafeteria and gift shop).

The assessment will include a consideration of any obstacles that may hinder the movement of people with reduced mobility (including, but not limited to, wheelchair users) or with visual impairment. Induction loop systems should be installed for those who use hearing-aids.

Every effort should be made to ensure that the entire attraction is accessible. Attractions which are not entirely accessible should compensate for this deficiency through appropriate information / interpretation measures.

For detailed information refer to KNPD's *Access for All* guidelines on [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org).

### **6.2 Access to Information and Communication**

The attraction will be assessed in terms of the way information is presented and communication with visitors is made. Therefore the attraction will be assessed on two main areas: interpretation techniques and the way non-interpretative information is presented.

Examples of interpretation techniques that cater particularly for this target group are:

- Braille guidebooks
- Tactile tours, i.e. allowing visitors to touch the exhibits
- Sign language

Audio-guides are also preferable to printed or other visual material for most people; however printed or other visual material is necessary for people with severe hearing impairment. Audio-guides and audio-visual shows may be suitable for people with partial hearing disabilities, especially when these audio tools are complemented by printed material.

Non-interpretative information (such as site plans or the route around the attraction) should also be printed using appropriate fonts and design in order to cater for people with partial visual impairments. In order to cater for the blind, such information should also be communicated via non-visual means.

Any non-interpretative information that is usually communicated orally should also be available in a non-aural format.

Information should also be available in an easy-to-read / easy-to-understand format for people with intellectual disabilities.

Websites and information accessed via computers on site must be accessible to people who use screen-reading software.

For detailed information refer to KNPD's *Rights Not Charity* manual on [www.knpd.org](http://www.knpd.org).

## **Section 7 - Layout and comfort**

### **7.1 Layout of entrance and exit / ticketing area**

The entrance and exit of the attraction should be planned in a manner that facilitates visitor flow. Special attention should be given to the ticketing area such that queues do not disrupt the experience of other visitors.

### **7.2 Layout of main attraction**

Visitor flow is an important consideration for all attractions. Bottle necks should be avoided as much as possible. Where appropriate, visitors may be directed by means of signage, for example in the case of circular tours. Site plans, especially those which are portable, can also be effective in improving visitor flow as they provide a common direction for all visitors.

### **7.3 Location of facilities**

All facilities (toilets, catering, retail, etc.) should be conveniently located.

### **7.4 Non-interpretative signage**

Non-interpretative signage is important to provide certain information to visitors, for example the location of facilities, directions around the attraction, emergency routes, etc.

All signage should be well-maintained and of good quality. Signs may also be customised to fit the style of the attraction (e.g. pre-historic setting, medieval, baroque, modern, etc.) or even its purpose / theme (e.g. bottle-shaped signs at a winery or brewery).

### **7.5 Comfortable temperature**

A comfortable temperature should be maintained inside the attraction, without disregarding any conservation needs.

Outdoor areas should also be made as comfortable as reasonably possible, for example by providing outdoor heaters in the winter and umbrellas or canopies in the summer.

## **Section 8 – Safety, conservation and security**

### **8.1 Safety of all areas**

Management must ensure that the attraction is free from any health and safety hazards by conducting a risk assessment or through other means as appropriate. It must ensure that all areas of the attraction are safe and any necessary signage in this regard should be available and clear to visitors.

### **8.2 Attention paid to conservation**

Conservation is understood as the protection of heritage for the benefit of current and especially future generations. This implies that resources should be continually well-managed and that a proactive approach is needed, though corrective action may also be necessary at times.

The need for conservation will vary according to the nature of the attraction. In a church or cathedral, for example, the need for conservation may refer to both the exhibits and the building itself, while in other cases only the exhibits may need to be conserved.

The type of conservation measures will also differ from one attraction to another. Conservation of archaeological remains, for example, is entirely different to the conservation of a painting. Irrespective of the subject matter, conservation should always be based on in-depth research and carried out in a professional manner.

### **8.3 Visitor management**

Visitor management refers to strategies that aim to minimise the impact of visitors on the attraction and its content. It may also serve to enhance the visitor experience.

Visitor management can range from tangible interventions (for example limiting the daily of number of visitors to the attraction) to intangible measures (such as encouraging appropriate visitor behaviour).

### **8.4 Level of security**

Attractions should have in place all the appropriate security measures, such as restricted access to certain areas, keeping certain exhibits out of reach, security cameras, presence of staff around the attraction, etc.

## **Section 9 - Quality of catering offer**

### **9.1 Tangibles**

There should be adequate provision of seating for the expected volume of customers. Tables and chairs should be placed at a reasonable distance from each other. Other layout considerations include the positioning of the cash point and/or bar counter as well as any queue management measures.

All crockery, cutlery, glasses, etc., as well as furniture should be of good quality (in addition to clean and well-kept) and appropriate for the attraction.

In order to enhance the visitor experience, catering outlets may be themed to complement the purpose or nature of the attraction.

### **9.2 Menu**

Customers should be informed of the available items either through a menu, a board or other effective means.

