

Post-training bulletin

# Deaf and hard of hearing museum visitors



Stalowa Wola 2014

**Training:**

Increasing the accessibility of Polish and Ukrainian Museums  
for the professional service for the deaf and hard of hearing.  
Regional Museum of Stalowa Wola, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014

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# Introduction

The training courses on provision of service and education for the people with disabilities were aimed at museum guides and museum educators from Poland and Ukraine. The objective of the training courses was not only to educate but also to indicate new solutions, to formulate the educational programmes and to increase the sensibility and understanding of the problems and the expectations of the people with disabilities. The training courses were conducted in the form of workshops and were attended by the people with disabilities.

The training courses on provision of the service for the deaf and hard-of-hearing took place on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014 at the Regional Museum in Stalowa Wola. The training courses were conducted by Ms Serena Cant from the United Kingdom, a deaf person and a trainer specialising in lectures held in BSL [British Sign Language] at London museums and galleries. The lectures were also delivered by Prof. Kazimiera Krakowiak, a special educator and her son, an art historian and a deaf person, Mr Łukasz Krakowiak.

Ms Serena Cant told the training participants about the deaf people and about the related diversities. She indicated different obstacles and problems the deaf people face at the museums which are often hard to understand for the hard-of-hearing people. The participants learnt about the good practices applied at London museums. Ms Serena Cant was supported by a lip-speaker, Ms Sara Scanlon.

Prof. Kazimiera Krakowiak introduced the participants to the hints and tips about the world of the hearing impaired. She presented the kinds of sign language and the Cued Speech. She provided the Polish statistical figures, she also presented the amplitude of the hearing, i.e. how do the hearing people hear and how do the people with hearing impairments hear and to what extent it differs.

Mr Łukasz Krakowiak shared his own experience to talk about the obstacles a deaf person faces in the public domain e.g. at a university. During the practical sessions, Ms Serena Cant was collaborating in showing and discussing the exhibitions with the deaf and hard-of-hearing participants. Ms Serena Cant is also the author of the innovative educational programme "Helping the museums to hear the deaf people".



# About the lecturers:

## **Serena Cant**

an independent lecturer and trainer specialising in lectures conducted in the BSL [British Sign Language] at London museums and galleries among others at: the Dulwich Picture Gallery, the Geffry Museum, the National Gallery, the Royal Academy of Arts, the Tate Britain, the Tate Modern, Victoria and Albert Museum, Wallace Collection. She conducted the training courses and was a mentor within the framework of the training course Signing Art, Tate Modern 2012. The author of numerous publications on art and making the art accessible for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

## **Kazimiera Krakowiak**

habilitated Doctor, is a lecturer at the Chair of Special Pedagogy of John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. She concentrates on the issue of speech and language development in the case of children with the most profound hearing impairments. She was the first person to develop the Polish Cued Speech, following the conception of Cued Speech by R.O. Cornett and "znaki ręczno-ustne" [hands and mouth signs] by Jan Piestrzyński, which enables the person with a profound pre-lingual hearing impairment to master the Polish language both in speech and in writing.

## **Łukasz Krakowiak**

obtained his M.A. degree in the History of Art at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and then graduated from the post-graduate studies in education of the deaf and dumb. At present, he is a Ph.D. student. He used to work inter alia at the National Museum in Majdanek. He is a deaf person.



Kazimiera Krakowiak

# HOW TO TALK TO THE HEARING IMPAIRED AND THE HARD-OF-HEARING?

If my interlocutor does not hear, I cannot speak. In order to be free from the disability, we have to learn how to speak. While working with the hearing impaired, one needs a skilful mouth and hands that can express love and pass on the truth.

1. First and foremost do not be afraid to talk to someone who cannot hear. Do not be afraid of not being able to communicate with this person or being misunderstood. Your friendly behaviour, kindness, placidity and persistence are of indescribable value for the deaf person, who, just like anyone else needs conversations with the other people.
2. Stand or sit in such a way that the deaf person could see your face and hands (your face and the face of your interlocutor should be at the same height, it should be well-lit and uncovered).
3. Listen carefully and patiently to what your interlocutor speaks. Do not become discouraged, if you do not understand everything at once. You can always ask the person to repeat something. After a while you will certainly be able to understand more.
4. Do not let the tense facial expression of your interlocutor to discourage you. Such tension usually proves the extraordinary attention and not hostility or other negative emotions.
5. Speak in a natural way: loudly but do not shout; slowly but fluently, not dividing the words into syllables, maintaining the proper accent and intonation.
6. Move your lips in a clear way, but do not exaggerate and do not open your mouth too wide; the excessively clear articulation hampers lip-reading.
7. Specify the subject of the conversation at its beginning; do not change the topic without signalling it.
8. Use full and complete sentences but avoid intricate and sophisticated ones.
9. If you interlocutor does not understand something, repeat the same thought using different words, trying to clarify its meaning (perhaps your interlocutor does not know some words). You should not repeat the same words, speaking more loudly and slowly.



10. Using auxiliary gestures, try to make them unambiguous. Do not use too many gestures (for the deaf people all the gestures are meaningful, which is why you can be misunderstood). Do not use meaningless gestures.
11. Try to maintain clear and unambiguous facial expression, consistent with the content of your utterance. You should not excessively and unnaturally smile during the conversation. The fake smile distorts the articulation and hampers lip-reading.
12. In order to facilitate the understanding, you can resort to writing. Write clearly, taking care of the proper shape of the letters. Use complete sentences and unambiguous sentences. Replace the word that your interlocutor does not understand.
13. While reading the written statements of the deaf person, do not become discouraged by the grammatical or stylistic mistakes. Note that the person, who does not hear from her/his birth, faces great difficulties while trying to master the language. Instead of condemning the mistakes, one should rather marvel at the high level of language command, despite the difficulties.
14. Treat every deaf person with the proper respect; do not let the stereotypes and the alleged mental limitations of the deaf people to delude you.

### It is good to know that:

1. A deaf person encounters great difficulties when there are three or more people participating in a conversation. It is difficult for this person to realize who is speaking and pay attention to every single utterance. In such a situation it is advisable for the interlocutors to speak in turns and each and every time signalise that they start to speak.
2. Some of the deaf people, especially those raised up in families and schools together with other deaf people use sign language. (in Poland: the classic Polish sign language, which is a natural language created by the community of the deaf people.) Mastering the language lets you freely communicate with this group of people.
3. At special schools for the deaf as well as in the TV programmes for the deaf people, a special, artificial combination of speech, signs borrowed from the sign language and fingerspelling, i.e. the so called Signed Polish [in Polish: System językowo-migowy, SJM, język migany].
4. The most comfortable way to talk to the deaf people is using cued speech (the system of special auxiliary gestures), which are used to visualise the speech; both the hearing person and the deaf person must fluently master this manner of speaking.





Łukasz Krakowiak

## SELF-PRESENTATION

My name is Łukasz. I do not hear, most probably, since my sixth month. Without the hearing aids I can hear only high-pitched sounds e.g. the sound of a big bell, a drum, a horn, a car, a barking dog or a very loud scream. I can hear or rather feel the infrasound or vibrations. When the orchestra plays, I can feel the touches in my chest and the shivering in everything I touch.

With the hearing aid I can hear a little bit more. I do not feel the vibrations but some sounds which are pleasant to me. I like wearing the hearing aids and listen to various sounds. When somebody is at the door I can hear my dog barking. I can hear when something falls on the floor. On the street, I can hear various sounds and voices. I do not like some sounds because they disturb me and I do not know many sounds.

As a child, I liked to imagine different sounds which I did not know. I watched a film with Charlie Chaplin once and I asked my mum what the sound made by fleas is. My mum laughed and said she could not hear them either. I often ask about sounds I cannot hear. I imagine they are a little similar to the sounds I know.

When someone speaks I hear the sound but I cannot hear the words. When a stranger speaks quickly and unclearly I do not understand a thing and I do not like to listen to this person. I always ask my friends and colleagues to speak slowly and clearly. I look at their mouth and I understand a lot. I can not see everything, which is why I find it difficult to talk to the hearing people, still, I often talk to different people and I like to talk. Sometimes, I help myself writing important words and sentences on paper.

On the other hand, when someone uses cued speech I can see all the words very clearly. I can hear the sound and I can see the mouth and hand which shows the words. I can clearly imagine every single word. It does not matter whether someone speaks slowly or quickly, every single word can be seen. Even when I do not wear my hearing aids, it is possible for me to understand the person using cued speech. With the hearing aids it is better to understand various sentences e.g. questions and answers. When someone uses cued speech it is easy to understand this person, also looking from a certain distance and even if the mouth is not fully visible. I like talking to people who use cued speech. I can spend several hours talking to the people who speak beautifully. I am lucky to know many people who use cued speech. When I was little and I could not speak, my mum used to teach me cued speech.

She would speak and show and I would listen, see and understand. I used to speak a little myself and I did not use cued speech. It was not until later that I started to use cued speech. In the kindergarten, my tutor used to teach cued speech to the deaf children. I was able to understand and speak more and more. Then I used to attend Szkoła Podstawowa dla Głuchych i Niedosłyszących [the Primary School for the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing] in Lublin. A lot of teachers used cued speech at that time. The lessons were not at all difficult. The children understood a lot and learnt eagerly. At times, when there was a teacher, who did not know cued speech, there were problems and misunderstandings. During the breaks we used to talk using cued speech but only to friends from my class. We used sign language to communicate with the students from different classes.

I learnt sign language as a child. I started learning it in the kindergarten. A friend of mine, and his parents and sister could not hear as well. He taught me sign language. He often visited me at home and I visited him at his home. I enjoyed learning the sign language. My parents wanted me to know both the sign and



the spoken language. I think they were right. It is good to know the sign language. One can have many deaf friends. Today, Rafał and his wife are still my friends.

I eagerly learnt English. My teacher was Ms Ewa Domagała-Zyśk Ph.D., who is a renowned specialist in the domain of teaching English to deaf and hard-of-hearing. In my opinion, the deaf people can learn foreign languages. They not necessarily have to speak beautifully. They can speak poorly but be quite good at reading and writing. The English language is easier for me than the Polish language because one can write quite correctly, even though he or she does not know every aspect of the English grammar. In the Polish language it is easy to commit a mistake.

Once I graduated from the Primary School I attended Prywatne Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Stanisława Wyspiańskiego [Stanislaw Wyspanski Private General Education Lyceum] in Lublin. That is an artistic school. Attending a school with the hearing students is difficult for a deaf person. Nonetheless, it turned out not to be as difficult as I had thought it would have be.

In the first year some of my friends used to mock me a little. I was uneasy because I thought everyone in my class knows more than I do. I was flabbergasted to discover I can do something properly, at times even better than some other students or I remember something better. I understood that I am not worse. All in all, I turned out to be an ordinary boy and an ordinary student. I used to draw, paint and make graphic works as anyone else did.

The most difficult thing for me was (and it still is) that some pieces of information get through to me later than to the hearing people. I often do not know what is going on and I have to resort to the help of other people. My teachers and my friends knew about my difficulties and would gladly help me. It is easier for me to learn when I am given some notes or readings concerning the lecture.

Once I graduated from the secondary school I also graduated from Studium Technik Graficznych [Graphic Techniques College] at Lubelska Szkoła Sztuki i Projektowania [Lublin School of Art and Design] and I obtained my M.A. degree in the History of Art at John Paul Catholic University of Lublin and then I graduated from the post-graduate studies in education of the deaf and dumb. At present, I am a Ph.D. student at the Institute of Pedagogy at John Paul Catholic University of Lublin. I intend to write my doctoral thesis about the difficulties encountered by the deaf people. I plan to conduct the research in sign language as well as in oral language and in cued speech.

I always relished in looking at the paintings of famous artists, the monuments and the collections of art. I willingly participated in school excursions and in museum practices during my studies. I was happy to see Mona Lisa in Paris. So far, I managed to visit numerous European museums. I was in Paris, in southern France, Berlin, Venice, Rome, Assisi, Vilnius, Trakai and Lvov, and, by all means, in most of the Polish museums. My M.A. thesis was based on the research I carried out in the museum in Kozłówka (about the stoves that are in the museum).

At the beginning, it was difficult for me to visit the museum. I barely used the assistance of the guides and experienced many hilarious adventures and misunderstandings. I had to search for many pieces of information on my own. I found reading the textbooks and examining illustrated books most helpful. I also used the various materials published by the museums, programmes, brochures about the exhibitions, etc. In some museums (e.g. in Lvov) there are quite extensive sources of information in the English language. During my studies I used to visit the museums with my peer students. Almost all of them learnt how to speak with me. Two of my friends were fluent at cued speech and they were my guides whenever I needed them.



Serena Cant

# HELPING MUSEUMS TO LISTEN TO DEAF PEOPLE

This handbook has been produced for the Regional Museum of Stalowa Wola to complement the workshops held there on 10 and 11 March 2014 as part of the “Museums without Barriers” programme, the Coalition of Polish and Ukrainian Museums for Provision of Professional Service to Disabled Visitors Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland-Belarus-Ukraine 2007-2013.

