

---

# State of Museum Access 2018

**Does your museum website welcome  
and inform disabled visitors?**

---



---

**Matthew Cock  
Molly Bretton  
Anna Fineman  
Richard France  
Claire Madge  
Melanie Sharpe**

---

# Contents

---

## Preface

Andrew Miller, UK Government Disability Champion for Arts & Culture

<b>1</b>	<b><u>Introduction</u></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2</b>	<b><u>Access Information</u></b>	
2.1	Types of access information .....	8
2.2	Formats .....	9
<b>3</b>	<b><u>Pre-visit information and communication</u></b>	
3.1	Opening message: welcome and tone .....	10
3.2	Contact information .....	14
3.3	Getting to the museum .....	15
3.4	Concessions and proof of disability .....	16
3.5	Staff training and awareness .....	17
<b>4</b>	<b><u>Visitors with disabilities</u></b>	
4.1	Autistic people and people with a learning disability .....	20
4.2	Blind and partially sighted people .....	25
4.3	D/deaf, hard of hearing people .....	29
4.4	People with dementia .....	32
4.5	People with mobility impairments .....	33
Appendix 1	<b>Access showcase</b> .....	<b>35</b>
Appendix 2	<b>Setting up an access panel / disability advisory group</b> .....	<b>36</b>
	<b>Partner organisations</b> .....	<b>38</b>
	<b>Other organisations</b> .....	<b>39</b>
	<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>40</b>
	<b>Notes</b> .....	<b>41</b>



“ Museums are a vital component of our national culture, places to immerse visitors in great stories and treasures that help us understand our past, present and future. All the more important therefore that they are accessible to all. The **State of Museum Access 2018** is packed with examples of best access practice from museums across the UK. There is evidence of much progress contained here of which the sector should feel proud and celebrate.

Access is a constantly evolving dynamic and many of the initiatives highlighted in this report will assist future-proofing museums as we move into the 2020s. This is a significant consideration, as the next decade will see the demands of access at museums and heritage sites increasingly compete for priority and funding with heritage considerations.

Rightly the report also reveals some disturbing facts. For example, one in five of our museums offer no access information on their websites. As access starts before any visit takes place and often online, this sends a message akin to ‘we’re closed’ to the one-fifth of the population who are disabled. Consistency and reliability of access information, both important factors to build trust with disabled visitors, are also revealed to be patchy across the sector.

With disabled people's combined spending power in the UK estimated to exceed £250 billion in 2018, the business case for inclusion is overwhelming. Yet as a wheelchair user, my own museum visits are frequently compromised by display cabinets that I can't see into or exhibits placed up steps. These acts of exclusion are often easily avoidable with just a bit more consideration of visitors' needs.

The State of Museum Access 2018 offers museums a valuable resource - a road map for improving access and inclusion information for people with a wide variety of disabilities. It also offers an access pledge that if adopted could lead to a step-change in institutional thinking. With the debate around inclusion and interpretation hot topics across the cultural sector, I want to support museums that lead the way in offering consistency of approach and quality of access. I believe on the evidence presented here, that ideal is within reach. ”

**Andrew Miller**  
**UK Government Disability Champion for Arts & Culture**  
**August 2018**

# 1. Introduction

---

According to the [Access Survey 2017 by Euan's Guide](#), opinion of museum access is relatively high, when compared to other types of venue, and rising [\[note 1\]](#). However, there is still substantial evidence of a 'disability engagement gap' at museums and heritage sites, where visitors with a disability are less likely to be regular or frequent visitors than those who are not [\[note 2\]](#). We believe that every museum can act to close this gap. This report includes guidelines intended to help museums create or review the information that they provide online to:

- **welcome** potential visitors with disabilities
- **inform** visitors of any barriers to access at the museum
- **reassure** visitors that the museum has worked, or is actively working, to remove them

Access has a broad meaning. In the words of Glasgow Women's Library:

“ Access is physical, psychological, social, financial and cultural and the ease of access communicates whether people are welcome or not. A respectful and dignified approach to access is demonstrated by ensuring people can easily get through the door, use the toilets, are treated well, and that their needs are seen as important and integral to everything the museum does. This says that they are valued. ”

[Equality in progress: fair access, representation and inclusion in museums \(2018\) \[note 3\]](#)

While this guide focuses on people with disabilities, museums should always consider access in the wider context that the Glasgow Women's Library highlights. This means that people with disabilities should not be defined solely by their impairment; there may be other reasons influencing their decision to visit or not.

# Museum access and inclusion starts online

---

A museum visitor's journey begins before they cross your threshold. Levels of awareness and motivation will influence decisions on whether to visit, when and how. The Euan's Guide Access Survey 2017 found that 95% of respondents sought disabled access information about a venue prior to visiting for the first time, and 85% stated that they checked the venue's website to achieve this. [\[note 4\]](#) One of the Access Survey respondents sums up why having website access information is crucial:

**“ Websites which don't include information about accessibility make me assume that they [the venue] are inaccessible. ”**

Museums can therefore help increase attendance of disabled people simply by providing useful information. To inform these guidelines, we undertook research in the form of an audit carried out by project volunteers (mostly working or studying within the museum and heritage sector), who visited the websites of 1718 museums across the UK, recording the presence or absence of access information. The museums audited were those registered in the Accreditation Scheme co-managed between Arts Council England, the Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland and the Northern Ireland Museums Council, and are therefore considered to be the best museums in the UK. [\[note 5\]](#)

This document updates and expands on VocalEyes' [State of Museum Access 2016 and accompanying Museum Access Information Guidelines](#) [\[note 6\]](#) The research methodology for each was the same, though while in the earlier report the focus was on access for blind and partially sighted museum visitors, this report addresses a broad range of disabilities and access requirements.

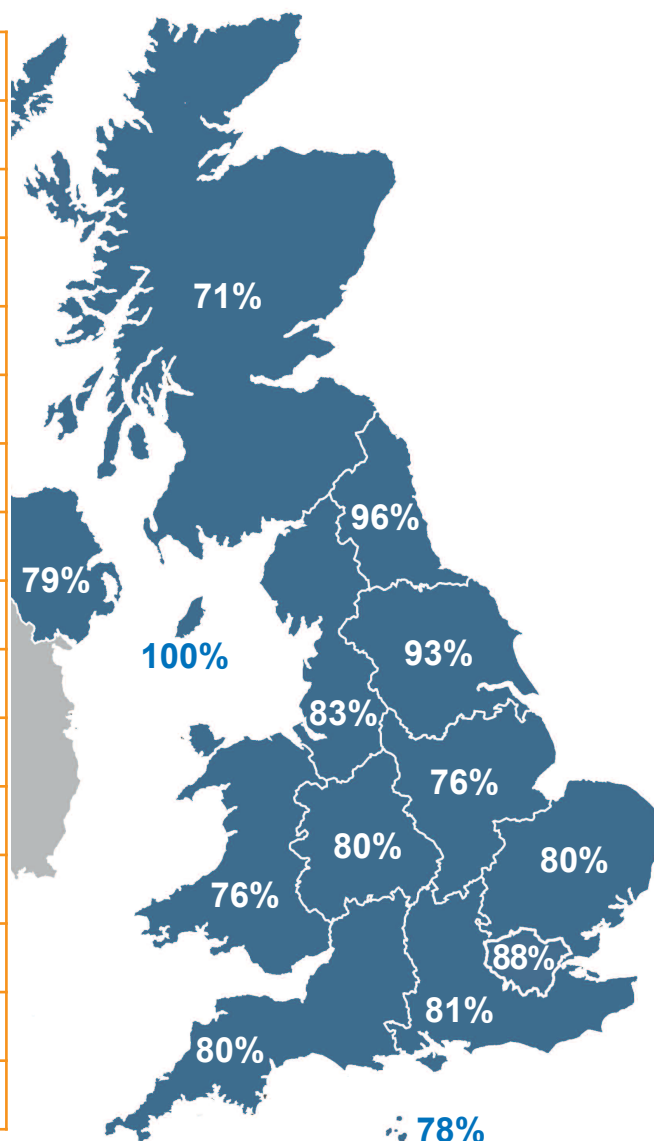
Our audit found that around **one in five (19%) accredited museums failed to provide any access information online**, an improvement on 27% in 2016.



While this does show improvement, overall the amount of detail is poor, as can be seen in the statistics scattered through this report, with the majority of museums providing little more than basic information relevant for people with mobility impairment only, which does not address the access needs of many people.

**Table 1: Proportion of UK accredited museums with online access information, by nation and region**

Nation or region	With access information
Isle of Man	100% (9 / 9)
North East England	96% (54 / 56)
Yorkshire	93% (124 / 133)
London	88% (110 / 125)
North West England	83% (106 / 127)
<b>UK average</b>	<b>81% (1301 / 1606)</b>
South East England	81% (180 / 223)
South West England	80% (156 / 195)
West Midlands	80% (97 / 121)
East of England	80% (118 / 148)
Northern Ireland	79% (33 / 42)
Channel Islands	78% (7 / 9)
East Midlands	76% (76 / 100)
Wales	76% (68 / 90)
Scotland	71% (163 / 228)



**Table 2: Proportion of UK accredited museums with online access information, by type of museum**

Museum type	With access information
Heritage sites	98% (188 / 191)
National museums	97% (69 / 71)
Local Authority museums	81% (368 / 455)
Independent museums	77% (582 / 759)
University museums	77% (56 / 73)
Military museums	67% (38 / 57)



**UK average 81%**  
**(1301 / 1606)**

# How to use this guide

---

In **Section 2** we present which types of access information a museum should provide on its website, as well as recommending using different formats, while remaining accessible to website users.

