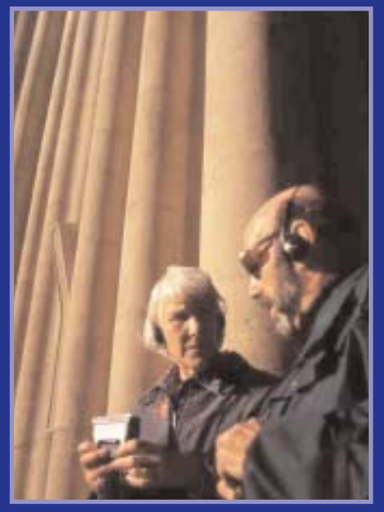
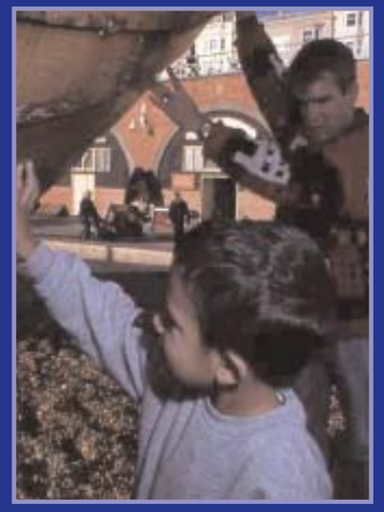
Further copies of the **Talking Images Guide**, as well as copies in accessible formats, are available from RNIB customer services on 0845 702 3153, email cservices@rnib.org.uk, priced **£9.95**.

Copies of the **Talking Images Research** are also available from RNIB customer services, priced **£5.95**.

Talking Images Guide

Museums, galleries and heritage sites: improving access for blind and partially sighted people





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ENGLISH HERITAGE

MAGDA
Museums and Galleries Disability Association

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

re:source
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Dunster Castle
Durham Cathedral
Dyrham Park
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Penrhyn Castle
Oldham Museum and Art Gallery
Plas Mawr, Conway
Portchester Castle
Portland Basin Museum
Portland Castle
Roman Baths, Bath
Royal Logistics Corps Museum
Royal Yacht Britannia
Scarborough Castle
Soldiers of Gloucester Museum
Southampton City Art Gallery
SS Great Britain
Stirling Old Jail
Tate Britain
Tate Modern
The Mary Rose
Victoria and Albert Museum
Wallace Collection
Walmer Castle
Warkworth Castle
Whitworth Art Gallery
York Cathedral and York City Model

Foreword

The Talking Images Guide

Museums, galleries and heritage sites: improving access for blind and partially sighted people

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1. Introduction

> "Going to a museum and having somebody guide me around and give me the information I need is superb, really quite exciting. But getting there and being disappointed because of a lack of information, or misguided information ruins it for me." **Auditor**

People with a sight problem experience many barriers when visiting museums, galleries and heritage sites. This guide presents ideas and advice on how to improve access for blind and partially sighted people. It draws on the research undertaken for the **Talking Images: museums, galleries and heritage sites** project and contains quotes from the twelve blind and partially sighted auditors, the focus group participants and the venues involved in the project. The guide also draws on the wider experience of the blind and partially sighted people involved in the project and on the knowledge of the partner organisations.

There is much existing good practice in museums, galleries and heritage sites across the UK, and approaches to access are continually evolving. However, there are still many venues where barriers remain for blind and partially sighted visitors.

Every venue and every visitor is different; therefore this publication does not attempt to be prescriptive. It offers practical guidance and contacts for further information to help venues provide a high-quality experience for visitors with sight problems. We hope that this guide will help instigate a dialogue between venues and blind and partially sighted people, colleagues in other venues and experts who work in different aspects of access.

Who is the guide for?

The guide provides a comprehensive and practical overview of all areas of access for visitors with sight problems, from planning to service delivery and evaluation. It is primarily aimed at staff in museums, galleries and heritage sites with responsibility for increasing access to their venues. It is also a valuable tool to inform policy makers, education and access practitioners and those responsible for ensuring access provision in the sector.

What is included within this guide?

The guide gives information on the services that can be provided to a visitor before, during and after a visit:

- **Reasons for improving your service** includes facts on sight loss, an overview of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and details of the Government's recent social inclusion initiatives and changes to the Registration Scheme for museums and galleries.

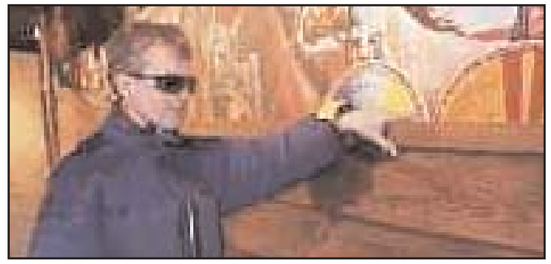
- **Planning for inclusion** offers some approaches to consultation and evaluation, and looks at issues to address when developing an access policy.
- **Improving access: information** looks at the varying information needs of people with sight problems and how they can be met.
- **Improving access: descriptions, tours, touch and events** considers different approaches to making collections accessible to people with sight problems.
- **Improving access: audio guides** examines issues in making audio guides accessible.
- **Promoting your service** examines different ways to market your services and events.
- **Welcoming visitors with sight problems** offers advice on improving visual awareness and how premises can be made more accessible.
- **In summary: developing services** discusses how to take forward and implement ideas and plans.

Contact details and sources of further information can be found at the end of the publication.

Background to the project

The **Talking Images** project is a collaboration between **Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)** and **Vocaleyes**. Research undertaken by RNIB has been funded by **Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. Arts Council England** through its **New Audiences Programme** has funded the research undertaken by Vocaleyes. All research was undertaken between 2001 and 2003.

A steering group has overseen the project, consisting of members of the lead organisations, funding bodies and other partner organisations including **English Heritage** and the **Museums and Galleries Disability Association (MAGDA)**. An advisory group has guided the development of the project and this publication.



Aims of Talking Images

Talking Images focused specifically on the use of audio description in museums, galleries and heritage sites and aims to:

- raise the standards of audio guides, description and general access to museums, galleries and heritage venues throughout the UK for blind and partially sighted people
- make a significant contribution to quality developments in the field of audio guides, description and inclusive interpretation
- positively influence the practices of all key stakeholders: museums, galleries and heritage venues; commercial producers of audio guides; cultural sector policymakers and funders; cultural training agencies and organisations of and for people with sight problems.

Methodology

The Talking Images project comprised a number of research studies. The methodology for each study is described in **Talking Images Research**, details of which are available on the back cover of this publication. These research studies examined current provision through:

- a telephone survey of 270 blind and partially sighted people which investigated attitudes towards and experiences of visiting museums, galleries and heritage sites
- audits of 63 audio guides undertaken by blind and partially sighted auditors at venues across the UK
- self-assessment questionnaires completed by the 55 venues involved in the project.

In addition to the research, Vocaleyes undertook case studies, which informed this publication and the research report. The case studies were undertaken with:

- **Kettle's Yard**, on an audio guide for the touring exhibition of work by Ben Nicholson that also visited The Whitworth Art Gallery and Southampton City Art Gallery
- **Tate Britain**, on the development of two audio tours
- **Christchurch Mansion** in Ipswich, on an inclusive low cost guide.

The full case studies report will be available via the Arts Council England website: www.artscouncil.org.uk

The organisations involved

RNIB is the leading UK charity working with people with sight problems. RNIB's vision is a world where people who are blind or partially sighted enjoy the same rights, responsibilities, opportunities and quality of life as people who are sighted.

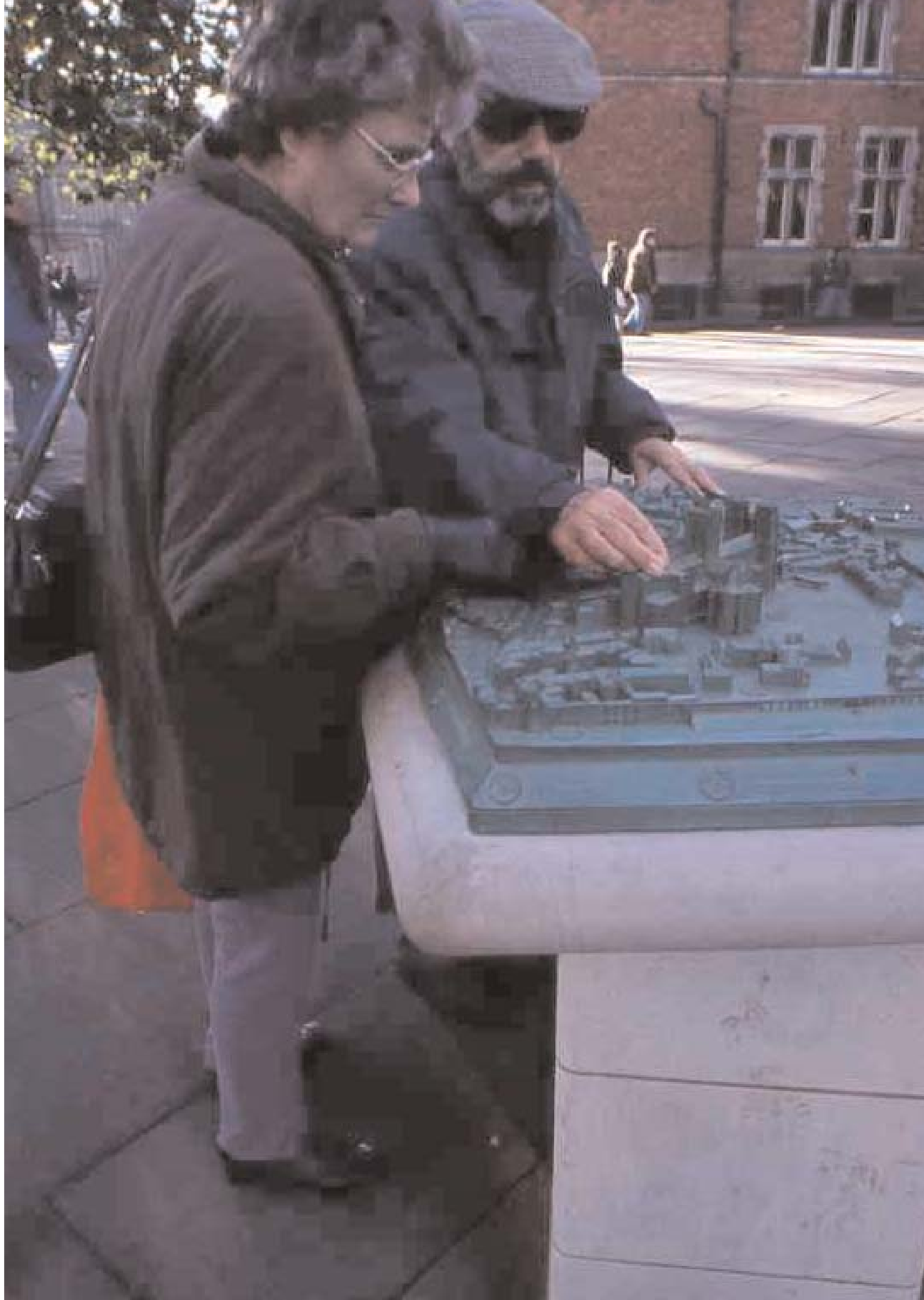
Vocaleyes enables blind and partially sighted people to experience the arts through high quality, live and recorded audio description. Originally specialising in theatre description, Vocaleyes' work increasingly includes description in the visual arts.

Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries is the strategic body working with and for museums, archives and libraries in England. Resource's mission is to enable the collections and services of the museums, archives and libraries sector to touch the lives of everyone.

Arts Council England is the national development agency for the arts in England, distributing public money from Government and the National Lottery. Arts Council England's ambition is to place the arts at the heart of national life, reflecting the country's rich and diverse cultural identity as only the arts can.

MAGDA is a not-for-profit organisation comprised of museum and gallery professionals who work to achieve access for all. MAGDA promotes the rights of disabled people to enjoy museums, galleries and heritage sites as visitors and employees.

English Heritage is the Government's statutory adviser on the historic environment. English Heritage is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body and reports to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.



2. Reasons for improving your service

There are many reasons for developing services for blind and partially sighted visitors. This chapter looks at:

- facts around sight loss
- the duties of service providers under the Disability Discrimination Act
- the Government's social inclusion agenda and its impact on cultural venues
- changes to the Museum Registration Scheme.

Facts about sight loss

The term, "people with sight problems" describes the full range of people who have uncorrectable sight loss. Sight loss is one of the most common causes of disability in the UK and is associated with old age more than any other disability. The most severe sight problems can lead to someone being registered as "blind" or "partially sighted".

Ophthalmologists can certify someone as being blind or partially sighted. Once this has happened the person can then be registered with their local social services department as blind or partially sighted. Not everyone who is eligible to register does so. A person can be certified:

- blind, if they can only read the top letter of the optician's eye chart from three metres or less wearing corrective lenses, if needed
- partially sighted, if they can only read the top letter of the chart from six metres or less wearing corrective lenses, if needed.

- Around two million people in the UK have a sight problem
- Every day 100 more people start to lose their sight
- One in twelve of us will become blind or partially sighted by the time we are 60. This rises to one in six by the time we reach 75.

People with sight problems come from many different backgrounds and lead all sorts of lives. Each person is affected by sight problems in a way that is individual to him or her – it is not the same experience for everyone.

There are many causes of sight loss. Some people are born with a sight problem, others may inherit an eye condition that gets gradually worse as they get older, or their eyesight may be affected by illness. Age related eye conditions such as macular degeneration or cataracts are the most common cause of sight loss in the UK. It is worth remembering that some of your visitors may have sight problems but do not consider themselves to be blind or partially sighted.

The vast majority of the two million people with a sight problem in the UK have some sight, with only around 140,000 people having no useful vision, of whom 3,000 were born blind. Most people with sight problems have visual memories.

- Eight per cent of blind and partially sighted people are born with a sight problem.
- 80 per cent of people with a sight problem are aged 65 or over.
- 70 per cent are over 75.

Sixty per cent of people with a sight problem have another serious illness or disability such as arthritis or a hearing impairment. Many have more than one other disability. There are around 23,000 people in the UK who have a severe loss of both sight and hearing, about 200,000 have less serious dual sensory loss.

The number of blind and partially sighted people is expected to rise sharply in the future, in line with the anticipated increase in the number of older people over the next three decades.

The RNIB website has links to research studies and the latest statistics on sight loss: www.rnib.org.uk

Disability Discrimination Act

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people. It requires service providers to change the way in which they deliver services to ensure that they are accessible to disabled people. For service providers, such as museums, galleries and heritage sites, it is unlawful to:

- refuse to serve a disabled person for a reason which relates to their disability
- offer a sub-standard service
- provide a service on different terms.

There is also a duty to make changes (called "reasonable adjustments") to the service provided enabling easier access for disabled people. There are four types of changes that service providers must consider:

- the provision of auxiliary aids and services that provide additional help or assistance to disabled customers
- making physically inaccessible services available by another means
- making buildings where services are provided more accessible (from 2004 service providers will have duties to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access).
- changes to any practices, policies or procedures that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to use a service.

The Act itself does not state what adjustments might be reasonable, but cites information on audio tape or the provision of a sign language interpreter as examples of such adjustments. The **Disability Rights Commission (DRC)** has produced a **Code of Practice for Rights of Access to Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises** on this part of the Act. Although this code is not the law itself, it has to be taken into account by the courts where relevant. It provides very detailed information about what the law means and how you can comply with it. It is available from Her Majesty's Stationery Office or can be downloaded free of charge from the DRC website.

Disability Rights Commission website: www.drc.org.uk

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is the cornerstone of the Act. It is an anticipatory duty – which means that you have to make changes to the way you deliver your services to make them accessible in advance of a disabled person attempting to use your service. You should not just wait for the first disabled person to turn up.

What will be considered reasonable in terms of adjustments under the DDA depends on a number of factors, such as your human and financial resources. Whatever your circumstances, it is extremely unlikely that there is not something which you could be doing to make your service more accessible. It is important to review your current situation and to create a prioritised plan for improvements. User consultation and progress monitoring should be used to ensure on-going improvement.

Almost all of the practical suggestions made within this guide are examples of auxiliary aids and services as defined in the DDA.

101 ways to implement the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), Eleanor Ellison, Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM): www.ilam.co.uk

Leisure and the DDA is published by ILAM and RNIB and gives information on the implications of the DDA on service providers in the leisure industry. Available from RNIB: 0845 702 3153

Social inclusion agenda

Everyone has the right to visit museums and explore their collections. Government social inclusion initiatives highlight the need to ensure that cultural facilities and opportunities are accessible to all. A number of recent reports have identified the vital role museums play in cultural provision, and how museums, galleries and heritage sites must ensure that their collections and resources are welcoming and appropriate for everyone.

- The **Policy Action Team 10 report (1999)** focused on Government spending and policies on arts, sports and leisure, and identified disabled people as being at particular risk of social exclusion.
- The Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) developed a **Social Inclusion Action Plan (1999)**, in which it commits to "extend cultural/leisure opportunities for areas and groups at risk of social exclusion."
- In setting out minimum standards to be used when developing access policies in **Museums for the many (1999)**, the DCMS stated that "museums and galleries are well positioned to provide fascination, pleasure and opportunities for learning for the whole community. This is why offering the widest access to museums and galleries is so important."

- **Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All (2000)** states that, "achieving the widest possible access to collections and knowledge should be an objective for museums, galleries and archives who aim to make their services socially inclusive".
- **Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives for all (2001)** examines how working across the sector can help tackle social exclusion.

All of these documents are available online at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport website: www.culture.gov.uk

Museum Registration

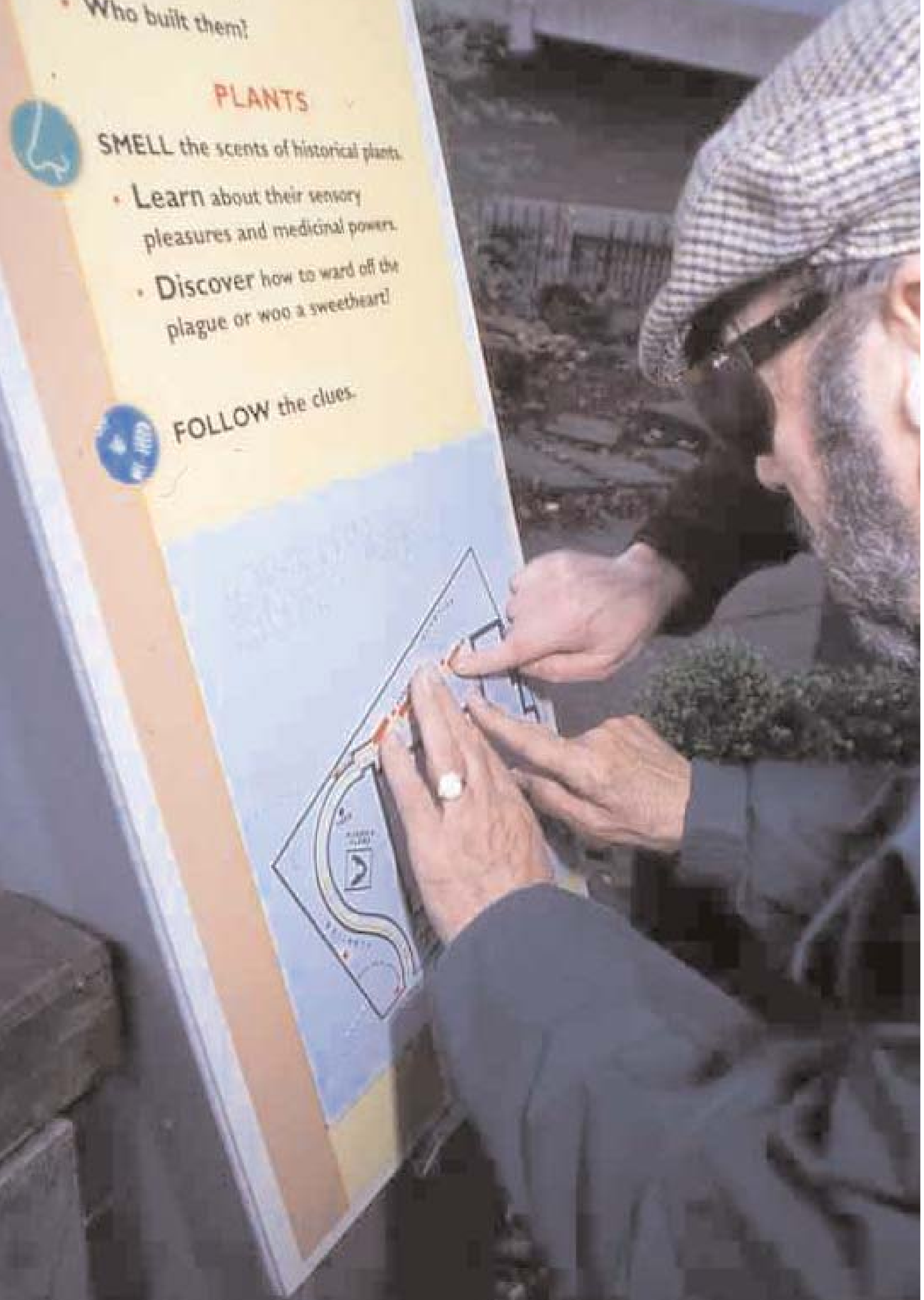
Resource's **Registration Scheme for Museums and Galleries: Registration Standard** was published as a draft for consultation in March 2003, and when in its final form, will replace the Registration Guidelines of 1995. The aim of the Scheme is to identity a minimum level of standards for museums and galleries and to encourage continuous improvements via planning. It contains standards that a museum must meet in order to obtain fully registered status, as well as activities that museums should consider undertaking.

The new standard places much greater emphasis on access and learning provision than previous guidelines. Museums will be expected to assess and address barriers to access, and services and facilities must encourage and permit access by a broad range of users. This guide can help institutions exploring the development of existing and new provision. In itself it is an example of good practice, based on research firmly rooted in user consultation.

In summary

Services should be developed for blind and partially sighted people:

- to improve access for the two million people with sight problems
- to ensure services are accessible as defined in the DDA
- to meet the need identified in recent social inclusion agendas.



3. Planning for inclusion

This Talking Images Guide contains information on different approaches to improving access for blind and partially sighted visitors. The key to comprehensive, sustainable and effective provision however, is to have an access policy and action plan. In order to develop this policy and action plan, it is necessary to consult with visitors and non-visitors with sight problems. Implementation should be regularly monitored. This section contains approaches to:

- developing an access policy and action plan
- undertaking access audits
- consulting with blind and partially sighted people
- evaluating services.