It identifies barriers to museums for deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors in the museum environment, and in educational services; makes suggestions for dismantling those barriers; demonstrates examples of good practice in museum education for deaf patrons, primarily in the United Kingdom; suggests ways in which deaf people can become involved as audience members and deaf guides; examines in detail the training of deaf guides, and illustrates some aspects of sign language in the arts domain. It concludes by examining fresh perspectives in art history which can be presented through catering for these audiences.

The same principles can be used for historic properties as well as museums and art galleries. Each step makes recommendations for practice and review, and thus can be used as a handbook for future reference.

This handbook primarily considers education for deaf adults, but the principles of inclusive education for deaf children are broadly similar and they will face similar barriers to adults, with diverse communication needs.

Educational activities for deaf-blind adults are not considered in detail, as this is a specialist arena which requires its own study, but some suggestions are made where possible and working with deaf-blind individuals is considered as a possible eventuality. However, by working with deaf-blind organisations and individuals, and collaboration between specialist educational services for both deaf and blind visitors, it is possible to enhance the museum experience for deaf-blind visitors.

This handbook primarily considers live events with communication support professionals (sign language interpreters, lipspeakers, cued speech practitioners) but other forms of communication support may be used as desired, e.g. speech-to-text or live captioning.

# Identifying your audience

**Summary:** this chapter considers why you should make efforts to include deaf visitors to your museum or site and what your core audience is likely to be.

## 1.1 Why include deaf visitors?

### 1.1.1

**360 million** people worldwide are believed to have hearing loss, or approximately **5%** of the world's population.<sup>1</sup> That is an enormous number of people who miss out on museum lectures, films, educational activities and opportunities for participating in cultural events because of deafness and consequent communication barriers.

### 1.1.2

For comparison, the often-quoted statistic in the United Kingdom is **1 in 7** and covers the complete spectrum of deafness and hearing loss.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1.3

Hearing impairment ranges from mild (hard-of-hearing) to profound (little or no useful hearing). Deaf visitors may: use sign language; speak and lipread; use assistive devices (hearing aids, cochlear implants, sound loops) or any combination of these, depending on educational background, personal preference, and identification with deaf culture: it is not always dependent on severity of hearing loss.

### 1.1.4

Deaf visitors may be: young or old; have congenital (from birth) or acquired hearing loss; hearing loss may be acquired through illness or accident at any age or as a natural part of the ageing process. The World Health Organisation suggests that the proportion of the world's population aged 60 or over is currently doubling from **11%** in **2000** to an expected **22%** by **2050** - or almost a quarter of Earth's population. This will mean millions more people with age-related hearing loss.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Identifying your core audiences

### 1.2.1

Identifying your core audiences of deaf people will help you tailor your services appropriately and ensure success in outreach to deaf visitors.

### 1.2.2

It is helpful to identify core visitor groups more by their cultural preferences than by the severity of their hearing impairment. Some people from deaf families may have relatively mild hearing loss but prefer to sign, as this is their family background; others who are profoundly deaf prefer to communicate orally

1 Source: World Health Organisation, 2012-13: Fact Sheet No.300, Deafness and Hearing Loss <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs300/en/>

2 Action on Hearing Loss (UK), formerly Royal National Institute for the Deaf

3 Source: World Health Organisation (WHO), 2012: <http://www.who.int/ageing/about/facts/en/index.html>



through the majority spoken language and through lipreading. There is some crossover between the two groups.

## 1.3 General categories of deaf visitor

### 1.3.1

**Sign language users:** predominantly people who are pre-lingually deaf (but some deafened people learn sign later in life). Sign users tend to identify themselves as a cultural and linguistic minority than as 'disabled'.

### 1.3.2

*For this group activities in sign language are of most importance: assistive technology in the museum environment is less important, e.g. hearing loops. For this group the principal barrier to mainstream cultural activities is a language barrier. However, participation in activities via the written word is also popular (speech-to-text) and it should not be automatically assumed that sign users are not interested in spoken language through the written medium: subtitling, synopses.*

### 1.3.3

**Those who are users of spoken language:** some may be skilled lipreaders, others less so, but they prefer the majority spoken language as their medium of communication. This group may include people either pre-lingually or post-lingually deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deafened through the natural ageing process.

### 1.3.4

*This group prefers to participate in mainstream events tailored to their needs, and the barrier is not language but physical comprehension. Assistive technology to enhance the hearing experience, careful development of activities to take advantage of quiet times or quieter environments and communication methods based on the written and spoken language, such as the use of subtitling and speech-to-text, are key concepts.*

### 1.3.5

**Deaf people able to use both sign language and oral communication:** sign language or cued speech; or speech and lipreading. Members of this group cross between communication methods and are able to benefit from activities aimed either at sign language users or oral communicators, or events which cross-over between the two, e.g. with two methods of communication support provided (interpreters and lipspeakers). Likewise, events offered in the half-way house of Sign-Supported English (SSE) or Signed Polish (SJM) which will attract visitors who like to have both lipreading and sign (typically sign users who are confident in the majority language or older deafened people who are learning or who have learnt sign language).

### 1.3.6

*This group is able to switch between communication methods according to their personal preference and are likely to regularly attend both types of event. This group's needs in the UK have been met by using SSE events, or using lipspeaking with signed support. Consider this group's needs by occasionally making provision in SJM and/or phonogestures in addition to PJM-only and lipspeaking-only events.*



### 1.3.7

Dual sensory impairment is not unknown – whether as a natural part of the ageing process where both sight and hearing are impaired, or whether congenital factors such as Usher’s syndrome are present.

### 1.3.8

*he needs of visitors with deafblindness are very diverse, depending on their communication skills and/or range of vision, and may range from simply wanting a synopsis in large print, to requesting to stand in front of the guide or interpreter (so that they are in their visual field) or wanting additional communication support. For groups of deaf-blind people individual tours may be more suitable for their needs but they do enjoy interacting with other deaf people in the museum environment. Anticipate that some deaf people with a degree of vision impairment or other disability will wish to participate in your events for deaf visitors.*

## 1.4 Recommendations:

### 1.4.1

Understand the diversity of deaf people in your outreach work.

### 1.4.2

It is **best practice** to provide educational activities for groups **1** and **2** separately, to address their different needs, but in parallel programmes so that both feel included and catered for in the museum environment as does group **3**. The needs of both groups are addressed in separate, but similarly inclusive, events, at the principal London museums in the case studies in section **4** and in museums of similar calibre in Paris and New York.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.4.3

You may also like to consider making your events aimed at older visitors more accessible by making loop systems available as a matter of course when arranging events for groups of elderly or retired people. This will also help to justify the expenditure on these loop systems by making them available to a wider audience.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.4.4

Be prepared for people with dual sensory impairments to turn up at events and make adjustments for them likewise: consider printing off one or two copies of synopses in large print, allowing these patrons to remain at the front of the group and so on.

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4 For example, the Louvre, Paris, offers tours for lipreaders; the Metropolitan Museum and MoMA, New York, offer real-time captioning and assistive devices.

5 See, for example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in which access to assistive devices is available without attending a specific event targeted at hard-of-hearing users: <http://www.metmuseum.org/en/events/programs/programs-for-visitors-with-disabilities/visitors-with-hearing-loss>

# Barriers to Access

**Summary:** this chapter describes the social, linguistic and physical barriers to access in museums, considering the museum environment as a whole.

## 2.1 What are the barriers to access for deaf people in museums?

### 2.1.1

The principal barriers to access for deaf people may be summarised as **physical** barriers, barriers to **intellectual access**, and **socio-economic** barriers.

## 2.2 Physical and environmental barriers

### General description of physical barriers

#### 2.2.1

The museum environment presents physical difficulties that are less obvious and less easy to appreciate than access for people in wheelchairs and lighting for visually impaired visitors, which are more obvious to people to do not suffer from these disabilities.

#### 2.2.2

These impacts can come from the museum design (the museum building) as a whole, the design of individual exhibitions (display, conservation, and selection of exhibits), and issues of interpretation (audiovisual material).

#### 2.2.3

**Impacts:** The building, lighting, the ambient acoustic environment, the way audiovisual material is used all present individual issues which create difficulties for deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors. The various issues, impacts and solutions are broken down in detail below.

### The visual environment of the museum

#### 2.2.4

**Issue: Traditional museum design:** the use of traditional freestanding glass cases in traditional displays or exhibitions can make things difficult for deaf visitors on a guided tour. Alternatively the museum may be very crowded with objects and it is not possible to take deaf visitors on a guided tour, particularly where sign language is used.

#### 2.2.5

**Impact:** It may be difficult to see the object and the guide or interpreter, especially if the cases are crowded close together. Also sign language may not be feasible in areas densely crowded with cases or objects.



People at the back may find it difficult to see between the cases and the reflections in the glass may be distracting for someone who is watching sign language or lipreading.

### 2.2.6

**Solution:** Think of alternative ways to take deaf visitors through these exhibits. Perhaps a talk in the education room or a formal lecture beforehand, with a map and guide to the objects, can be given instead, and a map and list of exhibits for a self-guided visit afterwards.

## Lighting

### 2.2.7

**Issue:** lighting that is too dark or too bright can have many negative impacts.

### 2.2.8

**Too dark:** For conservation reasons, many exhibits, whether temporary or permanent, are naturally kept in dim lighting, which may make it difficult for deaf people to see a guide or interpreter, and will, of course, impact most on deaf-blind visitors.

### 2.2.9

**Too bright:** At the other end of the spectrum, bright or harsh lighting highlighting an object may make the guide difficult to see. Think of squinting in the sunlight: you cannot see. For the same reason deaf people cannot see to lipread or watch signing against a background of bright light and those with vision impairments as well may find this more difficult too.

### 2.2.10

**Impact:** Sometimes this may mean that key works in the display are unavoidably unsuitable for inclusion in a talk for deaf people because conditions are too bright or too dark.

### 2.2.11

**Solution:** The solution is similar to **2.2.6** above. Consider an alternative venue in the museum to cover these artworks or objects, perhaps as a formal lecture.

### 2.2.12

Consider which artworks you can substitute to illustrate the key points from the objects which are too dimly or brightly lit. All guides in this environment whether hearing or deaf, and communication support professionals (lipspeakers/sign language interpreters) should be encouraged to walk through the display beforehand.

## The acoustic environment of the museum:

### 2.2.13

**Issue: the ambient environment and other visitors.** Sometimes the design of the museum, particularly in new museum buildings or extensions, has marked echo and amplification effects. Other than in lecture theatres, acoustics are rarely considered in museum design, and can lead to very noisy environments at busy times in popular museums.





#### 2.2.14

**Impact:** At busy times this may make museums sound very noisy places, particularly when school parties are visiting. Again, this is more of an issue for hard-of-hearing visitors and lipreaders than for sign language users, and it will affect individual members of guided parties who are elderly and have age-related hearing loss.

#### 2.2.15

Although noise impacts less on signing deaf visitors, a noisy environment is often a crowded environment preventing good sightlines of the guide and/or the communication support where appropriate – the audience needs to comfortably see hands and lips. Think also of those with dual sensory impairments who may struggle against a backdrop of noise when they cannot see so well.

#### 2.2.16

**Solution:** Consider programming activities aimed at all categories of deaf visitor and also at elderly people at quieter times or days when the museum is not hosting school visits. It may be possible to liaise with the schools educator to work out a timetable that does not clash with school activities.

#### 2.2.17

Consider having activities outside core opening hours (before or after the main museum opening hours) if you can occasionally afford to do so. This will naturally have an impact on budgets.

#### 2.2.18

**Issue: Exhibits:** Sometimes noise from other exhibits may be intrusive, for example, mechanical noise from working objects or film installations.

#### 2.2.19

**Impact:** For profoundly deaf sign language users who are less troubled by noise it is less of an issue, but for people who are hard-of-hearing or who rely on hearing aids plus lipreading surrounding noise can make understanding speech a struggle. Hearing aids amplify all sound, thus loud sounds will become both louder and distorted and uncomfortable to hear.

#### 2.2.20

**Solution:** Consider routing visitors away from the source of these sounds when planning a guided tour. The museum educator should alert all speakers to these issues when planning a guided tour of whatever form for deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences. As a last resort the loud sound installation may be temporarily turned off. This may in particular be an issue with collections of contemporary or modern art which include experimental audio-visual material.

### Barriers in audiovisual material and interpretation:

#### 2.2.21

**Issue: Films** Films are often included as part of the museum display. This may range from film contemporary with the artworks, films of how scientific objects work, experts talking about the artworks, object or artist, or introductions by the artists or makers themselves.



### 2.2.22

**Issue: 'Information telephones'** are telephone handsets which play sound recordings or spoken narratives and most often used for social history and should not be confused with **audioguides** which are treated separately below. Information telephones are typically used to convey oral history reminiscences (e.g. memories of WWII veterans) or old recordings which preserve sounds or languages not heard today (e.g. Manx language from the Isle of Man).

### 2.2.23

**Impacts:** Deaf visitors of all categories are isolated if they cannot access either films or this material as part of their visit. They obtain less enjoyment than their hearing peers when visiting the display as they cannot enjoy the full range of material.

### 2.2.24

**Solution:** Subtitling should be a mandatory part of making **films** accessible. Work with curators on subtitling the material either in-house or with specialist captioners. Consider also descriptive subtitling of sound effects or music, e.g. 'lively classical music', 'sombre and sad music', 'electronic humming noise' in order to give the deaf visitor an understanding of the film as a whole.