In **Section 3** we discuss how best to communicate with potential disabled visitors on the museum website, including using welcoming and inclusive language and tone; offering a range of means of contact, and providing information about ticket concessions, staff disability awareness and detailed information about how to get to the museum.

**Section 4** covers five audience groups that will together form a large proportion of disabled visitors. Each section covers typical information, resources, facilities and accessible events that a museum can offer for visitors, and if it does, should also detail on their access page.

**Appendix 1** gives tips on **Setting up an access panel or disability advisory group**, which a museum can use to develop both its access provision and website information.

**Appendix 2: Access showcase** provides links to a selection of museum access pages around the UK that demonstrate good practice, and should be used to inspire and inform.

## The museum access pledge

### #MuseumAccessPledge



Each museum presents its own unique challenges and barriers to potential visitors, and we appreciate that not all museums will be able to provide all the access facilities, services or resources recommended, and that budgets and staffing capacity vary hugely across venues. However, providing informative and accurate access information online is straightforward to implement and can have a significant impact.

**We therefore ask museums to make the following pledge:**

- **We will seek to proactively address barriers within our museum for people with disabilities**
- **We will encourage people with disabilities to visit our museum by ensuring that detailed access information is provided on our website**
- **We will enable potential visitors to decide for themselves whether to visit**
- **We will use welcoming and inclusive language to communicate directly with disabled visitors and encourage them to contact us and give feedback on their visit**

## 2. Access information

---

### 2.1 Types of access information

There are three types of access information that a museum should provide online.

#### 1. Venue accessibility

This should be in the Visit / Visiting section or page of your website.

It should be structured with headed sub-sections, each with a manageable chunk of information. This is useful both for visual readers, and those who access websites using a screen-reader (text-to-speech software), as they can navigate easily between headings to find the information they seek.

You may like to structure the page based on stages of the visitor journey (getting there, around the museum, access resources etc), or so that people with different types of disability or access requirement can find information relevant to them (e.g. blind and partially sighted people, people with mobility impairments). However, some information or resources will be useful for a range of people, so you may find yourself repeating information in multiple sections.

#### 2. Accessible events

Details of accessible events at the museum should be located in the Events / What's on section / page, alongside other events.

The accessible / inclusive features of the event should be well highlighted. For larger museums with many events, it should be possible to filter or search by key words e.g. Access, BSL.

Make it clear if events are drop in or require pre-booking.

Link to the events section and promote regular access events within your venue accessibility page.

Details of different types of accessible museum events can be found in Section 4.

#### Examples

Royal Museums Greenwich ([rmg.co.uk](http://rmg.co.uk))

Royal Academy ([royalacademy.org.uk](http://royalacademy.org.uk))

#### 3. Website accessibility features and options

This should be available as a link in the header or footer on every page of the website.

Technical web accessibility is outside the scope of this guide, but all museum websites should meet [WCAG 2.0 guidelines](#). [note 7]



## 2.2 Formats

Alternative formats can be useful supplements to the text, as detailed below. However, ensure any information contained is also included within the text.

**Images** can be useful, to show first-time visitors what the outside of the building looks like, or to show areas where access may be restricted, such as steep or narrow paths or corridors, toilets or stairs.

For people with partial sight, large and clear images of the exterior and interiors are useful, to help them prepare for their journey to the museum and navigate around it. However, the features contained within images should also be described, for those without sufficient levels of sight. Provide measurements for images illustrating restricted access for wheelchair-users, as chairs have different widths and turning circles.

**Film**, for example a short video embedded from YouTube, can be used to show venue access features, but the information conveyed should also be available in text, for blind and partially sighted visitors. Films should be subtitled, ideally using open captions, where the subtitles are always visible. The drawback of closed captions, where visitors have the option of turning subtitles on or off, is that not all website visitors know they are available or how to activate them.

YouTube's auto-generated captions are always inaccurate, so we strongly advise that you overwrite the generated captions to ensure accuracy. Stagertext's guidelines tell you how to do this.

### Further reading

[Stagertext guidelines for subtitling film content online \[note 8\]](#)

[VocalEyes guidelines for making film more accessible to blind and partially sighted people \[note 9\]](#)



### Virtual Reality was mentioned by 1% of museums (13)

Virtual Reality (VR) is a good tool to help disabled visitors familiarise themselves in advance with routes and facilities.

The Museum of English Rural Life provide a [Google Street View Tour \[note 10\]](#) on their website access page, and have written a [Medium post \[note 11\]](#) on how they did it.

While not a museum, Dundee United Football Club have launched a [virtual tour of their stadium at Tannadice Park \[note 12\]](#) which is specifically designed as a tool to help disabled visitors.

**Audio** that can be streamed or downloaded from the website is useful for blind and partially sighted people, particularly in the case of descriptive directions ([see section 3.3](#)), which can be listened to on a phone or portable mp3 player before or en route to the venue.

## 3. Pre-visit information and communication

### 3.1 Opening messages: welcome and tone

 19% of museums include **welcome text** that is addressed to disabled people.

Websites are key front-line tools for museums to communicate with their audience, and their tone and language should be consistent, inclusive and welcoming to all. The text on the access page should be addressed directly to the reader, rather than being about them. [\[note 13\]](#)

Many museums present access information within an ‘access statement’, that can often be impersonal in style. During our audit of museum websites, we frequently came across two sentences:

‘This access statement does not contain personal opinions as to our suitability for those with access needs, but aims to accurately describe the facilities and services we offer all our guests/visitors.’

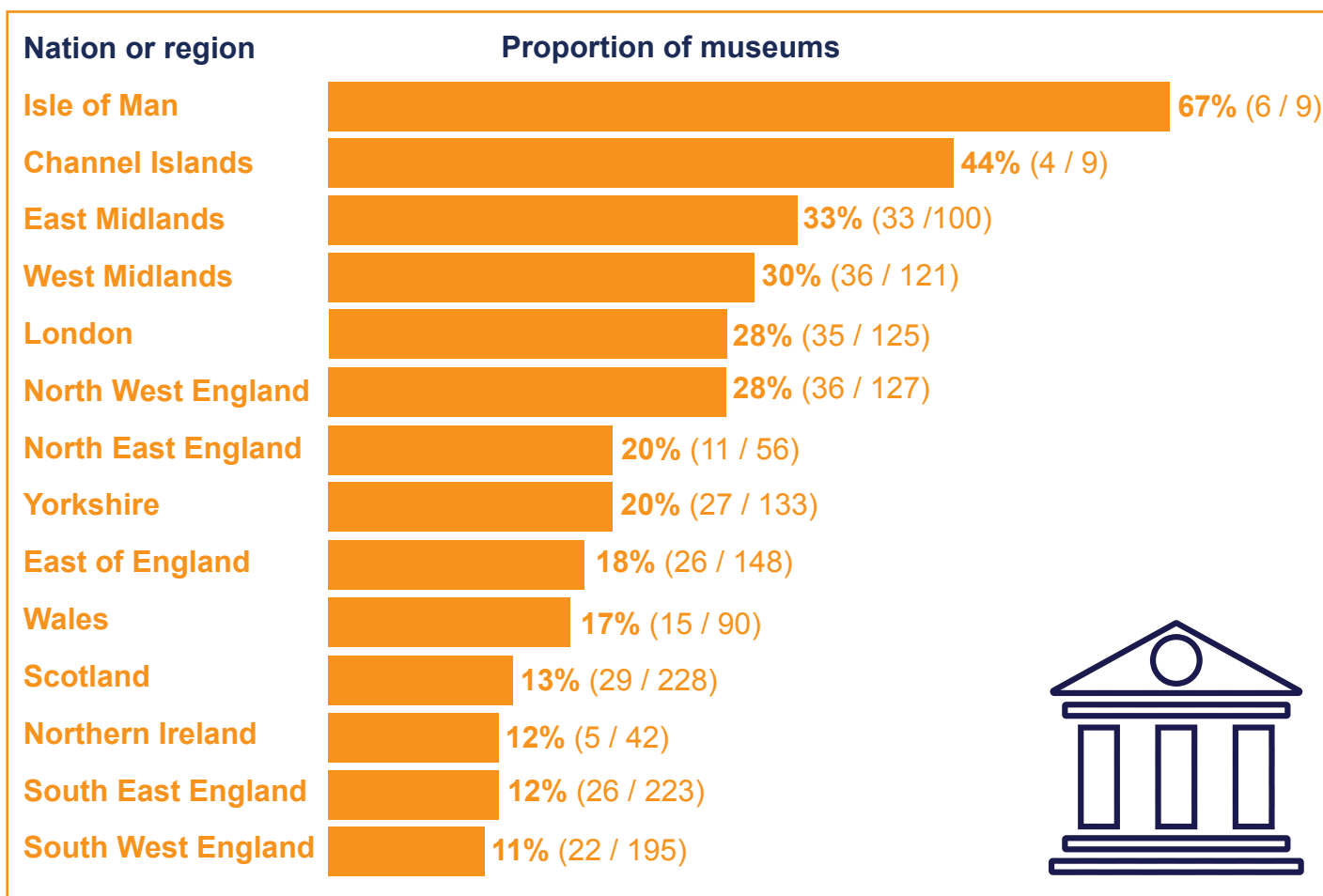
‘An access statement is a written, clear, accurate, and above all honest description of our current facilities and the services we offer, to enable you to make an informed decision as to whether the Museum meets your particular access needs.’

