

Access Policy

Author:	Ed Watts (Head of Civic Engagement and Education) and the Civic Engagement and Education Team
Name of museum:	The Whitworth
Name of governing body:	The University of Manchester
Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:	March 2025
Policy review procedure:	Reviewed by Whitworth Executive Team and Director, approved by University of Manchester Cultural Institutes Governance Committee (CIGC)
Date at which this policy is due for review:	March 2030
Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the Access Policy, and the implications of any such changes in future.	

1. Introduction

Purpose:

This Access Policy establishes a framework to ensure that the Whitworth remains a safe, accessible, inclusive, and welcoming space for all visitors, staff, volunteers, artists, researchers, and partners. It covers how people can engage with our collection and programme, gain access to our spaces and how we share information about our work. This policy outlines the gallery's commitment to overcoming barriers to access and embedding inclusivity in all operations.

Scope:

This policy applies to all visitors, staff, volunteers, artists, researchers, contractors, and other stakeholders who engage with the gallery and its collections.

2. The Whitworth and the University of Manchester

As Manchester's University Gallery in the Park, the Whitworth is part of The University of Manchester. We adhere to the University's Equality and Diversity Policy and align with the values outlined in The University's Strategic Plan, especially our shared commitment to being:

"An accessible organisation, committed to advancing equality and diversity."

This commitment drives all our practices and guides The Whitworth towards providing equal access and opportunity to all individuals, regardless of background, ability, or identity.

3. Access Statement

The Whitworth is committed to ensuring the widest possible access to our gallery, park, gardens, collections, programmes, and activities. We believe that everyone has the right to access, engage with art, and feel welcomed and valued. Access is integral to our work and is reflected in everything we do.

- **Access to the Collections and Exhibitions:**

- The gallery will provide public access to its collections and programmes through a range of exhibitions and displays, loans-out programmes, touring exhibitions, and through in-person study visits.
- The gallery will provide a variety of interpretation methods for its collections and displays.
- The gallery provides digital access to the collection through a public-facing online collection search.

- **Physical Access:**

- The gallery's building and public spaces are fully accessible to all visitors. Lifts to all floors ensure access to exhibitions and other public spaces.
- Hearing loops are available in the Grand Hall for large-scale talks, conferences, and events.
- Large print versions of interpretation and other written content are available to support visitors with visual impairments.
- The gallery has an accessible Quiet Space for visitors needing a private space for rest, reflection, or prayer.

- **Inclusive Welcome:**

- The Visitor Team plays a key role in ensuring engagement and accessibility for people of all abilities and needs. Exhibitions are designed with accessibility in mind, and relevant support materials are implemented where necessary.
- Collaboration between departments ensures all our programmes, events, exhibitions, and spaces are accessible to everyone.
- Technology enhances access by providing additional content and digital engagement opportunities for those unable to visit in person.

4. Access Working Group (AWG)

The Whitworth Access Working Group (AWG) is central to our efforts to improve and maintain accessibility and inclusivity across all areas of the gallery. It is made up of staff from all departments and is integral in ensuring that accessibility is a priority throughout the organisation.

- **Purpose:**

The AWG identifies and works across departments to address barriers to access, drives institutional change, and advises the Executive Team on accessibility-focused objectives. The group ensures continuous improvement by embedding inclusivity into all gallery displays, programmes and operations. Provide a regular, safe and confidential space to enable an honest exchange of ideas, experiences and understanding regarding barriers to access at the Whitworth.

1.

- **Objectives:**

- Identify and work together to overcome barriers to access for all.
- Challenge institutional biases that may hinder accessibility and inclusion.
- Support ongoing inclusive training for all staff.
- Ensure that all staff are equipped to report discriminatory incidents.

- Review and improve recruitment processes for diversity and inclusivity.

