

Access Policy 2025-2030



Approved RBC XXXX



Reading Museum Access Policy 2025-2030

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1. Purpose

This policy sets out Reading Museum's commitment to maximising inclusive public access to our museum, and to identify the ways we achieve this across the service.

2. Scope

This Access Policy relates to all collections held by Reading Museum as well as our services, activities, facilities, content, and programmes onsite, off-site, and online. It is published at www.readingmuseum.org.uk

3. The Public Sector Equality Duty (the Equality Duty)

3.1 Reading Borough Council (RBC)

Reading Borough Council has a public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. The Act brought together existing equality laws and made them stronger. It strengthened existing duties and placed new duties on public bodies. The protected characteristics listed in the Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

RBC's mission is 'to help Reading realises its potential and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success' (RBC *Investing Reading's Future* - our corporate plan 2022-25). RBC's Tackling Inequality Strategy 2023 to 2026 recognises that while Reading is one of the UK's most vibrant and economically significant urban centres it can be an unequal area in terms of wealth and life experiences, having some of the most affluent and some of the most deprived localities in the whole of the Thames Valley.

The Museum's access work, including learning, outreach, and volunteering, has a role in reducing these inequalities, aimed at closing the gap between the life experiences of our residents and achieving the Corporate Plan's vision of making Reading a more equal place to live by bringing the opportunities of growth and achievement to all Reading's communities.

RBC has developed a workplace Inclusion & Diversity Strategy 2024-2026. The strategy explains the steps RBC is taking to create an inclusive culture and workforce that reflects and understands the communities it serves, and to be seen as an inclusive employer. It acknowledges that organisations that are more inclusive are more productive, more innovative, and more creative.

3.2 Museums Partnership Reading (MPR)

Reading Museum has a strategic partnership with the University of Reading's Museum of English Rural Life called Museums Partnership Reading, and together are part of the Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio 2023-2027. The museums work together to provide cultural opportunities for Reading's young people and diverse communities, through schools, volunteering, digital engagement, exhibitions, outreach, and campaigns.

All National Portfolio Organisations need to show how they contribute to ACE's *Let's Create* Strategy 2020-30. This is built around three Outcomes and four Investment Principles, including Inclusivity and Relevance, ensuring that England's diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that ACE supports and in the culture they produce. NPOs must develop the inclusivity & relevance principle in the work they produce, present, and distribute by building a relationship with their communities, and demonstrating how their work is accessible and relevant to those communities. ACE asks organisations, like MPR, who receive regular investment to agree targets for how their governance, leadership, employees, participants, audiences, and the work they make reflects the communities in which they work. These targets cover both protected characteristics and socio-economic background.

3.3 Museum Accreditation Scheme

The Accreditation Scheme is the UK industry standard for museums and galleries. The Accreditation Scheme is run for museums and galleries of all sizes and types across the UK. It is managed as a UK Partnership between ACE, the Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Museums Council.

An approved Access Policy is both good practice and a key requirement of the Museum Accreditation Scheme, under which Reading Museum has Full Accreditation status (Accredited No. 978). Museums participating in the Scheme must have an access policy or statement reviewed and approved by their governing body at least every five years. It should cover how people can see, use, and reference the collection, gain access to the museum buildings and sites, and how the museum shares information about the collection with people.

4. Access assessment and the Access Plan

Access audits and assessments have been regularly undertaken since the full refurbishment of the Museum in 1999-2000. In 2012 and 2020 selected staff received training from the Centre for Accessible Environments to undertake in-house audits that inform this policy. After each audit, any new access actions are added to the Museum's Access Plan (this plan is also a Museum Accreditation Scheme requirement). This Plan sets out the work required to improve access by removing barriers identified by the audit as well as customer feedback and engagement with local support and advocacy groups. This is implemented and monitored by the Museum's Access Workgroup.

5. Our commitment to access

This Policy supports our statement of purpose by providing a framework that strives to include all our visitors, potential visitors, volunteers, and staff. We will make our collections and buildings accessible, by removing as many physical, intellectual, or cultural barriers to access as practicable, within the limits of legal, budgetary, staffing, and planning considerations.

We are committed to an audience-first focus, developing a programme of inclusive activities and events that are designed to involve, educate, and engage people from a wide range of backgrounds and all sectors of Reading's diverse community.

Areas of access covered in this policy include:

- Physical and sensory access: we aim to maintain buildings and facilities that are as physically accessible as possible.
- Intellectual access: we aim to provide information in a range of formats (including virtually) appropriate to the needs of a wide range of visitors.
- Emotional access: we aim to provide a good standard of customer care to ensure that all visitors feel welcome and comfortable in our venues.
- Financial access: we aim to keep charges as competitive as possible to ensure that as many people as possible can access our services.

5.1 Consultation and audiences

- The Museum is committed to understanding who its visitors/users and non-visitors/users are, so that we meet their needs and provide access to collections and services.
- The Museum is committed to developing and diversifying its audiences through its Access Plan.
- We will regularly consult and evaluate our services with users and use this information to ensure our services meet their needs, as outlined in our Access Plan.
- We will consult with non-users/less-engaged users to identify barriers to participation.

