VISITSCOTLAND
QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME
GUIDANCE NOTES FOR
ACTIVITY CENTRES AND
ACTIVITY PROVIDERS
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THE VISITOR ATTRACTION QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME

The VisitScotland Quality Assurance Grading Scheme for Visitor Attractions has been developed in partnership with the industry to provide visitor attractions of all types with a comprehensive, independent, accurate assessment of the quality of experience they are offering across all areas of their business. Industry consultation continues to be a critical component in the ongoing development of the scheme, to ensure it fully meets the needs and ambitions of scheme participants and visitors’ needs and expectations.

The scheme is designed to inspire and encourage improvement within the Visitor Attraction sector, helping every participant achieve their full potential in providing the best possible visitor experience.

Participants in the scheme will receive a grading visit from a Quality & Tourism Advisor (QTA), who will undertake a full assessment of the complete experience offered to visitors. Following the visit bespoke feedback and advice will be offered, based on the QTAs experience and observations. A detailed written report will then be supplied, enabling each scheme participant to clearly see how they have achieved their award, as well as advice on how improvements can be made where appropriate. Visiting hundreds of attractions each year the highly experienced team will share examples of best practice and industry trends.

Participating in the Quality Assurance Grading Scheme and displaying your award speaks volumes to your visitors – it demonstrates you take quality seriously.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE SCHEME
The scheme is open to any attraction, activity provider, activity centre or tour operator that offers a visitor experience.

WHAT IS ASSESSED
The grading visit comprises of an assessment of the quality of the entire visitor experience and takes into account every point of interaction visitor will have when engaging with your business.

The scoring guidelines below give a complete overview of all the elements that are assessed, split into a maximum of 9 key areas.

Please note, this is a quality based scheme and there are no facility requirements within the scheme. This ensures that, regardless of size, any activity centre can achieve a maximum award if they are providing an outstanding visitor experience. If you do not offer certain facilities, e.g. a café or shop, these areas are simply not assessed, with no detrimental impact on your award, providing that the overall experience meets the required standard for the award.
**Pre-arrival** – an assessment of website, digital information provision and booking procedures, along with other promotional material, e.g. brochures.

**Staff – Hospitality & Friendliness** – an assessment of the levels of friendliness shown by staff throughout all areas of the activity centre.

**Staff – Service & Efficiency** – an assessment of the levels of efficiency shown by staff throughout all areas of the activity centre.

**Cleanliness** – an assessment of the levels of cleanliness throughout the activity centre.

**Arrival** – an assessment of the quality of experience when the visitor arrives at the activity centre e.g. initial first impression, appearance of building, quality of signage etc.

**Core Experience** – an assessment of the core offering of your activity centre and how the visitor can engage with it, e.g. the quality of instruction, equipment, changing facilities etc.

**Catering** – an assessment of any catering facilities offered, e.g. menu display, quality and range of produce etc.

**Retailing** – an assessment of any retailing facilities offered, e.g. range and quality of merchandise, how easy it is for the visitor to browse products etc.

**Toilets** – an assessment of the quality and condition of any toilet facilities, e.g. quality of fixtures & fittings, provision of facilities etc.

**SCORING GUIDANCE NOTES**

**PRE-ARRIVAL**

**Website/Print – Ease of Use**

This will assess how useful and easy it is to access the information a visitor will rely on prior to visiting an activity centre. Elements considered:

- How easy it is to identify and find key pieces of information e.g. prices, opening times, make contact and directions.
- The appropriate provision of foreign language information.
- The ease of use of the website in terms of quality of images & legibility of content.
- How easy the website can be viewed on multiple platforms.
Digital / Print – Information Provision

This will assess the ease, accuracy and appropriateness of information made available to a visitor. Elements considered:

- Responding to queries e.g. tone, timeliness and effort made to add value to the original enquiry.
- Accuracy of key information on internet, website and promotional brochure.
- Provision of information for additional target audiences to enjoy their visit.
- Reassurance to visitor through the use of online review and / or known quality accreditations such as QA award.

Directional Advice

This will assess how easy it is for a visitor to find the activity centre and the accuracy of the information provided. Elements considered:

- Comprehensive and accurate online directions.
- The detail and accuracy of mapping.
- The quality and comprehensiveness of official brown signage, if this is used.

Booking Procedure

This will assess how easy it is for a visitor to carry out a booking by any means of communication. Elements considered:

- Comprehensiveness and accuracy of booking instructions with appropriate supporting information easily located on website, e.g. terms and conditions, secure payment facility
- Provision and accuracy of information to avoid any misunderstanding of tour details.
- Promptness and accuracy of receipt of booking confirmation.