### 2.2.25

Where the film is silent (e.g. early films) this should be indicated by a label so that deaf people understand that they are not missing out.

### 2.2.26

A lower-cost option for films may be to produce a **wall label with a transcript**, which should be both placed nearby and in an easy-to-read font.

### 2.2.27

For **information telephones**, transcripts in the form of either wall labels or easily available laminated sheets in a rack next to or below the telephones can be quickly and cheaply produced.

### 2.2.28

**Issue: Audioguides** Audioguides are listening devices with a headset plugged into a hand-held player. They are now commonly used to enable visitors to take self-guided tours round gallery exhibitions and historic sites (castles, palaces). They enable the visitor either to listen to a recorded script or to access information on a feature of interest by dialling a particular number and are often seen as being more accessible for visually impaired visitors. They are also seen as more accessible for mainstream visitors than peering at labels, which can hold up visitor flow and which can also have a visual impact upon a heritage venue. Sometimes they are a mandatory part of the visit because there are no labels.

### 2.2.29

**Impacts:** like films and information telephones these features are inaccessible to deaf visitors of all categories. Sometimes this is compounded by a misunderstanding by some staff of what audioguides are for: individual members of staff at venues have been known to insist 'audioguides are for deaf people' because they think of 'audio' + hearing.



### 2.2.30

**Solutions:** Front-of-house staff should be aware of barriers and offer deaf visitors appropriate alternatives which should include transcripts at the very least.

### 2.2.31

A **full transcript** is a low-cost solution. A script will be necessary to produce the audioguide anyway, and can be put to a good secondary use by reusing as the transcript, making the audioguide as a whole not only more accessible but also better value for money. Laminated copies should be kept in an easily accessible place and front-of-house staff should know about them to lend to visitors who want them for the duration of the visit.

### 2.2.32

Some museums use the audioguide as a basis for their written exhibition guides which are distributed free with the ticket on entry. This may make the entry price slightly higher to cover costs but has the benefit of making the audioguide material available in an alternative format without making the deaf visitor feel 'different'.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.2.33

Staff should not insist that visitors take the audioguide if it is not appropriate for them even if it is included in the entry price or is mandatory because there are no labels. This can lead to embarrassment and upset and leave the deaf visitor with an unpleasant impression of the museum.

### 2.2.34

They should offer appropriate alternatives such as lending the transcripts or giving a gratis copy of the venue or exhibition guide to enable the visitor to make sense of what they can see and the information they otherwise cannot access.<sup>7</sup> For deaf children an age-appropriate guide may be given.

### 2.2.35

Additionally, some audioguides can work with specific loop systems to enhance the hearing experience for people with mild hearing loss. Staff should check carefully which audioguide players they buy for accessibility and compatibility with loops. The manufacturer should indicate whether this is possible in their literature and make recommendations for compatible systems. It may be possible to lower the cost by buying a number of audioguide units with loop systems or pooling resources with other museums to make such an order.

### 2.2.36

Audioguide material can also be made available in sign language if desired which will improve accessibility for sign language users. However, it is a high-cost solution with the added issue of maintenance and rapid obsolescence of technology.<sup>8</sup>

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6 This is the policy of the National Gallery, London.

7 For example, historic sites at English Heritage.

8 For example, Tate Modern had a 'palm pilot' tour of key works at the Tate in BSL in the 2000s. However, this is now obsolete and is no longer in use. (pers. comm. Marcus Dickey Horley, Tate Modern, January 2014). The SS Great Britain, Bristol, has had BSL tours since 2006 but recognises the technology is in need of updating. (Atkinson, 2012a).



## 2.3 Communication barriers:

### 2.3.1

**Issue:** Communication barriers are not the same as the *language barrier* -which primarily affects sign language users, but of course the language barrier creates additional communication issues (see 2.6 for more detail on the language barrier). Communication issues mean being unable to interact effectively with museums and their staff: when it may be difficult to find out information about suitable activities, impossible to use the telephone to book for activities, or to understand museum staff, or museum staff misunderstand visitors' needs.

### 2.3.2

We have already noted the impact that staff knowledge of audioguides can have at 2.2.28-36 and this gives a flavour of the barriers to interaction at the museum.

## Front-of-house or reception staff and warders

### 2.3.3

**Issue:** front-of-house staff may have difficulty communicating with deaf visitors, perhaps because the deaf visitor may not identify themselves as deaf or because they do not know sign language.

### 2.3.4

**Impacts:** deaf visitors find it difficult to ask for general information on arrival at the museum or for directions to a specific activity because they cannot understand what is said, or make themselves understood.

### 2.3.5

**Solutions:** ensure front-of-house staff have received deaf awareness training and at the very least make eye contact when speaking to visitors, have patience, are willing to repeat themselves, and to draw attention to appropriate visual information (e.g. maps).

### 2.3.6

Make sure that your charging policy is clearly displayed on the entry sign or price board, particularly if you offer a concessionary rate for disabled visitors. Do not make it difficult for deaf people to ask for the applicable concessionary rate but have it clearly displayed. Your staff are then clear on the charging policy and a deaf person who finds it difficult to make themselves understood can point to the appropriate concession rate.

### 2.3.7

Signage such as maps and room display signs should be clear and easily visible and accessible. This is often cited as an example of how to help visually-impaired visitors, but it also helps hearing-impaired visitors because it assists museum staff to make complex spoken directions clear.

### 2.3.8

As required, additional temporary signs giving directions on the day of the event, and briefing of front-of-house staff that deaf visitors are expected and where to direct them, will help to minimise communication



difficulties on the day. If these are missing or unclear, or staff are not properly briefed, deaf visitors are exposed to a number of frustrating or embarrassing situations that may make them reluctant to return.

## Making assumptions

### 2.3.9

**Issue:** Museums can make the mistake of making assumptions that using one method of communication is enough: that using a loop will make the event accessible to all deaf people or that sign language will reach the whole spectrum of deaf people. They may also simply describe an event as “suitable for deaf people”. Deaf people need clear and comprehensive language.

### 2.3.10

**Impact:** Deaf people will turn up at an event that will not meet their communication needs.

### 2.3.11

**Solution:** Make sure the communication method for each event is clear in publicity material. Do not just describe the event as: “suitable for deaf people”. Suitable suggested wording could include: “event for sign language visitors, given by our Curator Mr X and interpreted into sign language by Miss Y” or “event for hard-of-hearing people, given by Curator Mrs A with lipspeaking support by Miss B.” If there is more than one communication method available, tell the audience what to expect: let them know synopses are available, or, if it is possible to have two forms of communication support, tell them: “Lunchtime talk by Dr D, interpreted into sign language by Mrs E and lipspeaking support by Miss F. Loops and synopses also available.”

## Advertising your event on social media, including your website

### 2.3.12

**Issue:** How can visitors find out about events aimed at them? Events are often described where it seems logical for professionals but is not necessarily intuitive to the lay reader, particularly people who do not use museums very often. For example, listing your event for deaf people under the heading of a tab labelled **Education**.

### 2.3.13

**Impact:** listing the events for deaf people under the **Education** tab may not be the best way of making it searchable. It is not obvious to non-professionals, who may not realise that museum education is a lifelong learning activity and be baffled by how to search for activities for deaf people. They may not always see themselves as part of an *outreach* community or understand that activities for them are seen as such.

### 2.3.14

It may therefore be very difficult to search for information on activities, when they are listed as follows, for example: **education > outreach > deaf visitors**.



### 2.3.15

**Solution:** It should be easy to find information on the museum's website about the activity by using **searchable keywords**, e.g. *deaf, sign language, lipreading*, and if possible, **tagging** these keywords.

### 2.3.16

As in **2.3.11**, be clear about the target audience and the communication support you are offering.

### 2.3.17

It is also important to create appropriate marketing in specific publications and social media platforms enjoyed by deaf people to let them know about the service you are offering. Building on **2.3.16**, remember that it is inappropriate to advertise lipspeaking or captioned support in magazines aimed at sign language users, and vice versa. Cascade your information widely among local, regional, and national networks of deaf associations with e-mail flyers. Make sure you put your event in your mainstream "What's On" or event booklets and posters too – spread the word as widely as possible.

### 2.3.18

The importance of marketing cannot be overstressed. How can deaf people come if they cannot find out about it? There is nothing more disheartening for new programmes than to have few or no deaf people turn up, particularly when communication support has been booked at some expense: it may discourage the museum or gallery from putting on any more events. **If the venue does not do this effectively, they are setting up barriers for themselves as well as for the deaf audience.**

## Making contact with the museum:

### 2.3.19

**Issue:** How do deaf people contact the museum to make general enquiries or to book for activities?

### 2.3.20

**Impact:** if only telephone numbers are given as contacts then deaf people are not able to contact the museum and may be discouraged from coming.

### 2.3.21

**Solution:** The museum website and printed publicity material should tell deaf people how they can contact the museum in 'deaf-friendly' ways, preferably through **e-mail, SMS** and/or **fax**.

### 2.3.22

A named point of contact should be responsible for dealing with deaf visitors (usually the museum's specialist educator or 'access officer').

### 2.3.23

Full details of the events, where to meet, who to contact, and how to find the correct location in the museum should be clear and easily found on the website.



## 2.4 Educational barriers

### 2.4.1

**Issue:** Many deaf people, especially pre-lingually deaf people, have historically had struggles with primary and secondary education and lack of access to tertiary education.

### 2.4.2

Today there is greater awareness of deaf people's needs and potential, access to tertiary education is widespread, but there are living generations of deaf people for whom education was limited and not tailored to their needs or to maximise their potential. Tertiary education for deaf people in Western Europe has largely been a phenomenon from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.4.3

A further barrier for many older deaf people may be lower confidence or competence in spoken and written language as a legacy of difficulties with formal education. This is not confined to teaching through the medium of sign language but also through failing to hear important grammatical usage in natural speech.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.4.4

This should not be confused with intelligence or intellectual capacity: rather the educational legacy is difficulty in accessing information through spoken language. In the same way a lack of speech or preference not to use speech, should not be seen as an indicator of competence in the written language.

### 2.4.5

**Impact:** Exclusion on language and communication grounds from cultural activity and lifelong learning outside formal educational settings after leaving school/college/university, leading to a sense of alienation and exclusion.

### 2.4.6

There is consequently a hunger for lifelong learning opportunities to remedy gaps in prior education as well as to partake in national cultural life.

### 2.4.7

**Solution:** Provision of activities carefully targeted at different sectors of deaf audiences of all levels and abilities (including deaf children and young people of school and university age). Museums are in a unique position to feed this appetite for lifelong learning opportunities for deaf people.

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9 The first deaf student attended Durham University in the 1970s, and there was a year-on-year increase in deaf students from both deaf schools and mainstream schooling backgrounds during the mid 1980s, when the present author attended Durham.

10 For example, in English, distinguishing the correct verb endings – past tense -ed is often silent and shows very little on the lips.



## 2.5 Economic barriers

### 2.5.1

**Issue:** Less disposable income. Disabled and deaf people are, broadly speaking, more likely to be economically disadvantaged than the general population, with higher rates of unemployment, particularly where communication difficulties exist. Additionally age-related deafness is a common factor in the retired population, a group which also has less disposable income.

### 2.5.2

**Impacts:** this group may find museum entry fees or fees for activities more difficult to pay for.

### 2.5.3

**Solution:** Where the museum has a policy of reduced entry fees for disabled people, deaf people should be included in this group (and this policy should be clearly displayed (see 2.3.6)).

### 2.5.4

Activities targeted at deaf visitors should ideally either be free or low-cost.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.5.5

**Audioguides** If the museum or site policy is for audioguides to be free, then equivalent devices or alternatives for deaf visitors should also be free. It is discriminatory to charge deaf visitors for something that is not their fault.

### 2.5.6

Likewise, if audioguides are available with a hearing loop it is unfair for the deaf person to be charged to use the loop. If security is an issue, then it is reasonable to ask for a small returnable deposit for the loop.

### 2.5.7

In the same way, for people who cannot access the audioguides at all, the loan of transcripts should be gratis, or the deaf person may be offered a gratis copy of the venue (exhibition) guide.

### 2.5.8

If it is the museum policy to charge hearing visitors a small sum for the hire of audioguides, then it is reasonable to charge deaf visitors the same sum for a palm pilot that conveys the same material in sign language or with subtitles. All visitors are then treated equally.

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<sup>11</sup> Comparative approaches of the UK, France and the US reflect different cultural norms and expectations. In the UK admission to the main public museums is free and museum lectures, guided tours and other events (other than specialist courses) are generally also free, thus activities for disabled and deaf people are also presumed to be free so that they are not disadvantaged. This applies as much to a mainstream event which has been made accessible (for example, a daily lunchtime talk which is interpreted once a month into sign language, such as at the National Gallery, London) as to specific events for deaf people, such as at Tate Modern and the Wallace Collection. Occasionally private institutions such as the Royal Academy of Arts, which is a private institution, may charge a nominal event fee of £3, which is still good value since the typical exhibition entry fee of £12-15 is waived. At the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, entry to the museum is free for disabled persons but guided tours are charged for. A small charge of €5 may be made for a talk or tour for deaf visitors: this fee is typical and in line with the fees payable for joining a normal guided tour. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, activities aimed at disabled audiences (including deaf people) are free on payment of the admission price (which does not include reductions for visitors with disabilities).