Access policies and action plans

"Disparate efforts are unsatisfactory for users and staff. A comprehensive access policy and implementation plan is needed so that provision for visually impaired people is reliable and so that all staff understand and work as a whole to the same end." **Venue participating in survey**

There are two key first steps to improving an organisation's approach to access:

- creating an access policy
- developing an action plan for its implementation.

Access policies

An access policy should aim to improve access for all visitors and will cover physical, sensory, intellectual and cultural access. Within such a policy, an organisation should state how it will meet the needs of blind and partially sighted people. It is important to begin by assessing current provision, for example with the Self Assessment Toolkit developed by Resource, in order to examine the barriers for disabled people to accessing premises, collections and information.

The **Survey of provision for disabled users of museums, archives and libraries (2001)** undertaken by Resource consulted with 340 organisations. This survey found that only 38 per cent of museums have a policy or plan that specifically mentions disabled people. In the survey of venues with audio guides undertaken for this project, just over half of the organisations have an access or disability action plan. Half of those with such a plan stated that it mentioned blind and partially sighted people.

There are a number of documents that set out ideas on access policies. It may be useful to consult the Museums Association's ethical guidelines on access and the DCMS's **Museums for the many**. An access policy should set out how a venue will:

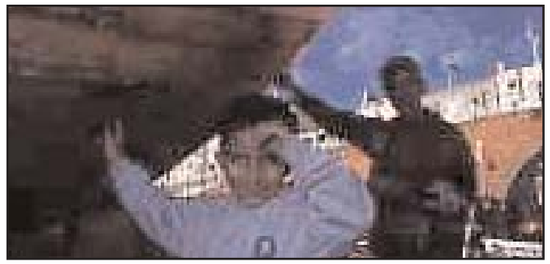
- meet visitors needs
- increase the number of visitors
- diversify the visitor base
- remove barriers to accessing premises
- provide access to information and collections
- train staff to welcome all visitors
- consult with visitors and non-visitors.

Consulting with users on access policies is essential to ensure that the outcomes of the policy are tailored to the needs of users.

The **Self Assessment Toolkit** is available online at www.resource.gov.uk

The **Museum Association's ethical guidelines** are available online at www.museumsassociation.org

Museums for the many is available online at www.culture.gov.uk



Action planning

An action plan will set out what steps will be taken in the future in order to implement an access policy. The plan should be endorsed at senior level, including the management board and board of trustees, and all staff should be made aware of it so that policy is implemented throughout the organisation. The action plan will need to be resourced to ensure sustainable provision and progress should be monitored regularly. Plans can be used as evidence of your efforts to meet the requirements of the DDA.

In the Resource survey of provision, 54 per cent of museums did not have part of their core budget earmarked for providing services for disabled people.

When defining priorities it may be useful to discuss practice with colleagues in other venues. Both the Museums and Galleries Disability Association (MAGDA) and Group for Education in Museums (GEM) have open discussion email lists that are a useful way to share ideas and practice. Approaches to opening up access to collections are discussed later in these guidelines, but considering what works in other venues will be vital. Working with venues that have more established provision and collaborating on marketing initiatives may help develop services and audiences.

Subscribe to MAGDA mail at: www.magda.org.uk

Subscribe to GEM discussion list at: www.gem.org.uk

Disability rights: developing an effective action plan (Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission) is a detailed guide to developing an action plan: www.hreoc.gov.au

RNIB can provide contacts of venues exploring different approaches to access, contact the Talking Images Arts and Heritage Officer.

Access audits

In the Resource survey of provision, organisations were identified as low, medium or high performers against 125 indicators. Nine out of ten high performers have carried out an access audit compared with less than a third of low performers.

Undertaking an access audit will help in both assessing current provision in a venue and in prioritising improvements.

The purpose of an access audit is to identify all the barriers and hazards to mobility within an environment, and to make recommendations as to how they may be overcome. Recommendations are prioritised according to legislation, health and safety and likely cost implications. The recommendations may include suggestions regarding the management of the buildings as well as physical alterations, as sometimes physical alterations are not sufficient or possible. The audit will enable your organisation to develop an action plan outlining how you will address the findings of the audit within the context of legislation and the resources available.

Access audits follow a sequential journey through the environment, whether it be a building or external space. The following elements are examined:

- building approach, including car parking and landscaped features
- entrances
- reception and waiting areas
- horizontal circulation: corridors, ramps, lobbies, doorways etc
- vertical circulation: lifts, stairs
- emergency egress
- wayfinding and signage
- toilets and washing facilities
- finishes, colour and contrast
- lighting
- signage and information provision
- fittings and fixtures – including displays
- policies and procedures
- IT provision – a brief overview of software and hardware provision.

At each stage of the journey sequence, barriers or hazards to mobility are identified, and recommendations are made as to how these may be overcome.

The National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC) has created the first national standard for auditors and access consultants, focusing on physical access. It helps clients to select access auditors and consultants free of charge and has an online database of members. The NRAC will provide a helpful resource for anyone seeking a professional physical audit although not all specialists in this field are members of the register. It is therefore useful to publicise your audit brief as widely as possible. If a professional access audit is too expensive, it will still be possible to contact local groups of disabled people, such as Access Groups.

The National Register of Access Consultants is available online at: www.nrac.org.uk

The Centre for Accessible Environments is a charity that provides information on how the built environment can best be made or modified to achieve inclusion by design and offers access consultancy: www.cae.org.uk

JMU Access Consultancy is a not-for-profit pan-disability access consultancy supported by RNIB: www.jmuaccess.org.uk

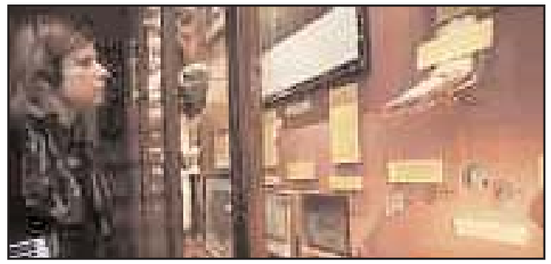
Consultation

"You need to involve visually impaired people at the formative stage of the project, in the development process and at the end, to say that this works or doesn't work" **Auditor**

Consultation with blind and partially sighted people is essential when developing access policies, services and specific projects. It takes time and commitment to recruit individuals to take part in consultation. But the process will be invaluable for development of services and in building relationships with the community.

Finding people can be difficult. Local societies of or for blind and partially sighted people, groups representing older people, social services and other local contacts will prove useful contact points.

Consultation should be an on-going relationship used to regularly review services. This could be achieved through a user group, advisory board or access committee. Consultation is always a two-way dialogue, sharing results and outcomes with all parties involved. Terms of reference should be made clear at the start of any consultation exercise and expenses covered. Many people will have experiences of other venues, both good and bad, that will benefit your organisation. Having a sight problem however, does not necessarily make someone an expert on visual impairment. It is important to gather a range of views, as individuals have very different experiences and opinions about a venue and the services provided.



In the Resource survey of provision, most consultation carried out was found to be reactive, and information tended only to reach those who were already users of the service. 47 per cent of museums said that they had user groups including disabled and non-disabled people, whilst only 27 per cent consulted with non-users. Only 43 per cent of museums had mechanisms for reporting back on consultation, compared to 75 per cent of libraries.

Evaluation

There are different ways to evaluate services. These include:

- providing visitors with sight problems the opportunity to comment on services and facilities
- providing customer feedback forms in large print
- gathering feedback at events, ideally through a structured questionnaire
- building evaluation methodologies into new projects from the outset.

Contact the RNIB for details of your local society for blind and partially sighted people

MAGDA's quarterly journal **Barrierfree** has articles and debate on current access issues in museums and galleries, regularly looking at issues around consultation: www.magda.org.uk

The **Cabinet Office Consultation website** contains advice for public services on undertaking consultation. It contains a consultation code of practice for government departments and agencies, case studies of best practice and advice for consulting with specific groups, such as minority ethnic groups. Access the site through: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk

Partnerships for learning: a guide to evaluating arts education projects by Felicity Woolf, has practical tips on project evaluation and can be downloaded free from www.artscouncil.org.uk

West Midland's Regional Museum Council's **Ask the Audience** report is one of many case studies sharing methodologies for evaluating projects: www.wm-museums.co.uk

In summary

In order to plan for inclusion:

- adopt an access policy that states how you will meet the needs of people with sight problems
- monitor implementation through an action plan
- consult widely with visitors and non-visitors
- build evaluation into services and projects at the outset.

4. Improving access: information

A lack of access to information can be a huge barrier to people with sight problems and can make visiting a venue or planning that visit a frustrating experience. Unless your organisation makes all information accessible, people with sight problems will not be able to find out what is on, get to the venue, explore and learn about your collections or have anything to take home as a souvenir or for reference. Service providers have a requirement to make information accessible under the DDA (see chapter three).

There are a number of ways in which blind and partially sighted people access information. This section contains advice on:

- an accessible information policy
- different forms of accessible information
- how to make online information accessible.

Information on how to make display text and signage accessible is contained in chapter eight.

Adopting an accessible information policy and plan

> "Literature ranging from advertising leaflets to general and specific information, is not currently available to visually impaired people at the venue. This needs to be rectified urgently." **Auditor**

For blind and partially sighted visitors, it is essential that visitor information is made accessible. This includes display text, captions and information available in guide books. Think about how someone with a sight problem will access information at all stages of a visit.

It will be useful to develop an accessible information policy by looking at the information you produce and prioritising it. This policy could be discussed as part of any consultation process with local blind and partially sighted people and will form part of an access policy. It should also form part of any house-style policy.

When information is produced in a range of formats, they should be of equivalent quality, produced at the same time and available at the same price. This means that when planning an exhibition, it is essential to plan the production of all formats at

the same time as planning your standard print information.

Once information has been produced in accessible formats, customers need to be made aware of its availability. Unfortunately, many blind and partially sighted people have low expectations of getting information in a way they can read so they don't ask for it. This is often misinterpreted by organisations as lack of demand. A clear, large print statement should be displayed in reception about the availability of large print, audio or braille information. Customers contacting a venue should also be made aware of accessible formats and offered information before a visit.

42 per cent of the venues surveyed for the Talking Images project admitted that at best, a blind or partially sighted visitor could access "none", or only "a little", of their venue, collections and events through using information in accessible formats.

Your policy should also consider what information is available to blind and partially sighted visitors after a visit. Sighted visitors may take home a visitor guide or other information. Copies of your audio guide, the script of the guide, visitor information in alternative formats, or copies of raised images could be made available to customers with sight problems.

Question: "What would you like to take home after your visit?"

Answer: "I think what's useful would be a tape or CD, sighted people can look through a book that can remind them of their visit, we could have the same experience." **Auditor**

Forms of accessible information

Magical Mystery Tour surveyed blind and partially sighted visitors to 151 historic sites and buildings in England and Wales. The most significant barrier to access was identified as the inability to use printed information.

Blind and partially sighted people read information in different ways, including standard print, large print, tape, braille, computer disk or over the internet. Different people have different preferences and one format will not suit everyone. This is why it is crucial to produce information in a range of accessible formats.

- Around two million people in the UK are unable to read standard print with any ease.
- 75 per cent of partially sighted people can read large print.
- 36 per cent of blind people can read large print.
- There are around 20,000 fluent braille readers in the UK and many more people who are able to use braille labelling and signage.
- 24 per cent of blind people use information on audio tape.

Standard print

Making information accessible is often cheaper and easier than many people think. When compared with how much is spent on standard print information, the cost can be very small.