STAFF – Hospitality & Friendliness

This will assess the level of hospitality and friendliness shown by staff throughout all stages of the customer journey, i.e. Pre-Arrival Enquiry, Arrival, Core Activity, Retailing and Catering (where appropriate). Elements considered:

- How friendly and pro-active staff members are with visitors. Do they smile, do they welcome the visitor, do they offer assistance etc.
- What efforts are made to create rapport, personalise the experience and exceed visitors’ expectations, at all stages of the experience.
- The extent in which staff will anticipate visitors’ needs and create a positive first impression
STAFF – Service & Efficiency

This will assess the level of service provided by staff throughout all stages of the customer journey, i.e. Pre-Arrival Enquiry, Arrival, Core Activity, Retailing and Catering (where appropriate).
Elements considered:

- Efficiency and effectiveness of all processes within the customer journey.
- Provision of information to ensure visitor understanding and enjoyment of the activity.
- Responsiveness to varying levels of visitor needs & visitor volume.

CLEANLINESS

This will assess all areas that the activity centre has responsibility for maintaining, i.e. admissions and arrival, equipment, catering, retailing and toilets.
Elements considered:

- The levels of cleanliness in all customer facing areas and equipment
- The levels of monitoring undertaken to ensure that standards are being maintained.

ARRIVAL

Appearance of External Grounds & Car Park

This will assess the condition and maintenance of the grounds and parking areas that fall under the activity centre’s responsibility. Elements considered:

- Parking provision.
- Condition of parking area with evidence of ongoing maintenance.
- Appearance of grounds and provision, quality and use of additional features such as planting, seating and lighting.
Appearance of Buildings

This will assess the intrinsic quality and condition of the Reception building/area, taking into account the age of the building and listed building restrictions. Elements considered:

- Build quality and maintenance.
- Use of enhancing features such as lighting, banners, architectural features etc.

Signing

This will assess the provision of signage highlighting all the main points and services of the activity centre. Elements considered:

- Sign quality and maintenance.
- The visibility and consistency of corporate branding.
- The detail and accuracy of information and the ease in understanding by all visitors.

Price Display

This will assess the accuracy and detail of pricing information and its visibility to visitors at all times. Elements considered:

- Prominence of price displays and the clarity and detail of information
- All the relevant platforms considered and used to promote pricing.

Visitor Flow Management

This will assess the layout of the main arrival areas (e.g. admissions desk, reception area or ticket desk) to allow the free and unobstructed movement of visitors. Elements considered:

- Positioning of and ease in identifying the reception desk and clarity given on the assigned waiting area for visitors to congregate before the activity begins.
- Queueing space and measures in place to avoid bottle necks / congestions.
- Provision of shelter and quality and condition of any shelter, if starting point of activity is outdoors.

Appearance of Staff

This will assess the appearance and smartness of staff, how identifiable staff are and how they enhance the image of the company through the wearing of a uniform. Elements considered:

- Quality and condition of staff clothing and presentation of staff.
- Consistency of uniforms worn, including methods of personal identification, throughout all areas of the activity centre.
Décor / Maintenance
This will assess the quality and condition of décor and maintenance of all elements upon arrival in the activity centre. Elements considered:

- Windows, doors, walls and flooring and fixtures and fittings.
- Heating, lighting and ventilation fitments and the appropriate provision of these elements.

CORE EXPERIENCE

Orientation
This will assess the information provision to allow a logical and natural progression through the activity centre. Elements considered:

- Ease of understanding the best route around the activity centre.
- Frequency of orientation information provision, e.g. is information provided at all key areas.
- Methods used to deliver orientation information.

Visitor Flow Management
This will assess the ease of travel through the main areas of the activity centre. Elements considered:

- Ease of access throughout and managing any likely congested areas.
- Provision in place to allow visitors viewpoint (where applicable).
- Appropriateness of venue for the chosen activity and surrounding activities.

Inclusivity
This will assess the consideration given to ensure accessibility of the activity centre for their entire target audience. Elements considered:

- The measures and tools in place to assist different visitor types.
- What the activity centre does to ensure the experience is accessible to differing needs, ages, interests of groups etc. e.g. children, visitors with mobility difficulties etc.
Instruction

This will assess the level of information on activity instruction and how it is presented. Elements considered:

- How comprehensive and easily understood the instructions are.
- The range of mediums used to facilitate visitor engagement including the quality and condition of any material used.
- The delivery of instruction e.g. tone, speed of delivery, volume, clarity of speech etc.

Appearance of Staff

This will assess the appearance and smartness of staff, how identifiable staff are and how they enhance the image of the company through the wearing of a uniform. Elements considered:

- Quality and condition all of staff clothing and presentation of staff.
- Consistency of uniforms worn, including, where appropriate, methods of personal identification, throughout all stages of the activity.