## 2.6 Language barriers

This barrier primarily affects sign language users and is distinct from the communication barriers identified in 2.3, although it often increases the impact of these barriers.

### 2.6.1

**Issue:** Lack of information and activities via the medium of sign language.

### 2.6.2

**Impact:** Access to cultural activities and intellectual concepts is made difficult by information being in spoken and written language. It also makes it difficult to find out information about events targeted at sign language users, since the information may not only be in the written language, but written by professionals, who do not appreciate the barriers to navigating information in the written domain (see 2.3.13 for the impact of those barriers on websites).

### 2.6.3

A secondary, but very important, impact lies in the choice of communication support professionals. It applies equally to sign language interpreters and to lipspeakers. It is preferable to choose professionals who already display a competence in the arts domains, those who have a qualification or demonstrable interest in the arts and can display competence in conveying specialist terminology to the audience without 'dumbing down' or abbreviating the content.<sup>12</sup> Where this is not possible, sign-language interpreters should have proven competence in a related domain, such as theatre interpreting, which is not only an allied area of competence but involves the confidence necessary for public speaking.

### 2.6.4

**Solution:** provision of activities through sign language and carefully targeted communication on the museum's website, preferably using easy-to-find keywords.

### 2.6.5

Appropriate choice of suitably qualified communication support professionals (sign language interpreters, lipspeakers, cued speech practitioners).

### 2.6.6

Ensure details about your event are written in clear and unambiguous language: it is not only a communication issue, it is also a language issue.

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<sup>12</sup> Callow, 2001, 7, p23-27, and personal observation by the author over 22 years.



## **2.7 Checklist: recommendations to consider when developing programmes for deaf audiences**

### **2.7.1**

Consider the physical environment as a major factor when developing events aimed at deaf visitors: identify the barriers in the building and exhibitions.

### **2.7.2**

Consider whether the deaf visitor will gain maximum enjoyment from the remainder of the visit by collaborating with curators and exhibition designers in advance. The visit has little educational value if the only aspect which is accessible is the educational activity. The educational activity should enable an enjoyable and informative independent visit to complement the activity.

### **2.7.3**

Ensure front-of-house staff (reception staff, warders) receive deaf awareness training and can communicate well with deaf visitors. In particular, ensure that they are briefed on days when events for deaf visitors are taking place.

### **2.7.4**

Make sure your signage and information boards are clearly legible and clearly displayed to enable deaf people to communicate their requirements easily and to navigate around the museum independently without the stress of communication. Add temporary posters to direct deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors to events.

### **2.7.5**

Consider how to advertise your events both within the museum's website and externally. Consider using sign language and subtitled introductions or short films to welcome deaf people on your website – these can be sent as clips or e-flyers. Give full details and be clear and straightforward in describing your events.

# Devising your educational programme for deaf people

**Summary:** This chapter considers the various possibilities for events for deaf people and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of each.

## 3.1 What kind of accessible event should we run?

### 3.1.1

The first thing you should consider is whether you want to have **separate events for deaf people** or whether you would like to make your event **accessible to both deaf and hearing audiences together**. There are advantages and disadvantages of both approaches. You may want to try both approaches at first, or keep a mixture of both approaches once your programme has got going.

### 3.1.2

**Involve deaf focus groups in the planning from the outset.** They will help you identify potential issues in your museum environment, become your potential audience, and be a very useful source of feedback in improving the programme. (See section 5 for more detail on this aspect of planning.)

## 3.2 Events aimed only at deaf visitors

### 3.2.1

Events aimed solely at deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors are popular and probably comprise the majority of events run by museums in the UK.

### 3.2.2

**Possible approaches:** deaf-led sign language talks, deaf-led talks for lipreaders, hearing-led talks with sign language interpreters and lipspeakers, live subtitling of formal lectures, guided tours outside core opening hours.

#### 3.2.2.1

More rarely, a lecture or tour by a hearing museum educator who is able to sign is possible. If it is relatively unusual for sign language interpreters to possess the necessary competencies in the arts (see 2.6.3), it is a rare and unusual combination of skills for hearing museum professionals, and requires not only competence in sign language, but familiarity with signs relevant to the museum, gallery or site's particular discipline.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.2.3

**Advantages:** it is easier for the deaf audiences to relax in an environment where they know everyone appreciates their communication issues. If this takes place at quieter times then it is easier to see and hear.

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<sup>13</sup> Although many British access officers have some signing skills, only one access officer has sufficient BSL skills to give talks in BSL.



It also has the added advantage that the deaf audience feels as if they are valued and important guests. Where used, a deaf guide becomes a role model they can empathise with.

#### 3.2.4

The method of delivery is targeted specifically at them and physical, environmental and other barriers will have been considered in creating the event. The event will allow pauses to be built in so that deaf visitors can appreciate the object or artwork without having to look at the speaker or interpreter.

#### 3.2.5

**Disadvantages:** This programming creates a sense of separateness – deaf people are ‘equal but different’. It can also be more expensive unless the museum creates a budget or a funding stream for accessible activity - a separate programme is an extra expense while opening museums out of hours requires extra staff time (both educational and warding staff).

#### 3.2.6

**Recommendations:** installing double programmes for sign language users and lipreaders alike to meet the very different needs of these groups. This can be through having the same but parallel events (e.g. programmed on different days, but with the same content and same speaker, for example) for each group, or making the event accessible through having both a sign language interpreter and a lipspeaker present, but this needs careful co-ordination and rehearsal in advance. In the latter circumstances, co-ordinating who stands where and letting the audience know roles and responsibilities of each party, so they can position themselves accordingly, is key.

## 3.3 Making mainstream programming accessible:

#### 3.3.1

You can make your mainstream programme accessible by using communication support at your regular events by using communication support professionals and live subtitling where appropriate (e.g. in the lecture theatre or in an exhibition with hand-held tablets).

#### 3.3.2

**Advantages:** this is an inclusive approach and enables deaf people to enjoy the same event with hearing friends and family. Where deaf people can lead these events they become positive role models for the population at large.

#### 3.3.3

It can be easier and more cost-effective to make these programmes accessible through adding communication support professionals, because these programmes have pre-existing budgets which can be more easily augmented.

#### 3.3.4

It is easier to programme accessibility in on a regular basis by choosing events the museum runs regularly. For example, if a museum runs weekly Saturday lunchtime art talks, they can choose to have one Saturday talk interpreted into sign language or lipspeaking.



### 3.3.5

Live subtitling is becoming increasingly popular and technology now allows for individual hand-held tablets to be used in exhibitions and in walking tours, and can be used both for making mainstream events accessible and for separate events for deaf people.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.3.5

**Disadvantages:** hearing visitors may not understand deaf visitors' need for good sightlines of live speakers. This can be overcome if an announcement is made when introducing the event that it will be made accessible through communication support and to ask the audience for their understanding in allowing deaf people to remain at the front at all times so they can see the signing and/or lipread.

### 3.3.6

Hearing lecturers need training in punctuating their delivery with appropriate regular pauses, to allow the interpreters, and if used, the speech-to-text transcribe to keep up, and to allow the deaf audience to see the artwork or object.

### 3.3.7

Whichever approach you adopt, do not be afraid to use a mixture of event types and personnel – formal lectures in a lecture theatre (subtitled or signed), guided exhibition tours with interpreters or live subtitling, activities such as artistic activities in the museum, and events run by both hearing and deaf people.

### 3.3.8

This keeps the programme fresh and varied. Remember, deaf people appreciate variety as much as anyone else.

### 3.3.9

Deaf visitors also want to hear from the experts too. If your museum has a world expert on a subject make sure that deaf people can learn from them too. Quality is an important keystone in intellectual access.

Checklist for successful talks for deaf audiences:

## 3.4

### 3.4.1

Have you worked with a focus group looking at your proposed programme in a holistic way?

### 3.4.2

Have you advertised the event appropriately, ensuring the audience knows how the event will be delivered, including the communication method?

### 3.4.3

It is preferable to create educational activities which support both sign language users and deafened and hard-of-hearing people who use oral methods of communication. This can be **simultaneous** if the space

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<sup>14</sup> Stagertext, <http://www.stagertext.org/about-stagertext/live-speech-to-text-in-museums-and-galleries>



and type of activity warrants it (e.g. in a lecture theatre or in a large gallery space where there is enough space for both communication support professionals to stand) but in smaller spaces, and for informal programming, consider having different forms of communication support at different times.

## Hints and tips for hearing lecturers working with deaf audiences:

### 3.4.4

Whichever method of communication you have chosen for the event, remember that the event will take longer than a similar tour for hearing people. The deaf audience cannot look at the speaker (sign language interpreter/lipspeaker/speech-to-text tablet) AND at the object at the same time. Hearing people can listen and look at the same time, deaf people can't. Allow time for the deaf audience to look at the object you are talking about.

### 3.4.5

Likewise, be prepared for questions asking you to repeat or clarify something you have said. If you cannot make yourself understood, try to repeat the same information in a different way (it can often be easier).

### 3.4.6

Maintain eye contact for all groups of visitors who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Don't look down at your notes or look fixedly at one person. It is not good practice to do so anyway, but the effects of exclusion are magnified with deaf audiences.

### 3.4.7

When someone asks a question, it is good practice to **repeat** the question to ensure that everyone has understood it, **before** you give your answer. Remember, the audience may not have seen or heard what the asker has said, so repeat it for the benefit of all.

### 3.4.8

If hearing guides work with a deafened/hard-of-hearing audience with assistive devices (loops, etc.) preference should be given to guides with clear speech and clear lip patterns to give the audience as much help as possible, even if you are also working with a lipspeaker or using cued speech. Deaf people often switch between reading one person's lips to another: it is less tiring.

## For live events – deaf-led, hearing-led, separate or integrated:

### 3.4.9

Offer **synopses** that highlight key words (names of artists or artistic movements and dates) that may be unfamiliar and are difficult either to read back in fingerspelling or to lipread, and summarise the key points. This is a low-cost solution to access and will make it much easier for the deaf audience to follow. Clearly this is less of an issue where speech-to-text is used.

### 3.4.10

If the event is a mainstream one that is made accessible, introduce the event so that both hearing and deaf people are made welcome, and it is clear to everybody what to expect.



### 3.4.11

It is helpful to have an access or educational officer present on the day. Be aware of other hearing visitors who do not appreciate that the deaf audience need to see the guide and/or interpreter. They may stand in an inconvenient position to gawp because they are unfamiliar with sign language, or wander between the guide and the audience. Consider using other staff to strategically block the way so that this does not happen.

### 3.4.11

**Timetable your events on a regular basis.** This makes it easier for audiences to remember your museum and your event, and to tell their friends about it. You could run events: once a month; once a quarter; every time you have a new exhibition. You could consider alternating events for deaf and for hard-of-hearing people: a sign-interpreted talk one month, a lipspeaker-supported talk the next.



# Case Studies of Best Practice in London

**Summary:** This chapter showcases a number of case studies of successful museum events for deaf people which vary in character and approach, and also warns of what can go wrong, using an example from Rome. Although the focus is on London museums as those familiar to the author, it should be noted that successful programmes for deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons in New York and Paris follow similar models. URLs for such museum programmes are given in the Bibliography.

## 4.1 National Gallery

### 4.1.1

The National Gallery was an early adopter of BSL talks in the mid 1990s, originally as an event dedicated to deaf visitors only, led by a freelance lecturer, together with a BSL interpreter, and run regularly on the first Saturday of the month.

### 4.1.2

Since around 2005 the programme has become embedded within the National Gallery calendar and consists of the following, which take place at least once a month. Events can be introduced by a **deaf host**, who is a well-known figure in the London deaf community,<sup>15</sup> and comprise both events targeted specifically at deaf visitors, and mainstream events which are made accessible.

### 4.1.3

Both forms of event mix and match a variety of approaches, since **variety** and **quality** are key issues for the National Gallery.

### 4.1.4

**Dedicated events for deaf visitors:** may be out of hours (allowing good sightlines and minimising noise from other visitors) and use either a hearing curator with a sign language interpreter (SLI) or a deaf lecturer working in sign language, together with an SLI undertaking voiceover, so that hard-of-hearing patrons may also lipread or listen with loops as required, and permitting quality control for non-signing access officers. Some events may also take place with lipspeakers in support.

### 4.1.5

**Accessible mainstream events:** the National Gallery has a regular and varied daily calendar and each quarter one or more talks may be led by a deaf lecturer with voiceover for the hearing audience, a member of NG staff with a SLI, or transcribed in speech-to-text (live captioning) the latter particularly suitable for formal lectures and thus for intellectual access.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Deaf hosts have been employed by the National Gallery, Royal Academy of Arts and Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A).

<sup>16</sup> This formula is also followed by the National Portrait Gallery, London, making at least one mainstream event a month accessible as part of their late-night programming on Thursdays and Fridays.





#### 4.1.6

These may include mainstream events which attract a challenging audience who all have varying needs: well-educated regular hearing patrons who come to this talk weekly, weekend visitors who may know little about art, visitors whose first spoken language is not English, and a regular and loyal deaf clientele, as well as many deaf visitors who use other sign languages. This approach ensures accessibility has a high profile among other visitors as well as the target audience.

