

UNIVERSITY ART COLLECTION - ACCESS POLICY

Name of governing body: Council of the University of Reading, Collections Governance Committee

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 2nd May 2024

Policy availability: A copy of this policy is available to all members of the public via our website and on request in our Art Collection Study Room.

Policy review procedure: The Access Policy is reviewed at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted below.

Date at which this policy is due for review: 31st May 2029

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Introduction

The University Art Collection is committed to enabling access to everyone, for education, research, and enjoyment, by minimising or removing barriers that can provide people from engaging with its collections and spaces.

We do everything that we can, within the reasonable constraints of all resources and security, to offer an accessible programme that involves, educates, and engages all our users. The University Art Collection recognises that access is a complex issue and that access provision benefits people generally, not just those with specific needs.

Scope

This policy provides a framework that guides the University Art Collection's approach to providing access to its collections and associated information, including services, activities, facilities, content, and programmes onsite, off-site, and online. It covers visitors, staff, students, researchers, and volunteers.

Access will need to be balanced with the need to care for the collections and by the current state of our collections information. Access issues are also addressed in our **Forward Plan**, **Collections Care and Conservation Policy**, and **Documentation Policy**. Additionally, this Access Policy is informed by the University of Reading Health and Safety Policies.

Definition of Terms

- **Attitudinal** – e.g., some people may have a lack of interest in, or awareness of, the collection, or our programmes and services.
- **Cultural** – e.g., some people may feel that the collection is not relevant to them and does not reflect their cultural or social heritage, or their interests.
- **Digital** – e.g., some people may not have access to the internet at home or use a mobile phone.
- **Financial** – e.g., some people may not be able to afford to visit the collection or take part in our programmes.
- **Geographic** – e.g., some people will live too far away to visit the collection.
- **Intellectual** – e.g., some people may find the collection too specialist in its approach to subjects and how they are presented; some may have learning disabilities which affect their ability to engage with the collection; and some may not be able to read or speak English.
- **Physical/Sensory** – e.g., people with physical disabilities, limited mobility, or hearing or visual impairments may not be able to access the collection, our website, social media channels or programmes.

Improving Access

To eliminate barriers to access the University Art Collection has considered several different forms of accessibility (see definitions above). We aim to build accessibility into all areas of our work and this commitment extends to our workforce as well as visitors. All members of the University Art Collection Team are involved in implementing this policy.

While some aspects of this policy are still a work-in-progress, especially given parts of the collections are currently only open by appointment, the University Art Collection is actively working to improve access in each area in the following ways:

Attitudinal Access

- ensuring that our promotional activities present the Collection as a welcoming, nonthreatening, inclusive destination.
- ensuring that visitors are made to feel welcome on arrival and are put at their ease.
- creating environments in which people can feel comfortable, valued, and able to learn at their own pace and level.

Cultural Access

- making the collection and its programmes as relevant as possible to the University's culturally and socially diverse society.
- making the collection and its programmes as relevant as possible to the local community.

Digital Access

- ensuring that all online material is designed to be accessible to everyone, using W3C Web Accessibility Initiative standards.
- providing digital access to exhibitions, programming, facilities, and resources where possible
- providing information in alternative formats, including via telephone conversations, for those may not have access to the internet and/or any digital devices.
- reviewing appropriate pages on the website to ensure any information about how to access our buildings, collections, and services are up-to-date.

Financial Access

- maintaining free entry.
- providing outreach programmes (both physically and virtually) to primary and secondary schools that find it difficult to meet the cost of visiting the museum.

Geographic Access

- providing a rich online experience.
- providing object loans to other museums nationally and internationally.
- producing exhibitions and displays in public spaces.
- offering hybrid versions of programming where possible.

Intellectual Access

- ensuring that the text used in our exhibitions, educational resources, publications, website, and social media channels is carefully tailored to the needs of their intended audiences, in line with the University of Reading's guidelines for text and style.
- providing levels of information and interpretation to suit a range of audiences and abilities.
- providing effective wayfinding signage.
- ensuring that the content and delivery of our learning programmes are tailored to the specific learning needs of their audiences.
- providing guides in different languages for exhibitions that have people for whom English is not their first language as a priority audience.
- ensuring that information on our website is available in key tourist and community languages.

Physical Access

- upholding the statutory requirements of the Equality Act (2010) by taking reasonable steps to ensure that policies, practices, and procedures do not discriminate against disabled people; by provide auxiliary aids and services which enable disabled people to use the museum; and by removing, altering, or circumventing physical barriers within our buildings.
- ensuring that lift access is provided to all public spaces.
- providing accessible parking spaces for blue badge holders.

