

## Access Framework

The purpose of this document is to define a consistent Science Museum Group wide approach to access provision and accepted standards of best practice for disabled people. This is in addition to our compliance with the legal and statutory frameworks provided by the Equality Act (2010), Building Regulations, Website Accessibility Regulations and British Standards. It provides **top-level definitions, guidance and principles** to enable all SMG sites and departments to work together constructively towards our organisational value of being Open for All.

Our intention is to work in partnership with disabled people to provide excellent experiences for disabled visitors and colleagues.

This framework will require regular reflection and review as we continue to learn. Specific access advice is embedded into other SMG documents for colleagues, designers and contractors which should be referred to for more detailed guidance.

### What do we mean by access?

In this context, access means providing access to our buildings, facilities, collection, digital outputs and programming for disabled people<sup>1</sup>. Our Equity Framework provides similar guidance for welcoming and specifically working in partnership with traditionally underserved audiences which may also include disabled people.

The Science Museum Group recognises the social model of disability, which is a way of viewing the world developed by disabled people. The model says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Barriers can be physical, intellectual, sensory or attitudinal. It is the role of our organisation to identify and remove barriers that exclude disabled people (both as visitors and colleagues) and take action to recognise, reflect and value their ideas and knowledge.

### Why is access so important?

There are more than 13 million disabled people in the UK<sup>2</sup> and this varies across the country. 14% of Londoners are disabled compared to 19% of people in the South East and 25% in the

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document we use the phrases *disabled people* and *access/accessibility*, although we recognise every person's right to describe themselves and their needs in whichever way they feel most comfortable.

<sup>2</sup> Data from The Papworth Trust, 2018 <https://www.papworthtrust.org.uk/about-us/publications/papworth-trust-disability-facts-and-figures-2018.pdf>

North West. 83% of disabled people acquire their impairment during their lives. This means that, for example, only very small numbers of people use British Sign Language as their first language (24k in 2018) and only 7% of Blind British people use Braille<sup>3</sup>, although 1 in 5 people will live with sight loss at some point in their lives. Disabled people are also likely to be disadvantaged in other ways, for example, full-time disabled workers earn on average 12% less than full-time non-disabled people. There are also more disabled women than men in the UK (23% compared to 19%) and the prevalence of disability varies by ethnicity, while 1 in 4 black adults in the UK are disabled, it is 1 in 5 for white adults, so disabled people may be further disadvantaged by other circumstances.

Access considerations are also important for many people who are not or would not describe themselves as disabled. Much of the work that we do for access reasons also benefits a broad range of visitors. As examples, the provision of lifts and ramps also benefits families with buggies as well as wheelchair users and visual and audio interpretation which may be created for disability access reasons is also of benefit for the more than 7 million adults in England who have very poor literacy skill<sup>4</sup>.

Currently around only 5% of SMG visitors and 3% of employees define themselves as disabled, compared to 18% of the UK population and 12% of employees in the UK culture sector. There is much more we need to do to ensure that disabled people form a representative part of our organisation.

### **Where does science capital fit in?**

As our number one strategic priority is to 'grow science capital in individuals and society' it is important to understand how a science capital informed approach can support our access work. Science capital is a social justice model which recognises that some people, including disabled people, have historically been excluded from science. An interest in science - or finding it fun - is not enough to support a broader range of people feeling science is "for them". We need to consider who is represented, whose ideas and cultures are centred and valued, and focus on changing the environment - the museum - rather than the groups who experience exclusion.<sup>5</sup>

### **Where are we now?**

Across SMG, many steps have already been taken to ensure that disabled people are welcomed, catered for and represented. These go beyond the minimum standards of making our buildings and facilities physically accessible with, for example, lifts, ramps and accessible toilets, and include:

- Working with disabled people to tell their stories in displays such as the Medicine Gallery and in the story of Alexander Graham Bell in the Information Age Gallery at the Science Museum
- Seeking to be more representative in our portrayals of the people who do science in live events, online and in interpretation, as in the *Hello Universe* exhibition at the National Science and Media Museum