5.2 Community links and outreach

- The Museum is committed to actively engaging with diverse local communities and bringing opportunities to all Reading's communities. Our Access Plan will develop links to target audiences, especially through partnership and co-production with other community, cultural and educational organisations.
- The Museum will maintain outreach options for those who are unable to visit the Museum, particularly the Loan and Memory box schemes for audiences in schools, care homes and hospitals, and by attending events in target communities through Museums Partnership Reading.

- The Museum is committed to providing volunteer opportunities and seeks to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds. The recruitment and management of volunteers is guided by our Volunteer Policy through Museums Partnership Reading.
- The Museum hosts the Reading Register Office ceremony room for weddings and citizenships. This provides opportunities to welcome new audiences to the Museum.

5.3 Premises

- The Museum operates from four sites: Reading Museum, Abbey Gateway, Riverside Museum, and an off-site store.
- The Museum is committed to providing full access to all areas of its buildings, and facilities. There are some limitations due to the physical constraints of listed buildings, especially in office areas and store areas.
- Information for potential visitors explaining our opening times, services and access to the collections is available on our website, social media, leaflets, and by telephone and e-mail.

5.4 Collections

- The Museum is committed to increasing public access to the collections and information, and to increasing knowledge and understanding of the collections and heritage sites.
- We will provide varied means of access and interpretation to the collections including permanent displays, temporary exhibitions, loans, object handling, tours, events, and activities. The provision of access will be balanced against the appropriate care and management of the collection in question, guided by the Collection Management Policy.
- Collection staff will be available every Thursday afternoon in the Museum galleries to answer questions and identify objects brought in by the public.
- To increase access to collections not on display we offer research facilities, web-based resources, and access to staff.
- Stored collections are available to view by appointment with the collection team.
- Collections are continually being updated and developed to better reflect the diversity of the local area guided by the Collection Development Policy.

5.5 Information

- The needs of visitors are considered when preparing and presenting collections information and interpretation in the galleries, exhibitions, offsite and online.
- The Museum will ensure that all information and communications (including leaflets, labels, blog, social media, and website) follow good practice and the Museum's guidelines for text and style.
- The Museum aims to keep the public informed of its collections, temporary displays and events through appropriate publicity including social media and its blog.
- We will provide levels of information and interpretation to suit a range of audiences and abilities.
- Information and interpretation will be provided in a range of formats, for example labels, large print, film (with captions), interactives and audio, as resources allow.
- The Museum aims to present labels, displays, exhibitions, online and marketing materials that respect a diversity of backgrounds. Images and/or descriptions of the Museum will reflect the diversity of the community.
- Other than English, over 100 languages are used by Reading residents. English is the language used across all Reading's communities and will continue to be the primary language used in the delivery of our services. The Museum's Access Plan will consider both the provision of basic language resources in plain and simple English and visual stories as ways to assist people's understanding of the collections. Both types of resource will be available on the website and in the museum galleries.
- We will provide information about access provision on our website www.readingmuseum.org.uk/your-visit/access

5.6 Learning and programming

- The Museum will provide a range of suitable handling materials drawn from the collections for different audiences and levels of ability.
- We will provide learning programmes that are tailored to the needs and requirements of specific target groups and audiences.
- Educational materials will be made available for different audiences and abilities, as required and as resources allow.
- Temporary exhibitions, events and activities will be programmed throughout the year for people with a wide range of abilities.

5.7 Customer care

- All staff members and volunteers are involved in implementing this policy, assisting, and welcoming our customers.
- The Museum will work within the framework of the Reading Borough Council customer care commitments and standards.
- All users of the Museum will be treated with equal respect within an inclusive atmosphere and welcomed according to their individual needs.
- Where possible, the venues will provide baby changing facilities, access and parking for pushchairs and seating for the comfort and ease of visitors.
- Wherever possible, the venues will provide signage and navigation to suit a range of needs and will respond to requests made by the public regarding information required in alternative formats, as resources allow.
- We provide visitor facilities to meet our customers' needs at the Museum including a shop and café.
- The Museum is committed to providing a safe environment for all. This includes thinking about the sensory experience of our users. It has procedures for the safe evacuation of all users and staff in an emergency. There are policies and procedures for Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults.

5.8 Workforce and training

- Reading Borough Council is an equal opportunities employer. All people will receive equal opportunities in recruitment, employment, and training. The Museum is committed to increasing the diversity of its workforce within RBC policies, including RBC's Inclusion & Diversity strategy.
- As part of staff induction process, new staff will receive equality and diversity online training.

5.9 Financial

- All Museum venues have free admission.
- The Museum will provide some activities free of charge so that all parts of the community can enjoy its services.
- Volunteers should not be deterred from offering their services because they feel they cannot afford to volunteer. The Museum's Volunteer Policy sets out the circumstances in which travelling expenses can be offered.