



VisitEngland®

Place of Interest Quality Assurance Scheme (PIQAS)

Benefits of Participation and Core Criteria



The Place of Interest Quality Assurance Scheme (PIQAS)

PIQAS has been developed to provide a number of tools for operators of places of visitor interest to enhance quality and spread best practice within the sector. The service offers a consumer focused quality assessment, helping to identify strengths and highlight development areas, based on industry examples.

The broad theme of a place of interest can range from pure fun to high culture. Each place of interest will be looked at within the context of the general sector in which it sits.

All areas that impact on the visitor experience are included in a quality assessment, ranging from the initial enquiry through to departure. The assessment will recognise areas that may be unique as well as common areas. Where a place of interest doesn't have a particular facility, such as a car park or catering, that aspect will not be included. The service does not attempt to grade places of interest but will assess each on its own merits using objective quality benchmarks.

For the purpose of this scheme, a place of interest is defined as:

'A site, the primary purpose of which is to allow public access for one or more of the following areas of interest:

Education – manned or unmanned sites

Heritage & Culture – manned or unmanned sites

Environment – manned or unmanned sites

Special Interest – manned sites only

Craft Attractions – manned sites only

Sites suitable for PIQAS are likely to be smaller in scale and scope, with less interpretation and visitor services, and possibly a shorter dwell time, than those found in Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS) sites.

Although a craft attraction might include a strong retail element, there must be at least one other significant reason for the site to attract visitors, other than a place of refreshment, and related to the foregoing definitions.

Venues that are primarily for sporting activities, theatrical/cinema performances and solely retail outlets fall outside this definition.'

The following sites might be appropriate for PIQAS, but this list is not exhaustive:

Archaeological site

Church/Chapel

Craft workshop

Fish farm

Forest

Historic site

Industrial site

Local nature reserve

Natural feature

Nature trail

Municipal park

Retail art studio

Sculpture trail

Viewpoint

Waymarked trail

How will PIQAS benefit you?

PIQAS is a valuable management and marketing tool for all places of interest and smaller attraction operators. The service meets the needs of places of interest and smaller attractions whether volunteer run, charity organisations, unmanned sites or natural features in the landscape.

The Marketing Benefits

- **Unlimited use of the VisitEngland quality rose marque**, recognised by three out of four members of the public as a sign of quality (VB research data 2007). This is available electronically for use on your website, in advertising and in other promotional material.
- **Enhanced promotion** on www.enjoyengland.com and www.visitbritain.com, the official tourism websites for England and the UK. These websites attract well over 20 million visitors each year.
- **Dated annual certificate** for display on your premises. Free window stickers to highlight to visitors that you have been 'quality checked'.
- **Automatic FREE inclusion** in the National Code of Practice for Visitor Attractions.

The Management Benefits

Quality Guidance booklet – a practical and easy to follow format containing quality guidance and many examples of best practice, drawn from all sectors of the attractions industry.

Self Assessment Toolkit – this will help analyse the strengths of your place of interest and, when used in conjunction with the Quality Guidance booklet, will help to develop action points for quality development.

A quality assessment of your place of interest – biennial, objective and professional quality assessment of all those areas which impact on the quality of the visitor experience. One-to-one debrief providing instant structured feedback on the visit which allows for other aspects of the place of interest to be discussed.

Report highlighting aspects of quality and any development issues – an important reference document that provides an essential tool for operational planning. Access to advice on accessibility and sustainability – available online on VisitEngland's trade website and specifically geared towards your industry.



How does it work?

PIQAS is operated by VisitEngland's Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance team.

Assessments are carried out unannounced as 'mystery visits'. Assessments are carried out biennially and at any time the place of interest is open to the public. Assessors may visit solo or as a family group, as considered appropriate.

The service does not attempt to 'grade' places of interest but will assess each on its own merits using objective quality benchmarks. All well run places of interest should be able to achieve the accreditation. Should accreditation not be awarded, the reasons are fully explained and where appropriate a follow up visit will be arranged.

How is quality assessed?

The assessor will 'experience' all aspects of the place of interest, from initial phone and website checks to departure. They will follow the full visitor route. The assessment is followed by a debrief. This acknowledges quality strengths and highlights any areas for quality development. Any advice is for consideration, and objectively based on examples of best practice drawn from relevant sectors of the industry.