Signing

This will assess the quality and condition of all signage and materials. Elements considered:

- Accuracy of information provided and ease of interpretation by all visitors.
- Positioning of signage and consistency of corporate branding (where appropriate).

Décor / Maintenance

This will assess the quality and condition of décor and maintenance of all elements comprising the core area of the activity centre. Elements considered:

- Windows, doors, walls, flooring and fixtures and fittings.
- Heating, lighting and ventilation fitments and the appropriate provision of these elements.

Equipment

This will assess the quality and condition of the equipment and the range provided to meet the activity requirements. Elements considered:

- Provision of equipment to meet visitor demand at all times.
- Evidence of regular maintenance of equipment.
- Quality and condition of storage areas that are accessible to visitors.
Changing Rooms

This will assess the provision and location of changing rooms to meet the requirements of the entire visitor mix. Elements considered:

- Quality and condition of the changing rooms and facilities.
- Spaciousness of changing rooms to allow free and comfortable visitor use.

CATERING

Visitor Flow Management

This will assess the spaciousness of any catering areas and the ease of visitor flow around key points. Elements considered:

- Ease of understanding of where and how to access food & drink service.
- What measures are in place for the management of visitor flow appropriate to the service type and volume of business.

Menu Presentation

This will assess the visibility and quality, of menus. Elements considered:

- Methods, mediums and comprehensiveness of menu display.
- Promotion of menus.

Food & Beverage – Quality, Range & Presentation

This will assess the quality of produce and range of dishes available to suit the visitor mix. Elements considered:

- The quality and range of produce available.
- Promotion of local provenance.
- Culinary skills demonstrated by chef and team.

Appearance of Staff

This will assess the appearance and smartness of staff, how identifiable staff are and how they enhance the image of the company through the wearing of a uniform. Elements considered:

- Quality and condition of staff clothing and presentation of staff.
- Consistency of uniforms worn, including methods of personal identification, throughout all stages of the activity.
Décor / Maintenance

This will assess the quality and condition of décor and maintenance of all elements within the catering outlets, including:

- Windows, doors, walls, flooring and fixtures and fittings.
- Heating, lighting and ventilation fitments and the appropriate provision of these elements.
- All elements of table appointment.

RETAILING

Visitor Flow Management

This will assess the spaciousness of any retail areas and the ease of visitor flow around key points. Elements considered:

- How easy the visitor can browse and view merchandise and locate payment desk.
- The effectiveness of queueing systems in place.

Merchandise – Quality & Range

This will assess the quality and the range of products on offer which, along with pricing should reflect the visitor mix. Elements considered:

- The quality and appropriateness of the product range.
- The variety of products on offer.

Where appropriate, it is recommended to source local and Scottish products.

Presentation

This will assess the presentation of merchandise through the effective use of display units, corporate branding and lighting levels. Elements considered:

- Methods used to enhance the presentation of merchandise.
- Details of sourcing, product description and accurate pricing.

Appearance of Staff

This will assess the appearance and smartness of staff, how identifiable staff are and how they enhance the image of the company through the wearing of a uniform. Elements considered:

- Quality and condition of staff clothing and presentation of staff.
- Consistency of uniforms worn, including methods of personal identification, throughout all stages of the activity.
Décor / Maintenance

This will assess the quality and condition of décor and maintenance of all elements within the retail outlets. Elements considered:

- Windows, doors, walls, flooring and fixtures and fittings.
- Heating, lighting and ventilation fitments and the appropriate provision of these elements.

TOILETS

Visitor Flow Management

This will assess the spaciousness of any toilet facilities and the ease of visitor flow around key points. Elements considered:

- Manoeuvrability in cubicles and levels of congestion around wash hand basins, hand dryers and mirrors.
- Level of space to hang/store personal belongings when using facilities.

Fixtures and Fittings

This will assess the quality and condition of fixtures and fittings and ancillary products. Elements considered:

- Hand dryers, hand towel dispensers, soap dispensers, tissue holders, waste bins, locks, hooks, light fittings, heaters, toilets and urinals, wash basins, vanity units, mirrors, taps and other chrome work.
- Soap, tissues and towels (where used) and the quality of baby changing facilities (where provided).

Décor / Maintenance

This will assess the quality and condition of décor and maintenance of all elements within the toilet facilities. Elements considered:

- Windows, doors, walls, flooring and fixtures and fittings.
- Heating, lighting and ventilation fitments and the appropriate provision of these elements.
Adequacy of Provision

This will assess the provision of toilet facilities. Elements assessed:

- Provision of toilets to cope with peak demand.
- Provision of washbasins, hand dryers etc. to cope with peak demand.
- Provision of additional facilities, e.g. baby change.

Visitor Information – scored for reference only and will not impact on your award.

This will assess the provision and range of visitor information promoting other businesses in the area that could complement the visitor experience to your attraction, including:

- Range of platforms where the visitor can access the information
- Provision of information to reflect the visitor mix.

