Culture Durham

Defining Access
We define access as something that is made possible when physical/environmental, sensory, intellectual, cultural, attitudinal, financial, geographical and/or technological barriers are removed or reduced.

Our commitment to accessibility
The aim of Culture Durham 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 the Culture Durham 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 Culture Durham. 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. We are committed to ongoing training in access issues for staff, students and volunteers.

To eliminate barriers and ensure equality of access we will consider the following forms of accessibility:

- **Physical** – 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
- **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.
- **Cultural** – to consider the needs of people for whom English is not a first language, or whose knowledge of the history and culture of the areas covered by our collections may be limited. Wherever possible, we will seek to represent the interests, life experiences and culture of diverse communities within our exhibitions.
- **Attitudinal** – to ensure the physical environment and Culture Durham 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** – Culture Durham is committed to a policy of reasonable pricing for entry to all venues, with free entry wherever possible for those groups to whom price may be a barrier. 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 electronic resources.

**Employment and Training**

Durham University is an equal opportunities employer. In line with Durham University’s Policy on Diversity and Equality and the Equalities Act (2010), the Culture Durham team will aim to eliminate unlawful or unfair discrimination with regards to employment. Culture Durham will seek to encourage and support all staff to achieve equality of opportunity for recruitment, employment, training and advancement within Durham University.

Culture Durham 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 these forms of accessibility. This plan will be organised under the following headings:

- Building 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**

Culture Durham 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 catalogues, displays, 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 backgrounds.

We will offer physical access to our collections to researchers at all sites as well as access to staff and will aim to develop additional web-based resources. We will also continue to operate an active policy of loans to other museums and exhibition venues.

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**
Culture Durham is 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 people from a range of backgrounds and abilities.

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 adequate 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 in Culture Durham 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. 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.

**Review**
This policy will be reviewed at least very five years to ensure that it remains in line with national guidelines and standards. Date of next review: January 2021.