
Checklist

SCOTTISH
MUSEUMS
COUNCIL

Improving intellectual access



Intellectual access is about ensuring that visitors and staff can understand any information which your organisation provides; it is also about making the museum or gallery experience relevant to their lives. Regardless of their subject knowledge, social or ethnic background, mental health, reading age, literacy levels or learning difficulties, visitors and staff should feel comfortable with what you offer them.

Providing information and promotional material

- Is your promotional material (website, leaflet, seasonal programme, events list) written in simple, accessible language? (Plain English Campaign offers some very useful advice on this.)
- Do you use alternatives to the printed word – such as symbols or pictures – to make your meanings clear?
- Is the information you provide friendly and inviting in tone, suggesting that anyone is welcome through your doors?
- If admission is free, do you state this? (Many people will think that you charge otherwise.)
- Do you advertise concessions at particular times or for particular groups? (There might be ‘safety in numbers’ if peer groups can attend together.)
- Have you thought about opening late one night a week, to give your visitors as many options as possible? (It may also be a quieter time for those who do not like busy public spaces.)

Increasing access to the building or site

- Does the signage outside your building or site invite people in? (Banners or sandwich boards can be used to advertise temporary/permanent attractions or your café/shop, for example.)
- Have you thought about whether your building or site might be intimidating to some people? (The signage mentioned above can help here, as can your presentation of the venue in promotional material, events on the street, community art in the grounds, etc.)
- Do your front of house staff or attendants make visitors feel welcome? You should think about:
 - giving them training in customer care and disability awareness
 - changing official looking uniforms for something more casual (eg sweatshirts with your logo on them)
 - encouraging them to guide visitors as well as 'guard' the collections.

Increasing access to exhibitions and collections

- Is the written information within your exhibitions - labels, panel text, interactives, audiovisual displays, etc - presented in a number of different ways and at a variety of levels? (You might think about techniques such as 'hierarchy of text' whereby information moves from the simple to the more complex, as the visitor reads on.)
- Have you used techniques in your interpretation such as pictures, symbols and colour as an alternative to the written word?
- Do you provide special events which can help people with different backgrounds, skills and knowledge levels engage with your collections? (You could try working with artists, mental health organisations, colleges, etc.)
- Do you consult visitors about improvements to new and existing displays or other aspects of the museum or gallery? (You could also consult local groups, organisations and charities.)

- Do you offer an outreach service or travelling exhibition programme, whereby community groups can 'try out' the museum or gallery experience in a familiar environment?

Policies

- Has intellectual access been included in your access policy?
- Do you have a fire evacuation policy which takes into account different levels of understanding? Not everyone will follow 'standard' instructions in an emergency. Signage which includes symbols for fire exits could help for example. (Your fire officer and local groups, organisations and charities can offer further advice on this.)

Recommended reading and contacts

It is only possible to give general pointers within this checklist. For more detailed information see Resources: Access and the DDA and Contacts: Access and the DDA on the SMC website.

Highly recommended: *Access in Mind: toward the inclusive museum* (Intellectual Access Trust, 1998) – SMC has a few copies to give away, but otherwise contact Ann Rayner on: 0131 337 6001.

You can also find useful information on intellectual access in the Interpretation section of SMC's website.

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