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nrib.org.uk/professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/research-reports/reading-and-braille-research>

<sup>4</sup> <https://literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy/>

<sup>5</sup> An overview of science capital, including a link to the original academic paper, can be found here: <https://learning.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/blog/what-is-science-capital/>

- Delivering a range of activities for disabled visitors including Early Birds, Sensory Astronights, British Sign Language tours, VIscovery and SIGNtific events
- Delivering a range of interpretative devices and tools for disabled visitors such as subtitling and BSL on films, hearing loops, Braille and large-print books, tactile objects and transcripts
- Providing a range of facilities including wheelchair borrowing and welcoming assistance dogs in training
- Working successfully with disabled colleagues to adapt our working practices and spaces to meet their needs

Whilst these are good examples of success and learning across sites and departments, and we have won a number of awards for our access provision for visitors in the past, there is much more to do and we must continue to change and develop.

### Where do we want to be?

As a value-driven organisation which aims to be *open for all*, it is imperative that accessibility is considered in every aspect of our work and that disabled people are well represented in our workforce and amongst our volunteers and advisors. Our intention is to work in partnership with disabled people to provide excellent experiences for disabled visitors and colleagues.

We are committed to involving and consulting with disabled people to ensure that we are maintaining high standards and continually improving access.

We are committed to ensuring that all colleagues are supported and trained to understand the impact of their role in relation to access.

We are committed to engaging everyone with STEM. Therefore, the authentic representation of disabled people and their lives and experiences in the stories we share is a priority in our collecting, in gallery and exhibition making, in our events and programmes and in our digital offer. In addition, the welcome that we provide to disabled visitors to our museums must be of the highest quality.

We are committed in our masterplan and capital projects to achieving and in some cases exceeding best practice standards. For example, we are committed to providing a Changing Places toilet at each of our sites not just in newly constructed buildings where it is a legal requirement.

### Guiding principles

In order to reach our ambitions, we need to continue to identify and recognise barriers that exclude disabled visitors and staff and then take action to recognise and address them. We will do this using these principles:

- **Consulting:** we work in long-term partnerships with disabled consultants and visitors to embed their needs and experiences into our work
- **Representing:** guided by the principles of our Equity framework, we use science-capital informed approaches to work with disabled people to positively represent their experiences and lives
- **Enabling:** seeking the advice of access professionals, we ensure that we provide facilities, staff training and resources which enable all visitors to enjoy and engage with our museums and collection online

- **Reviewing:** we reflect on, review and seek the opinions of disabled people to learn and develop our practice

### How might we apply these principles?

It is important for us to be honest and recognise that the amount of time and resources required to work through these principles and to achieve our access ambitions will vary considerably depending on the scale and scope of each piece of work and also on the broader financial context within which we are operating.

We must avoid making assumptions about disabled people and their needs, but that does not mean that every small project needs to create a new strand of consultation, rather time should be made, for instance, to speak to Audience Research or other colleagues with experience and prior knowledge to learn from and to refer to SMG guidance and processes. This should be done at the earliest planning stages of a project so that any provision is factored in from the outset. Large-scale projects will engage a range of professionals, including architects and designers, as well as access consultants who will be briefed in our approach and principles, whereas smaller-scale activities, exhibitions/displays and events are likely to be done entirely in-house.

For every scale of project, however, it is important to be clear about the breadth of accessible provision that will be built in and also which audiences will be specifically prioritised.

### How might we measure our progress?

Creating change on a structural level takes time and we need to be open to iterative learning, reflecting and changing, working outside our comfort zones. We need to define what success looks like, how it is measured and acknowledge that it may change over time. Methods may include:

- Audience Research (in-house and externally commissioned)
- Visitor Insight Reports
- Critical feedback from focus groups, external organisations and partners
- Use of our science engagement measures

The SMG Open for All Steering Group and local site-based Open for All groups have responsibility to oversee the progress and achievements of our work in access, under the 'create spaces open for everyone' part of the Open for All plan. These groups can also provide guidance for any colleagues needing further advice or support on access work.