RNIB produce clear print guidelines to help publishers make their information accessible to as many people as possible. The guidelines encourage publishers and designers to:

- use a minimum font size of 14 point
- make sure there is a strong contrast between text and background colour (black on white and black on yellow are among the strongest contrasts but there is a range of options)
- not to run text over pictures or diagrams
- use paper that minimises show through and glare.

Adopting RNIB's clear print guidelines can be done immediately and at virtually no cost. If you produce all your visitor and collection information using clear print guidelines and a 14 point font, you will be maximising the number of people who can access it.

The **See it Right** pack contains complete clear print guidelines and tips and advice on producing information in a wide range of formats: 0845 702 3153

The Confederation of Transcribed Information Services (COTIS) promotes the provision of accessible information. It provides guidelines and have been developing a checklist of issues around quality: www.cotis.org.uk

Large print

Large print is considered to be anything that is in a 16 point font or above. Large print users will each have their own requirements in terms of text size and you cannot produce information in one size that will satisfy all those who read large print. Therefore, processes are required that enable appropriate responses to

individual requests. This can be as simple as having an electronic text file where the font size can be adjusted on request and printed immediately for the customer. The guidelines for the production of clear print, mentioned previously, need to be followed when producing large print.

Nearly three quarters of the organisations surveyed for the Talking Images study provide visitor guides to their permanent collections in print, whilst less than a quarter provide this information in large print.

Braille

Braille is a system of raised dots which are read by touch. It can be produced in-house with the right software, training and an embosser (braille printer), although it is more common for it to be produced through a transcription agency.

Audio tape

Audio tapes can be produced in-house or by a transcription agency, or with the help of a local talking newspaper, or local radio station. An agency would give a more professional feel to standard literature, and make longer documents easier to listen to, whilst the in-house approach would be well suited to material aimed at individual customers.

RNIB can transcribe information into braille, tape and large print as well as providing details of other national and local transcription agencies. Telephone customer services on 0845 702 3153.

Vocaleyes can record information into audio: www.vocaleyes.co.uk

Electronic text

This can be a cheap and easy way of producing information and distributing it, by email or computer disk, to the growing number of blind and partially sighted people that have access to computers. The information can be accessed through the use of large screens or access technology such as programmes that enlarge the text on the screen, or screen readers that read what is on the screen and convey the information to the user via speech or braille. Individuals may also be able to create their own large print or braille documents using the electronic file.

Information will not always be available on what software customers are using. As a basic rule simple text files will work well for all forms of access technology.

Providing a range of formats

It must be remembered that many people with sight problems use different forms of

information in different situations and it is important to check with the visitor. For example, it should not be assumed that if someone requests information prior to their visit to be prepared in braille or tape, that they would want information that they use during the visit in the same format.

On-line information

The growth of the internet means that people with sight problems now have the opportunity to enjoy a wealth of information and services independently in a way not previously available. As with the production of electronic text, web pages must be appropriately designed. If certain guidelines are not followed, sites cannot be used by blind and partially sighted people. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are published by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) and should be used in the development of all websites.

Over two-thirds of the venues surveyed stated that they have a website. Of these, less than 30 per cent stated that they are accessible to blind or partially sighted people.

In the Resource survey of provision for disabled users of museums, archives and libraries, only 26 per cent of museums stated that they have websites complying with standard guidelines for universal access.

RNIB campaigns for good website design and urges designers to take responsibility to ensure that everyone can access their websites and to use the WAI guidelines to ensure that online information is accessible to all. RNIB offers website accessibility audits to help you make your site more accessible. If your website achieves a good standard of accessibility, it will then be eligible for RNIB's **See it Right Accessible Website** logo.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are available online at: www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT

The RNIB website has tips on how to design a more accessible website: www.rnib.org.uk

In summary

Ensure that all information you produce is accessible to people with sight problems by:

- adopting an accessible information policy
- producing information in a range of accessible formats
- ensuring that your website is accessible.

5. Improving access: descriptions, tours, touch and events

There are many ways to make collections accessible to visitors with sight problems and which approaches are used will depend on the venue, collections and resources available. These could include:

- guided tours that describe collections
- special events when a site, objects or works are described
- touch tours or handling sessions
- representations of objects or images in tactile formats
- multi-sensory exhibits
- providing access to collections online
- audio guides (discussed in detail in chapter six).

Descriptive tours and events

"What we are trying to get is for people to paint a picture for us. To describe the room or object as they see it so that we are using their eyes." **Auditor**

Audio description is putting visual images or events into words. It is used in theatre, in cinema, on television, at sporting events and on DVDs and videos to improve access for blind and partially sighted people. Describing visual images and objects in a museum, gallery or heritage setting will help visitors with sight problems to better understand your collections. Sighted visitors may also enjoy good descriptions.

"A good description for me is something that tells me what the person can see in as clear and concise a way as possible." **Auditor**

"I think there is a balance... You can't be completely objective, it wouldn't mean anything, it would be clinical but also you can't be too interpretative so that you go too far. You need to give the information so that I can draw the conclusions." **Auditor**

Descriptions might be recorded for use on audio guides or on the web, or they may be presented live. A number of venues, such as the National Gallery, offer regular events when a work of art or object is described with detailed background and contextual information. Large reproductions of the work are also used in these sessions. Other venues offer guided tours when works of art or objects are described and may also be touched.

Members of staff could undertake training to provide descriptions, or venues may prefer to work alongside a freelance

describer or educationalist experienced in working with blind and partially sighted visitors. More specific guidance on descriptions is contained in chapter six. Other guidelines on description are also available from Art Education for the Blind.

In the Resource survey of provision for disabled users of museums, archives and libraries, 37 per cent of museums stated that they provided audio description services or tours.

Vocaleyes provides training on describing in venues, as well as offering description services: www.vocaleyes.co.uk

Audio Description Association and Audio Description Association Scotland can also put you in contact with local describers.

Art Education for the Blind: www.artseducation.info

Touching the real thing

"For me the opportunity to handle objects and items on display was fascinating. You could sit on the chairs in the castle and feel what it would have been like in its heyday." **Auditor**

Many blind and partially sighted people will enjoy the opportunity to touch objects as a way of gaining access to collections. For some people it is a vital way of obtaining information on an object, for others it provides additional information to help them understand that object. Touching can give people the opportunity to explore items for themselves and to make their own discoveries and assumptions rather than receiving information through a third party. There are two main ways for blind and partially sighted visitors to touch – touching real objects or artefacts (covered in this section), or touching representations such as tactile images or models (covered in the next section).

Respondents to the phone survey who visit museums, galleries or heritages sites were asked to rate their overall experience of services and facilities at these venues. Displays and objects you can touch (37 per cent) and models you can touch (35 per cent) were most likely to be awarded "very helpful" ratings. This shows how important touch can be for some visitors.

There are a number of approaches to providing visitors with the opportunity to touch real objects and artefacts in your venue. These include:

- a guided touch tour
- providing people with the information to undertake a touch tour independently, such as the audio tours offered by the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Imperial War Museum
- handling sessions including artefacts from your collections.

Visitors could also be provided with objects to touch which aren't from collections but which help understand collections. For example, objects that demonstrate the functioning of a mechanical article, examples of materials and tools used in the production of artefacts or art works, or objects which convey concepts used in art works could be included. Sound could also be used in touching sessions such as period music, readings of literature describing scenes depicted in classical art work or recordings of natural or urban environments.

"One idea we've been talking about ... is to have a tactile display for everybody to touch which has examples of canvas, sized canvas, over painting, under painting, different types of oil painting, glazes, whether the glaze is cracked. So that you could feel and they could be referred to in any description." **Auditor**

When developing a touch tour, it might be useful to think about developing a selection of themed objects that can be touched. Selecting a range of objects, some of which contrast with others in terms of materials, date and style may be useful for visitors. For example, you could include busts made of bronze and of marble, sculpture that is realistic in its representation alongside abstract pieces or ceramics plates made of stoneware and of porcelain.

Although there may be issues with the conservation requirements of some objects, remember that touching will only be occasional. Visitors could be provided with hand wipes or invited to take rings off their fingers. Handling gloves may be appropriate for touching certain exhibits, though whenever possible people should be allowed to touch the object directly.

A person accessing an image by sight will see the whole and complete image instantaneously. A person using touch to access an image will rely on their brain piecing together many different bits of information. They then need to attempt to make sense of this information by trying to organise it into a whole and complete image. Because of the difference between visual and tactile perception, when touching an object or image, a visitor will need to have some form of additional information such as description or braille information to help them create a mental picture.

There has been an increasing amount of research in cognitive, educational and social psychology into how blind and partially sighted people read tactile objects and images and the difference between sight and touch.

Art Beyond Sight provides a useful overview into how people read tactile objects.

The Resource website has a report on handling collections withcase studies: www.resource.gov.uk

Art Through Touch is an organisation which aims to promote and provide access to art activity for blind and partially sighted people. It has regular events including seminars on access issues: www.members.aol.com/ATTouch/

Tactile images and models

Tactile images

Tactile images give people with sight problems the chance to appreciate and understand material and information that would not normally be accessible to them. The ways in which tactile images can be used are very diverse, for example:

- to complement audio guides
- in conjunction with guided tours
- in educational sessions
- off-site before or after a visit.

They might represent:

- two-dimensional works of art
- objects that cannot be touched
- architectural features, building facades
- designs on fabric or printed designs, for example wallpaper
- information that is provided in visual formats, such as diagrams.

There is much more to creating a tactile image than just raising the visual image. Any visual image has to be redefined in order to produce a tactile image that a person with sight problems can use. This redefinition may mean simplification, alteration, adaptation and sometimes distortion, to convey the important features contained within the visual image. This often results in

the tactile image looking completely different from the visual image.

Not everyone will want to interact with tactile images. This can be for a variety of reasons, which include:

- having had a bad experience in the past in trying to read them
- having never been shown how to use tactile images
- that their tactile sensitivity is poor.

As mentioned previously, the process of tactile exploration is gradual and sequential unlike sight. This means that some people may need to be taught how to explore tactile images and that images must be accompanied by information in braille or audio.

Before embarking on the production of tactile images consider why they are needed. Not everything will translate into a meaningful tactile image. Consider:

- what information the tactile images should portray
- how someone would use them
- how to get the tactile images into the hands of users.

It may be best to send the tactile image to the visitor prior to the visit. An example of this is The Living Paintings Trust who run a free library service for blind and partially sighted people. Packs that contain raised images and accompanying taped descriptions of famous paintings, sculpture and architecture are distributed from their library via the post.

The main method of producing tactile images is by using swell paper, sometimes called Minolta or microcapsule paper. The swell paper method requires the design of black and white artwork which is transferred onto the swell paper. The swell paper is then put through a special heat diffuser which makes the dark areas on the paper swell up thus creating the tactile image.

Other methods include thermoform and embossed graphics. The thermoform method, sometimes called the collage method, requires the making of a relief master from which plastic copies are taken. Embossed graphics are produced by a special embosser that builds up an image using dots punched into paper.

When planning to develop tactile images for your venue, it is best to consult a specialist.

There are several organisations that can help with the production of tactile images including:

National Centre for Tactile Diagrams: www.nctd.org.uk

Living Paintings Trust: www.livingpaintings.org

RNIB: 0845 702 3153

Models designed to be touched

Models that are designed to be touched are another important aid to help people with sight problems access information that would not normally be open to them. This is particularly the case when trying to convey information about very large objects or areas that are impossible to view as a whole. For example, when a person walks around a building like a cathedral, they may be able to get an idea of its layout and basic shape at ground level. What is difficult, particularly for people with sight problems, is to comprehend the shape of the whole building, this is where a model can have an important role to play.