Both are good descriptions of what access information should achieve, but if done well, there is no need to include these sentences within the information provided. They are self-referential and do not inform the visitor, and instead come across with undertones of a legal disclaimer. It’s difficult to imagine this formal tone being used in other parts of a museum’s website, for example, for an exhibition or gallery promotion. [\[note 14\]](#)

**Table 3: Proportion of UK museums that provide a welcome message to disabled visitors, by museum type**

Types of museum	Proportion of museums
National museums	42% (30 / 71)
Independent museums	20% (151 / 759)
University museums	19% (14 / 73)
Military museums	18% (10 / 57)
Local Authority museums	17% (79 / 455)
Heritage sites	14% (27 / 191)

**Table 4: Proportion of UK museums that provide a welcome message to disabled visitors, by UK nation and region**



## Welcome message: Good or Poor?

“We believe that access to Maidstone Museum should be easy for all visitors, and make sure that we’re able to accommodate visitors with a disability in discovering our selection of exhibits. We implemented a number of changes to the building in recent years to ensure convenience for all, with the installation of access ramps and a lift to the first floor exhibitions among those improvements undertaken. We are always looking at ways to make access to the museum easier and value your feedback in refining how we improve our services. Simply contact us today with any suggestions on how we can support you on your requirements, and we’ll work to accommodate your needs.”



**Good.** Evidence that Maidstone Museum have made changes will be reassuring to disabled visitors. They clearly understand that increasing access is an ongoing endeavour, and they invite visitor feedback.

“Museum staff welcome all people with disabilities and have received Welcome Host and/or disability awareness training. They will do their best to help you and to make your contact with the Museum successful. If there is something that you feel could reasonably be improved, or if you have any special requirements, please let us know.”



**Good.** Visitors to Salisbury Museum are reassured that front-of-house staff are trained and approachable.

“We encourage everybody to interact with our collections and help everybody to do so to the best of our ability.”



**Good.** A nice inclusive message from Keswick Museum and Art Gallery.

“At the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre we welcome all visitors and aim to do everything we can to make sure every visitor has a buzzwangling time.”



**Good.** How a museum communicates with its visitors is vital in making everyone feel welcome. Here, the museum is on brand, inclusive and funny all within one sentence.

“Didcot Railway Centre warmly welcomes all visitors with physical, sensory and learning disabilities and our staff will do all they can to ensure that your visit is both comfortable and enjoyable. Visitors should however be aware of an unavoidable flight of 18 steps on the only access route to the centre (see below for more details).”



**Good.** The centre show that they have considered a range of disabilities and are up front about a major barrier to access. They go on to provide excellent access information and refer to a planned HLF application and support by a local Access Group.

“We want to make the museum as accessible as possible, but [the museum] is a 16th century Grade 1 listed building, and because of this we cannot modify it to better accommodate disabled members of the public.”



**Poor.** Instead of this statement, the museum should provide details about which areas are accessible and inaccessible, and provide alternative means of viewing inaccessible areas (through images, film or VR for example). The wording also gives the impression that all disabled people use wheelchairs.

“Accessibility: Fully accessible.”



**Poor.** While this sounds promising, this was the only access information provided. In the absence of details of resources and facilities (e.g. accessible toilets, step-free access, Large Print etc.), a visitor will be uncertain that their access needs will be met. What could be implied is that the museum believes it is fully accessible for wheelchair users, but the lack of detail still doesn't give confidence.

“We welcome visitors with disabilities; we also welcome assistance dogs. We are committed to developing and promoting inclusive access to the museum. We suggest that you telephone before a visit for specific access information which you may require.”



**Poor.** This starts well, but the website provided no other information. Inclusive access means that the website should provide all visitors with the information they need in advance, and not place the burden on a particular group to go through additional steps, which in the case of the phone could be inaccessible to them (if they are D/deaf or hard of hearing).

## 3.2 Contact information



**Contact details** were provided by 39% of museums.



A **named, or dedicated access contact** was provided by 6% of museums.

The venue accessibility page should include contact information to enable people to:

- 1) Ask individual questions that may not have been answered by the website information;
- 2) Request personal assistance, for example wheelchair loan, parking reservation, audio description support;
- 3) Give post-visit feedback on their experience.

It is important to give options for the means of making contact. D/deaf people are likely to prefer using email to phone, and some blind people prefer the phone to email.

Provide an email address, rather than relying on online forms that use CAPTCHA (a system intended to distinguish human from machine input, as a way of combating spam and automated extraction of data from websites). These are often inaccessible for screen-reader users, even when an audio alternative is provided.

People will be reassured that a dedicated access contact has suitable knowledge and training. If the contact details are the same as for general information, it is important that requests about access are dealt with and responded to promptly and expertly.

### 3.3 Getting to the museum



**Getting There** information was provided by 19% of museums (306)



**Descriptive directions** were provided by 8% of museums (122)

Along with the museum's address, it is useful to provide detailed directions for those travelling via different modes of transport.

For many visitors, particularly autistic or blind and partially sighted visitors, the journey to a museum can be very challenging. Highlighting buildings, statues and other places of interest on the way can help distract those with anxiety, or reassure people with sight loss.

Let visitors know about engineering works / closed roads or transport changes in the local area where possible.

In large towns or cities, let people know alternatives: for example, they may prefer to travel via a station that is further away, but has step-free access.

Detailed information also gives blind and partially sighted visitors the opportunity to make an independent visit. VocalEyes has [developed guidelines to help museums and other arts or heritage venues produce descriptive directions and venue information for blind and partially sighted visitors](#). [note 15]



Information about **disabled parking** was provided by 48% of museums (766)

Your access page should include, where applicable, up-to-date information about:

1. Bookable parking spaces for disabled people in your car park (with clearly marked extra space for wheelchairs at rear and side of the vehicle). This should ideally be as flexible as possible so that if a space is available, it can be booked at short notice.
2. Nearby on-road or car park spaces for Blue Badge holders.

### 3.4 Concessions and proof of disability

This section is relevant for museums that charge for entry or special exhibitions.

Deaf and disabled people are entitled to request an extra ticket, free of charge, if they would be unable to attend the museum or exhibition without the active support of another person.

A disabled visitor's support needs may occasionally involve 1:1 support at all times but is more likely to be focussed on specific aspects of a visit to a venue, such as travel, interacting with staff, eating and drinking, being within a crowd, navigation around a building, or using the toilet. Waiving the cost of the companion or personal assistant's attendance is thus a suitable reasonable adjustment on behalf of the venue when seeking to comply with the Equality Act 2010.

We advocate the use of the terms **companion** or **personal assistant** in relation to providing free tickets to a customer who requires assistance, as these are neutral phrases that can apply to all forms of personal support.

If you require proof of eligibility before issuing tickets at a concession rate, this needs to be clearly noted on the website access page, and where tickets are sold online.

We suggest stating that the following forms of copied evidence make an individual eligible:

- Front page of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Attendance Allowance letter (no specific rate)
- Evidence that the individual is registered severely sight impaired (blind)
- Recognised Assistance Dog ID card
- Credability's Access Card ([accesscard.org.uk](http://accesscard.org.uk))

We recommend that you do not ask for a doctor's letter, as this can involve an additional cost to the disabled person.

We also recommend stating that you will use your discretion to issue concessions without evidence on a case-by-case basis.

Museums should consider offering other schemes that may encourage and enable disabled visitors such as membership options and flexible ticket offers allowing shorter / more frequent visits.

#### Further reading

[Personal Assistant tickets, a practical guide by Attitude is Everything \[note 16\]](#)



### 3.5 Staff training and awareness

 10% of museums referred to **awareness training** of their front-of-house staff (133)

It is reassuring to visitors to know that front-of-house staff have been trained in disability awareness, or received more specific training to support visitors with a particular disability. Let visitors know how they can identify trained staff. For example, at the Science Museum staff wear badges that let visitors know they are BSL-trained.

Front-of-house staff and those responding to phone or email enquiries also need to be aware of the resources and facilities available for disabled people on site, where they are, and how to use them. Interactions with staff can make or break the experience for disabled visitors. The best designed resource can remain unused if staff do not tell people about it, or they are unable to locate it on request.