#### 4.1.7

**Conclusion:** a highly successful and well-attended programme with a very strong sense of scholarship. Freelance lecturers are expected to study the artworks in minute detail and avail themselves of the NG's own library and painting dossiers.

## 4.2 Tate Modern and Tate Britain

#### 4.2.1

Prior to the opening of Tate Modern, the Tate (at the site now known as Tate Britain), was another early adopter of regular programming for deaf visitors with a regular Tate guide + interpreter in the late 1990s, which also went into abeyance until the late 2000s.

#### 4.2.2

From the outset programming at Tate Modern, opened in 2000, was intended to encompass accessibility and a regular '**First Friday of the Month**' event for deaf visitors during late night opening was instituted, which continues to this day. Initially led by Tate staff, it is now almost completely deaf-led with a voiceover for hearing companions, BSL learners, and so on, but talented hearing speakers with empathy for deaf audiences are also employed.

#### 4.2.3

It is hugely popular and benefits from enormous spaces allowing plenty of people at a time to see, but has almost become a victim of its own success in that numbers in the last few years have been so high (numbers of over 100 are usual) that it has become an access issue in its own right, since visitors jostle to see the speaker. At the same time lipreaders complained that they wanted their own provision.

#### 4.2.4

To address the issues of over-subscribed talks and access issues for lipreaders it was decided to split the audience by making separate provision based on specific needs. The first Friday signed talks are still programmed, but are repeated by either the same deaf speaker or a different lecturer, with a lipspeaker, on the **second** Friday of the month.



#### 4.2.5

At the same time, over the last 2 or 3 years, to build up a regular audience for Tate Britain, similar signed deaf-led talks are held on the **third** Friday of the month. All are held at the same time, 7pm to 8pm.<sup>17</sup> At present audiences are relatively small for Tate Britain, circa 20-25 people, and are not yet sufficient to justify provision for a separate lipspeaking event.

#### 4.2.6

**Conclusion:** as with 4.1, a choice of formats represents **variety** for the visitor and takes account of the needs of lipreaders who form a significant sector of deaf people. The Tate has proved itself flexible and innovative in this new approach. Uptake for lipspeaking events is a relatively new innovation but is growing, a tribute to the Tate's reputation.

#### 4.2.7

Based on this experience, the author now recommends that where practicable, separate programmes for sign language users and lipreaders are initiated from the outset in new programmes, rather than provision made at a later date for lipreaders.<sup>18</sup> For more on such a programme, see 4.4.

### 4.3 Wallace Collection

#### 4.3.1

The quarterly Wallace Collection programme entitled **Deaf Visions**, has been wholly deaf-led since 2005, giving it a corporate identity<sup>19</sup> which recognises that deaf people are very visually aware and can offer a visionary interpretation of art.

#### 4.3.2

It follows the format of a **lecture** given by one deaf guide on a particular topic and a **creative workshop** led by another deaf guide, utilising art skills to make an individual work of art or collaborative work based on one of the artworks included in the lecture: the duration of each activity is approximately 45-50 minutes.

#### 4.3.3

Depending on the subject the workshop may take place first, as an introduction to the more formal part of the programme, the lecture, afterwards or vice versa: where possible the former is preferred, since the event is programmed to run from 1530 to 1730 or 1800. The museum closes to the public at 1700 so it is usually possible to run a tour after the workshop without any other noise distraction.

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17 One hour is considered the standard duration for a lecture or guided tour in the UK for any type of audience, and is particularly suitable for deaf visitors whose concentration may flag beyond this period. This period of time permits a limited number of objects to be studied in depth and to cover any questions that the deaf audience may ask. By contrast a tour in LSF (Langue de Signes Française) at the Musée d'Orsay was observed by the author in December 2007. It followed French cultural norms of an extended guided tour of two hours, which, however, elected to cover more material in less depth, rather than cover fewer objects in greater depth, which made it a less productive learning experience.

18 Sir John Soane's Museum, first year programme, 2012-13

19 The Royal Academy of Arts also has corporate branding for its programme for deaf people, called InterAct: in fact there is a suite of branding across its programming for different disabilities, InMind for visitors with dementia and InTouch for blind people, all of which use these particular English phrases to communicate the essence of the adaptations made for each user group. This strong branding is an example of good practice that communicates to the core audience what they can expect.



#### 4.3.4

2 – 2.5 hours are dedicated to the combined activities with a brief refreshment break in between (tea and biscuits) to foster a sense of inclusivity and to provide a break from the concentration required in comprehension.

#### 4.3.5

The audiences for these activities tend to be fairly small, 6-20, enabling eye contact to be maintained throughout and fostering a sense of inclusion. Guides may use BSL with voiceover, SSE, or be oral with a sign language interpreter.

#### 4.3.6

It is not unusual for deaf people with different communication needs and styles to work together in undertaking each part of the afternoon's programme, with the same interpreter performing different roles depending on context. All audience members can therefore participate equally even with different communication needs.

#### 4.3.7

The profile of the Wallace Collection is an institution which attracts older, well-educated people who have acquired deafness through age and the latest strand in educational provision for visitors with hearing impairment will focus on this group.

#### 4.3.8

**Conclusion:** This is a well-regarded programme which has become the model for several smaller institutions of a similar size and similar budget.<sup>20</sup> It is innovative, sensitive to the changing needs of its audience, and constantly changing, with expectations of high standards of research and scholarship from its deaf lecturers, and promotes a great sense of inclusivity among what can be a very disparate group of deaf people.

## 4.4 Sir John Soane's Museum

### 4.4.1

Sir John Soane's Museum is new to providing accessible talks for deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors, with the first talks delivered only in October 2012. The museum has several restrictions which do not apply to other venues, and provides an insight into the difficulties of working in historic buildings. Each room or architectural space is small and crammed with artefacts such as architectural fragments and sculptures; secondly, low light levels because of the architecture in some areas, particularly in the winter when the museum is lit by candlelight; and thirdly, the impact of other visitors wanting to gain access to the same spaces, all make it difficult, if not impossible, to provide guided tours for deaf visitors with adequate sightlines for both BSL users and lipreaders.

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<sup>20</sup> This bipartite model has been followed by the Geffrye Museum, London, since 2008 and is being implemented at Sir John Soane's Museum, London, in its new programming, 2012-13. The National Gallery in London also occasionally follows this model in, for example, in regularly making accessible two of its major daily events in sign language (whether BSL-interpreted or given directly in BSL) once or twice a year. The two events are normally the 30-minute at 1pm, and the 10-minute talk given at 4pm, with an opportunity for deaf visitors to enjoy the artworks and socialise in the café in between, generating revenue for the National Gallery.



#### 4.4.2

The solution has been to involve deaf lecturers from the outset in planning the educational activities to circumvent these restrictions. The education room, which is bright and well-lit, and a small and intimate space with good sightlines, is used. Numbers are restricted to the maximum which can be accommodated in the education room and the event takes place on the evening opening on the first Tuesday each month.

#### 4.4.3

The first part of the educational event always starts with a slide show showing the artworks related to the theme of the talk (for example, Soane's Grand Tour). This is followed by a self-guided tour of the museum to look at the actual objects, which also functions as the break between activities, then visitors return to the education room for an art workshop, creative activity, or discussion group.

#### 4.4.4

This particular series is unique in having not only deaf guides for all activities, but also in making provision for sign language users and lipreaders from the outset (rather than adding activities for lipreaders or in other formats, e.g. subtitled talks as at the National Gallery and the Tate).

#### 4.4.5

The same educational activity is run twice, once for BSL users and once for lipreaders, being a good use of both the museum's resources and those of the deaf guides, all of whom live outside London.

#### 4.4.6

The museum is also unique in using deaf guides who are willing to work with both user groups (by no means always the case: sometimes the deaf guides on the Tate BSL programme do not want to work on the lipspeaking programme, or vice versa). The current guides comprise a deaf lipreader who works with a sign language interpreter for the BSL group, two bilingual deaf guides who can work directly with both BSL and lipreading visitors, and a BSL user who works directly in BSL with that group and with a lipspeaker for the lipreading group.

#### 4.4.7

**Conclusion:** This programme is already popular. It does not have room to grow in terms of numbers but the museum's collections offer infinite variety for the future.

## 4.5 Walks and Talks for Lipreaders

#### 4.5.1

The 'Walks and Talks for Lipreaders' programme is run by a private individual who is a qualified and experienced lipspeaker, in conjunction with museums and galleries across London. This lipspeaker works extensively in the arts and heritage field and therefore has experience of assisting lecturers and guides with such activities, as well as being qualified in lipspeaking. Indeed, she works at several of the museums and galleries mentioned in the above case studies.



#### 4.5.2

Her programme, which takes place approximately three times a year, addresses a need for persons with acquired hearing loss to maintain a prior interest in cultural heritage which they are no longer able to access through mainstream activities because they can no longer follow spoken language well.

#### 4.5.3

The format is usually a walk around a particular area of London pointing out features of historic or architectural interest, followed by a visit to a museum or gallery in the area at the visitor's leisure: for example a recent walk in the Albertopolis<sup>21</sup> area of South Kensington was combined with a visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum. As with the Wallace Collection, this is essentially a bipartite activity, allowing the deaf visitor respite from prolonged concentration on communication. These walks require careful reconnaissance, not only of the route but also of suitable places where groups of deaf people can pause in safety to have adequate sightlines of the walk leaders, since of course they must stop in order to lipread the guide and cannot be distracted while walking.

#### 4.5.4

As these tours are run privately, a small fee of £5 per walk is charged for each individual, which compares well for guided tour fees in the UK generally.

#### 4.5.5

**Conclusion:** a popular and successful programme that is growing year on year, predominantly for retired deaf people. The lipspeaker is helping to develop guidelines for historic places and for other groups of deaf people, i.e. sign language users and deafblind visitors, for similar programmes.

## 4.6 Case study: alternative approaches in Rome: Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna (GNAM)<sup>22</sup>

#### 4.6.1

At the GNAM there were no events aimed specifically at deaf visitors: instead the gallery contained a permanent interactive multimedia display for visitors with hearing and sight impairments, focusing on four key works in the gallery.

#### 4.6.2

The principle of multimedia and multi-sensory access is a good one – all visitors, regardless of disability, enjoy an enhanced sensory experience.

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21 The name given to the area around Exhibition Road, South Kensington, containing a number of museums and other cultural venues and institutions, originally planned by Prince Albert in the wake of the Great Exhibition of 1851, epitomising a number of grandiose Victorian architectural styles.

22 Based on personal visits to Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna and Musei Capitolini (a smaller display of the same kind), Rome, July 2013



### 4.6.3

The multisensory display contained:

1. tactile panels that reproduced the texture of an artwork;
2. thermoform images which reproduced the subject of the artwork;
3. labels in braille and in raised lettering;
4. small video panels that were not working;
5. thick circular pads whose meaning was unclear and there was nothing to show what they were for or how to use them.

### 4.6.4

Nothing was labelled to show its purpose, thus although the tactile displays for blind people were obvious the purpose of 4 and 5 was unclear. A means of access was made inaccessible at the point of use!

### 4.6.5

The author researched the displays afterwards. They were not publicised via the museum website, but were eventually traced. Thus the museum is not promoting their provision for visitors who are deaf and blind to the outside world, reducing its accessibility still further.<sup>23</sup>

### 4.6.6

The video panels turned out, as predicted, to have a sign language commentary on the selected work, but as they were not working, there was no provision via the medium of sign language. The circular pads turned out to be vibration pads to feel music. For blind visitors, period music was played through a headset to evoke the atmosphere of the era in which each work was painted. Deaf visitors could feel the music – but there were no instructions on how to get these to work or that the music had to be on to obtain the benefit.

### 4.6.7

**Conclusion:** The impression given by this provision was a ‘disabled persons’ corner’ in which different needs were lumped together without any distinction, a reminder of outmoded attitudes in which disabled people of all kinds were often regarded generically as ‘the disabled’, a mass of people rather than as individuals. It also strongly resembled the once-common placement of disabled people ‘out of sight’ in special schools or institutions regardless of their specific needs. Its motivation thus felt exclusive, rather than inclusive.

### 4.6.8

Had these interpretation panels been placed in the same room as the artworks they depicted, they would have enabled a far more integrated experience, allowing deaf, blind and mainstream visitors to enjoy the works together, and contributing to the experience for all.

### 4.6.9

They would also have had greater visibility, in terms not only of more use, but also to spot when the technology was not working and to put it right.

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.leonardavaccari.it/internal.asp?cat\\_id=55333&category\\_name=Le%20vie%20dell%20arte%20attraverso%20le%20emozioni](http://www.leonardavaccari.it/internal.asp?cat_id=55333&category_name=Le%20vie%20dell%20arte%20attraverso%20le%20emozioni)



#### 4.6.10

Clearly the aim was to have a permanent display, but the inactive elements of the displays clearly illustrated the danger of reliance on technology. Multimedia technology breaks down or becomes obsolete, and thus its use in access contexts must be carefully considered.

## 4.7 Conclusions: None of these programmes have become successful without a number of key criteria:

### 4.7.1

The museums have been willing to involve deaf visitors and deaf practitioners from day one and to adjust their programmes in the light of feedback from deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors, deaf guides, and interpreters alike. This remains an ongoing process as programmes develop over time: no programme is static.