There are a number of ways in which models can be used. They can:

- be produced of works of art like paintings which, when used alongside tactile images and audio description, can provide a powerful tool to explain what is contained within a painting
- provide geographical information like the layout of a city centre by detailing buildings and giving a bird's-eye view of the area.

Models can be reproduced in a variety of different materials like bronze, wood, plastic, and resin. The choice of material will come down to cost and durability.

The factor common to all models is that of scale which is extremely important to ensure that the correct information is being given to any visitor.

> The Magical Mystery Tour survey showed that 68 per cent of visitors who used tactile models or images found them useful.

Although simple models can be made using everyday materials, the more detailed ones require particular skills and experience. This skill and experience is not only in designing and manufacturing the model, but also in understanding how people explore models using touch, giving advice on how much information can be conveyed and whether other media should be used in conjunction with it.

Contact the Dog Rose Trust for more information about interactive models: www.dogrose-trust.org.uk

Developing multi-sensory exhibits and features

> "Remember a blind person has to build picture in their mind by using their other senses." **Auditor**

Several museums, galleries and heritage sites are developing exhibitions or commissioning works of art that do not predominantly rely on sight. Exhibitions have been developed that focus on touch. Some museums have incorporated soundscapes that recreate a historical time or particular situation. Some galleries have commissioned art works that are created through sound or understood by touch.

There is a huge potential to create exhibitions or new commissions that offer opportunities and experiences for all visitors that are not focused on sight.

Interactive exhibits and terminals

Many museums, galleries and heritage sites are now incorporating digital interactive terminals into their exhibitions. These terminals are only accessible to blind and partially sighted people if they have been designed to be. Inclusive design principles should be part and parcel of the design brief. For advice, contact a universal design expert. It may be possible to incorporate access technology into terminals, for example, using sound to provide access to touch screen technology. High definition screens (with high quality colour and contrast, and the possibility of magnification) can be very useful for partially sighted people.

Access Prohibited? Information for designers of public access terminals examines the design of digital interactives: www.tiresias.org/pats/index.htm

A guide to inclusive design is available from the Disability Rights Commission.

Research and guidelines on interactive can be found on the British Interactive Group website: www.big.uk.com

Sensory Design Services are inclusive design consultants working to influence the design and development of products, equipment and services to ensure that they are accessible. More details and factsheets are available at: www.sds-uk.org

Access to collections through the internet

Digital technologies have a huge potential to make cultural assets, information and learning opportunities more widely available. Blind and partially sighted people are often excluded from this potential, finding many websites difficult or even impossible to use, simply because of the way they have been designed (see chapter four).

There are museums and galleries that have developed online resources that are accessible to blind and partially sighted people. COMPASS is an on-line database featuring around 5,000 objects from the British Museum's collections. The site has been designed so as to be fully accessible to people using access technology.

The Matisse Picasso i-Map Project developed by Tate Modern, has been designed specifically for blind and partially sighted people as a way to explore some of the ideas, innovations and working methods of Matisse and Picasso. The i-map site incorporates files than can be used to create tactile images. Other sites, such as the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, have sound files of recorded description, which relate to images on the site or objects in collections.

The COMPASS database can be accessed from the British Museum website:www.british-museum.ac.uk

The i-map project can be accessed at: www.tate.org.uk/imap

The Smithosian virtual exhibition on the Disabilty Rights movement can be accessed at: www.americanhistory.si.edu/disabilityrights/index.html

Participatory sessions

Learning events

Around 22,000 young people under the age of 16 are growing up in the UK with a sight problem. The majority of young blind and partially sighted people are in mainstream education.

When developing educational sessions that will be attended by students with sight problems, it is important that educational materials are accessible. It is important to work with the teacher of the group. The RNIB's education and employment division offers advice and curriculum support to teachers of blind and partially sighted students and will also be able to offer advice to the venue on ensuring that sessions are accessible.

Many museums offer learning programmes for people of all ages. Again, it is important that all materials are provided in accessible formats, particularly for sessions targeted at older people.

Artist-led sessions

Several venues, such as Whitechapel Art Gallery, work with artists or educational practitioners in devising sessions that enable blind and partially sighted people to explore exhibition themes and ideas through practical art sessions. If you are thinking about developing practical art sessions for people with sight problems to explore collections, it might be useful to refer to books that describe how artists with sight problems work.

Artists at work – Interviews with professional artists who are visually impaired or blind, contains six artists reflections on their work

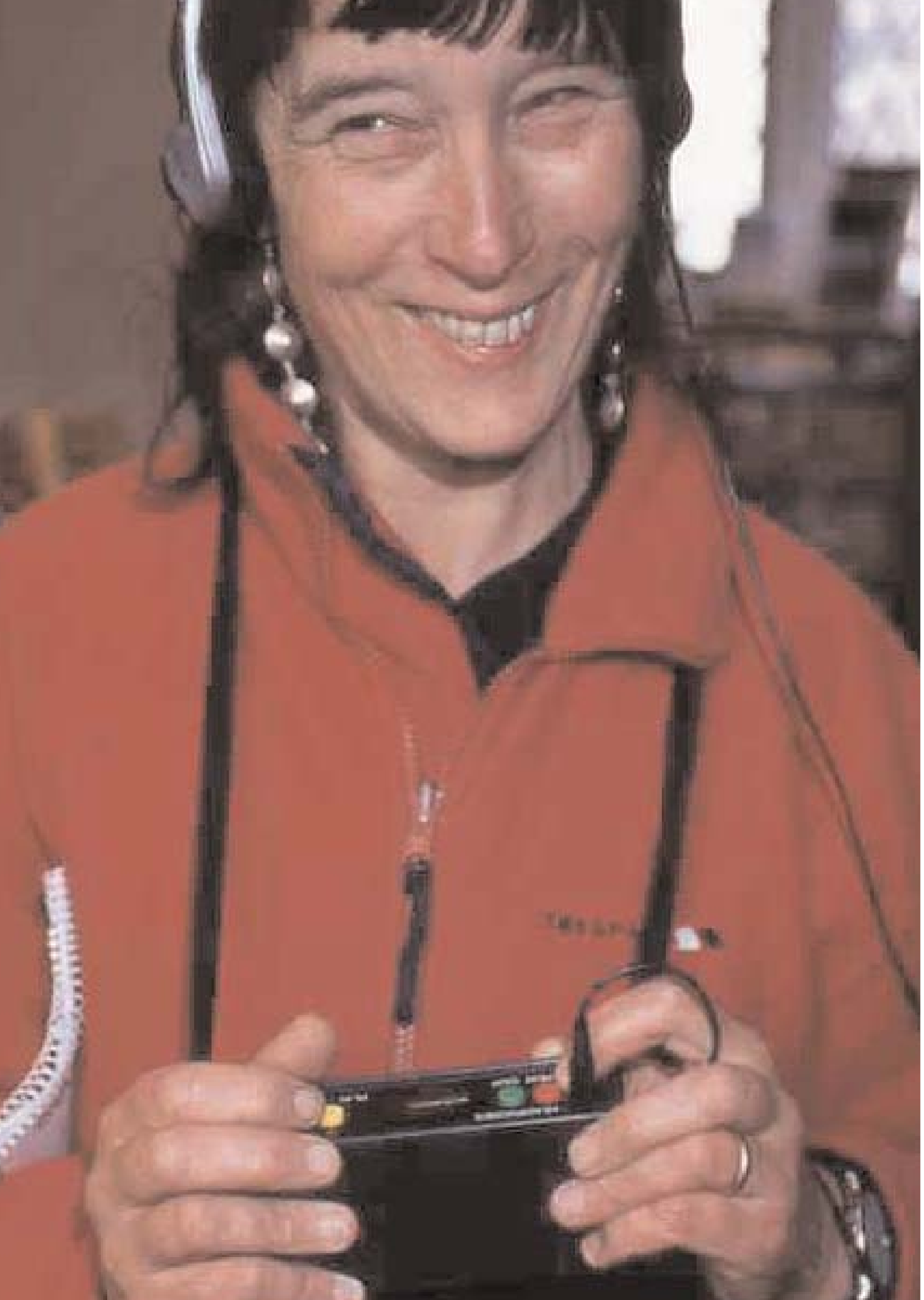
Painting from a new perspective, available from RNIB, is a book focusing on six artists who have decided to carry on painting, despite losing their sight and has recorded descriptions of the art works included in the book

What colour is the wind: insight into art and visual impairment describes blind and partially sighted students at work.

In summary:

Access to collections can be improved in a number of ways. Approaches that might be relevant to your organisation. are:

- descriptive events or tours
- touching objects or features
- producing representations of objects or images in tactile formats
- multi-sensory exhibits
- providing access to collections online
- developing participatory sessions.



6. Improving access: audio guides

One of the ways to open up access to collections is by producing an audio guide. Issues around producing an audio guide are contained in this chapter drawing on the research undertaken for the project and the experience of the organisations involved. This section covers:

- whether an inclusive or specific guide might be appropriate for your organisation
- including people with sight problems in the development process
- different types of audio guide technology
- choosing tone, style and content
- guidance on developing descriptions
- creating a tour
- providing orientation information
- linking the tour to the venue.

What is an audio guide?

An audio guide provides pre-recorded information to visitors about a collection or site. It can be aimed at groups of visitors with particular needs such as children or people with sight problems – or can be designed for a mainstream audience.

Audio guides can be used to:

- provide historical or cultural information about the venue
- recreate a sense of the venue's past
- help visitors find their way around the venue
- point out specific features that may otherwise go unnoticed
- describe artefacts in detail.

The guide may take the form of a tour with a narrative that leads the visitor on a journey, or it may be responsive to the visitor – providing information on request.

At best it will enhance a visit by adding value, and communicating interesting information in a lively and engaging way. At worst it can be cumbersome, out of date, crudely designed, factually wrong, badly recorded, hissy, boring or unintelligible. Or it can be fantastic, only staff don't know that it exists and consequently customers don't get to know about it either.

The guide can be produced in-house, or by a commercial producer. Commercial producers offer different levels of service from writing and recording the material to maintenance and staffing. If you produce the guide in house you will need to budget for maintenance and updates as well as the initial production. A list of audio guide producers is contained in the further

information section at the end of the report.

Installing an audio tour should always begin with careful consideration of exactly what added value it is going to give the visitor to your venue or presentation. The audio guide should relate to the building as a whole ensuring that it becomes an integrated part of what you do, not a bolt on extra. When an audio tour is done well, it significantly adds to a visitor's enjoyment and understanding, and also inspires them to further independent investigation during and after a visit. One thing that audio tours almost never do is generate revenue.

A specific or inclusive guide?

Audio guides can be a valuable tool for improving access for visitors with sight problems. Just because a guide is in audio however, does not necessarily mean that it will be accessible to blind and partially sighted people. The technology used and the way that the guide is produced will determine its accessibility.