**Table 5: UK museums that mention staff disability training on their website, by type of training**

Type of training	Museums that refer to training
Disability awareness training	122
Visual awareness, guiding or AD training	28
British Sign Language training	23
Dementia Friends	22
Autism awareness training	13
Deaf awareness training	9
Makaton training	3

**Table 6: Proportion of museums that mention staff disability training, by UK nation and region**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Proportion of museums</b>
Isle of Man	78% (7 / 9)
North West England	20% (26 / 127)
North East England	14% (8 / 56)
Yorkshire	14% (19 / 133)
London	14% (17 / 125)
East Midlands	12% (12 / 100)
Northern Ireland	10% (4 / 42)
South West England	9% (17 / 195)
South East England	8% (17 / 223)
West Midlands	7% (9 / 121)
Wales	7% (6 / 90)
Scotland	6% (13 / 228)
East of England	5% (8 / 148)
Channel Islands	0% (0 / 9)

## 4. Visitors with disabilities



**Disabled access is relevant for around one in five of the UK's population, who experience a broad range of impairments and conditions, and their families and friends.**

This section provides brief information and key statistics about five groups of visitors with disabilities, as well as the information, facilities, services and resources that a museum can provide within the venue and on their website. Details of accessible events are also provided.

Historically, many museums have only provided access information relevant for people with mobility impairments, and wheelchair users in particular. Mobility impairment is certainly experienced by the largest number of people, according to NHS figures, and the number of wheelchair users in the UK is around 1.2 million, or 2% of the population, with around two-thirds of these regular users. [\[note 17\]](#) As shown in the table below, other types of impairments are experienced by equally significant numbers of people. It is time for museums to recognise this and broaden their access provision.

**Table 7: Number of people and proportion of UK population reporting different impairments, by impairment type. Family Resources Survey 2016-17 (19,000 households)**  
[\[note 18\]](#)

Type of impairment reported	People (million)	Proportion of population
One or more of types below	13.9	22%
Mobility	7.1	11%
Stamina / breathing / fatigue	5.4	9%
Dexterity	3.9	6%
Mental health	3.4	5%
Memory	2.4	4%
Hearing	2.1	3%
Vision	1.7	3%
Learning	2.0	3%
Social / behavioural	1.1	2%
Other	2.1	3%

## 4.1 Autistic people and people with a learning disability



This section relates to both autistic people and people with a learning disability because much of the advice can be useful for both groups of people and their families. We do not mean to imply that autism is a learning disability.

### Autism

‘Autism is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them.’

According to the National Autistic Society, around 700,000 people in the UK are on the autism spectrum. Together with their families, this means autism is a part of daily life for 2.8 million people. 79% of autistic people and 70% of parents of autistic children feel socially isolated. Visits to museums and heritage sites can be a powerful way of combating this isolation, which venues can encourage and support.

It is important to remember that autism is a spectrum condition which means autistic visitors may have very different needs from one another.

### Learning disability

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities which affects someone for their whole life. The level of support needed depends on the individual. For example, someone with a mild learning disability may need support with getting a job. Whereas someone with a profound learning disability may need full-time care and support with every aspect of their life – they may also have physical disabilities.

People with certain conditions can have a learning disability too. For example, people with Down’s syndrome have a learning disability. Some people with a learning disability are also autistic.

There are 1.4 million people with a learning disability in the UK, approximately 2.16% of adults and 2.5% of children.

**Source:** Mencap ([mencap.org.uk](http://mencap.org.uk))

### At the Museum

Museums can support autistic people and people with a learning disability by offering relaxed visiting times, highlighting quieter opening times or by providing pre-visit information online to make visiting in regular hours more achievable. Good pre-visit information allows them and their families to plan their visit, which can help alleviate anxiety.

### Sensory map / trail

Sensory access is important for large numbers of visitors including autistic people and people with a learning disability, such as people with dementia / memory loss, a hearing or visual

impairment, or mental health condition. Sensory information can be provided in text form, or included on a sensory map that can be downloaded from the website.

Some considerations:

- **Crowds.** Information on your website about times of the day or week when the museum is quieter is particularly useful for autistic people and people with a learning disability and their families to make informed choices about when to visit.
- **Lighting.** For many, the transition from bright to dark spaces or vice versa can be disorienting and take time to get used to.
- **Noise.** It can be helpful in busy museums to suggest galleries or routes that are quieter than others. Tell visitors about areas of the museum that are generally noisier, or have particular sounds – e.g. the café, audiovisual displays or exhibits that are triggered by movement, hand driers in the toilets.
- **Smells.** Strong smells of food from the café or restaurant or even smells built into displays could be an issue for visitors with sensory sensitivities.
- **Temperature.** Notify visitors if certain galleries or areas of the museum are particularly cold or warm.

## Examples

[Chelmsford Museum Sensory Map \[note 19\]](#)

[Museum of English Rural Life Sensory Map \[note 20\]](#)



## A Visual Story was mentioned by 2% of museums (38)

A visual story is a short description of your spaces and what will happen on a visit. It includes lots of photographs and uncomplicated language. It can be created for a specific event or for general visits. It needs to include information about things like stairs and lifts, toilets and café, and can help show what the entrance, galleries and staff uniforms look like. Make it available to download from your website, and hand out from the front desk.

## Examples

[Museum of Farnham \[note 21\]](#)

[Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books \[note 22\]](#)

[York Castle Museum \[note 23\]](#)

## Break out, Chill Out or Quiet spaces

Noise, crowds, bright colours and interactive displays can result in sensory overload. A break out space can be useful. These should have blank walls, soft colours, cushions or beanbags, soft blankets, stress balls and drinking water. A few small pop-up tents within the room can allow several people to de-stress at the same time. Provide sketchbooks, paper and pencils,

sensory toys, and copies of your autism-friendly resources. Pop-up spaces can be useful in the summer holidays when family visits are more common.

### Example

[Eureka Museum](#) [note 24]



**Sensory backpacks / boxes** were mentioned by 1% of museums (21)

They could include maps, toys to touch, activity suggestions, trails and ear defenders, PECS symbols and a photo booklet to help with communication.

### Examples

[Sensory backpack at the National Museum of Scotland](#) [note 25]

[V&A Museum of Childhood Bethnal Green](#) [note 26]

### Further reading

[Museum DCN article on Sensory Back Packs at V&A](#) [note 27]



**Ear defenders** were mentioned by 1% of museums (18)

There may be unexpected noises in your museum – such as visitor-activated audio or hand dryers in the toilet. These can cause distress for autistic people or people with sensory processing disorder. Have some ear defenders available for loan from the front desk.

## Easyread

It can be useful to create an Easyread version of access information that helps people with a learning disability. Use easy words and short sentences, Large Print in plain fonts and images to support the text.

### Examples

[Penlee Museum and Art Gallery](#) [note 28]

[Sir John Soane's Museum easy read guide](#) [note 29]

## Makaton

Makaton is a language programme using signs and symbols, predominantly used by people with learning or communication difficulties. It is designed to support spoken language and the signs and symbols are used with speech. Over 100,000 people use Makaton either as their main method of communication or to support speech.

The Makaton Charity runs the [Makaton Friendly scheme](#) [note 30] which is designed to recognise organisations that use Makaton. One Makaton-friendly museum is Coventry Transport Museum ([transport-museum.com](http://transport-museum.com)) which informs visitors on its access page of Makaton symbols at the entrance to each new exhibition that explain the theme for that space, and that museum and shop assistants are trained in basic Makaton signing. Other

Makaton-friendly museums include The Brickworks Museum ([bursledonbrickworks.org.uk](http://bursledonbrickworks.org.uk)) and Combe Martin Museum. ([combemartinmuseum.co.uk](http://combemartinmuseum.co.uk))

## PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

PECS is an alternative communication system using simple pictures and is designed to help children with autism or other language and communication disorders express their thoughts and needs. In the museum environment, PECS can be used to help prepare a child before their visit, and for the child to make choices on site.

### Example

[National Museum of Scotland \[note 31\]](#)

## Other useful information for your access page:

- Areas where families and individuals can eat their own food
- Café location and menu, including dietary information
- Areas with likely queues
- Security and bag checks
- Toilet locations (and warning if they have noisy hand driers)
- Information about major changes in your museum, such as construction work and refurbishments
- Information about the exterior of the museum, as well as the interior

## Events and activities



**Events for autistic people** were mentioned by 1% of museums (23)



**Relaxed events** were mentioned by 1% of museums (16)

### Examples

[Natural History Museum Dawnosaurus \[note 32\]](#)

[Science Museum Early Birds \[note 33\]](#)

A number of museums run projects for groups of people with a learning disability. These are most likely to be one-off self-contained projects for adults, undertaken in partnership with other organisations, or ongoing sessions as part of access and learning activities for children, organised through special schools or Special Educational Needs (SEN) staff.

## Further reading

Ambitious About Autism is the national charity for children and young people with autism. Jack Welch has written for them about [Autism-friendly museums](#) [note 34].

The National Autistic Society ([autism.org.uk](http://autism.org.uk)) offers [training courses and consultancy](#) [note 35] and has [information on trips to museums](#) [note 36].

VisitEngland / National Autistic Society [guide to help tourism businesses](#) [note 37]

[The Autism Friendly Award](#) [note 38] is given by the National Autistic Society, currently [ChelmsfordMuseum](#) [note 39], RAF Museum ([rafmuseum.org.uk](http://rafmuseum.org.uk)) and Roman Baths ([romanbaths.co.uk](http://romanbaths.co.uk)).

