

Destinations for All - Brussels 2018



An investigation identifying the barriers encountered by wheelchair users within a spa environment

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Literature review
- Method
- Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion



Introduction

Accessible tourism

Describes access for all, to tourism products, services and environments. This includes those with access requirements, who may have mobility, vision, hearing or cognitive impairments.

The word **accessibility** implies that **disabled people can, without assistance reach, enter or pass to and from, and make use of facilities without being made to feel that one is an object of charity.**

It is also increasingly being used in contexts that do not focus solely on disability, to include older people, families with young children, those who are obese, as well as those with permanent and temporary disabilities.



Why consider spa?

Wellness tourism is **booming** – a growing trend where people enjoy a wellness experience as their primary and secondary reason for travelling.

Wellness tourism is growing faster than global tourism – worth \$563bn in 2015, (Global Wellness Institute, 2017).

Spas are historically places that people have travelled to, for social as well as wellness and healing benefits, (Rawlinson and Heap, 2017).

Spa is moving towards **wellness** and away from pampering,
(Global Wellness Institute, 2017).

They appeal to the new customer demographic replacing Baby Boomers – Millennials, who value experiences over material possessions,

(Intel Academic, 2017)





- **Szechenyi Baths, Budapest, Hungary**
- **Blue Lagoon, Iceland**
- **Thermae Spa, Bath, UK**





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Figures on worldwide disability

Approximately 15% of the worlds population has a disability

(World Health Organisation, 2011)

In 2013 it was estimated that the global population of those with disabilities was 1.3bn – about the same population as China (Donovan, 2016)

1 in 5 Australians has a disability – over 4 million people

(Australian Network on Disability, 2014; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016)

Almost 14 million people in the UK have a disability – almost 1 in 5 (Gov.uk, 2017)

Over 40 million Americans have a disability – 12.8% of the population

(United States Census Bureau, 2016)

The number of those with disabilities is expected to rise, due to ageing populations and the health problems associated with living a longer life



Context of this study

The study focused on mobility impairment – specifically wheelchair users in the UK:

- 1% of the population of developed countries use a wheelchair
- 1.2 million wheelchair users in the UK (NHS England, no date)
- 90% of wheelchairs used are self propelled (Flemmer and Flemmer, 2015)
- It is estimated that 30% of a population will have access requirements in their lifetime



This figure is also expected to rise as people live longer, and chronic health conditions become more prevalent

People can be dependent on wheelchairs for a number of reasons:

- Lifelong conditions such as Spina Bifida and Cerebral Palsy
- Later developed neurological conditions such as multiple sclerosis and myalgic encephalomyelitis
- Physical changes such as amputations or spinal cord injuries

People can also be temporarily wheelchair dependent post surgery or as part of injury recuperation



Despite legislation from global authorities and national governments to promote equality and inclusion, and protect human rights for all, disabled people face **barriers** in their daily lives that prevent them from fully participating in daily activities

(Williams et al, 2017; Jackson, 2018)

To improve this situation, it is recommended that these barriers be identified and removed, benefitting not just disabled people, but everyone with access needs

(Gray et al, 2003; Tarasoff, 2017;



Literature review

- Sustainability implications
- Benefits of spa for wheelchair users
- Existing barriers in other industries and sectors



Sustainability implications

Economic

An important growing customer segment – particularly within hospitality and tourism

(Poiria et al, 2010; Wan, 2013)

In Australia, the spending power of their disabled population was valued at AU\$54 million (2013) (Australian Network on Disability, 2014)

In 2017 the spending power of the UK disabled population was valued at £249bn to the economy. (Visit England, 2015)

The Purple Pound was worth £12.1 billion to accessible tourism experiences in England alone in 2015 (BBC, 2017)

In the United States, the total after tax disposable income for working adults is estimated to be \$490bn (Yin, et al, 2018)



Social

Creates a more inclusive environment for all

Wheelchair users can better participate in activities with friends and family members

Improving the built environment for wheelchair users today, will benefit future generations



Environmental

Improving accessibility benefits not just those with mobility impairments, but for those who need pushchair access, those who cannot easily walk up stairs

Accessibility describes the “usability” rating of a facility and is becoming an increasingly important descriptive term (Rimmer et al, 2017)



Benefits of spa experiences and therapies for wheelchair users



Watsu session, (Rancho La Pueta, 2018)