### 4.7.2

It is especially important to listen to guide (both hearing and deaf) and audience feedback about the quality of interpretation and to analyse any translation or interpretation issues identified by the audience.

### 4.7.3

Having said that, it is important to stress that the provision of talks in sign language is not a showcase for the language itself: it is the medium through which the subject is being taught. There may occasionally be criticism of individual deaf presenters' and interpreters' style, but just as hearing speakers have their own individual manner of speaking, so do deaf lecturers and sign language interpreters.<sup>24</sup> As more events are programmed, and audiences are exposed more and more to talks on a variety of subjects and by a variety of speakers, this becomes less and less of an issue. Issues with incorrect content are more important as they compromise the quality of information conveyed.

### 4.7.4

Regular review of content, issues, programming and personnel will enable event programming to flourish and expand to attract more people.

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<sup>24</sup> This can be interpreted as a typical process of maturing audiences and will subside with greater exposure.

# Involving deaf visitors in your museum

**Summary:** This chapter considers the involvement of the deaf community in various ways in planning and carrying out a series of successful events at your museum.

## 5.1 Philosophy of involving deaf people at all levels

### 5.1.1

'**Nothing about us without us**' is a slogan of the disability rights movement, articulating the fundamental principle of the right of disabled people to self-determination, that is, to make and contribute to decisions involving them rather than other people making decisions on their behalf. It translates into Polish as *nic o nas bez nas*, a phrase with a long heritage.<sup>25</sup>

### 5.1.2

Decisions should be made in consultation with the target audience – decisions made alone without the involvement of the target audience will overlook detail which could be crucial to the success of your events for the target audience (see 3.1.2). In practice, this means involving deaf audiences **from the outset** in designing and improving your educational activities for deaf people.

### 5.1.3

In an ideal world, key museum staff (educators, front-of-house staff) should receive **deaf awareness training** before embarking on a programme of events aimed at deaf people. In practice this may not always be possible, but it should certainly be a cornerstone of any programme that is developed, that staff should attend such training so that they are able to welcome deaf patrons in an inclusive manner.

## 5.2 The pre-planning stage

### 5.2.1

Before planning your activities for deaf people at your museum, ensure that you make contact nationally, locally and regionally with deaf people and their organisations from across the spectrum of deafness. They will be vital at all stages of access planning.

### 5.2.2

Invite representatives from your local deaf club, and from national organisations representing deaf people, and deaf students from a local university or college, to a focus group meeting to identify the activities they feel they would enjoy at your museum, gallery, or site.

### 5.2.3

Be prepared to get it right from the start – be open and willing to listen.

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<sup>25</sup> Nihil novi nisi commune consensu : Sejm, Radom, 1505





#### 5.2.4

Be prepared to offer communication support of different kinds for different groups of deaf people from the outset, and make the offer openly and without preconceived ideas. In your invitation to the meeting, also invite your audience to state their needs when making contact with you and this will enable you to identify any other individuals who may need more support (e.g. deaf-blind individuals).

#### 5.2.5

You could offer this as a series of tick boxes:

**Sign language/ Lipspeaking/Cued speech**

**Notetakers or speech-to-text reporters/ Other, e.g. deafblind manual support**

You can also state what other support you will have available on the day, for example that you will offer synopses and that loops (fixed or portable) will be available.

#### 5.2.6

Be aware that if you offer only one method of communication you will only reach some of your potential deaf and hard-of-hearing audience. To avoid misunderstanding, be clear about what you are offering so the support meets the audience's requirements. (See also **2.3.9** and **2.6.6**)

#### 5.2.7

You could run an initial event as a 'launch event' or introductory session with a short guided tour (30-45 minutes) together with a discussion group, to encourage people to make the effort to come and to build interest in your venue.

#### 5.2.8

Bearing in mind the barriers described above at **2**, identify suitable venues in the museum for the educational and discussion activities. Well-lit, intimate spaces are best.

#### 5.2.9

Each museum, gallery, or site is unique and individual, with its own buildings, heritage and culture. Thus each programme will be slightly different.

#### 5.2.10

Encourage structured discussion of key issues:

1. Ask your audience if they have identified any particular barriers in the museum they would like you to address;
2. What type of programme do your visitors want to have?
3. Do they want to join mainstream events or to have separate events?

## 5.3 The execution stage

### 5.3.1

If it is appropriate for your museum, consider using a **volunteer deaf host**, at least for an inaugural event – someone who is well-known in the community and can introduce the event and speaker. This helps to establish the rapport between the museum and the audience.



### 5.3.2

The deaf host can also be a conduit for objective feedback about the talk itself (quality and content of talk and interpretation) and about the audience.

### 5.3.4

**Request feedback from the audience.** At the end of each event, use a simple questionnaire in clear and unambiguous language to allow the audience to leave feedback. Use this to devise your own analysis and feed it back to all involved: speaker (deaf or hearing), communication support, and education department. This allows you to plan and improve your events.

### 5.3.5

**Use deaf guides where you can.** Museums which recognise the benefits of using deaf guides will gain in return. Deaf guides are covered in more detail in section 6, as this is a key component of developing new and successful programmes. Consider using deaf guides in different roles, for example for your website. Webclips can perform a useful function not only in publicity but also as part of the incremental training of deaf guides.

## 5.4 Recommendations

### 5.4.1

Review your strategy after the initial event. What worked well? What did not work so well?

### 5.4.2

Review your publicity – did it work? Who turned up?

### 5.4.3

Respond positively to audience feedback and incorporate it into your planning.

### 5.4.4

Have follow-up meetings with everyone involved to identify issues which are specific to your museum as well as the more general access issues. That way everyone is empowered to contribute to decisions.

### 5.4.5

Listen carefully to feedback that may alert you to poor quality of interpretation that did not do justice to the subject or grant true intellectual access to the audience.

# Training deaf people as museum guides

**Summary:** This chapter considers the role of deaf guides and alternative models of recruiting or training such guides.

## 6.1 Dismantling a further barrier by using deaf guides.

### 6.1.1

That barrier is the intermediary of a third party. Even where there is an engaging hearing speaker and an excellent sign language guide or lipspeaker, there is no substitute for the personal rapport between speaker and lecturer.

### 6.1.2

Talks led by a deaf guide, whether a sign-language guide or someone who is hard-of-hearing, thus have the advantage of two-way empathy. The deaf guide is able to empathise with and anticipate the problems of language and communication faced by the audience and becomes a role model for the audience.

### 6.1.3

There are many things to recognise in training deaf people as museum guides but the primary consideration should be that, where possible, the deaf person is appropriately qualified, with qualifications similar to those for persons employed in museum education generally.

### 6.1.4

In the UK museum education is generally undertaken in-house by curators specialising in a particular art historical discipline (more commonly for adult audiences) and museum educational professionals who have a teaching qualification (particularly for children). Most also employ trusted freelance professional lecturers who may work across many different galleries who may specialise in art workshops, foreign-language tours, or tours for specialist audiences.

### 6.1.5

Most deaf lecturers therefore also work freelance for many different galleries rather than being attached to a single gallery, and this is typical of both the UK and France.

### 6.1.6

In practice, it may be difficult to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of deaf and hard-of-hearing people who are both qualified for, and sufficiently enthusiastic to, undertake this work.

### 6.1.7

Thus even in long-established programmes, the pool of deaf and hard-of-hearing lecturers remains small in proportion to the number of programmes deaf people now enjoy. Museum education is a specialist dis-



discipline which naturally attracts a small minority of the population as a whole, and to find a minority within a minority is challenging.

### 6.1.8

Even deaf people who are museum professionals, and there are many, may not enjoy or feel comfortable in leading educational events for deaf people. There is no single factor and no deaf member of staff should be pressurised into leading programmes for which they do not feel themselves suitable simply because they are deaf. There may be barriers for them too (see **2.3**, **2.4** and **2.6** for these barriers). Perhaps their interests lie elsewhere, e.g. in research; they are not confident in public speaking whether because of their deafness or because of their personality; or because they do not mix socially with other deaf and hard-of-hearing people and may lack the specific language and communication skills.

### 6.1.9

That said, in setting up programmes you may identify deaf museum professionals who have the interest, motivation and skills to participate in training programmes for deaf-led activities and to lead them in the future. Such opportunities can be advertised in professional bulletins and journals as well as in deaf-related publications in order to encourage such individuals to come forward.

### 6.1.10

**The most important factor is to begin a programme first:** taking it over to a deaf-led model or including deaf lecturers can come later. If you do not have deaf guides, do not worry: do not let it deter your museum from beginning a programme for deaf and hard-of-hearing people. You will find your deaf guides later.

### 6.1.11

Indeed, you may find that your deaf guides can arise out of your audience, as has been the case with the most recent training course in the UK (*Signing Art*, 2012).

## 6.2 Suggestions for recruiting deaf guides:

### 6.2.1

The primary qualification should be, as for hearing guides, qualification in a relevant discipline such as archaeology, design, history, or history of art, and/or a teaching qualification.<sup>26</sup>

### 6.2.2

Bearing in mind, however, barriers of educational attainment, suitably qualified individuals from allied backgrounds should also be considered, or, as in **6.4.7**, selected from enthusiastic regular members of the audience. A possible model for this group is suggested at **6.10**.

### 6.2.3

Advertise in the deaf press and among disability and deaf arts organisations in order to find a pool of suitable candidates.

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<sup>26</sup> Callow, 2001, 6.1, p19



## 6.3 Methodologies for training deaf guides:

### 6.3.1

**Individual tours scripted by the museum.** Some museums run scripted talks and tours with guides employed specifically to deliver these talks. This means that anyone can deliver the museum's script for that subject, so long as they have been trained accordingly, and deaf guides can learn the same content as their hearing peers (and be trained with them with the appropriate communication support). Training will involve teaching that particular script or groups of scripts.

### 6.3.2

**Advantages:** this method enables a variety of deaf people, who may not necessarily have the appropriate specialisms, but who are otherwise suitable for the role, to give museum talks on the same basis as their hearing peers who will not necessarily have a classical museum background either.

### 6.3.3

It can be replicated for each subject for which the museum has standard scripts.

### 6.3.4

It is the cheapest method of involving deaf lecturers on a basis of equality with hearing peers who will be delivering the same script to the same standard.

### 6.3.5

It is a method which is well-suited **fact-based** museum environments such as the Science Museum, London, or to **historic properties**, which will also involve delivery of historical facts or re-enactments delivered according to a script, such as at the Historic Royal Palaces, London.

### 6.3.6

It is also an excellent approach for audiences of children and young people and repays investment as it can be replicated regularly at holiday periods or with parties of school groups.

### 6.3.7

It is also suited to smaller museums which have small collections or a limited approach and enables deaf guides to replicate standard museum tours for the average visitor but in the comfort of a deaf-focused environment.

### 6.3.8

For scientific institutions there may be a greater emphasis following the script and less leeway for interpretation, but other institutions with smaller collections may encourage the deaf guide to provide additional information and interpretation.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For example, at the Geffrye Museum, London, a museum of almshouses which showcases changes in the domestic environment from the 16th century to the present day. For a lecture on the 1930s home, the present author included her experiences of growing up in a 1930s house which still retained original features.



### 6.3.9

It can be used as the basis for talented deaf guides to progress to further training at a later stage.

### 6.3.10

**Disadvantages:** Training needs to build confidence in answering audience questions and should not be confined to just the script. Deaf audiences are very visually aware and will request a great deal of detail from the guide on very small visual details. Also, bearing in mind educational barriers, they may request supplementary information to clarify points made (see 2.4).

### 6.3.11

Likewise training on an ad-hoc basis can also be limited in scope, with the same subjects recurring on a regular basis, which does not necessarily encourage long-term audience loyalty.

### 6.3.12

It can be labour-intensive, requiring the acquisition of knowledge on a subject-by-subject basis without the support of further development.

### 6.3.13

It is less well-suited to interpretive environments such as art galleries where not only facts, but also an accumulated weight of connoisseurship and discussion of artistic theories, must be delivered.

### 6.3.14

**In-house training:** Museums beginning or developing a series of deaf-led talks may offer a tailored programme of training. This will require separate development and is typically offered after programmes have become established, so that the demand for deaf-led programmes is easily demonstrated and the expense can be justified. It can build on prior experience of delivering scripted tours.

### 6.3.15

Examples of such training have been programmes in which one institution has set itself up as a centre of excellence in such training. These have been relatively few: the Louvre's 3-year programme in the 1990s to train deaf museum and heritage guides across the range of national and city museums and sites in Paris,<sup>28</sup> and four programmes offered at Tate in the 2000s (*ArtSigns* 2001, 2003, 2005, and *Signing Art*, 2012).

### 6.3.16

The Louvre programme and *ArtSigns* 2005 both offered academic art history classes and masterclasses in teaching methodology from existing hearing lecturers.<sup>29</sup> *ArtSigns* 2005 was the longest of all the three *ArtSigns* programmes, building on the more limited experiences of *ArtSigns* 2001 and 2003: the 2005 programme consisted of a 6 month course of weekly workshops.

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28 Derycke, 1994; Réunion des musées nationaux, Musées de la ville de Paris; Centre des monuments nationaux (formerly Caisse nationale des monuments historiques)

29 The present author is a graduate of *ArtSigns* 2005. Although she was an existing practitioner, she found the course useful for continuous professional development and gaining professional accreditation.