- **Membership and Meetings:**

The AWG includes representatives from all departments and is open to any staff with valuable lived experience of intersectional access needs. It meets every 4 weeks and maintains a clear operational link with the Management and Executive Teams. Accessibility is a standing agenda item at all departmental meetings to ensure alignment with strategic decision-making.

- **Role and Impact:**

The AWG fosters dialogue, shares best practices, and ensures that accessibility is considered across all gallery activities. The group uses data and feedback to ensure transparency, accountability, and a culture of continuous improvement in inclusivity.

- **Advocacy for Change:**

The AWG plays a vital role in advocating for institutional change regarding access. The group provides a platform for voices from all levels of the gallery, ensuring that inclusivity is embedded into every aspect of our work.

- **Inclusive Training:**

The AWG ensures regular accessibility training for all staff and volunteers and works closely with lived experience-led and specialist partners to ensure that best practices are followed.

- **Incident Reporting:**

The group works with staff, volunteers and visitors to report and address discriminatory behaviour and incidents, ensuring that all concerns are dealt with promptly and sensitively.

5. Collaboration with Lived Experience-Led and Specialist Partners

The Whitworth is dedicated to ensuring that lived experience and expert knowledge from diverse communities are central to shaping all aspects of our work. This includes programming, exhibitions, and operational areas, where strategic partnerships with lived experience-led and specialist organisations are embedded in our practice.

- **Strategic Partnerships:**

We collaborate with a wide range of partners, including lived experience-led organisations, disability advocacy groups, mental health organisations, ethnic minority and cultural groups, and other specialist accessibility services. These partnerships ensure that our approach to access and inclusion is informed by the expertise of those who are directly impacted by these issues.

- **In Programming :**

- We work directly with community groups, artists, and cultural organisations to co-create programming and exhibitions that are inclusive and reflect a broad range of perspectives.
 - Regular consultation with lived experience-led organisations to ensure programmes are inclusive and accessible to a diverse range of audiences.
 - Through partnerships, we ensure that programmes reflect the stories, perspectives, and artistic expressions of historically marginalized communities, fostering a truly inclusive gallery space.

- **In Operational and Policy Areas:**

- We partner with disability and inclusion organisations to ensure that our operational processes (e.g. event management, visitor services) are accessible to all.
- This includes reviewing our policies, practices, and recruitment processes to ensure inclusivity is integrated into every aspect of gallery operations.
- We also work closely with specialists in areas such as accessible technology and audio descriptions to enhance the accessibility of our digital content, online exhibitions, and in-gallery experiences.

6. General Access Guidelines

- **Opening Hours:**

The gallery operates Tuesday – Sunday, 10am – 5pm, and Thursday 10am – 9pm. Special access arrangements can be made for specific events or needs.

- **Visitor Conduct & Code of Conduct:**

- The gallery adheres to a clear [Code of Conduct](#), which all visitors, staff, and volunteers must follow to create a respectful and safe environment.
- Visitors must respect boundaries and consent, challenge personal biases, and refrain from abusive or discriminatory behaviour.
- Any violation of the Code of Conduct may result in a visitor being asked to leave the premises.

7. Recruitment, Training, and Development

The Whitworth is committed to building a workforce that is as diverse and inclusive as the visitors we serve. To this end, we partner with local organisations that specialise in supporting access for people with impairments and other diverse groups.

- **Training:**

- Our staff receive training in disability awareness, learning difficulties, and mental health first aid, all tailored for the gallery environment.
- We also offer inclusive recruitment practices, ensuring that candidates from underrepresented and disabled backgrounds are given equal opportunities.
- Training programs are designed to build confidence in staff, empowering them to provide exceptional support to all visitors.

8. Special Access Provisions

- **Educational, Community Engagement and Group Visits:**

The gallery's Civic Engagement and Education team works to ensure that necessary adjustments are made for school visits, educational groups, community groups, and tours, ensuring that all materials and spaces are accessible for all audiences.