Mencap ([mencap.org.uk](http://mencap.org.uk)) provides information on autism and learning disability.

Claire Madge has a range of dedicated posts and lists of autism in museums events on her website Autism in Museums ([autisminmuseums.com](http://autisminmuseums.com)) including [10 steps to breaking down the barriers](#) [note 40].

Lemos and Crane, [Re-imagine: Improving access to the arts, galleries and museums for people with learning disabilities](#) (2014) [note 41]



## 4.2 Blind and partially sighted people



Over two million people in the UK live with sight loss, around one person in 30. Of these, around 360,000 people are registered as blind or partially sighted. It is predicted that by 2020 the number of people with sight loss will rise to over 2,250,000 and by 2050 will double to nearly four million.

Sight loss affects people of all ages, but as we get older we are increasingly likely to experience it. One in five people aged 75 and over and one in two people aged 90 and over are living with sight loss. Source: [RNIB \[note 42\]](#)

### At the Museum

It is important to understand that there are a range of visual impairments, and only a small proportion of people with sight loss have no sight at all.



**Audio-described guides** were mentioned by 3% of museums (56)

A regular audio guide (mentioned by 8% of museums (135) on their access page) is not necessarily accessible to blind and partially sighted people – both in terms of the content, and the software or hardware utilised.

Audio-descriptive guides are written by professional audio describers, and weave in detailed description of objects and spaces with contextual information. They may also include detailed orientation, guiding the visitor from one stop to the next.

We recommend providing a variety of options by which to access recorded audio description:

- **App for iOS and Android** An app designed for sighted visitors can be made accessible, using the operating system's built in text-to-speech functionality. If you are providing touch screen devices, some blind or partially sighted visitors may have little or no experience of using these, so a very simplified interface is recommended.
- **A handheld device with physical button keypad:** keep several of these charged and ready for use at the information desk – the number dependent on your visitor numbers. Audioguide companies can provide these for rent or purchase.
- **Mp3 files** that a visitor can download from your website and/or SoundCloud on to their own device in advance of their visit. We recommend providing the tour as both a single file with all tracks stitched together, and individual tracks as a playlist.

Publicise recorded descriptive guides and downloadable audio on your website access information page, within the museum, and throughout your marketing, in Large Print. Although not all blind and partially sighted people will see the marketing, word-of-mouth from friends, family and companions is a common way to find out about services.



## **Braille resources** were mentioned by 10% of museums (166)

There are around 20,000 fluent braille readers in the UK and many more people use braille labelling and signage. It is an important element of many blind people's lives, and is adapting to new technology, in the form of e-braille readers. Braille has two levels:

- **Grade 1** is a letter-by-letter translation. It can be understood by all braille readers, and should be used for single words, for example tactile instructive signs.
- **Grade 2** uses contractions for common words. It takes up less room and is quicker to read. It should be used for longer texts, such as gallery interpretation. The audience for this grade of braille will be smaller.

Braille takes up more room than other text. One page of text translates to between two and three pages of braille.

Be prepared for some editorial changes. For example, the structure of a document might need to be clarified, a table of contents added, or visual references described. You can find companies that transcribe and print braille through the RNIB Sightlines Directory ([sightlinedirectory.org.uk](http://sightlinedirectory.org.uk)).



## **Handling / tactile objects** were mentioned by 11% of museums (172)

Some museums make objects available for handling or touch (whether on open display, on request, or for specific events). If some objects on display or parts of the building fabric can be touched, the museum needs to ensure that the rules are consistent and known by all staff. Touch opportunities should be accompanied by description - whether in braille, a recording, or delivered verbally by staff. Some blind and partially sighted people enjoy the experience of engaging with art through touch, while others may prefer not to.



## **Large Print** resources were mentioned by 20% of museums (323)

Large Print versions of publications are very useful for people with visual impairments – 75% of partially sighted people and 36% of registered blind people can read large print. Furthermore, they are often used by people with poor eyesight, learning disabilities, dyslexia or problems with co-ordination or manual dexterity.

Provide Large Print versions (defined by the RNIB as being Arial font sized 16 point or larger) of all gallery labels and panels, free guides or maps. It costs little to produce Large Print versions in-house.

Be consistent about where the documents are located (as near to the gallery or exhibition entrance as possible) so return visitors know where to find it. Think about ease of carrying – break the texts down into manageable booklets rather than having one heavy volume.

Do not create Large Print by enlarging a standard document using a photocopier, as the print quality will not be good enough. Proofread to ensure that headings and paragraph text are not separated by page breaks.

When promoting a Large Print version of a leaflet or a brochure, ensure that this is clearly displayed in text that also conforms to Large Print standards.

Provide a downloadable digital file of labels and panel text online which visitors can read before their visit, by changing the font size or listening using text-to-speech software. Use Microsoft Word or open source text file, rather than PDF, which is a less accessible format.



**Magnifying glasses** were mentioned by 4% of museums (72)

Magnifying glasses are useful for people with poor eyesight to help them read labels and inspect details on artwork and artefacts on display. You can make these available to borrow from an information desk or embed them into displays.



**Tactile / raised diagrams or maps** were mentioned by 3% of museums (51)

Tactile images are a means of conveying non-textual information to people who are blind or partially sighted, and may include representations of artworks, objects, maps, graphs or diagrams, using raised lines and surfaces. Tactile images should always be offered as part of a wider interpretive toolkit, with textual information for the item in question also delivered in braille, audio or by a live guide.

Tactile maps are useful for giving blind or partially sighted visitors the opportunity to understand a site, its scale and its general layout, even if they are not used as navigational aids during the visit. There is a skill in interpreting tactile maps and they are not a replacement for assistance from staff; it cannot be assumed that someone can navigate independently using a tactile map.



**Guide Dogs / Assistance Dogs** were mentioned by 40% of museums (641)

There are around 5,000 guide dog owners in the UK currently, a small proportion of those who experience sight loss. It is of course good to advertise that guide and assistance dogs are welcome at the museum, but do also consider whether you can offer a water bowl, and provide a spending area (a sectioned area where a guide dog and other assistance dogs can relieve themselves) if practical. You could also provide somewhere to leave the guide dog where it can be looked after if the owner has been offered personal assistance round your venue.

## Events



**Audio-described tours** were mentioned by 5% of museums (88)

Live audio-described tours are a popular means for blind and partially sighted people to experience museums. They focus on a selection of highlights within a gallery or exhibition providing descriptions of the spaces, displays, objects or artworks. Live tours offer a social experience for visitors with opportunities to engage with other visitors on the tour, have a dialogue with the tour leader, request further descriptive detail, and offer their own interpretations. The verbal description can be supplemented by touch opportunities – handling objects or tactile diagrams – before or during the tour.

There are two approaches to putting on a live audio described tour:

### 1) Training museum staff in audio description and visual awareness

By investing in staff and developing audio description skills in-house, museums can offer ad hoc on-demand tours, and programme regular audio-described tours on an ongoing basis.

### 2) Professional audio describer

For a one-off tour you can engage an external professional audio describer, to work with museum staff to develop and deliver a tour.

## Considerations

- Will the tour be bookable or drop-in?
- Group numbers, including sighted companions
- Marketing the tour widely to gain an audience
- Scheduling the tour at an appropriate/ accessible time
- Length of the event and whether breaks or refreshments are included
- Availability of colleagues with visual awareness training to help greet and guide visitors

## Further support

For further information or support regarding any aspect of blind and partially sighted people's experience and enjoyment of museums and heritage sites, visit [VocalEyes \(vocaleyes.co.uk\)](http://vocaleyes.co.uk) or contact them via [enquiries@vocaleyes.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@vocaleyes.co.uk) or 020 7375 1043.

## Further reading

[Sensing Culture \(sensingculture.org.uk\)](http://sensingculture.org.uk): Explore ideas and approaches to improve accessibility in the heritage sector for those experiencing sight loss

Barry Ginley, '[Museums: a whole new world for visually impaired people](#)', [Disability Studies Quarterly](#), Vol 33, No 3 (2013) [note 43]

## 4.3 D/deaf and hard of hearing people



**Deaf:** An individual who is active in the Deaf community through sign language and culture. Often diagnosed as profoundly deaf, and uses sign language as their primary form of communication.

**deaf:** An individual who is medically diagnosed as deaf (ranging from moderate to profound in one ear or both) but may not necessarily use sign language or identify with Deaf culture and communities.

**D/deaf:** used to include both groups defined above.

**Hard of hearing:** An individual who has mild to moderate hearing loss and can communicate verbally, but is unlikely to use sign language.

- There are 11 million people with hearing loss around the UK, one in six of the population. It is estimated that by 2035, this number will increase to 15.6 million people, one in five of the population.
- There are around 50,000 children with hearing loss in the UK. Around half are born with hearing loss while the other half will lose their hearing during childhood.
- More than 40% of people over 50 years old have hearing loss, rising to 71% of people over the age of 70.
- It is estimated that there are at least 24,000 people around the UK who use British Sign Language (BSL) as their main language although there are no official records.