- ensuring that all areas are accessible to wheelchair users.
- providing traditional wheelchairs for users to borrow during their visit.
- where physical access poses severe problems and alterations to the building cannot be made due to listed status, alternative arrangements will be made to provide some experience of that part of the collection or service for visitors.

Sensory Access

- providing front-of-house staff who have the awareness and skills to successfully communicate with and provide a quality service to people with visual or hearing impairments.
- following RNIB and Action on Hearing Loss good practice guidelines.
- ensuring that video-based exhibits have subtitles if they use the spoken word and that, budget allowing, key audio-visual exhibits that are central to an exhibition's main message include BSL as well as subtitles.
- offering on request sessions that are specifically designed for people with sensory impairments.
- providing audio guides for visually impaired visitors where appropriate.
- providing sensory backpacks which include ear defenders where appropriate.
- ensuring that our website meets the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) AA standard.

Reviewing Access and Consultation with Users

Through a process of regular audit and review, the University Art Collection will assess, identify, and address existing access issues, as resources permit. If necessary, an access action plan will be prepared that sets out the work required to improve access by removing barriers identified by the audit and visitor feedback. This plan will be implemented and monitored by staff.

The most recent comprehensive external Access Audit was conducted in April 2022 by the Centre for Accessible Environments. The Audit, which was coordinated with the Museum of English Rural Life, has identified specific areas for improvement for the University Art Collection. These will be tackled over the next few years and will be prioritised based on discussion with users and the availability of funding.

The Collection will regularly evaluate its services with input from users and use this information to ensure our services meet their needs. An evaluation strategy will be adopted to measure success in relation to different projects and initiatives.

We will also consult with non-users to identify barriers to participation. The Collection is committed to developing and widening its audiences as specified in its **Audience Development Plan**.

Staff

The University Art Collection is part of the University of Reading, an Equal Opportunities Employer. All people applying to and working at the University will receive equal opportunities in recruitment, employment, and training.

As part of the staff induction process, new staff undertake online Equality and Disability Awareness training, which includes how to address the needs of visitors with specific requirements, appropriate

use of language and assisting those with disabilities during the evacuation procedure. The University of Reading also offers a variety of professional development courses about accessibility.

The University of Reading is committed to set a high standard in Health and Safety for staff, students, and visitors. Health and Safety guidelines are therefore enforced and updated regularly. Several members of staff based within the former St Andrews Hall hold Emergency First Aid certificates. During special events, likely to attract larger numbers of attendees, a member of staff with first aid training must be in attendance and appropriate risk assessments should be created.

Researchers

The University Art Collection aims to respond to all research and access enquiries within 10 working days, barring any unforeseen circumstances. A new dedicated email address has been created for the University Art Collection, to prevent enquiries being lost, to enable us to tailor the service should users have any accessibility needs, and to allow analysis of access requirements of our visitors.

Volunteers, Placements and Work Experience Students

The University Art Collection is committed to providing opportunities to volunteer with the collections and to undertake placements or work experience over a defined period. These opportunities are dependent on available resources and can only be undertaken by those aged 14+.

It is the aim of the University Art Collection to provide high quality experiences, for all volunteers and placement/work-experience students, which are tailored to each individual's learning needs. Specific projects are therefore discussed and agreed upon with all participants in advance to enable a mutually beneficial experience.

The recruitment and management of volunteers is guided by our **Volunteer Policy**, the University's Safeguarding of Young People Policies, and advice from the UMASCS Volunteer Coordinator.

Related Policies, Legislation and Guidance

This policy has been written in line with the University of Reading's Diversity and Inclusion policies as specified on its webpages (<https://www.reading.ac.uk/diversity/>). These are implemented in line with the Equality Act 2010. The Act legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society under nine protected characteristics. It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations.

Several organisations provide specialist advice around access, in particular:

- Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) – see rnib.org.uk/
- Action on Hearing Loss (also referred to as RNID) – see rnid.org.uk/
- Mencap – see mencap.org.uk/
- Web Accessibility Initiative – see w3.org/WAI/

There are also several internal resources that provide advice around access at the University of Reading, in addition to the Diversity and Inclusion policies. These include:

- Disability Advisory Service, offering advice and guidance to students with any disability, mental health condition, or specific learning difficulty (SpLD).
- Reading University Student Union's part-time Disability Officer, elected from the student population.

- UMASCS' Disability Champion, whose volunteer role is to help advise the Department about how we can be more accessible.
- UMASCS' Mental Health First Aiders, who have been trained to spot the triggers and signs of mental illness, and provided the confidence to step in, reassure and support a person in distress.