Accessibility

VisitEngland's Quality Assurance team has recognised the need for the inclusion of accessible guidance and advice within VAQAS and PIQAS, and as an integral part of assessment debriefs. The diversity of places of interest means that a 'standard' would be difficult, but certainly not impossible, to draw up. Some places of interest may have in-built physical difficulties but this does not prevent planning for large print guides, enhanced audio guides etc.

The importance of attitudinal change and recognition of differing accessibility needs cannot be overstated. As such, advice on this aspect is available by visiting www.visitengland.com/access. While the function of the website is mainly signposting, it is an important proactive step in guiding operators towards formulating Access Statements. This can help towards meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and contribute to enhancing the quality of the visitor experience for all.

Sustainable and Responsible Tourism

Operating a place of interest in a sustainable way relates to environmental and economic activities that may minimise the impact on the environment or maximise benefits to local communities. By adopting a sustainable management approach you can do your bit for the environment and the local community in which you operate, while at the same time improve the quality of the service you offer to visitors.

Encouraging responsible tourism relates to visitor behaviour which can be environmentally sensitive. Suitable advice on 'green' actions is provided where integral to the quality of the visitor experience. Signposting to more detailed advice on operating a 'green' business is available by contacting VAQAS or visiting VisitEngland's website www.visitengland.com/green

The National Code of Practice for Visitor Attractions

All places of interest that participate in PIQAS also agree to adhere to the relevant and appropriate requirements of the National Code of Practice for Visitor Attractions. The Code is available to all attractions throughout England and participating places of interest will be listed on the VisitBritain consumer website. The Code is a self-certification scheme. The requirements include information provision, visitor facilities and statutory obligations. A full copy of the Code can be obtained from VAQAS. All PIQAS participants are exempt from the Code of Practice registration fee.



PIQAS Core Criteria

Core criteria for the Place of Interest Quality Assurance Scheme follow. These are not onerous and it is expected that they should all be easily achieved. It is recommended that the core criteria are read in conjunction with the quality guidance offered in the VAQAS Core Criteria and Quality Guidance booklet, available as a download at www.vaqas.org.uk. Whilst many of the aspects covered in that booklet might not be relevant to your place of interest, there are sufficient areas of commonality to consider the points raised there.

The VAQAS Self Assessment Toolkit can also be downloaded from www.vaqas.org.uk and will prove invaluable in carrying out your own pre-assessment at your place of interest.

The following core criteria apply to those places of interest which provide the facilities mentioned. If, for example, catering or car parking is not available, then their absence does not adversely affect the assessment.

1. Pre-arrival/Arrival

- This includes:
- Telephone Enquiries
 - Leaflet, Brochure and Website Content, Accuracy and Clarity
 - Initial Signage
 - Appearance of Initial Grounds, Buildings, Car Park
 - Visitor Information
 - Cleanliness

Core criteria

- Where a place of interest has an entrance charge, visitors should be able to gain information by telephone. Where practical this information should include opening times, admission charges, any additional charges for individual areas of the site and any significant restrictions to entry (e.g. no children, no dogs, difficult access).
- Current advertising materials (e.g. print, website, leaflet) must provide an accurate and clear reflection of the amenities, services and facilities provided. Advertised charges should not be exceeded at entry. A map or directions should be included.
- Access to the site should be safe, clean, well maintained, clearly signed and with some attempt to direct parking, if applicable. Entrance signs before the point of entry must clearly display opening times, the full range of prices and any restrictions to entry.
- Where applicable, staff must be easily distinguishable from visitors and must deal promptly and courteously with all visitors.
- A high standard of cleanliness must be maintained at all times and where applicable the entrance area of an overall tidy appearance.



2. Place of Interest

The broad theme of a place of interest can range from pure fun to high culture and it will be looked at within the context of the general sector in which it sits, recognising areas that may be unique and areas of commonality.

This includes:

- Layout, Range and Quality of General Signage
- Range of Content
- Quality of Presentation and Interpretation
- Appearance, Attitude and Knowledge of Staff
- Cleanliness

Core criteria

- The layout of the place of interest should be designed to ensure practical access to all areas, with visitors directed by clear and well maintained signs, if appropriate.
- The range of content should be appropriate to the accepted and advertised broad theme of the site.
- All exhibits or features should be presented with the use of appropriate media to ensure accurate interpretation.
- All areas to be well maintained and illuminated to ensure a safe environment.
- All equipment and installations used by visitors should be safely maintained, fit for purpose and in good working order.
- Staff should be easily identifiable and able to deal promptly and courteously with visitor enquiries and complaints.
- A good standard of cleanliness and an overall tidy appearance must be maintained at all times.