**Source:** [Action On Hearing Loss, Facts and Figures \[note 44\]](#)



**1 in 6 people in the UK have hearing loss**

## At the Museum

### Audio guides with volume enhancement and transcripts

These are useful for people wearing hearing aid devices and increasingly, those with Cochlear Implant devices (CI). Some CI users prefer to receive audio guides via Bluetooth as they can alter the volume and tone of the speakers' voices. Transcripts for audioguides are also useful. Availability of transcripts needs to be highlighted on the access information page.

### British Sign Language (BSL) films

Viewed on a phone or tablet that can be downloaded to personal device prior to a visit or accessed by a loaned device at the museum.

The Roald Dahl Museum ([roalddahl.com/museum](http://roalddahl.com/museum)) and Signly worked together using an app that delivered BSL talks. Audience members use their mobile devices to scan QR codes around the museum which trigger BSL videos.

Bethlem Museum of the Mind ([museumofthemind.org.uk](http://museumofthemind.org.uk)) have used integrated BSL and captioned videos to reach wider members of the Deaf and deafened community on monitors within the permanent displays. There are currently few venues in the UK offering this option.



**Subtitled audio-visual material** was mentioned by 4% of museums (69)

Film should be subtitled for deaf and hard of hearing people and people for whom English is a second or other language. Subtitles are also ideal where all visitors may have difficulty hearing audio, such as busy areas, areas where audio is inappropriate or where multiple sound sources are playing.



**Transcripts of audio-visual material** were mentioned by 4% of museums (65)

Transcripts are easy to create and helpful for those who want to follow any commentary that does not have accessible features such as closed captions.



**Hearing induction loops** were mentioned by 18% of museums (297)

Induction loops or infrared systems in lecture theatres and at information and ticket desks will help people to hear voices more clearly over background noise.

If a deaf person uses a hearing aid, they can set it to the hearing loop setting (formerly the 'T' setting). If they don't, they can use a hearing loop with a loop-listening device, which transmits the sound through headphones, earphones or a stethoset.

Those with advanced model hearing aid devices, including CI, receive audio via Bluetooth. As technology progresses, new induction loops will have inbuilt Bluetooth transmitters or dual Bluetooth/infrared options. Modern hearing aid devices can link via Bluetooth with mobile phone and tablet devices.

## Events



### **BSL interpreted talks** were mentioned by 3% of museums (56)

BSL interpreted talks are delivered by professionally-registered BSL interpreters who are usually positioned by the side of the speaker and relay all spoken words in BSL. Depending on the length of the talk, there may be two interpreters, taking turns. This form of interpretation is popular with members of the Deaf community who use BSL as their primary language.

### **Live BSL tours given by Deaf tour guides**

Some museums hold regular live BSL tours with trained tour curators who deliver using BSL. They have undertaken specialised training to relay any mainstream tour, delivering art and museum-specific words as BSL. These Deaf tour guides are not usually professional BSL interpreters, as this is a different specialised delivery. They use specific signs to describe any emotive and artistic descriptions of art and artefacts.



### **Captioned talks or tours** were mentioned by 1% of museums (9)

Captioned talks are where speech is simultaneously displayed as text on tablets or on the lecture theatre screen. These are popular with deafened and hard of hearing people who are able to hear some words but require additional communication support through live subtitles. For talks in a lecture theatre, the Speech-To-Text Reporter (STTR) works onsite or remotely, and reiterates spoken words verbatim as projected live subtitles. For tours, the STTR works remotely as people follow the curator round the venue with a tablet in hand.

### **Further reading**

Stagetext are available to advise, support and engage with museums and heritage sites on any aspect of access for d/Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people. They advocate pragmatic solutions and will work with venues to ensure that everyone has the best experience possible. Contact them via [enquiries@stagetext.org](mailto:enquiries@stagetext.org) or visit [stagetext.org](http://stagetext.org).

Action on Hearing Loss: [visiting museums and galleries](#) [note 45]

Museum Association: [Opening up museums to deaf audiences](#) [note 46]

Museums Association: [Deaf visitors: physical accessibility checklist](#) [note 47]



## 4.4 People with dementia



There are an estimated 850,000 people currently living with dementia in the UK. This number is expected to rise considerably in the coming decades. Although dementia is not exclusive to older people, one in six people over 80 come to experience it. Museums are thus likely to increasingly feel the effects of visitors experiencing dementia as the population ages over the coming years.

Having accessible and inclusive buildings, facilities and programmes are of course helpful. However, the biggest difference a venue can make to effectively welcome visitors experiencing dementia and their companions is to ensure their staff and volunteers are trained to give a warm welcome and friendly visitor experience.

### At the Museum

Information about onsite facilities and services is essential to ensuring potential visitors have the information they need to make decisions and effective plans for their visit. The following pre-visit information is particularly important:

- Contact details of someone to speak to in advance of a visit
- Travel and arrival: public transport options and parking facilities, including cost, distance to entrance, signage
- Details of training that staff and volunteers have undergone and whether they can be recognised in any particular way, e.g. uniforms or Dementia Friends badge
- Clear and simple signage and maps (including pictures)
- Walking distances
- Level access routes
- Availability of mobility aids (wheelchair or scooter loan)
- Seating
- Large print information
- Hearing loops
- Quiet spaces

### Events



**Dementia friendly events** were mentioned by 1% of museums (9)

#### Further reading

Alzheimer's Society, [Dementia-friendly arts guide](#) [note 48]

Dementia Friends ([dementiafriends.org.uk](http://dementiafriends.org.uk))

Historic Royal Palaces, [Rethinking Heritage: A guide to help make your site more dementia-friendly](#) [note 49]

Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery, [Dementia toolkit for small museums](#) [note 50]




## 4.6 People with mobility impairments



There are around 1.2 million wheelchair users in the UK, and a total of 7.1 million people who experience mobility impairment. As well as those who use wheelchairs regularly, much of the information below will also be useful for other disabled and elderly people who may have low stamina, breathing difficulties or become easily fatigued.

### At the Museum

 **Ramps, step-free / level access:** information provided by 53% of museums (846)


 **Lifts** were mentioned by 35% of museums (568)

 **Areas not accessible to wheelchairs or potentially to people with mobility impairments** were mentioned by 41% of museums (656)

Provide details of the location of lifts in the museum. If there is no lift access to upper or lower floors, then be clear which rooms or galleries are only accessible by stair and provide alternative means of viewing the objects and rooms, using images, film and description. For example, you could provide a photographic pack with descriptions, or an interactive feature on a tablet and/or accessible computer. If this is not also available on the website, let visitors know where this is in the museum.

 **Toilets** were mentioned by 54% of museums (873)

Tell visitors the location of accessible toilets (not 'disabled toilets'), and provide images and details of the arrangement, and measurements of door openings and turning circle. Accessible toilets are designed to meet the majority of needs of independent wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments, as well as the additional requirements of people with bowel and bladder conditions. They also help people with other physical conditions such as impaired dexterity and grip, balance and other conditions where physical support from grab rails and the presence of an emergency alarm is helpful.

 **Changing Places toilets** were mentioned by 4% of museums (68)

The Changing Places consortium ([changingplaces.org](http://changingplaces.org)) estimates that around 250,000 people cannot use standard accessible toilets. This includes people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, as well as older people. Changing Places toilets have extra features that a standard accessible toilet does not have. This can include a height-adjustable changing bench, a hoist system and plenty of space. If your museum does not have a Changing Places toilet, it is useful to mention if there is one close by.





## **Wheelchair loan** was offered by 26% of museums (421)

It is good practice to offer wheelchairs that can be borrowed by disabled or elderly visitors. If your museum has outdoor spaces, you might consider offering the loan of a mobility scooter.

### **Seating**

Provide information of any seating in galleries or exhibitions, and exteriors such as gardens.

#### **Further reading**

Centre for Accessible Environments [Managing Accessible Toilets Factsheet](#) Jan 2017 [note 51]

[Changing Places consortium](#) (changingplaces.org)

Euan's Guide The '[Let's Talk Toilets](#)' report 2017 [note 52]

Kids in Museums, [How can your museum better welcome families with a wheelchair user?](#) [note 53]

Museums DCN, [Around the toilet: a research project report about what makes a safe and accessible toilet space](#) (2018) [note 54]

## Appendix 1: Access showcase

---

A selection of museum access information pages that showcase best practice. All links were active at publication. There were many more excellent ones; this is a selection of the best.

**Black Country Living Museum** ([bclm.co.uk/visiting/accessibility/24.htm](https://bclm.co.uk/visiting/accessibility/24.htm))

**Bletchley Park** ([bletchleypark.org.uk/visit-us/accessibility](https://bletchleypark.org.uk/visit-us/accessibility))

**Brighton Museum and Art Gallery** ([brightonmuseums.org.uk/brighton/plan-your-visit/accessibility/](https://brightonmuseums.org.uk/brighton/plan-your-visit/accessibility/))

**Burns Museum** ([burnsmuseum.org.uk/visit/accessibility](https://burnsmuseum.org.uk/visit/accessibility))

**D Day Story** ([thedaystory.com/plan-your-visit/visitors-with-disabilities/](https://thedaystory.com/plan-your-visit/visitors-with-disabilities/))

**Dunham Massey** ([nationaltrust.org.uk/dunham-massey#Facilities%20and%20access](https://nationaltrust.org.uk/dunham-massey#Facilities%20and%20access)). National Trust properties' website access pages are generally short, but link to very thorough and detailed access statements. We've included Dunham Massey as an example.