- **Massage can provide pain relief for primary and secondary health conditions** (Sritoomma et al, 2012; Keeratitanont, et al 2015; Peamruetai, et al 2016)
- **Heart rate and blood pressure reduction** (Beck, 2011)
- **Reduced anxiety and mental fatigue** (Beck, 2010)
- **Sedative – promotes sleep and relaxation** (Johnson, 2011)
- **Improved symptoms of fibromyalgia and acute pain**
- **Anti-inflammatory** (Gomez et al, 2013; Suarez et al, 2013, Ortega et al, 2017)
- **Balneotherapy is beneficial for joint, spinal and mobility conditions** (Gass and Gass, 2001; Varga et al, 2008; Ucok et al, 2008; Zhang et al, 2014)
- **Watsu (water massage) relieves acute muscle pain and fibromyalgia symptoms** (Resende Silviera Leite et al, 2013)



Existing barriers in other industries



(The Ramp People, 2018)



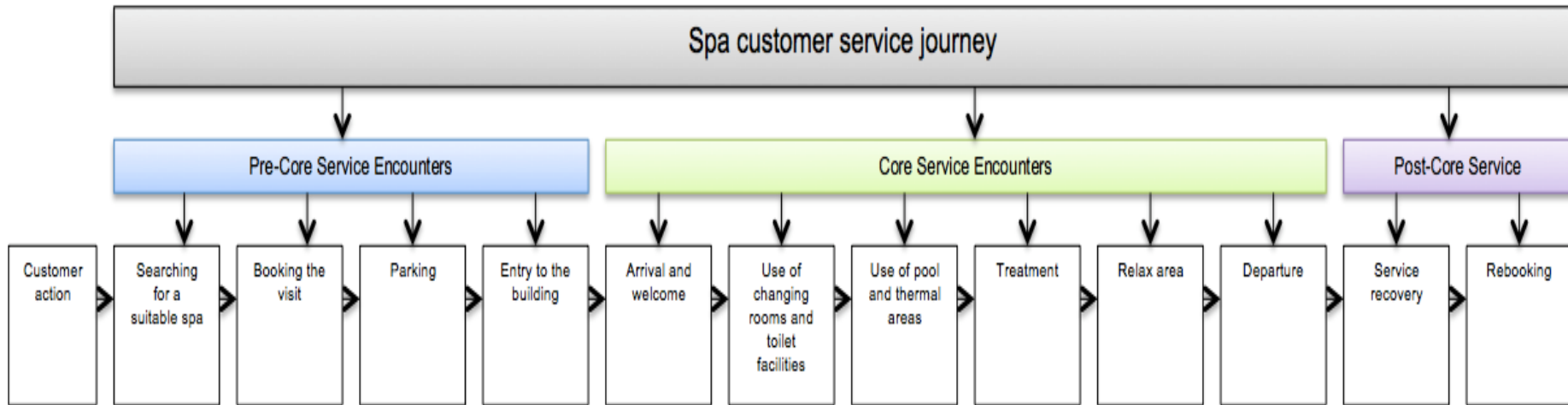
The literature review examined aviation, and locations such as a library, a dental practice, hotels, and health care settings such as a maternity ward.

The following barriers were identified:

- Environmental: Steps, steep ramps, narrow doors
- Social: Poor attitudes, lack of knowledge, rudeness
- Information: General lack of information, poor signage



From the literature review, the following conceptual framework was produced, based on the spa customer service journey through a spa



Aims and Objectives

Research Aim:

This study aimed to identify the barriers encountered by wheelchair users within a spa environment

Objectives:

1. To identify the **Environmental** barriers encountered by wheelchair users within a spa environment
2. To identify the **Information** barriers encountered by wheelchair users within a spa environment
3. To identify the **Social** barriers encountered by wheelchair users within a spa environment