"Audio guides are essential for the enjoyment and understanding of venues, artwork and objects, enabling visually impaired people to appreciate collections and their history without having to rely on members of staff or other sighted assistance. A good audio guide often directs people requiring more detailed information on to relevant sources, giving added depth and meaning to the exhibits that are described. Audio guides contribute enormously to the pleasure I, as a visually impaired person, get from visiting museums, galleries and heritage sites. Without audio guides the impact of major exhibitions, and the pleasure they give would be greatly reduced for me." **Auditor**

"Audio guides should extend access to people whose access is otherwise limited. An audio guide for visually impaired visitors provides a level of independence in going around an exhibition. It gives information and cues which would be very difficult to do in another way, other than offering a guided tour. There are, though, dangers in providing recorded information which over-interprets a work - telling people how to look rather than what the work is. A delicate balance has to be struck." **Venue participating in case study**

The Talking Images project audited both audio guides that were specifically written for people with sight problems, and ones that were designed for a mainstream audience. The auditors found good and bad examples of both types.

The audio guides developed for the case studies were developed specifically for people with sight problems. Developing a specific guide may best address the description and orientation needs of people with impaired vision.

Mainstream guides however, can be made more accessible to blind and partially sighted people by involving them in development and by following the suggestions in this chapter. Many sighted people enjoy descriptions, as they help them to explore a work or object in more detail. Therefore some of the principles offered in this chapter on description may be of benefit to all visitors.

Handsets that allow users to select tracks mean that one guide can offer information that is relevant to some visitors but can be skipped by others. Although there is a limit to the amount of information that can be recorded on any handset, this approach of "layering" information can make the guide accessible to different groups of visitors, or visitors with different needs.

"You want an inclusive guide – you don't want a specific guide. If you have an inclusive guide and it embodies optional extra information for blind people, then you don't have to have two audio guides – that must surely be the best of both worlds." **Auditor**

Including blind and partially sighted people in the process

In order to produce an accessible audio guide, be it specific or standard, blind and partially sighted people should be consulted about what they need, what they want, and what works for them. One way of doing this is to set up a focus group to advise on the production of the audio guide and other access issues (see chapter three). The focus group should be involved at every stage, and certainly before commissioning, as they should have an influence on what sort of audio guide you choose, both in terms of the information provided and the technology used to access it.

The focus group should be used to test out ideas, information, descriptions and equipment during the writing process, to make sure you are providing the right level of detail.

- Do they think description is enough on its own?
- Would they prefer a different balance between description and contextual information?
- Would they like tactile information?
- Do they need help to find their way around the venue?

Using focus groups is not without problems, and there may be strong-minded people with conflicting points of view. You need to try to get a balance between visitors who are blind and those who are partially sighted, and to take into account their differing needs and opinions.

Once the guide has been completed it needs to be evaluated and if necessary, updated. The focus group can then be used to look at future provision so that the guide is not seen as an end, but rather a beginning.

"The other side of this is to get the venue to think of this as a continuing process rather than commissioning something now and then not doing anything else. You have to add to it, it's a continuum." **Auditor**

Types of audio guide

The range of audio guides available is increasing all the time. This section does not attempt to survey specific technical options. Rather it is designed to summarise the types of equipment available, and to ask questions to help you decide between them.

Further information on the technologies used to produce audio guides is available in the Talking Images research report.

Tapes

Some guides, like older generation cassette players, hold information in linear form – playing through the recorded text in one direction. There are no secondary levels of information, though the information can be paused and rewound if needed.

One advantage to this kind of player is familiarity. Another is ease of use, with straightforward controls. The devices are generally lightweight and they are inexpensive. For certain narrative tours, these will be the best option.

But they are inflexible and you will need to consider whether to include orientation information as part of the tour or not. Many people find this kind of information distracting from the main

purpose of their visit and the result can be more of a barrier than an aid to appreciation.

And these units need to be maintained. Walkmans bought off the high street are not designed for the level of usage they might get in a venue, and many auditors struggled with faulty or run-down units.

Digital

Other sites and exhibitions will demand more flexibility and this is where digital technology comes into its own. Information is accessed by punching in numbers on a keypad. Information can be layered, and individual paths constructed for individual groups of visitors. The visitor is largely in control of what they listen to and the time they spend listening. Descriptive or other visitor information can be separated out from orientation or way-finding information, giving greater choice to the listener.

These units are versatile but not without drawbacks in terms of the usability of some of the handsets available. On some units the keys are not well defined, or the layout is confusing. Numbers do not respond with a bleep when you press them, so you may not know if the number you pressed has registered correctly. Often the only way of confirming you have pressed the right number is to look at a screen - which is small and indistinct. Also, errors are only indicated visually not aurally.

Work is being done by producers to address some of these problems, and a well written text can give aural identification to let the user know they are listening to the right track.

But one of the main difficulties with this technology is that the number to press on the handset will have to correspond with cues given within the venue, and these cues are generally visual.

"What ruined one visit for me, was that both myself and my sighted guide could not find the numbers you needed for the audio guide... when we did find it, it was in an obscure corner up in the air… I had to work so hard finding the information that it detracted from the pleasure of the visit." **Auditor**

Although digital units are generally robust and, with fewer moving parts, can stand up to high levels of use, they represent a considerable financial investment and need tighter systems of security. This means they may not be suited to some smaller venues.

Automatic

Automatic audio handsets have recorded information which is activated by signals positioned around the venue. This means

that users can be certain of where they are in a venue and do not need to hunt for visual cues. It also means that they don't have to struggle with keypads. But there is a cost implication for this level of technology; it will not be suitable for certain sites. Installation in historically sensitve sites may also be a problem.

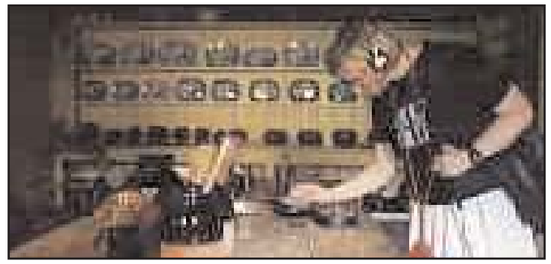
Choosing tone, style and content

It must be remembered that any visitor is putting their trust in the audio guide to meet their needs and provide the correct depth and breadth of content. This can be a challenge when you have a very diverse visitor base. Structure is important as visitors are looking for recommendations and for the audio guide to breathe life into the venue or presentation that is being interpreted.

However, there are strong differences of opinion over the question of the tone and style of delivery. At one end of the scale is dramatic interpretation, and at the other dry academic, completely objective narrative. It is necessary to walk a fine line between the two, dictated by the subject matter.

Here are some pointers from a qualitative study undertaken for English Heritage in 2002, **Why do visitors use audio guides** by Susie Fisher Associates.

- The vast majority of visitors prefer the context to be set by an objective narrator. This is the authoritative (although the actual tone doesn't need to be teacher-like) voice they are expecting from an institution to deliver interesting facts for them to find out.
- There is a gender divide. On the whole women prefer more of a human story whilst men are more comfortable with straight facts and technical details.
- Dramatisation makes it much easier for visitors to visualise what is going on. Unless it is made clear, visitors will often assume that the dramatisation is supposition and not fact. This is where the objective narrator is key – they can introduce the dramatisation and make it clear that it is drawn from academic analysis.
- Highlighting particular features by directing the visitor to them and then incorporating their significance into the narrative is very effective. Visitors really feel they are getting information on features they would otherwise miss. It is also an opportunity to introduce technical detail without it being too overwhelming.
- Sound effects add incredible richness to the delivery, but only when they are properly produced and don't interfere with delivery of the facts.



Different displays, exhibitions or sites will call for different types of audio guide. The demands of a permanent exhibition, for instance, are different to those of an exhibition which tours, where the hanging order of exhibits will change as the space that houses them changes.

In a permanent exhibition you may want all the works to be described. Or you may want to provide different routes through the exhibits. You may want these routes to change every so often so that the tours continually evolve. And even in permanent exhibitions, objects will be moved or removed from time to time.

Some venues may be more suited to a set tour, a journey with a narrative. This will have a specified route, with a start point and an end point and listening to it may take a specified amount of time.

You may want visitors to be able to chose between levels of information. This may be to make guides accessible to a number of different groups, or to include further avenues for exploration so that each visitor can construct his or her own tour.

The description

An audio guide that is accessible to visitors with sight problems will include a high level of description. Descriptions may be of a selection of objects from a permanent display, or may focus on a particular room or touring exhibition or work. There are professional individuals and companies who have experience writing descriptions for visitors with sight problems, or staff can be trained to do it themselves (see chapter five).

When visiting a cultural site, blind and partially sighted people want what we all want:

- to be engaged
- to experience a building or work of art in as direct a way as possible
- to feel involved
- to listen to interesting information presented in an interesting way.

> "You want to come away discussing the art, not the description." **Focus group participant**

It is difficult to define a good description. Auditors knew a good description when they heard one but found it difficult to say exactly what was good about it.

They did, however, find it easy to talk about what was bad.

"The length of description was often too long."

"I am afraid I got rather bored."

"There was no change in pace or variety within the voice."

"The descriptions were meticulous but ultimately un-engaging."

"Descriptions, directions and history were given together in one block." **Auditor's comments**

But although unable to define what makes a description good, certain qualities were identified as contributing towards a positive experience:

- There is no ideal length for a description. They can be tedious and brief or engagingly long.
- What makes a difference to many blind and partially sighted visitors is the quality of the voice. A recording of an enthusiast, for example, may convey more about a historical site than the well written, measured prose of an expert.
- A description should mention the size of a room or object or work of art, and how it is framed or displayed – whether it is raised up, or behind glass.

What is essential is that the description brings the picture or artefact to life.

Generally speaking, a description will start with an overview of the work before focussing in on particular details.

"You must start off with a global idea of what the painting is of, I really think that's important, otherwise the rest of it won't matter, it won't make any sense." **Auditor**

There is no easy formula about how to go about describing a picture, or which area to describe first. Each work will have its own particular qualities, and each description will therefore need to reflect that.

A description should:

- include information on the **style** of the piece as well as its historical context
- discuss the **materials and techniques** used in making the work, especially if they are unusual or particularly impressive.
- try to convey something of the **atmosphere** of the space in which the work is exhibited.
- communicate the **impact** a work or building may have at first glance, as well as describing the details which go together to create that impact.

Generally the overview will come before the detail, but there may be specific examples of where the detail builds into something spectacular. The experience of a sighted person in that space needs to be recreated. The description should engage the listener and come to a satisfying end.

In most cases it is useful to start with a simple statement about what something is: "A Mendlesham chair" for instance. This will take people mentally to a certain place. You can then explain what being a Mendlesham chair means: "Unique to Suffolk, these chairs were made between 1800 and 1860, out of fruit wood with an elm seat."

After this contextual information, further description can give both visual detail and a sense of the chairs' character: "They are elegant with thin legs and carved spindles in the seat backs. They are highly polished, which accentuates the warm rosy colour of the wood."

For a painting or work of art it may be useful to give the title of a work first, such as "Madonna and Child". We need to know if it is a painting or a sculpture or a relief. We need to know what it is made of.

After that the description needs to tell us more about what that particular artist has done with the Madonna and Child both in terms of the composition and the effect that creates. For certain tours it may be appropriate to place the work within an art historical context. In other tours you may want to emphasise a thematic link, or to stress the work's social importance.

There may be occasions when it is better to keep the title back, introducing it at a later point within the description, perhaps if the title's relationship to a work is not straightforward and needs some explanation, or where the viewer is supposed to enjoy a discontinuity between the title and the work.

For example being told that a picture called "The Picnic" actually shows a lion tearing into the guts of a zebra creates a certain effect. Having the image of the lion devouring the zebra first, and then being told it is called "The Picnic" later creates a very different feeling. Consider how the work sets up and then deals with expectation, and try to make the description reflect this.