Both the quality and presentation of food is important, while menus should also offer variety.

Prices should be clearly displayed.

## **Section 10 - Quality of retail offer**

### **10.1 Tangibles**

Shelving units and other furniture should be placed at a reasonable distance from each other. Other layout considerations include the positioning of the cash point as well as any queue management measures.

All furniture and fittings should be of good quality (in addition to clean and well-kept).

In order to enhance the visitor experience, retail outlets may be themed to complement the purpose or nature of the attraction.

### **10.2 Merchandise**

Merchandise should be varied to include some top quality items in addition to more affordable souvenirs. The stock should also be varied in terms of the type of items available, for example, not limited to books and postcards only. Local items should be identifiable. Specifically produced souvenirs are encouraged.

All prices should be clearly displayed.

## **Section 11 - Other additional services**

### **11.1 Availability**

Attractions that offer other additional services or facilities will gain extra points during the quality audit since these serve to enhance the visitor experience.

Some examples are the provision of a library, availability of Wi-Fi facilities or an internet café, special events, temporary exhibitions, and so on.

### **11.2 Quality**

Where additional services are offered, these will also be assessed in terms of quality.

Where additional services are not available, this criterion is marked as 'Not Applicable' so as not to further penalise the attraction.

## **Section 12 - Quality of service**

### **12.1 Cashiers / Staff at entrance**

Cashiers and other staff members located at the entrance of the attraction have an important role to play in creating a positive first impression. Staff should be well-groomed and of smart appearance. They should offer a warm welcome to visitors and be able to assist them with any queries they may have. Knowledge about the attraction is therefore imperative.

### **12.2 Catering staff**

Catering staff members should also be of smart appearance and have a positive attitude when dealing with customers. They should be efficient in carrying out their tasks and provide a professional service. Menu knowledge is therefore imperative.

### **12.3 Retail staff**

Retail staff members should also be of smart appearance and have a positive attitude when dealing with customers. They should be efficient in carrying out their tasks and provide a professional service. Knowledge about the merchandise is therefore imperative.

### **12.4 Other staff**

Any other staff members should also be of smart appearance, efficient and knowledgeable about the attraction, and should have a positive attitude at all times.

## **Section 13 - Cleanliness & Physical condition**

- 13.1 Exterior / entering the attraction**
- 13.2 Interior (main attraction)**
- 13.3 Toilets**
- 13.4 Catering**
- 13.5 Retail**

All areas of the attraction should be clean at all times. Some effort should also be made to keep the immediate surroundings of the attraction's entrance clean and tidy during attraction opening hours. A cleaning schedule should be kept for all public toilets.

All areas of the attraction should also be kept in a good state. A maintenance programme may be useful to plan regular and occasional maintenance interventions, while any worn-out furniture, fixtures or fittings should be replaced.

## **Section 14 - Quality of toilet facilities**

### **14.1 Adequate provision**

The provision of two toilets (one for males and one for females) is considered the minimum acceptable standard, though exceptions may be given to attractions that cater for small numbers of visitors.

The greater the provision of public toilets, the more points are assigned to the attraction. This is always assessed in relation to the volume of visitors. For example, 4 toilets may be considered good for a large attraction, very good for a medium-sized attraction and excellent in the case of a small attraction.

### **14.2 Amenities**

All the basic amenities should be available at all times (including at minimum toilet paper, hand soap and hand-drying facilities). All amenities should be of good quality.

### **14.3 Baby-changing facilities**

The availability of baby-changing facilities adds value to an attraction and contributes directly towards making the attraction more family-friendly. Baby-changing facilities should be of good quality in addition to being clean and well-kept at all times. Ideally baby-changing facilities should be found in a purpose-specific place, such that they are accessible to both males and females.

## **Section 15 - Sustainable development**

### **15.1 Eco-friendly initiatives**

Eco-friendly initiatives may consist of waste management policies, resource conservation, green procurement, organising eco-related events (e.g. clean-ups, car-sharing initiatives, tree-planting activities, etc.), and many others.

#### Indicators:

Poor	- no environmental initiatives
Acceptable	- basic internal procedures in place
Good	- several internal procedures in place
Very good	- several internal procedures in place including some requiring investment, and communication of such procedures to visitors
Excellent	- participation in or organisation of at least 1 external activity during the period under review, in addition to the above

### **15.2 Community / CSR initiatives**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) may be in the form of employing local people and selling local products, implementing measures to reduce community disruption, donations or fundraising activities to support charitable causes, buying fair-trade products, recruiting people with a disability or from other disadvantaged groups, offering flexible working conditions to employees with young children, providing the opportunity for students to become apprentices, etc.

#### Indicators:

Poor	- no CSR activities
Acceptable	- basic measures in place (employing local people, selling some local products)
Good	- additional measures in place showing some commitment to CSR (e.g. a considerable number of local products for sale and encouraging visitors to purchase these items)
Very good	- a good number of interventions and activities showing strong commitment to CSR
Excellent	- involvement of all staff in CSR activities and several varied interventions showing a strong and continual commitment to CSR