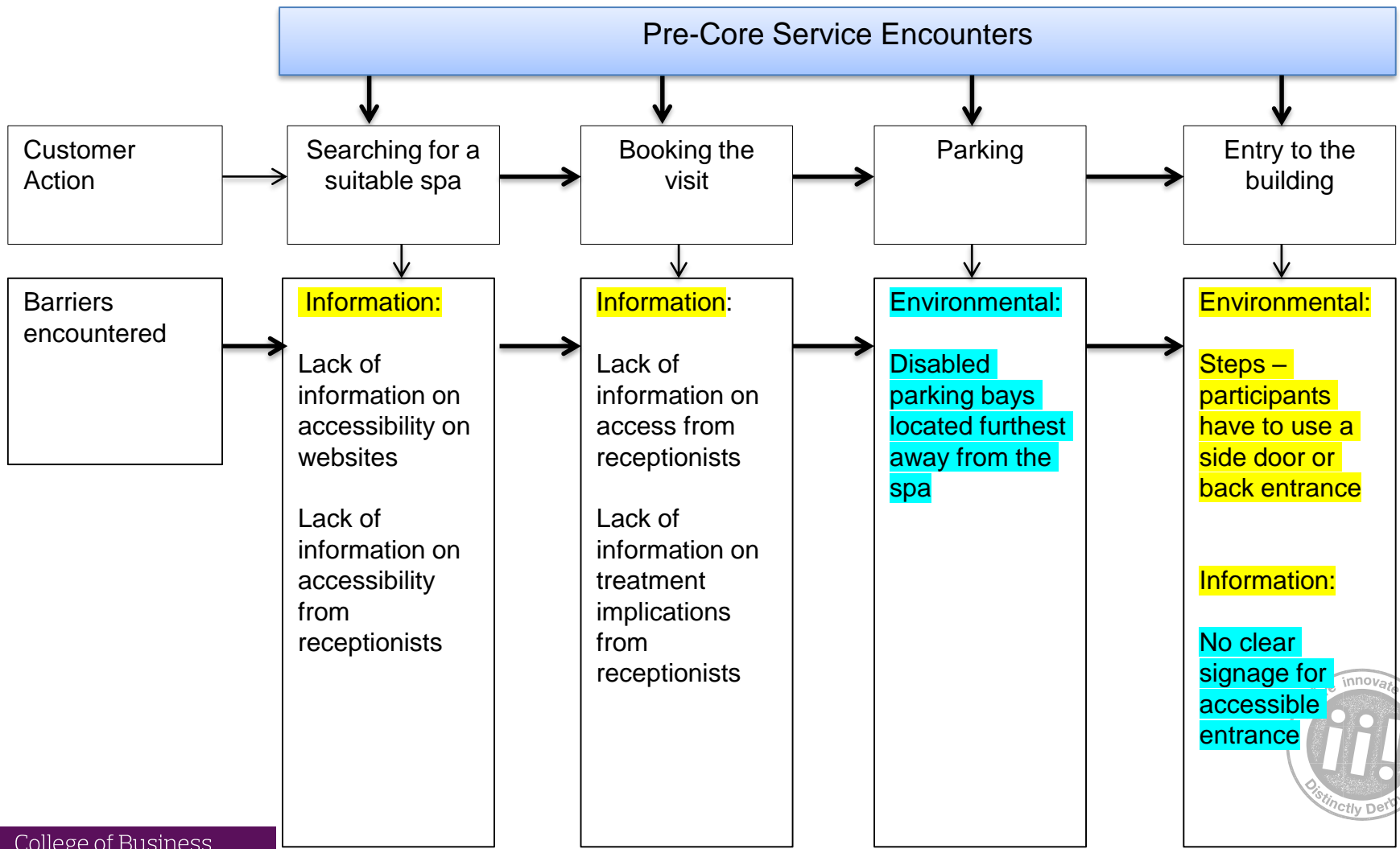
Methodology

- Research: Exploratory
- Paradigm – Interpretivist
- Approach – Inductive
- Type – Qualitative
- Sample: Purposive, snowballing

Semi structured interviews were carried out, to identify the type of barriers encountered by mobility impaired users when visiting a spa