The extent to which a description will include historical, contextual and biographical information will rely on what type of tour is being produced. On digital handsets it is possible to produce levels of information which can detail an artist's life or examine a particular technique. On a linear tour this information will have to be integrated into a description.

Descriptions should include any written information which is available to sighted visitors in the gallery, either by quoting written gallery information or by including it within the text of the description.

A note on interpretation

Whilst there is debate to be had about how interpretative to be in a description, or how to reflect a picture's ambiguities, it is never useful to just be vague. The following example is of two descriptions of the same work which were given to a focus group of gallery visitors with sight problems.

The first one attempted to concentrate on the form and remain uninterpretative.

1968 Ramparts (oil on carved board). A rectangular background, some 19 inches high and 21 inches wide – that is about 48 by 53 centimetres – is painted a smooth earthy brown.

Standing proud of it is a slightly smaller rectangle – this one divided up into a number of smaller, overlapping geometric sections.

At top and bottom of this smaller rectangle are areas of white. Between them a line of three differently sized rectangles. The one to the left is brown like the background. The central one is a darker brown, and the third, a lighter, orangey brown.

The line created by these three rectangles starts off – to the left – as horizontal and almost central. But a little way across, the line shifts dramatically downwards. The two rectangles centre and right slope downwards. To the far right is a tall rectangle – painted the same brown as the background.

Two other sections seem to float above the relief. Their colour is similar to the two white sections. Both are similar in shape – a trapezium – with parallel sides, horizontal tops, but with a bottom edge which slopes down towards the right.

One is positioned within the top white section and to the right. Its slanting edge runs along the top edge of the slanting brown line. Carved within it is a circle – the inner edge painted white.

The other trapezium sits next to it – just left of centre – and a little lower. In this, another circle has been inscribed rather than cut.

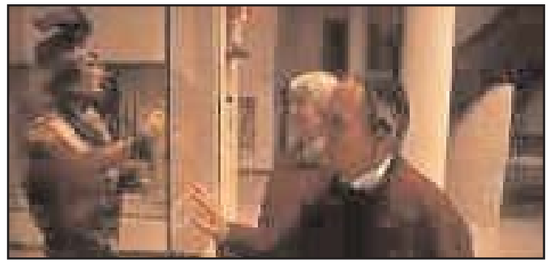
The second description allowed a level of interpretation to colour the description:

Subtitled "Ramparts", this relief was made in 1968, whilst Ben Nicholson was living in Switzerland.

A rectangular backboard, just over eighteen inches high and nearly two feet wide – that's about 48 by 53 centimetres – is painted a smooth earthy brown.

This backboard frames, as it were, a collection of overlapping geometric shapes.

At top and bottom are areas of frosty, silvery white. These have been scratched and rubbed in places to create an irregular, uneven surface, like snow drifting across dirty ice. A patch at the top left has been roughly scraped so that a grubby brown shows through like a stain. Elsewhere, are smudges of thick, powdery white.



Separating the top frosted section from the bottom, three differently sized rectangles progress across from left to right. The one to the left is the smallest and is painted a similar earthy brown to the background, but with a scuffed quality. The central rectangle is a darker brown – with a blacker sheen – which makes it sink back away from us into the relief – although it actually stands proud of the one to the left. The third rectangle – in fact almost a square – is a lighter, orangey brown.

Whilst the line created by these three rectangles starts off – to the left – as horizontal and almost central, the other two forms have shifted downwards – as though a geographical fault has sheered this layer and pushed it bodily down towards the right.

Now sloping, these two rectangles seem in danger of slipping out of the composition – squeezed out from between the frosted white sections at top and bottom. The only thing which stops them going any further and holds them in some kind of equilibrium is a tall rectangular form to the far right – painted a similar brown as the background. But even this seems to have been affected by the strong movements within – and the top right corner of the orangey brown square dents into it.

Two other forms animate the relief further. Both are a similar shape – a trapezium – with parallel sides, horizontal tops, but with a bottom edge which slopes down towards the right. In colour both shapes reflect the two frosty-white sections as though somehow related to them – though the texture of the board is allowed to show through, giving these a lighter, more insubstantial feel.

One of these trapeziums is positioned within the top frosted section to the right. Its slanting bottom edge seems to be holding the dark brown rectangle and orange square in their downward slope. Carved within it is a circle – the inner edge of which is painted white, creating a moonlike glow.

The other trapezium sits next to it – just left of centre - and a little lower. Within this is another, larger, circle. Inscribed rather than cut, this circle has an ethereal quality – like an echo of the first.
Hovering in front of the darker brown rectangle – the trapezium appears like a guillotine, which having severed the line of rectangles, pushing it downwards and backwards into the relief – now holds the pieces in their final balanced positions.

The focus group found the first, shorter version much harder to understand, and also thought it was the longer of the two descriptions. The second description was felt to be more involving, giving more information about the process of looking at the work, as well as what was positioned where. They found the use of colours and qualitative words useful in constructing a strong sense of the work. They felt they had something positive to talk about.

Creating a tour

When writing any guide, it is essential to give a brief introduction to what the tour consists of, with basic information about what is available on the tour. It may, for instance, be possible to get recorded input from a museum director or exhibition curator about what was behind the choice.

It is important to say how long the tour will last, and what form it will take. The introduction can also give a visitor information on the venue such as describing the layout of the building and giving information on the location of toilets, shops and café.

Recording quality is important. Poor quality recording detracts from the space you are in. Muffled sound or indistinct voices will be difficult and frustrating to listen to.

Although opinion is divided about the use of sound effects, the general feeling is that if they are used sensitively and are relevant to the narrative, they can enhance a visit, but used crudely they will detract from the text.

You should consider whether the text should be recorded in a studio or in the space. Some auditors felt that the natural acoustic of the building allowed them a greater sense of the space. Others found that a "live" acoustic made the voice less distinct. Such a recording could also create problems for people who are hard of hearing if recording is not properly undertaken. Again, much depends on the space being described and the professionalism of the recording process.

> "They went to a lot of trouble to give you an audio impression of what the rooms had been like, but it was an example of when sound effects overwhelmed the information they were trying to give you." **Auditor**

If recorded for a digital handset, descriptions should give an aural confirmation of the subject at the beginning of each track, so that people know they are listening to the right piece of information. There should also be some indication at the end of a track so that people know when to move on or pause the description.

Orientation information

Everyone needs information on how to get around a venue, but it is particularly important to people with sight problems. Orientation information can be incorporated into an audio guide although individuals have different views about how useful it is. For some people it gives a sense of independence, allowing them to move unaccompanied through an exhibition. For others it wastes time which could be spent listening to information about a site.

> "If you have to find your way around, it takes the concentration away from the guide. It takes the enjoyment away as well." **Focus group participant**

One of the main problems identified with recorded orientation information was that it was unclear how it was meant to function.

> "The information just starts and you have no way of knowing how long the voice will be going on for."
>
> "You don't know if you're supposed to remember it or if it will be repeated."
>
> "You waste time concentrating on a detail which turns out to be irrelevant."
>
> "There is often the sense that 'I'm never going to remember all this so I might as well stop listening'." **Auditors**

Recorded information needs to guide visitors through itself, as well as guiding them around the building or collection. If not, visitors don't know whether to set off while the track is playing, or wait for it to finish. They may not know, when it does finish, whether they are where they ought to be. And they may have no way of finding this out.

Getting from one room to another

Give approximate distances from one place to the next but be careful about being over-specific, one person's step is another person's stride. Use existing way-finding clues within the building so

that people can check their progress. These could include:

- a difference in temperature from one room to the next
- a difference in light level
- a change in the colour of the walls
- a change in the type of flooring
- a dominant smell or sound
- an atmospheric change as the journey moves from a large public space to a smaller, more intimate or domestic setting.

Possible hazards should be mentioned en route in a way which is informative but not sensationalist, these may include:

- tiles which get slippery in wet weather
- uneven floor surfaces
- rooms or corridors with low level lighting
- low doorways
- glass cabinets
- slopes
- steps and whether they go up or down
- donation boxes.

Once you arrive at a room

As well as how to navigate a space people also need the space itself described.

> "I'd like to know about the size of the space that I am in, that's the most important thing…" **Auditor**

When describing a room, it's not just about size, a sense of how the space is, or was, used can be far more useful. "A grand mediaeval hall which at meal times would seat two hundred nobles on long oak tables" may conjure a more immediate and useful picture than "this room measures twenty metres long by five metres wide and was used for large dinners".

As a visitor enters a space, they need to know where they are - whether at one end of the room, in a corner, or in the centre of its longest wall.

> "There had clearly been a deliberate effort to pick up on relevant features. It was particularly impressive that the guide made some attempt to describe the view out of the windows, as this is commonly missed from most audio guides. It is not necessary for every window or room, but helps to give orientation of the room and the building." **Auditor**

Linking the guide to the venue

> "We couldn't just make our exhibitions accessible; the entire museum experience required some adjustment, including staff training, brochures, and marketing strategies. There were networks, terminologies, attitudes and politics to understand before we could begin to reach this new audience." **Alan J. Friedman, director of the New York Hall of Science**

Audio guides can never stand alone - and audio description is only one tool which can be used to make museums, galleries and heritage sites more accessible to visitors with sight problems. Guides need to operate within a context of physical access to the building. This means looking at how to improve way-finding through the building, as is discussed in chapter eight.

It means tackling the issue of labelling, also examined in chapter eight. There is a reluctance in many museums, galleries and heritage sites to create labels in large print. The argument is often to do with being sensitive to the space and the art or artefacts displayed in that space. But whilst an understandable concern, it fails to address what is a fundamental issue. Bad labelling will simply make an audio guide redundant. It will be money spent for nothing.

One method to help a visitor find and recognise the audio guide cue number is to create a tactile plan of the space – with the described objects and their cue number shown on the map. Issues around tactile plans are discussed in chapter eight. These issues include the fact that not all people are used to reading tactile information, and that people will still need to know when they have reached the right place.

Practical implications

There are many practical implications of managing an audio guide in a venue.

- What length will the guide be?
- How many units will be needed?
- How are the guides going to be distributed and collected?
- Should visitors be charged for taking the tour?
- Who is going to manage and pay for maintaining the equipment?
- Who is going to manage and pay for updating the guide?

It is important to ensure that everyone has access to the same information, not just to comply with the DDA but also in order to aid the social aspect of visiting. Make sure that a script of the tour is

available, along with induction loops, headphones and single ear loops. This is important even if the audio guide doesn't need headphones to be used. Also make sure that there are straps on your equipment that are long enough for it to be hung around someone's neck.

These issues need to be considered right at the beginning of the project and built into budgets as they will impact on budgets, staffing and planning.

In summary

If your venue is developing an audio guide, consider how the guide can be made accessible to people with sight problems by:

- including blind and partially sighted people in the development process
- choosing technology that is accessible
- including a high level of description that brings buildings and collections to life
- including orientation information and wayfinding clues to help people navigate the space and describing the spaces visitors are in
- linking the audio guide to the venue and to your other services
- planning how the guides will be maintained and updated at the start of the project.

7. Promoting services

Once services and events are developed it is vital to promote them. Marketing takes time and resources and the approaches mentioned in this chapter will not work for all venues. There are venues, however, that have shown that consistent commitment has resulted in regular audiences at events, excellent links with local societies and other community groups and significant numbers of people using their services. A well-planned and imaginative approach will ensure that everyone, visitors and staff alike, share the benefits of providing services.

This section contains:

- findings from the research on what motivates people to attend venues
- how to promote services to visitors and non-visitors
- on how to promote services to visitors at a venue
- how to develop an access guide.