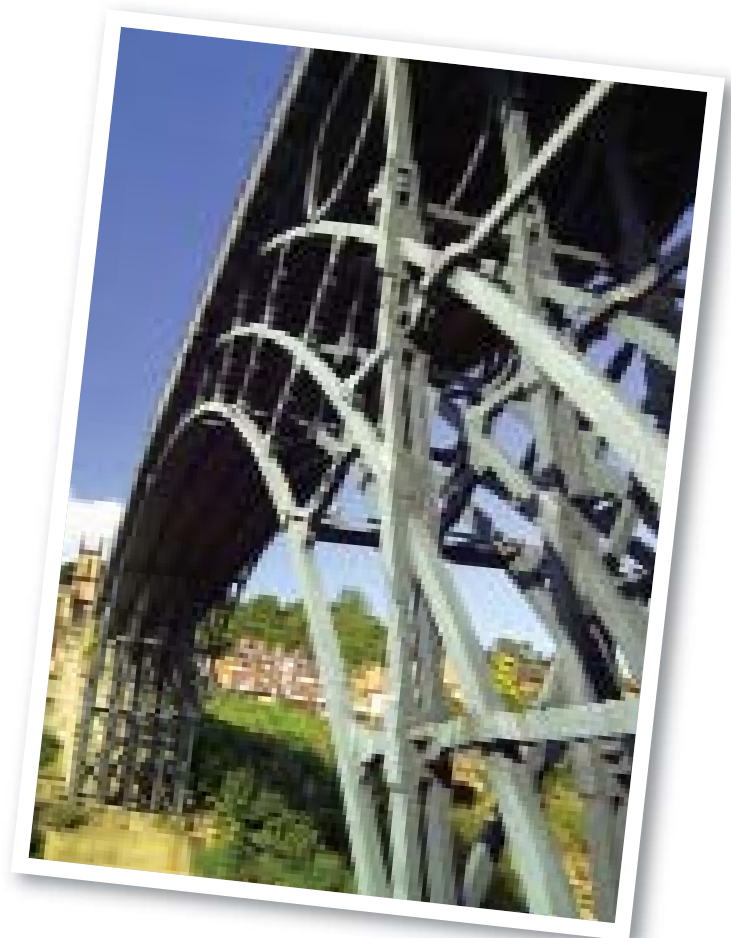
3. Toilets

This includes:

- Layout and Design
- Fixtures and Fittings
- Maintenance and Cleanliness
- Disabled Access

Core criteria

- If provided, these must be in a suitable location, adequate for the size of the site and may be unisex.
- Where possible disabled access should be included.
- Toilets should include the provision of a WC, wash hand basin(s), soap, toilet paper, toilet roll holders and hand drying facilities.
- Toilets should be regularly maintained in an acceptable condition and adequately ventilated.
- A good standard of cleanliness must be maintained at all times.



4. Catering

This includes:

- Layout and Design
- Range, Presentation and Quality of Food
- Appearance, Attitude and Efficiency of Staff
- Maintenance and Cleanliness

Core criteria

- If catering is provided, décor, fixtures and fittings may be functional, but should be well maintained, suitable for the purpose and safe.
- Seating areas should be free from obstruction to allow freedom of circulation, with adequate heating, lighting and ventilation for safety and comfort in indoor areas.
- All cooked food should be kept and served at the appropriate temperature, with menu descriptions accurate and prices clearly displayed.
- Staff should be easily distinguishable from visitors, competent and able to deal promptly and courteously with visitor enquiries and complaints.
- A good standard of cleanliness should be maintained at all times.

5. Retailing

This includes:

- Layout and Design
- Range and Presentation of Merchandise
- Appearance, Attitude and Efficiency of Staff
- Maintenance and Cleanliness

Core criteria

- If retail is provided, décor, fixtures, fittings and furniture may be functional, but should be well maintained, suitable for the purpose and safe.
- All items should be accurately priced and clearly displayed.
- Staff should be easily distinguishable from visitors, competent and able to deal promptly and courteously with visitor enquiries and complaints.
- The range of content should be appropriate to the accepted and advertised broad theme of the site.
- A high standard of cleanliness and tidiness should be maintained at all times.





To join PIQAS, simply complete an application form and return with your fee to the PIQAS office.

To receive an application form call 020 7578 1451, email vaqas@visitengland.org or visit our website www.vaqas.org.uk
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