

DURHAM UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY & COLLECTIONS MUSEUMS, GALLERIES & EXHIBITIONS ACCESS POLICY

Defining Access

Durham University Museums, Galleries & Exhibitions are committed to sharing our collections more widely, where possible, and recognise that promoting and supporting access is beneficial to the collections themselves; to the University; and the wider community. For the purpose of this Policy, we use the definition of the Arts Council (England), which defines access as: “something that is made possible when physical, cultural, social, financial, intellectual, psychological and emotional barriers are removed or reduced” (*Arts Council Collection Collections Access Policy & Procedure*, Section 3, https://artscouncilcollection.org.uk/sites/default/files/3_Collections_Access.pdf).

Our commitment to accessibility

The aim of Durham University Museums, Galleries & Exhibitions with regard to accessibility can be summarised as making our collections available to the widest possible range of audiences for the purposes of researching, learning and enjoyment subject to the constraints of maintaining the safety, security and preservation of the items, and our users at all times. This Access Policy promotes a framework that strives to include all users and potential users whether they choose to visit in person or remotely through a range of means, as resources allow.

We recognise that there are barriers to access at all sites and to the collections within our portfolio. However, we believe that all people have a fundamental right to engage with, use and enjoy the collections. We are committed to removing and reducing barriers to access wherever possible and within the resources available to us. We aim to provide the widest possible access to our buildings, collections and services to enable audiences from all sections of the community to enjoy use of the collections.

Our policy is to build accessibility into everything we do to develop and improve the service across our venues and collections. Our commitment is long term and our policy is to make continuous improvements.

Our commitment to accessibility extends to our staff, students and volunteers as well as visitors and those we engage with, both onsite and beyond. We are committed to ongoing access training for staff, students and volunteers.

To eliminate barriers and ensure equality of access we will consider multiple forms of accessibility including, but not restricted to:

- **Physical** – to take reasonable steps to enable people with physical disabilities to reach, use and appreciate every part of our buildings. To also take account of the needs of the elderly and of people caring for young children.
- **Sensory** – to enable visitors with impaired vision or hearing to enjoy the University’s collections
- **Neuro Diversity** – to ensure that our engagement activities recognise the neuro diversity of our audiences.

- **Intellectual** – we recognise that people have different learning styles and we will provide differing interpretation to meet their needs. We also recognise that finding material may prove challenging and we will endeavour to ensure that our catalogues and other finding aids best facilitate research. We also aim to ensure that people with learning difficulties can engage with and enjoy Durham University's collections.
- **Life Experiences** – to consider the needs of people from a range of backgrounds, whose histories and lived experiences may or may not be reflected in our collections. Wherever possible, we will seek to represent, with sensitivity and accuracy, the interests, life experiences and cultures of diverse communities within our exhibitions.
- **Attitudinal** – to ensure the physical environment and our staff are welcoming to visitors from all communities. We will also aim to ensure that the people of County Durham and the North East region feel the collections are of significance to them.
- **Financial** – we are committed to a policy of free entry wherever possible. Where charges are made, these will be reasonable and appropriate concessions will be available. Research access to collections will be provided free of charge. All retail and catering services will stock goods which take account of the range of incomes for all visitors.
- **Geographical** – the collections held by the University are drawn from a diverse range of world cultures. We will aim to use alternative methods of access to the collections, for example via printed and electronic media, for those who are unable to access the collections in person.
- **Technological** – the internet and other forms of electronic communication offer great opportunities for increasing access. However, we recognise that new media can also act as a barrier. We will aim to follow relevant standards and good practice for accessibility and usability in the development of all digital resources.

Employment and Training

Durham University is an equal opportunities employer. In line with Durham University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and relevant legislation, Durham University's Museums will aim to eliminate unlawful or unfair discrimination with regards to employment. We will seek to encourage and support all staff to achieve equality of opportunity for recruitment, employment, training and advancement within Durham University.

We will ensure that staff and volunteers with disabilities are provided with appropriate adapted or additional equipment or services as far as resources allow. These procedures will be monitored and reviewed regularly.

Action Plan

We will develop, and regularly review, an Access Action Plan that considers all of the barriers to accessibility listed above. This plan will be organised under the following headings:

- Buildings Access
- Access to Collections
- Access to Learning
- Access to Visitor Services
- Access to Communication

Overall policy in each of these areas is outlined below.

Buildings Access

We will aim to provide equal access wherever possible to our buildings for all visitors. Attention will be given to both permanent and temporary structures when making the building accessible. Some of our historic buildings are listed and this may limit the physical adaptations that are possible. Nevertheless, we will constantly work to improve the facilities available to visitors and will actively seek ways to make our collections accessible even when our buildings are not.

We are committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all. Procedures for the safe evacuation of disabled people in an emergency will be regularly reviewed and training for staff in these procedures will be provided.

Access to Collections

Our staff are committed to increasing public access to the collections and the information we hold about them. We will provide varied means of access to the collections, within our financial means, including, but not restricted to, catalogues, displays, exhibitions (physical and digital), handling sessions, publications, events and web-based resources.

We will provide levels of information and interpretation to suit a range of audiences and abilities. We will aim to ensure that the presentation and labelling of displays respects a diversity of cultural perspectives and lived experiences. We will also constantly review the information presented in our physical and digital spaces in order to ensure that it is informed by current research.

We will offer physical access to our collections at all sites to researchers, staff and students and we will aim to develop additional web-based resources to support wider access and engagement. We will also continue to operate an active policy of loans to other museums and exhibition venues, locally, nationally and internationally.

Collections information is available to researchers and enquirers on-line and on-site. We will maintain and develop our handling collection, where appropriate.

Access to Learning

We are committed to placing learning at the heart of our service. We aim to provide learning opportunities for different audiences and levels of ability and tailor our programme to the needs of specific groups where appropriate and within the resources available.

We will aim to provide education programmes for all permanent galleries and temporary exhibitions to interpret the collections for and with people from a range of backgrounds, abilities and lived experiences.

We will identify and develop partnerships with a range of other educational and community organisations to ensure that our activities continue to cater for the widest possible audiences.

Access to visitor services

Our front of house staff will assist and welcome all visitors. They will endeavour to help visitors have access to, enjoy, and learn from the collections. All visitor services staff will receive appropriate training in customer care.

We will consider the comfort of our visitors by providing, where possible, accessible toilets, baby changing facilities, access for wheelchairs, other mobility aids and pushchairs, a variety of seating in galleries and loanable on-site wheelchairs.

We aim to provide appropriate signage and navigation tools to suit a range of audiences (eg. in different sensory formats and languages) as resources become available.

Access to communication

We will promote the activities and events taking place within our venues using accessible means of communication. We will aim to provide material on request in alternative formats for a range of needs and languages. We will aim to ensure that all internal and external communications follow good practice guidelines as prescribed by specialist organisations such as the RNIB.

We will provide a range of ways that people can communicate with us and actively feed into our engagement processes. We will actively develop audiences for our venues.

We will evaluate our services and projects to ensure they meet the provision of this Policy and we will consult with users and non-users on all significant new developments and regularly conduct audience research to better identify these two groups.

Review

This policy will be reviewed at least every five years to ensure that it remains in line with national guidelines and standards. Date of next review: June 2028.

Approved by ULCC 19 June 2023