**Glynn Vivian** ([swansea.gov.uk/article/36752/Access](https://swansea.gov.uk/article/36752/Access))

**Museum of London** ([museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london/plan-your-visit/museum-accessibility](https://museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london/plan-your-visit/museum-accessibility))

**Manx National Heritage** ([manxnationalheritage.im/visit/getting-about/accessibility-information/](https://manxnationalheritage.im/visit/getting-about/accessibility-information/)). All the venues run by Manx National Heritage have access guides, with lots of detailed information and images.

**National Museum of Rural Life** (National Museums Scotland) ([nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-rural-life/plan-your-visit/#access](https://nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-rural-life/plan-your-visit/#access)). As well as providing lots of information, there is also a prominent link to disabledgo.com.

**Norwich Castle** ([museums.norfolk.gov.uk/norwich-castle/plan-your-visit/access-facilities](https://museums.norfolk.gov.uk/norwich-castle/plan-your-visit/access-facilities)), which provides a list of access resources available in different galleries

**No.1 Royal Crescent** ([no1royalcrescent.org.uk/accessibility/](https://no1royalcrescent.org.uk/accessibility/))

**Old Royal Naval College** ([ornc.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/accessibility](https://ornc.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/accessibility))

**RAF Museum London** ([rafmuseum.org.uk/london/plan-your-day/accessibility.aspx](https://rafmuseum.org.uk/london/plan-your-day/accessibility.aspx))

**Roald Dahl Museum** ([roalddahl.com/museum](https://roalddahl.com/museum))

**Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books** ([sevenstories.org.uk/visit/accessibility](https://sevenstories.org.uk/visit/accessibility))

**ThinkTank** ([birminghammuseums.org.uk/thinktank](https://birminghammuseums.org.uk/thinktank)). Includes a link to a virtual tour, designed to help autistic visitors prepare for their visit.

**Wallace Collection** ([wallacecollection.org/visit/access/](https://wallacecollection.org/visit/access/))

**The Whitworth** ([whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/visit/access/](https://whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/visit/access/)). The Whitworth has made available audio descriptions for the gallery, building and spaces that can be listened to or downloaded via their Soundcloud.

## Appendix 2: Setting up an access panel / disability advisory group

---

Ultimately, the content required within your access information webpage will be particular to your venue. The best way of discovering what you need to include will come from talking to disabled visitors. We recommend involving disabled people in a consultative process to develop your access information, and provide ongoing support to visitors with disabilities. Ideally a museum would also have disabled people represented at all levels of staff (paid and volunteer), and Board.

How you set up a group will be unique to your museum, but here is some advice based on the article [Setting up a disability advisory group \[note 55\]](#) by Julia Cort, Community Learning Manager, and Rachel Harrison, Community Engagement Officer at Horniman Museum and Gardens, with additional notes based on VocalEyes and Stagertext's experience of their user panels:

### 1. Establish buy-in

- Establish awareness and buy-in for the group across your organisation.
- Set up an internal structure to ensure the group's advice is useful, timely and acted on.
- Minute meetings and circulate agreed actions after each event.

### 2. Make sure you have the resources to run the group long-term

- Staff time to coordinate the group
- Travel expenses
- Refreshments
- Access support such as BSL interpreters
- Accessible space for the group to meet
- Benefits for members such as free access to paid exhibitions

### 3. Appoint a group chair

Museum sector research shows that it is best practice to recruit an external, disabled person as chair to ensure impartiality and to benefit from their expertise and contacts.

### 4. Recruit members

- Recruit local people with daily lived experience of disability. They should be interested in your museum and making museums more accessible.
- A chair can help recruit members. Send out simple application forms with the option to complete them over the phone or in person. Hold the first meeting as an informal group interview for everyone to decide if the group is for them.
- If you are seeking representation from individuals with specific disabilities, you may wish to approach local groups. You can find details of local sight loss groups in RNIB's Sightline Directory ([sightlinedirectory.org.uk](http://sightlinedirectory.org.uk)), and the National Autistic Society has a [directory of local branches](#). [note 56]

- Let members know that they are not expected to attend every meeting, and that they can stand down from the group at any time. You may wish to have a larger pool of people, from which a proportion attend each individual meeting. It may be that after a year or so, a member may feel that they have contributed all they can. You can then invite new members. A certain amount of turnover of members is healthy and will ensure fresh ideas.

## **5. Scheduling meetings**

- Schedule meetings for a year in advance.
- Schedule for times that mean members do not have to travel in the dark or in rush hour. You should also try to avoid working hours so as not to exclude people who work.
- You can also schedule meetings at useful points in project timelines, so you can provide concrete information to the panel but before binding decisions have been made.

## **6. Provide opportunities for all members to contribute fully**

- When recruiting members, find out their access requirements, including how they would like to receive information about the meeting and any extra support needed. Circulate agenda and any documents two weeks before each meeting.
- Keep your agenda to a maximum of four items and always include an opportunity for members to share 'any other business', such as current projects or examples of best practice.
- Use the first meeting to jointly create a short group agreement. This could include communication rules (such as stating name before speaking), and other rules to ensure everyone can contribute.
- Ask members if they are happy to be contacted individually or as a group for support between meetings and add their response to the agreement.

## **7. Invite staff and external contractors to meetings**

- It is much more effective if staff members, designers and architects hear advice from the group directly.
- Prepare staff in advance by sending them the group agreement, highlighting any communication strategies and chat to them about any concerns they have.

## **8. Be prepared to act on the group's advice**

- Act on advice or discuss why you haven't.
- Tell the group when you have acted on their advice and its impact. This builds trust between the group and the museum which is vital to a productive relationship.

## **9. Evaluate the group on an ongoing basis**

# Partner Organisations

---

## VocalEyes ([vocaleyeyes.co.uk](http://vocaleyeyes.co.uk))

VocalEyes believe that blind and partially sighted people have an equal right to experience and enjoy arts and culture. Founded in 1998, VocalEyes' audio describers and trainers work with theatres and museums across the UK to improve access to their performances, events, exhibitions and venues.

VocalEyes is a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England. VocalEyes' museum programme is also generously supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

## Stagetext ([stagetext.org](http://stagetext.org))

Stagetext is a registered charity which provides captioning and live subtitling services to theatres, museums and other arts venues to make their activities accessible to people who are d/Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. Established in 2000, Stagetext are committed to improving access to arts and culture for all deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people.

Stagetext is a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England.

## Autism in Museums ([autisminmuseums.com](http://autisminmuseums.com))

Autism in Museums is an initiative to raise awareness of accessibility for all in museums. It has been created by Claire Madge who had been sharing autism in museums best practice and events on her blog [Tincture of Museum](http://Tincture of Museum) since 2012.



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



## Other organisations

---

### **Attitude is Everything** ([attitudeiseverything.org.uk](http://attitudeiseverything.org.uk))

Attitude is Everything improves Deaf and disabled people's access to live music by working in partnership with audiences, artists and the music industry. Attitude's [State of Access reports \[note 57\]](#) and [Access Starts Online music industry campaign \[note 58\]](#) formed the original inspiration for the State of Museum Access report series.

### **Centre for Accessible Environments** ([cae.org.uk](http://cae.org.uk))

CAE offers consultancy for access audits and accessible interpretation and guidelines, particularly physical access as well as intellectual.

### **DisabledGo** ([disabledgo.com](http://disabledgo.com)) and **Euan's Guide** ([euansguide.com](http://euansguide.com))

Disabled access review sites which specialise in detailed access information for public buildings and places of interest. Museums should supplement their own access information with a link to their venue on one or both sites, and if there is no listing for them, work with each organisation to get your venue reviewed. Both websites are well-used, and your presence there will be sure to encourage disabled visitors.

### **Disability Cooperative Network** ([musedcn.org.uk](http://musedcn.org.uk))

A group of committed museum professionals working with national charities, people with disabilities, disability networks in other sectors and others to promote and embed inclusive practice in the heritage and cultural sector.

### **Jodi Awards / Jodi Mattes Trust** ([jodiawards.org.uk](http://jodiawards.org.uk))

The Jodi Mattes Trust fosters the cultural equality of disabled people by celebrating best practice through the Jodi Awards, given biennially (next in 2019). The Jodi Awards are for best use of technology to widen access to information, learning, collections and creativity for disabled people in museums, libraries, archives and heritage. Their website has useful and inspirational case studies on past winners.

### **National Register of Access Consultants** ([nrac.org.uk](http://nrac.org.uk))

The National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC) is an independent UK wide accreditation service for individuals who provide access consultancy and access auditor services. It was set up with government backing to provide a single source for organisations seeking competent advice in relation to inclusive environments and accessibility.

### **VisitEngland and VisitScotland Accessibility Guides** ([accessibilityguides.org](http://accessibilityguides.org))

VisitEngland and VisitScotland's website for the easy production and publication of Accessibility Guides. Produce a guide by answering a series of questions on your venue's accessibility, uploading useful photos and inputting any further information. You will be given a unique URL to promote your guide, which you can add to your website and share across social media channels.