- **Private Events:**

Accessible arrangements for private events, commercial events, and activities, and curator-led tours can be arranged in advance.

9. Digital and Remote Participation and Learning

To broaden access to the Whitworth's learning and participatory opportunities by expanding our digital and remote offer, ensuring those unable to visit the gallery in person can still engage with our resources.

- We will create online resources, including educational videos and downloadable materials, ensuring they are fully accessible to audiences across the globe.
- We will offer virtual workshops and remote participation opportunities, so that those who are geographically distant or unable to visit due to physical, financial, or other barriers can still take part.
- Every digital initiative will be inclusive, integrating accessible technologies such as audio descriptions, sign language interpretation, and closed captioning to ensure our content is available to all.
- We will explore innovative technologies to enhance the learning experience and bring art and creativity to those who may not be able to visit in person.

We follow general principles of usability and universal design, and endeavour to meet level 2 (AA) of the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#).

10. Language and Terminology

The Whitworth is committed to using language that is respectful, inclusive, and accurately reflects the diversity of our visitors and staff. We recognize that language is evolving, and we continuously strive to ensure our practices decentre normative assumptions and empower individuals to self-define their identity.

- **Neurodivergence:**

Neurodiversity describes the population as a whole and recognises the diversity of different brains.

- It is important to note that the term "neurodiverse" should not be used to describe an individual, as "neurodiversity" refers to a community or population. We are all still learning, and while language about neurological diversity is complex and contested, using terms accurately is crucial for decentring norms and assumptions.
 - **Best Practices for Neurodivergence:**
 - Avoid "othering" or treating neurodivergence as something separate from the wider human experience. Neurodiversity relates to humanity as a whole, including you.
 - Respect that everyone has the right to self-define and choose the language they use to describe their identity.
 - If in doubt, ask individuals about their preferred language and terminology. It's important to avoid assumptions about how someone prefers to identify.
 - **Intersectionality:**

Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals can experience multiple layers of disadvantage due to overlapping identities. For example, a person who identifies as both disabled and a woman may face different barriers than someone who is disabled but does not share the same gender identity. The lived experiences of a white woman and a Black woman, for example, will not be the same, and the barriers they face are shaped by both race and gender.

 - For people with disabilities and neurodivergence, intersectionality suggests that some barriers may not only stem from their condition but from additional characteristics, such as race, gender, or sexual orientation.
 - **Identifiers and Language:**

Language around identity is personal and should be approached with respect and sensitivity. Artists, staff, and visitors should feel empowered to share aspects of their identity as they choose, without fear of being reduced to a single characteristic (e.g., being defined solely by their disability).

 - **Best Practices:**
 - Avoid making assumptions about identity. If you're unsure about someone's identity or pronouns, ask respectfully, and allow space for them to share.
 - Use plain English in all gallery communications, including exhibition labels, press releases, marketing materials, and labels. Avoid art jargon to ensure accessibility for all.
 - Create opportunities for visitors and staff to self-define their identities and ensure that language used in the gallery reflects the diverse identities of those involved.

- **Involving the Community:**

To ensure that our language, practices, and programs are inclusive and respectful; the Whitworth adheres to the principle of **#NothingAboutUsWithoutUs**. This means that disabled, neurodivergent, and other marginalized people should always be involved in the planning and delivery of activities, ensuring that their perspectives are central to the decision-making process.

- **Learning from Mistakes:**

We acknowledge that despite our best intentions, we may not always get it right. If we use the wrong term or inadvertently offend, we encourage openness, learning, and dialogue. If someone provides feedback on a misstep, we will take it seriously and aim to learn from it in the future. Mistakes are an opportunity to improve, and we welcome feedback to refine our approach.

This policy works alongside other key areas of operational and policy including:

- Access Action plan
- Access Working Group Terms of Reference
- Safeguarding policy for children, young people and adults at risk.
- Code of Conduct
- Anti-Racism Group terms of reference