

HSBC Sheffield Branch - Case Study

Overview

HSBC is one of the world's largest banks and financial services organisations, serving 40 million customers globally. Creating accessible and inclusive environments for the benefit of customers and employees – of all abilities – is a key focus for the bank. **The Challenge**

Through surveys and focus groups with colleagues with a range of diverse disabilities, abilities and lived experiences, HSBC identified some common problems faced by disabled people when accessing branch services. These included:

- Customers with sight loss experiencing problems with overall branch design and availability of braille signage.
- Wheelchair users reporting issues with finding enough space to turn full circles.
- Customers and colleagues with hearing loss stating that conversations with the teller at glazed branch counters were not always easy to understand.

In response to these issues, HSBC built their new Sheffield City branch in 2023. The branch is HSBC's most accessible and inclusive branch, going beyond the bank's Global Minimum Design Standards.

The Approach

To ensure accessibility was at the heart of the design, HSBC collaborated with accessibility partners Microlink, architecture firm Axis and with local Sheffield charity Artworks Together, who provided art by individuals with a range of abilities.

- To meet their 'goal' standards, HSBC and partners integrated numerous best practice accessible design solutions. A few examples include: **Sensory room / Family room** – A multi-purpose calming space with adjustable heating, sensory colour lighting, fidget toys/blankets and a wall projection room for people with sensory processing problems (e.g. autism spectrum disorder).
- **Height adjustable desks & tables** – Included in the staff back-office areas and front office to support the needs and wellbeing of branch colleagues and customers.
- **Priority seating** – Included (with signage) in the waiting area seating zones.
- **Customer quiet hour** – specified daily hour supporting customers with hidden conditions such as dementia, or ADHD who prefer a calmer branch.

- **Assistive technology** – A wide range of cutting-edge assistive technology was integrated into the design of the Sheffield branch.
- **Circadian lighting** – Installed in staff back-office areas the sensory room and some semi-private spaces, circadian lighting matches the natural light outside and the body's natural rhythm.
- **Braille** – Installed on lift signage, wayfinding, handrails, internet stations, WCs, and entrance signs, the signage is also high contrast and tactile.
- **Accessible kitchen** – An accessible back-office kitchen with several features for staff with mobility or dexterity challenges.
- **Training** – training for frontline colleagues including VR simulations of autism and hearing loss to better understand the experience of all customers.

Impact

The Sheffield project was initiated and developed as a global blueprint for HSBC's target, or 'goal' level design standards - to be shared with all HSBC markets (HSBC has 2,099 Branches worldwide). The Sheffield branch will also help define future design strategies for neurodiversity globally, and the Bank's design guidelines are being updated with all the key learnings from the Sheffield project.

Looking ahead

HSBC's most accessible branch in Sheffield has been developed with the future in mind and is the Bank's most sustainable branch ever built. This forward thinking means that the design principles adopted in the Sheffield branch, set the standards for HSBC to deploy over the longer term, to the benefit of all their customers and colleagues globally.

Discover how Microlink can support your organisation on its journey towards disability inclusion. [Contact Microlink](#)