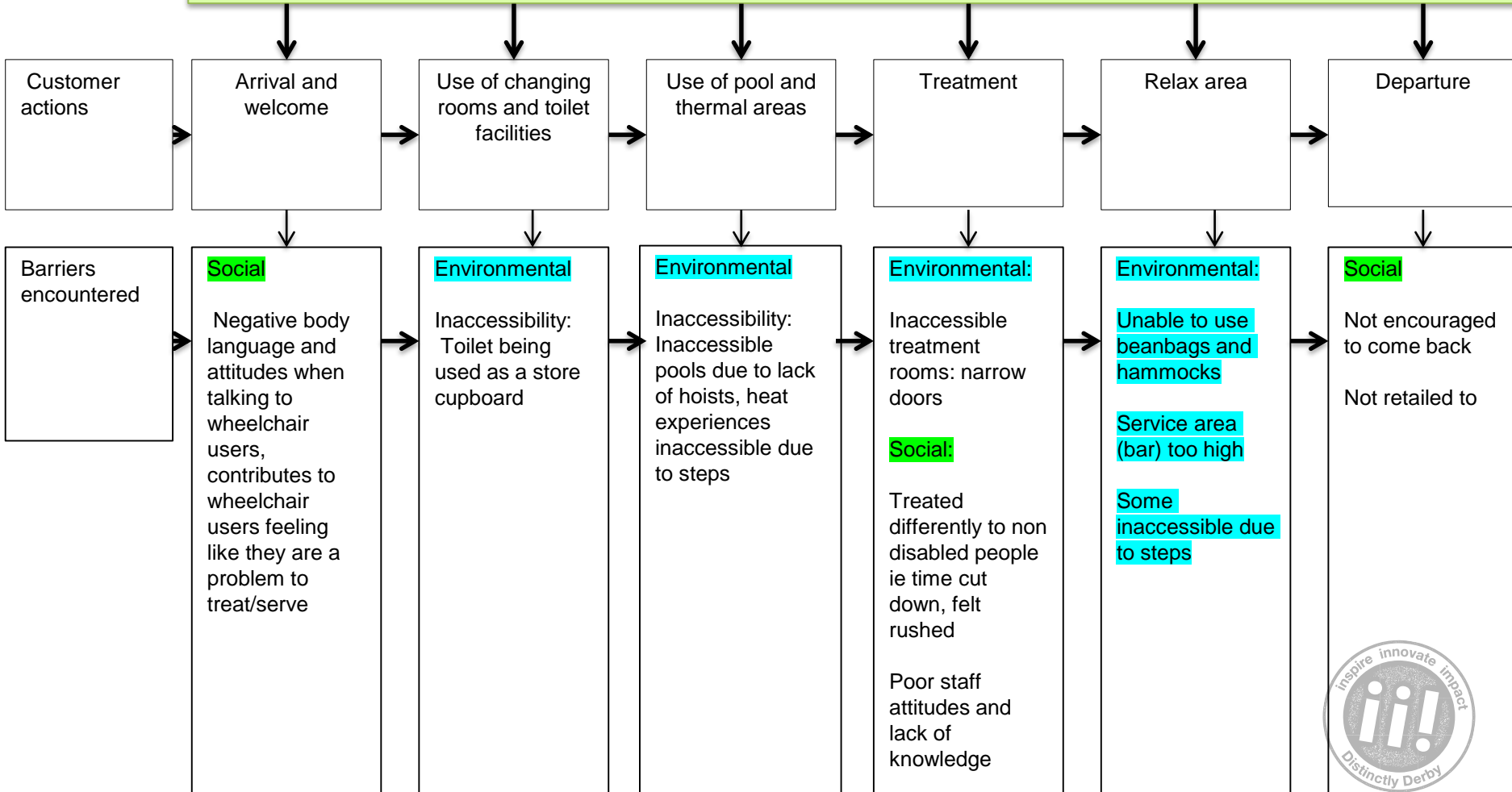


Findings: Pre-Core

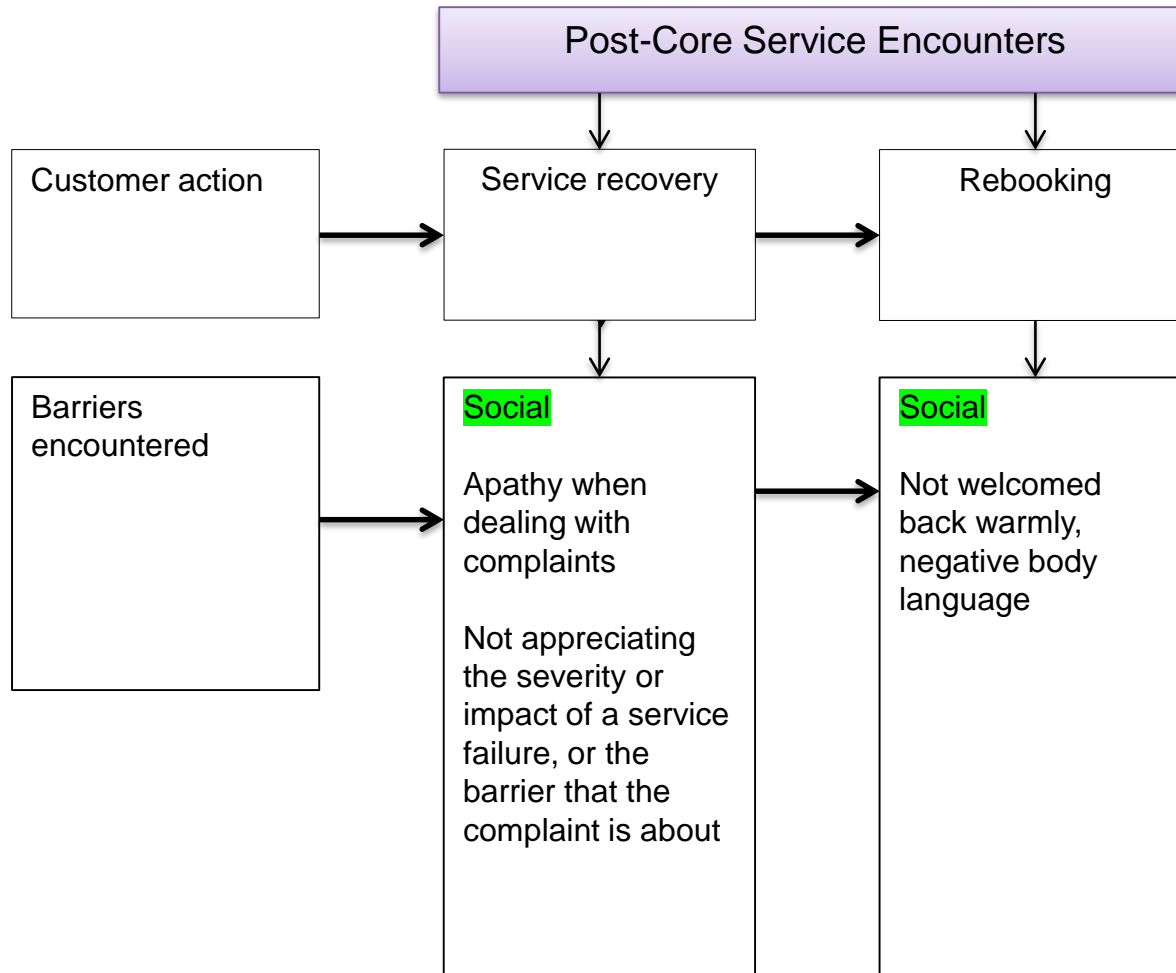


Findings: Core

Core Service Encounters



Findings- Post-Core



Summary of findings:

Information: Lack of accessibility information on websites and from receptionists, lack of treatment information from receptionists, lack of knowledge from spa therapists, poor signage on spa buildings.

Environmental: Inaccessibility of the spa building, treatment rooms, pools, thermal experiences and relaxation areas.

Social: Poor attitudes from therapists and receptionists, apathy when dealing with complaints, not welcomed warmly or encouraged to come back.



Discussion

Information barriers

Websites need clear and detailed access information, including accessibility of local transport links for those who do not drive. Reception/booking staff need to know this information for helping with enquiries and reservations.

Reception staff and spa therapists need to know the implications of receiving treatments and their effects on common health conditions, in order to accurately inform wheelchair users – and other spa guests

Spa therapists should receive training in college on how to adapt treatments to better serve wheelchair users eg. aiding with lifting, ensuring comfort and security on the couch

Accessibility signage on buildings needs to be clearer



Environmental barriers

Spa designers and architects should design spas of the future with wheelchair users in mind

Social barriers

The study highlighted the need for the education of all spa staff in communicating and interacting with wheelchair users with empathy and understanding



Conclusion

- Barriers encountered by wheelchair users in other service industries, are also encountered within spas
- Within a spa environment, wheelchair users are more vulnerable to the effects of barriers, particularly social barriers
- Further research could be undertaken on other impairments



Thankyou

Any questions?



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