# Acknowledgements

---

With thanks to the volunteers who gave their time to audit the website access information of all 1700 UK accredited museums between 1 March and 30 April 2018.

Janet Alderman, Dr Claire Bailey-Ross, Emma Barran Scott, Johnny Basra, Laura Boon, Pete Brown, Nicki Cockburn, Ciara Costello, Adam Coulson, Lorna Cruickshanks, Ally Davies, Nazeea Elahi, Laura Falkiner-Rogers, Ashley Fisher, Allison Freeman, Michelle Headley, Laura Jayne Gardner, Jo Gillam, Becky Greenhill, Claire Haggarty, Mary Hickford, Elaine Hill, Fran Horner, Jane Hughes, Nadine Ishani, Karen Johnston, Linda Logan, Emma Mason, Charlotte McCarthy, Lucy Neville, Fiona Romeo, Corey Timpson, Kate Toomey, Lucy Ward.

We would like to thank [DebraJane Design](#) for the design and typesetting of this report. Many thanks also to Jacob Adams, Sarah Boiling, Sharon Heal, Andrew Miller and Becki Morris for reviewing the report and giving useful feedback.



# Notes

---

**Note 1:** 81% of respondents (disabled people, their families and friends) felt that museum access was 'generally good', compared to 57% in 2016. For heritage sites ('historic places'), 71% considered accessibility to be generally good while 29% considered it generally bad.

<https://www.euansguide.com/media/10926169/the-access-survey-2017-euans-guide.pdf>

**Note 2:** DCMS, Taking Part, Findings from the longitudinal survey waves 1-3 (2016). Consistent museum visitors (i.e. people who reported visiting museums in each of the three years of the study) were less likely to have a disability or long term illness (19%) than other respondents, including those who never visited (27%). Less than a quarter of visitors to heritage sites (23%) reported having a disability, compared to around two in five (39%) of non-visitors.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-longitudinal-report-2016>

**Note 3:** <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/equality-in-progress/eipreport/>

**Note 4:** <https://www.euansguide.com/media/10926169/the-access-survey-2017-euans-guide.pdf>

**Note 5:** Of the 1,718 museums in this list, 109 were excluded from the survey, either because the museum was closed to the public (permanently or temporarily) or because no website was found (again, permanently or temporarily). Thus, the percentages cited in the report are based on the 1,606 museums that were open to the public and had functioning websites during our audit period (1 March and 30 April 2018). The audit was mainly quantitative in approach, recording the presence or absence of information, and did not judge the quality or accuracy of that information. The accessibility of the websites themselves was also outside the scope of this audit. It is possible that some of the museums surveyed have good or excellent access resources at their venue, but that these are not mentioned on the website. This may particularly be the case among local authority museums, which may have less direct control over their websites, which are often subsections of the authority's web presence. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/document/list-accredited-museums-uk-channel-islands-and-isle-man>

**Note 6:** <https://vocaleyes.co.uk/state-of-museum-access-report-2016/>

**Note 7:** <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag-20>

**Note 8:** <http://www.stagetext.org/about-stagetext/training-in-how-to-subtitle-your-own-content>

**Note 9:** <https://vocaleyes.co.uk/services/resources/guidelines-for-digital-accessibility-film/>

**Note 10:** <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/visit-us/accessibility/>

**Note 11:** <https://medium.com/merl-rm-blogtest/putting-our-museum-on-google-streetview-265e464218e3>

**Note 12:** <https://www.dundeeunitedfc.co.uk/the-club/virtual-tour>

**Note 13:** ‘An analysis of the messages [communicated by the museum] tells us who is centred as the target audience and who is most welcome in terms of inclusion, representation and visibility. These messages have a psychological impact, which is either validated or absolved by the social experience of visiting or interacting with the museum, determining if people will choose to engage with the institution or not, as either audience, workforce, volunteer or Board.’ Glasgow Women’s Library, Equality in progress: fair access, representation and inclusion in museums (2018), p. 53. <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/equality-in-progress/>

**Note 14:** The two sentences likely come from a template access statement in an initiative by Visit England in 2010, which they have recently replaced with Accessibility Guides ([accessibilityguides.org](http://accessibilityguides.org))

**Note 15:** <https://vocaleyeyes.co.uk/services/resources/descriptive-directions-and-information-for-blind-or-partially-sighted-visitors-to-arts-venues>

**Note 16:** <http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/resources/practical-guides/personal-assistant-tickets>

**Note 17:** Improving Wheelchair Services <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wheelchair-services/>

**Note 18:** UK Government, Department of Work and Pensions, Family Resources Survey 2016-17. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-resources-survey--2> The FRS survey is of people living in private households, not those in nursing or retirement homes. This means that figures relating to older people may not be representative of the United Kingdom population, with disability prevalence for older people higher than estimated from the FRS.

**Note 19:** <https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=247922>

**Note 20:** <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2018/01/Autism-sensory-map.pdf>

**Note 21:** <https://farnhammaltings.com/wp-content/uploads/Visual-Story-Museum-Final.pdf>

**Note 22:** [https://www.sevenstories.org.uk/\\_assets/media/editor/archive/PDFs\\_of\\_Print/Social-Story.pdf](https://www.sevenstories.org.uk/_assets/media/editor/archive/PDFs_of_Print/Social-Story.pdf)

**Note 23:** <https://www.yorkcastlemuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/06/York-Castle-Museum-Visual-Story.pdf>

**Note 24:** <https://www.eureka.org.uk/plan-your-visit/access-information/>

**Note 25:** <https://www.nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-scotland/plan-your-visit/events-and-resources-for-autistic-people/>

**Note 26:** <https://www.vam.ac.uk/moc/learning/sen/visiting-autistic-child/>

**Note 27:** <https://www.musedcn.org.uk/2016/07/26/sensory-backpacks-at-the-va-with-abigail-hirsch-claire-madge-va/>

- Note 28:** [http://www.penleehouse.org.uk/assets/file/Penlee Easy Read guide2.pdf](http://www.penleehouse.org.uk/assets/file/Penlee%20Easy%20Read%20guide2.pdf)
- Note 29:** <https://www.soane.org/sites/default/files/downloads/sir-john-soanes-museum-easy-read-guide.pdf>
- Note 30:** <https://www.makaton.org/aboutMakaton/makatonFriendly/>
- Note 31:** <https://www.nms.ac.uk/media/1155061/communication-illustrated-cards.pdf>
- Note 32:** <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/events/dawnosaurs.html>
- Note 33:** <https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/see-and-do/early-birds>
- Note 34:** <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/understanding-autism/out-and-about/guide-to-an-autism-friendly-museum>
- Note 35:** <http://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/training-consultancy.aspx>
- Note 36:** <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/holidays-trips/museum.aspx>
- Note 37:** <https://www.visitbritain.org/visitengland-and-national-autistic-society-launch-guide-help-tourism-businesses>
- Note 38:** <http://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/autism-friendly-award.aspx>
- Note 39:** <https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/museums/accessibility/>
- Note 40:** <http://autisminmuseums.com/autism-in-museums-10-steps-to-breaking-down-the-barriers/>
- Note 41:** <https://www.lemosandcrane.co.uk/home/index.php?id=235006>
- Note 42:** <https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/key-information-and-statistics>
- Note 43:** <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3761> <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3761>
- Note 44:** <https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/about-us/our-research-and-evidence/facts-and-figures/>
- Note 45:** <https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/live-well/accessibility-guidance/visiting-museums-and-galleries/>
- Note 46:** <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/15022012-deaf-audiences-news>
- Note 47:** <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-visitors/15022012-physical-access-checklist>

**Note 48:** [https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/dementia-friendly\\_arts\\_guide.pdf](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/dementia-friendly_arts_guide.pdf)

**Note 49:** [https://www.hrp.org.uk/media/1544/2017-11-14\\_rethinkingheritage\\_lowres\\_final.pdf](https://www.hrp.org.uk/media/1544/2017-11-14_rethinkingheritage_lowres_final.pdf)

**Note 50:** <http://dementiafriendlykent.org.uk/news/tunbridge-wells-museum-dementia-tool-kit/>

**Note 51:** <https://cae.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CAE-Managing-Accessible-Toilets-Factsheet-Jan-2017.pdf>

**Note 52:** <https://www.euansguide.com/news/the-let-s-talk-toilets-report-2017/>

**Note 53:** <https://www.keepandshare.com/doc/8214937/kim-wheelchair-resource-england-pdf-248k?da=y>

**Note 54:** <https://www.musedcn.org.uk/2018/08/02/around-the-toilet-a-research-project-report-about-what-makes-a-safe-and-accessible-toilet-space-2018/>

## Share this report

Please help us to spread the word about this report and raise awareness of how access to museums can be improved for disabled people.

The download link for the report is:

<https://vocaleyes.co.uk/state-of-museum-access-2018>

A text-only version in Large Print (Arial, 16 pt) is also available in Microsoft Word.

Tweet about this report using @VocalEyesAD @StageText and @AutismInMuseums and #SOMA2018

The museum access pledge is at: <https://vocaleyes.co.uk/museum-access-pledge>

Tweet about it using #MuseumAccessPledge