### 6.3.17

*ArtSigns* 2005 was run in conjunction with the City Literary Institute of London (City Lit), which specialises in further education for deaf students, and Shape Arts, an arts development organisation for deaf and disabled people. It led to a recognised qualification in teaching of adult learners,<sup>30</sup> and crucially included teaching from deaf lecturers at the City Lit as well as established art lecturers at the Tate.

### 6.3.18

Bearing in mind economic barriers (see 2.5) this course was subsidised by the three partner institutions to allow students to take it for free.

### 6.3.19

**Advantages:** Such courses ensure that deaf lecturers receive the same training opportunities as their hearing peers in a format that suits them and will also cover the specific requirements of lecturing and guiding to deaf people. They break down barriers in intellectual access by enabling deaf lecturers to obtain professional training with appropriate communication support.

### 6.3.20

**Disadvantages:** Such courses are very expensive to run and require subsidy, particularly where economic barriers exist. They require an intensive organisational and financial effort to replicate and retention of deaf guides is not particularly high for the financial outlay, although they dismantle intellectual barriers by providing high-quality training in an appropriate context for deaf guides.

### 6.3.21

To overcome these issues the Tate introduced a short course of four intensive workshops in order to recruit more deaf guides into the profession: *Signing Art* (2012). Using financial support from the Skills Funding Agency, these four workshops concentrated on academic and research skills, general teaching skills, teaching skills in BSL, and working in museums, all but the last taught by existing deaf professionals, with inbuilt mentoring sessions to supplement the course.

### 6.3.22

This course was designed to have a permanent legacy by being filmed in sign with subtitles so that students could refer back to the course materials and be used by other institutions as a basis for similar courses.

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30 City and Guilds Further Education Teaching 7407



## 6.4 Suggestions for other possible approaches:

### 6.4.1

It is possible that while one museum takes the lead, other museums and heritage sites could join with that museum in forming a consortium offering a varied training and sharing the financial cost and thus increasing their chances of attracting external funding from professional, national, or international bodies.

### 6.4.2

In London, continuing professional development for museum staff, deaf guides, and communication support professionals has taken place at other venues as well as the Tate. (See also 6.11)

### 6.4.3

The collaborative model can also work well in creating events between sites with related collections to offer high-quality events that provide fresh perspectives for deaf audiences.

### 6.4.4

Individual institutions may offer bursaries or scholarships for deaf students to receive training or to study alongside their hearing peers. One such institution was Historic Royal Palaces, London, which offers an excellent case study in breaking down financial, educational and economic barriers to provide extra training for a deaf guide who had successfully completed *Signing Art 2012* at the Tate. He received subsidised training with hearing peers to obtain a national guiding qualification.<sup>31</sup>

### 6.4.5

This may be a suitable model to follow, which results in high quality standards and the opportunity for the deaf guide to work across the sector, but specific training in working with deaf audiences is also required, and may not be obtainable via this method.

## 6.5 Recommendations for employing deaf guides:

### 6.5.1

**Audiences:** Consider your aims and your target audiences carefully. Consider matching the deaf speaker to the audience and whether additional communication support is needed for speaker or audience.

### 6.5.2

Ideally, deaf people would like to break down communication barriers between different groups of deaf people and work to achieve this. In practice they may prefer to work with a specific group (sign language users or hard-of-hearing and deafened people) and this preference should be respected.

### 6.5.3

The group which is best suited to working with both audiences will be deaf individuals who feel something in common with both groups.

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<sup>31</sup> Level 2 guiding, Institute of Tourist Guiding, the first level which culminates in Level 4, Blue Badge guiding. See: <http://www.itg.org.uk/guide-to-guiding/level-2.aspx> for details of this qualification.





#### 6.5.4

**Synopses:** Encourage your deaf lecturers to produce synopses as suggested at **3.4.9** and/or full scripts. This is the industry standard in the UK for live events which are not subtitled, and fulfils four main functions which are all key to accessibility and a good quality experience:

1. It is, of course, the lecturer's script which should be learnt thoroughly (speakers, deaf or hearing, should not refer to notes because they cannot hold notes in their hands while signing, or using a microphone or other assistive device, nor should they break eye contact with the audience.
2. It enables the museum to maintain quality control over the intellectual content.
3. It is preparation material for communication support professionals (sign language/cued speech/lip-speakers)

It becomes another form of access for the audience by making the speech available in a written format.

# Linguistic issues in sign language in the domain of art history

## 7.1 Background:

### 7.1.1

Sign language has a rich and long history which is still evolving as more and more deaf people have access to higher education, leading to a diversity of careers once denied to them.<sup>32</sup> In turn, this has led the continuing evolution of sign language.

### 7.1.2

Cultural activities in sign language contribute to this evolutionary process.

### 7.1.3

The UK experience over the last 20 years has seen both sign language interpreters and deaf museum lecturers contributing new signs to the BSL lexicon which have gained acceptance by being regularly used in a museum context. However, for some concepts such as *Impressionism* there is no standard sign.

### 7.1.4

Provision of educational activities in museums elsewhere will therefore contribute directly to the native sign language lexicons in each country and should be carefully recorded and justified on a linguistic basis to create a resource that can be easily used by practitioners at other museums.

### 7.1.5

Consideration of these issues is not only important in contributing to the development of sign language, which in museum terms is a by-product. The main aim of the museum should be to have events which are full of high-quality educational content in which the deaf audience can easily understand the concepts expressed.

### 7.1.6

Museum educators should, as far as is possible, have some understanding of these issues, for quality control and to check that content is being delivered appropriately. This is doubly important because many museum educators will have little or no understanding of sign language themselves. Sign language interpreters need to be able to deliver these concepts and should, where possible, also have some background in the history of art themselves.

### 7.1.7

The creation of an appropriate glossary should therefore be part of the training of deaf guides and sign language interpreters who wish to work in museums.

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<sup>32</sup> For example: in the UK skilled manual labour in the upholstery and tailoring trades were once regarded as traditional occupations for deaf people.



### 7.1.8

A good sign for an art term should be **iconic** that is, physically represent the unique visual quality of the object, artwork, movement or person, but at the same time explain the meaning, that is, the abstract quality or motivation behind the concept.

## 7.2 Some signs and their etymology:

### 7.2.1

Sign names:

#### 7.2.1.1

**Vincent van Gogh:** a sign imitating the slicing of his ear. This is a unique and virtually universal and easily understood sign name, and is biographical.

#### 7.2.1.2

**Sir Joshua Reynolds:** is similar. He painted a self-portrait of himself as a deaf man and his sign name therefore mimes his hand behind his ear, as in the portrait.

#### 7.2.1.3

**Constable:** the name of this English painter is translated as a straightforward translation of the English word 'constable', which means 'policeman'. However, this 'sign name' may not be universally understood across other languages where this word does not exist or where the sign for 'policeman' does not exist.

#### 7.2.1.4

**Picasso:** is more diverse. There are as many signs for Picasso as there are for 'periods' of his work! He is well-known for his portraits which represent the human face across different planes. Thus most signs play on this concept involving the hands close to the face: the hands and face twist in opposite directions to represent the distortions across different planes.

### 7.2.2

Artistic concepts:

#### 7.2.2.1

**Cubism:** The hands are stacked to make two C shapes one above the other – thus cuing the 'c' hand-shape and iconically representing cubes. The top hand keeps the 'c' shape and moves towards the signer, while the hand below turns the 'c' shape downwards. The top hand then moves underneath and up in front of the other hand, coming to rest with the 'c' hand also rotated 90 degrees. This represents the movement through planes and perspectives characteristic of Cubism. Thus it shares some resemblance to the sign name of Picasso, the same 'etymology'.

#### 7.2.2.2

**Gothic:** is another sign that has a number of versions. It is the architecture of the pointed arch, which is both what makes it visually identifiable and forms its underlying philosophical principle. Thus the sign can be visually distinct either by pointing two fingers upwards to represent tall pillars, meeting at the top in a pointed arch, or by other methods.



### 7.2.2.3

**Still life:** has no settled single form, because it is very context-dependent. It can be literally translated *still + life*, which is suitable for many Dutch meditations upon death. For animal still lifes, a literal translation of the French *nature morte* ('dead nature') may be preferable. Others, such as still lifes of flowers, may be best signed as petals dropping off flowers, conveying the meaning of 'still life' in that context: the passing of time and the presence of death.

### 7.2.2.4

**Surrealism:** using the relationship to the unconscious or subconscious mind, the sign for that has evolved to place the hand at the back of the head. This, in fact, is the same sign as for 'cochlear implant', but here it is context-driven, with the sign borrowed for this abstract concept.

## 7.3 Summary:

These are examples of the challenges faced in creating and working with an appropriate sign language vocabulary.

### 7.3.1

It should be noted that the audience may not be familiar with these signs. It is best practice for both deaf guides and interpreters to fingerspell such words before using them to familiarise the audience with the meaning, context and use of the sign.

### 7.3.2

A separate programme to produce a lexicon, or recording of these signs in use to build a databank of vocabulary, which can be consulted by existing and new practitioners, is also useful.

# Giving Something Back

**Summary:** This chapter considers case studies in subjects which are naturally attractive to deaf visitors and how these can raise the bar not only for deaf visitors but also for hearing museum curators.

## 8.1 The philosophy of equal access: a two-way flow

### 8.1.1

Of course deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors want access to the same intellectual quality of talks as everyone else and to explore the same variety of subjects. All subjects and approaches are suitable.

### 8.1.2

However, the creation of talks for this group of visitors provides an opportunity for the museum/gallery to produce **innovative work**, as a deaf perspective informs a new understanding of the artworks: in the same way that mainstream museology is now led by variant readings based on an understanding of the artwork through different cultural perspectives.

### 8.1.3

This approach is especially useful in creating programmes for deaf visitors from new, because it is specifically tailored to their needs, by looking at features which are of intrinsic interest to deaf visitors: how **gesture** is used to convey **narrative**. This is one element of the mainstream subject of **iconography** and is therefore a very good way of making this particular subject accessible.

### 8.1.4

The first case study below examines religious paintings from both the Eastern and Western Christian traditions, portraits, and the 'conversation piece' to explore how gesture is used to indicate speech, narrative, and emotion as part of a specific **language of art** analogous to sign language.

### 8.1.5

Deaf visitors are naturally also engaged with the heritage of famous deaf people, as figureheads of collection diversity and examples of the way lesser-researched topics can prove illuminating. Examples of such figures include John Goodricke, deaf astronomer,<sup>33</sup> and Sir Joshua Reynolds, deaf artist, widely represented in British collections, who is the main subject of the second case study.

### 8.1.6

These are included as suitable topics to inaugurate a new programme rather than to be the sole focus of the programme, or which can be used for events celebrating diversity.<sup>34</sup>

33 John Goodricke has been regularly portrayed by costumed deaf actors John Wilson and Mark Nelson at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

34 For example, since 2011, the National Gallery, London, has run a number of talks on the subject of disability and disabled artists in the gallery to coincide with the Liberty festival for disabled people, which takes place annually outside the gallery in Trafalgar Square.

## 8.2 First Case Study: The Language of Gesture

### 8.2.1

Links are provided in the footnotes.

### 8.2.2

Our first painting is a 15<sup>th</sup> century work by the minor Italian artist Antonio Cicognara depicting the Annunciation in which the hand gestures mirror *Luke* 1:28, 1:38 (*Łukasz* 1:28, 1:38). The two paintings illustrate key aspects of the theology of the Annunciation narrative for the viewer, but they also illustrate a conversation between two people.<sup>35</sup>

### 8.2.3

The second painting develops the 'conversational' aspect in a mid 17<sup>th</sup> century work by the French artist Philippe de Champaigne. Instead of holding a palm up in greeting, the angel points his finger towards heaven. This simple gesture is 'sign language' for a message, and also indicates the origin of the message from above. It also illustrates the content of the message, since it also points towards the holy dove: thus a great deal of rich information is contained within a single gesture. Mary bows her head not only to honour her holy guest, but in acceptance of the message.<sup>36</sup>

### 8.2.4

Slightly later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Murillo contributes to the development of the language of art in the Counter-Reformation. His protagonists use the same gestures but in a much less formal manner than Champaigne's. Murillo was concerned with speaking to the rural poor whom he used as models, thus their gestures are less formal and more 'natural', with swift brushstrokes and an angle that appears to indicate a sudden arrival. The lily is held informally in the angel's hand, almost as if it were a village boy offering a flower to a village girl, but it has not yet been presented. We are at the moment where he is delivering the message, but the overshadowing of the Virgin has not yet come to pass.<sup>37</sup>

### 8.2.5

**Summary discussion:** this approach is very effective as an introductory subject for a new programme and in teaching mainstream subjects by analogy to sign language. What other subjects could be approached in this way (the language of flowers, the language of architecture, portraiture)? How does it add to a new understanding of the artworks from a museum educator's perspective?

## 8.3 Second Case Study: Deaf Heritage and New Deaf Perspectives

### 8.3.1

**Sir Joshua Reynolds** (1723-92) became one of the chief artists of 18th century Britain, crowning his career with becoming the first President of the Royal Academy of Arts, and a knighthood.