Even though this score is for reference only, advice will be provided as necessary on how to improve this element

THE GRADING BANDS AND SCORING

The awards are represented by 1-5 stars, as follows:

5 star award - 85% - 100% - reflects an Exceptional customer experience
4 star award - 78% - 84% - reflects an Excellent customer experience
3 star award - 71% - 77% - reflects a Very Good customer experience
2 star award - 64% - 70% - reflects a Good customer experience
1 star award - 55% - 63% - reflects an Acceptable customer experience

No Grade Awarded reflects an Unacceptable customer experience

Scores from 0 to 10 are awarded for all the elements assessed. The overall percentage score determines the award a tour merits.

If, however, a tour scores a zero for any of the below elements, this will result in no award being confirmed, as the tour will be failing to meet minimum acceptable standards for the overall experience to merit an award.

- Staff – Hospitality & Friendliness
- Staff – Service & Efficiency
- Cleanliness
- Instruction
WHEN DOES THE VISIT TAKE PLACE
All visits are scheduled during your normal opening hours in the form of an incognito visit. A business will normally receive a visit every 2 years unless the business specifically requests an earlier visit in order to review an award. This visit would incur an additional fee. Details of a second visit are included at the end of the guidance notes.

*Please note, at VisitScotland’s discretion a 5* business can receive a grading visit more frequently, usually every year, to ensure that the highest possible standards are maintained.*

New applicants are given priority when scheduling visits and it is endeavoured to visit them within 6 weeks of receipt of application (unless otherwise instructed by the business).

HOW DO I LEARN ABOUT MY AWARD
Where possible, the Quality Tourism Advisor will give detailed feedback and relevant business advice to the owner or manager of the business immediately after the visit and will confirm the award. The written report will be received within 2-3 weeks of the visit.

*An Award Review Committee supports the QTAs in confirming awards of all new applicants and in any change of award.*

If there is a need to consult the Award Review Committee as part of the confirmation process, you will receive notification of the award in the following weeks.

FEES, SCHEDULE OF CONDITIONS & APPLICATION FORM
To view our fees, schedule of conditions and complete an online application form, please go to www.visitscotland.org/joining-quality-assurance.aspx

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT
- SUSTAINABILITY
- TASTE OUR BEST
- WELCOME SCHEME
SUSTAINABILITY

As part of participation in any one of VisitScotland’s Quality Assurance Schemes a business is required to undertake a minimum amount of sustainability actions. This is reviewed by the Quality Tourism Advisor as part of the main grading visit and will include the following topics:

1. Energy Efficiency
2. Water Efficiency
3. Waste management
4. Sustainable Purchasing
5. Travel and Transport
6. Natural and Cultural Heritage
7. Sustainable Management
8. Customer Engagement and Communications
9. Inclusivity

Relevant advice and signposting to key industry partners will be given to help make a business more sustainable. Further information can be found on www.visitscotland.org/sustainable-tourism.aspx

TASTE OUR BEST

Where there is a catering outlet, a business can be considered for the Taste our Best food award as part of the main grading assessment and with no additional fees.

Taste our Best is VisitScotland’s Quality Assurance food and drink scheme, developed in response particularly to visitors’ growing interest in sampling local produce. This scheme assesses the overall quality of the eating experience, as well as the extent to which businesses use and promote Scottish produce.

Further information can be found on: www.visitscotland.org/taste-our-best.aspx

WELCOME SCHEMES

To complement our Quality Assurance Scheme, a range of Welcome Schemes are offered. Welcome Schemes recognise the special efforts a business makes and the facilities they offer to cater for visitors with specific interests. For further information on all our Welcome Schemes go to www.visitscotland.org/welcome_schemes.aspx

OTHER SERVICES OFFERED

Advisory Visit

If you are new to tourism or looking to achieve a specific grading, an advisory visit prior to your main grading visit is highly recommended. One of the experienced QTAs will visit your establishment and give face-to-face advice to help you work towards achieving a specific star grading. The QTA will give you an insight into your current award (if applicable) from their own visitor experience and will identify the key areas for improvement in order to meet your desired award.
Second Visit
A second visit can be requested if you wish to have your award re-assessed. This could happen after the completion of a major refurbishment in between normal grading visits, resulting in an increase in the overall quality of the property. Alternatively it could be following extensive staff training and / or key operational changes which could offer an improved visitor experience.

Please contact the Customer Services team at customerservices@visitscotland.com to request a second visit application form and details of the cost for this service. On receipt of the form and payment a visit will be arranged to re-assess your award.

Brown Signage
Brown signage is not authorised by VisitScotland but participation in the scheme provides eligibility to submit an application to Transport Scotland. Full details on Brown Signage, FAQs and an application form