35 <http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&siteId=1&module=artist&objectId=4527&viewType=detailView&lang=en&actionListenerClassName=ch.zetcom.mp.presentation.tapestry.util.customCode.ActivateDetailTabPos-2ActionListener>

36 [http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/result.inline.detail.t1.collection\\_detailInline.\\$TsplImage.link&sp=13&sp=Sartist&sp=SfilterDefinition&sp=0&sp=3&sp=1&sp=SdetailView&sp=29&sp=Sdetail&sp=1&sp=T&sp=0&sp=SdetailView&sp=3](http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/result.inline.detail.t1.collection_detailInline.$TsplImage.link&sp=13&sp=Sartist&sp=SfilterDefinition&sp=0&sp=3&sp=1&sp=SdetailView&sp=29&sp=Sdetail&sp=1&sp=T&sp=0&sp=SdetailView&sp=3)

37 [http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/result.t1.collection\\_detail.\\$TsplImage.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=2&sp=SdetailView&sp=6&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F](http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/result.t1.collection_detail.$TsplImage.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=2&sp=SdetailView&sp=6&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F)



### 8.3.2

He became deaf in his 20s on his Grand Tour to study art in Italy, and over the years his deafness worsened. There may have been some genetic element to his deafness, since other members of his family were also deaf. As he was often shown with an ear trumpet this device is sometimes called the 'Reynolds trumpet'. In later life his vision also became increasingly poor and towards the end of his life he was what we would now recognise as deaf-blind.

### 8.3.3

The author thus regularly lectures on the life and work of Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose deafness had a profound and lasting impact on his own work, which offers a variety of perspectives on deafness and disability.

### 8.3.4

On a practical level he discouraged conversation during sittings, which disconcerted his fashionable sitters. He also had a deep interest in gesture and expression, which made his portraits among the most animated of his day.<sup>38</sup> He was also deeply interested in all the arts, but his friendships with actors and writers went beyond having interests in common. It was surely no coincidence that he surrounded himself with actors and writers, men who were gifted communicators in gesture and expression (providing context and body language) and in the written language.

### 8.3.5

One of his close friends was Samuel Johnson, the writer of the first English dictionary. Reynolds was close enough to Johnson to depict him unflatteringly. In this portrait he can be seen to be full of nervous tension, betrayed in his hands. Other portraits of Johnson show him as short-sighted, to which Johnson protested, because he disliked being shown as 'blinking Sam'.<sup>39</sup>

### 8.3.6

Reynolds was thus unafraid to show disability, which was exceptional for the time and in fact painted himself wearing glasses.<sup>40</sup> He produced a group of portraits of himself and his set of friends, including Johnson's 'blinking Sam' picture and his own self-portrait as a deaf man.<sup>41</sup> This has given rise to the 'sign name' for this artist, imitating the gesture shown in the portrait.

**8.3.7** Thus a number of interesting cultural perspectives can be used to provide an important connection with a deaf audience and shed new light on Reynolds for hearing audiences.

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38 [http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/result.t1.collection\\_detail.\\$TsplImage.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=1&sp=2&sp=SdetailView&sp=1&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F](http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/result.t1.collection_detail.$TsplImage.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=1&sp=2&sp=SdetailView&sp=1&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F)

39 <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitLarge/mw03491/Samuel-Johnson>

40 <http://www.bridgemanart.com/en-GB/asset/369841/reynolds-sir-joshua-1723-92-after/self-portrait-wearing-glasses-c-1788-oil-on-panel>

41 <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/reynolds-self-portrait-as-a-deaf-man-n04505>



# Summary and Key Recommendations

**Summary:** This chapter poses some key questions and draws some conclusions as to the benefits of providing educational access.

## 9.1 Why should we make special efforts to welcome deaf visitors?

### 9.1.1

Deaf audiences themselves can give you the answer, whether they sign or speak or both. Deaf audiences are among the most loyal of all audiences, a phenomenon noted by all the London museums. Deaf visitors who enjoy accessible talks through whatever medium have an attendance record that would put the stereotypical “cultivated” middle-class professional to shame and will visit at least one accessible event a week.

### 9.1.2

For deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors successful events are proof of the dismantling of very real, but invisible, barriers and promote lifelong learning. Mainstream visitors attend museum educational activities to expand on what they already know or to discover new worlds; deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors will attend for these reasons, of course, but they will also attend to supplement an education which will at times have been a struggle for them.

## 9.2 How will the museum, gallery, or site benefit?

### 9.2.1

Museums will obtain important social benefits through dismantling the barriers for deaf people within the museum world, through the promotion of talented deaf individuals who contribute to educational activities.

### 9.2.2

They will also gain important new intellectual insights from the cultural perspectives deaf people bring to the interpretation of artworks, reinterpreting the languages of iconography and symbolism afresh through deaf eyes, and discovering lesser-known aspects of works through the prism of deaf heritage.

### 9.2.3

Deaf audiences are immensely observant and challenge hearing educational staff to examine works in minute detail, enabling them to refresh their knowledge and understanding of these works.

## 9.3 How will other audiences benefit?

### 9.3.1

Other audiences benefit from seeing activities for deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors. At the very least individuals with hearing loss who may not think to identify themselves as having a hearing loss, because a very common attitude is to hide it, may come forward and request an assistive device or to join a mailing list for future adapted tours.





### 9.3.2

Even if they are not deaf, other audiences gain when museums are made more accessible for deaf people. For example, having subtitling on films is useful at noisy times or for people who do not speak the language very well. In the same way, people who do not sign still benefit from the visual description inherent in sign language: for example, delineating complex patterns.

### 9.3.3

Museum visitors also benefit from seeing positive deaf role models in an intellectual sphere. It demonstrates that deaf people can 'hold their own' in demanding intellectual environments and thus encourages increasing social parity.

### 9.3.4

Deaf heritage subjects are of interest to the wider public in that they enable new perspectives on sometimes familiar works of art. Liberty Festival events at the National Gallery are always well-attended by a wider public.

### 9.3.5

It promotes the museum in a positive light not only to the deaf community but to the world at large. At one event in a London museum, an American visitor was so impressed with seeing an event specifically for deaf Muslim ladies, many of whom did not have English as their first spoken language, or even BSL as their first sign language, that he stated it was the highlight of his visit.

### 9.3.6

It can thus be seen that providing access for deaf visitors is a mutually rewarding experience.

## 9.4 Key Recommendations:

### 9.4.1

Variety of event type and communication method is key both to attracting a diversity of deaf people and to building loyalty for the audience. Be as inclusive as possible from the start.

### 9.4.2

In the same way, providing more than one method of assisting deaf audiences at each event, for example with communication support (sign language/lipspeaking/cued speech) + synopses is helpful, or assistive devices such as loops + synopses.

### 9.4.3

Simple, low-cost steps such as good signage, synopses, and transcripts, can complement more expensive accommodations for deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors which require more financial investment – such as loops and speech-to-text transcripts.



#### **9.4.4**

Training and continuous professional development of all parties – museum educators, deaf lecturers, and communication support workers is key, to keep on top of issues and to adapt the programme to the site's particular requirements and the type of audience it attracts.

#### **9.4.5**

Appropriate and carefully targeted publicity and use of social media networks for all groups of deaf people will repay these investments by attracting more users.

#### **9.4.6**

Ensure that all purchased equipment such as room and audioguide loops, tablets, etc. is regularly checked and reviewed, since there is nothing more frustrating for deaf audiences than to turn up for an event with malfunctioning equipment. Don't let them gather dust!

#### **9.4.7**

Make as much use of your deaf guides as possible – use them for web clips and capturing a sign language lexicon and resource as well as for talks and tours.

## **9.5 Concluding remarks:**

### **9.5.1**

The present author has been involved in giving and designing events for deaf people since the 1990s and thus has seen deaf audiences not only grow but mature. It is a maturing audience that has gone through clear stages, from small beginnings in which audiences frequently consisted of 1 signing deaf user, 1 hard-of-hearing person, and 1 hearing person, to audiences of 100+ at some venues such as Tate Modern. Talks and tours for deaf and hard-of-hearing people are now part of 'deaf culture'.

### **9.5.2**

More than this, talks for deaf audiences, with their communication needs, benefit everyone, not only in new perspectives, but in the creation of a new art form, that is visual, engaging, and inspires passion in both users and practitioners.

# Glossary

**access officer:** educational officer responsible for organising activities for community groups (disabled people, the elderly, ethnic minority groups, low-income groups)

**audiovisual:** exhibition or installation materials which comprise audio or video material, or both (for example: oral history 'telephones', films)

**British Sign Language:** The sign language of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, known colloquially as *BSL* and equivalent to *Polski Języko-Migowy (PJM)*

**BSL:** acronym for *British Sign Language*

**continuous professional development:** ongoing professional, academic and vocational training

**CPD:** recognised acronym for *continuous professional development*

**cued speech:** British equivalent of **phonogestures**, but not used in a museum or gallery context, unless accompanying *lipspeaking*

**deaf: 1.** describes moderate, severe, or profound hearing loss, regardless of communication method. It should be understood that this only rarely relates to total hearing loss, and that a wide spectrum of individuals can be described as deaf.

**2.** In political terms it is also known as *little 'd' deaf* to indicate mainly persons who have acquired loss, are oral by education and background, and do not use or identify with sign language or Deaf culture. It is generally associated with post-lingual hearing loss.

**Deaf:** known as *Big 'D' deaf*, used to indicate affiliation with sign language and Deaf culture and generally, but not exclusively, associated with pre-lingual or congenital hearing loss.

**Deaf culture:** predominantly based around the use of sign language and affiliation with schools and clubs for the deaf.

**deaf-blind:** describes dual sensory loss, which may be genetic in origin, or acquired through age, and which may result in a greater degree of sight loss than hearing loss, or vice versa

**deafened:** with acquired post-lingual hearing loss (rather than being deaf from birth)

**deaf-led:** led by deaf people (whatever their degree of hearing loss or choice of communication method)

**fingerspelling:** the use of the manual alphabet



**hard-of-hearing:** mild to moderate hearing loss which may result in the wearing of hearing aids, predominantly preferring oral communication (speech, lipreading)

**hearing impaired:** general term for hearing loss across the spectrum, comprising both mild loss (hard-of-hearing) and profound loss (deafness)

**heritage:** all the tangible and intangible assets involved in cultural transmission, often used to refer to, but not confined to, the historic environment. It encompasses art, culture, language, museums, and other cultural activities as well as the historic environment.

**historic environment:** all aspects of cultural heritage which have left material traces in the historic environment, for example, archaeology, architecture, historic monuments

**lifelong learning:** comprises both formal (e.g. evening classes and university programmes from undergraduate to postgraduate level) and informal learning including museum activities

**lipreading:** speech comprehension through watching lips (and other contextual features, e.g. facial expression, body language). *Lipreading* is generally the British term; in US texts it may be referred to as *speechreading*

**lipspeaker:** trained interpreter who repeats speech without voice but with clear speech patterns for deaf people who prefer lipreading. Lipspeakers may work with speech patterns alone, or reinforce these with *cued speech* (phonogestures), fingerspelling, or simple sign language. In the US such a person may be known as an **oral interpreter** and lipspeaking is known as **oral interpreting**.

**loop:** assistive listening device which may be fixed or portable, permitting the deaf person to listen to the speaker alone without any background noise by switching their hearing aid or cochlear implant to a specific setting

**outreach:** activities which engage with communities of non-traditional museum visitors, for example, low incomes, ethnic minorities, disabled people

**palm pilot:** hand-held audiovisual guide allowing the visitor to select and learn more on features of interest at their own pace. These may be subtitled or in sign language for deaf visitors.

**placement:** grammatical feature of sign language conveying spatial relationships within a single sign or group of signs (that would require the use of prepositions, postpositions and several descriptive relational words in spoken language)

**self-guided visit:** independent visit without tour guide, which can be undertaken alone or before or after a guided activity (formal lecture, guided tour, etc.)

**sightline:** the unhindered view of the guide and/or communication professional and the objects for deaf visitors



**sign language interpreter:** person who interprets in either full grammatical sign language (BSL/PJM), a version using the same signs in the grammatical order of the native spoken language (SSE/SJM), or a continuum in between.

**sign supported English:** sign language used in English word order, the British equivalent of **System Językowo-Migowy** (SJM). This may be referred to in US English as *SEE* (*Signed Exact English*).

**SLI:** standard acronym for *sign language interpreter*

**SSE:** standard acronym for *sign supported English*, cultural equivalent of **SJM** or US **SEE**.

**speech-to-text transcription:** live verbatim notetaking by a trained notetaker which is projected on a screen, enabling the deaf person or a deaf audience to follow what is being said and to take part in discussions. A rapid notetaker can caption speech with a minimal time delay, effectively becoming live subtitling. This process can also be used to generate notes for deaf people who are unable to write their own notes (because once they look down to write, they are unable to follow what is said next).

**user-generated:** material created by the people who use the resource, in this case the students on the course

**voiceover:** interpretation from sign language into spoken language

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## **Resources and contacts:**

Stowarzyszenie Tłumaczy Polskiego Języka Migowego [www.stpjm.org.pl](http://www.stpjm.org.pl)

Useful sections on how to employ, and how to work with, sign language interpreters:

Jak zatrudniać tłumaczy?

Jak współpracować z tłumaczem?











[www.muzeum.stalowawola.pl](http://www.muzeum.stalowawola.pl)