Why visually impaired people visit museums, galleries and heritage sites

"Normally, I'll happen to be there on a particular day, either because we are on holiday or we've decided to have a day out somewhere." **Auditor**

Before even thinking about plans and strategies it is useful to reflect on why people visit a venue. Motivations can range from a day out with friends to an interest in the building or a specific event.

Of those respondents to the phone survey undertaken for Talking Images who had visited a gallery, museum or heritage site, 52 per cent said "a day out" best described their reason for attending. A total of 23 per cent had a particular interest in a site, building or its contents while 22 per cent had visited a temporary exhibition or event.

As important as why people go to a venue will be the reasons as to why they might not, and what will influence their decision. Reasons will range from a general lack of interest to a sense that as somebody with a sight problem there is little to benefit them. Problems relating to organising visits or transport will also impact on a decision.

Almost three-quarters of respondents who never visited venues (72 per cent) indicated they would consider making a visit if they were made aware that a venue had facilities such as audio guides, specialist talks or objects they could touch.

Marketing services to people before a visit

When asked how aware they think blind and partially sighted visitors are of the services at their venue, 80 per cent of organisations surveyed for this project felt that blind or partially sighted visitors would either be "not at all" or only "a little" aware of services.

Information does not reach people with a sight problem easily. Many of the venues participating in the Talking Images project were unsure of how to promote their services and felt that few people with sight problems either knew of their services or were accessing them.

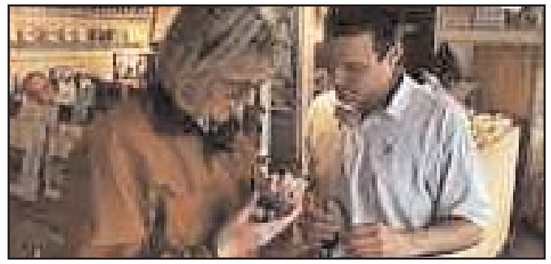
"You've got to do a lot of work to promote it and to get people there. You've got to be very pro-active." **Auditor**

Local contacts will prove invaluable in disseminating information. A good place to start is by establishing links with local societies for blind and partially sighted people, self-help groups and social workers for people with sight loss. Consider using local radio stations and local talking newspapers. Specialist press and publications, for example national tape magazines such as National Talking Express, or New Beacon, a monthly RNIB publication, may also be useful.

Involving blind and partially sighted people in consultation will help gain advice on where to promote services locally.

All 270 respondents to the phone survey undertaken for Talking Images were asked to indicate from a list what would be their main source of information if they wanted to find out about leisure events and activities. Societies or groups for blind and partially sighted people (36 per cent), friends and family members (31 per cent) and talking newspapers (31 per cent) were the sources most commonly identified.

As is shown above, blind and partially sighted people often receive information from sighted family and friends. Mentioning the services you offer for people with sight problems in all your visitor information will help promote services, as well as raising awareness of the ways in which blind and partially sighted people access leisure activities.



Contact RNIB for information on New Beacon and national tape magazines.

There are over 500 local talking newspaper groups throughout the UK. For information on your local talking newspaper contact the Talking Newspapers Association of the UK: www.tnauk.org.uk

As with all visitors to cultural venues the time and expense will be in securing a first visit and it is important to build a mailing list of visitors with sight problems to keep them informed about events and exhibitions.

With the individual's permission it may be that a small telephone mailing list is kept as a quick and effective marketing tool. In theatre it has proved to be a very effective and welcomed way of letting people know about audio described productions. The pro-active promotion of services as part of an audience development programme, as well as outreach work, contact with local societies, clubs, schools and residential homes will help develop relationships.

Arts Council England has commissioned Marketing and Disabled Audiences: A Guide for the Arts, which will be available in December 2003.

Promoting services to visitors at the venue

Marketing services is also about letting people know what is on offer when they get to the venue. Several of the auditors involved in the research had been in situations when staff were unaware of services offered to blind and partially sighted people. The phone survey also highlighted occasions when visitors had been told no services existed when that was not the case.

"The person at reception was hopeless! They didn't have a clue what services they had available for visually impaired people." **Auditor**

"An important thing is that, when an organisation has produced an accessible audio guide, they should tell their staff! They need to communicate this information so that whoever you get when you ring up that day, will know." **Auditor**

All members of staff need to be aware of and regularly updated on services and projects provided for blind and partially sighted visitors. A checklist in reception and at points where members of staff answer the phone with all services available will be useful, particularly for newer members of staff. Displaying the

easily recognised "eye symbol", the logo of the Partially Sighted Society, in prominent places in your publicity and at reception will alert visitors to the fact that services for blind and partially sighted people are available.

It is important to have clear large print signs in a prominent place in reception to alert as many people as possible to services such as information in large print or audio. This will be seen by visitors who have a sight problem but who do not consider themselves to be blind or partially sighted.

To obtain a version of the eye symbol contact the Partially Sighted Society: 01302 323132

Developing an access guide

Many cultural venues are now developing access guides that contain information on services for disabled people, and some have developed access guides specifically for blind and partially sighted visitors. Such information guides should contain:

- practical information on planning a visit such as address, opening times, concessionary rates, your welcome to guide dogs
- general description of building
- brief details about collections and events
- information about the assistance that can be provided such as a guide, and how much advance notice is required of a visit
- details on all visitor information and visitor guides which are available in alternative formats and from where they can be obtained. Mention whether this information can be borrowed in advance, can be taken away, or purchased afterwards
- details about any other services available to blind and partially sighted people, for example, touch tours or collections, accessible ICT equipment
- details about audio guides for the general public (which may be enjoyed by many people with sight problems), on audio guides that are specifically developed for blind and partially sighted people, and the cost if there is one
- details of any events that are specially targeted at people with sight problems
- telephone numbers of specific departments, members of staff, useful organisations or numbers for booking exhibitions or restaurants
- a contact name and number where more information can be provided if required

- travel information for all modes of transport. This information might include:
  - which train, underground or tram station is nearest
  - if you can take a bus and which number is best
  - where the buses stop
  - how to get from the nearest bus, train, underground, tram or station
  - if you can park a car and where
  - how much this might cost
  - if you need particular coins as you park or after your visit
  - what concessions are available to blue badge holders
  - what to say to a driver if you are coming by taxi
  - the approximate cost of a taxi from the station
  - if there are any travel information numbers.

When producing such a guide, it will be useful to consult with visitors with sight problems about certain issues, such as their experiences of travelling to your venue. If you are suggesting a walked route from a station to your venue, you should try it out with someone who has a sight problem to make sure you are providing the information they need. The guide should be produced in accessible formats and widely publicised. Make sure that local societies for blind and partially sighted people have copies, that they are available at the venue, local libraries and tourist information centres. The guide should also be made available online and advertised in all visitor information.

If producing an access guide, provision must be made to make sure it can be updated. Consideration should be given at the outset as to how this can be done simply and effectively so that it continues to be a valuable tool.

In the Resource survey of provision, 50 per cent of museums did not have an access guide for disabled people and did not currently plan to produce one.

Providing information before a visit

"Having information about the museum in an accessible format that I can read would encourage me to attend, then I can make an informed choice." **Auditor**

Most blind and partially sighted visitors will find it useful to access information before a visit. The previous section discussed providing visitor information but visitors may also want information on your collections, exhibitions or building.

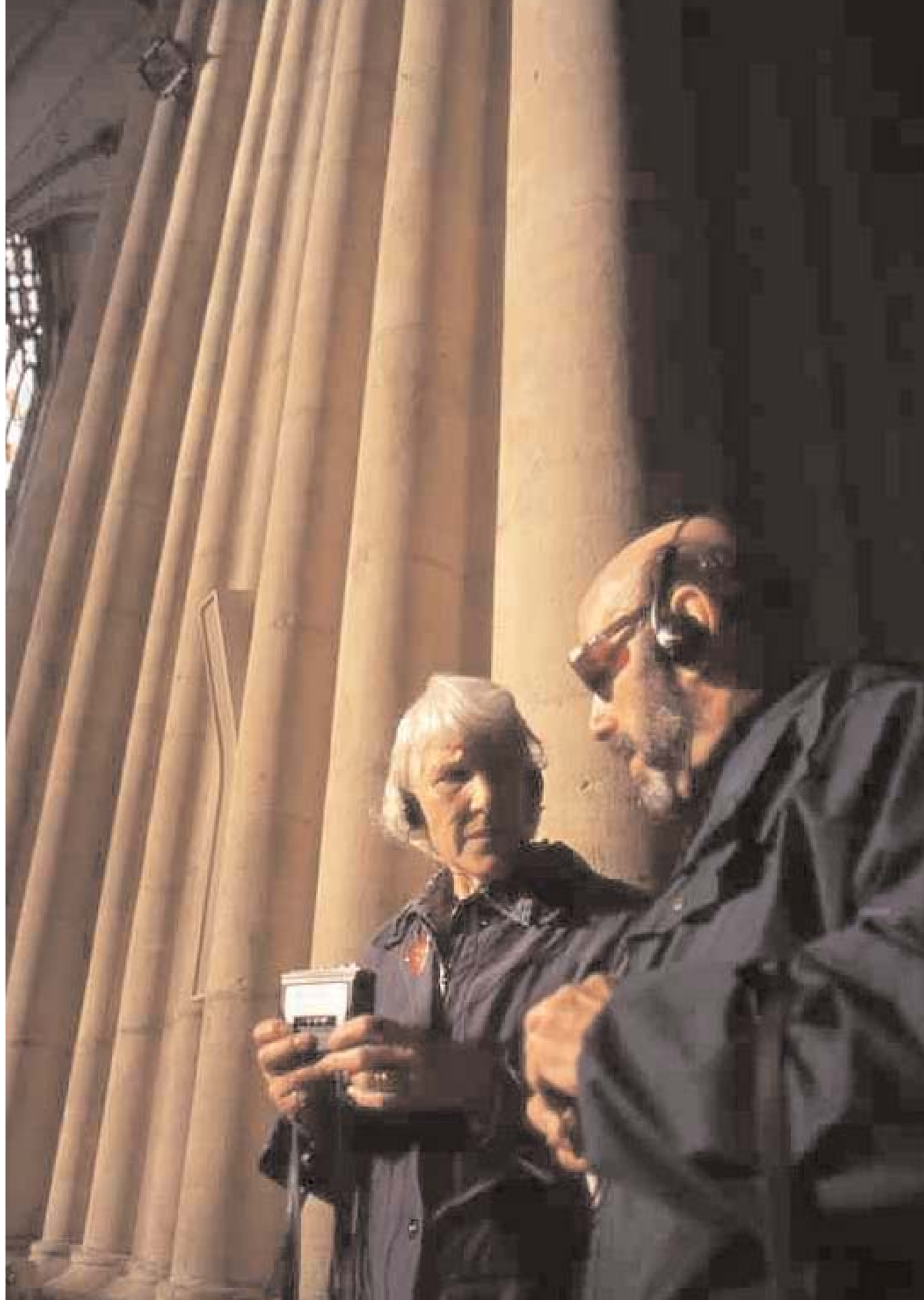
Some venues are thinking about developing pre-visit packs aimed at blind and partially sighted people. These might contain information in braille, large print or on tape, allowing visitors to digest this information before a visit. Some pre-visit packs, such as that for Ely Cathedral, have been made available on loan to blind and partially sighted people from the National Library for the Blind (NLB), RNIB and local societies as well as from the venue itself. Advance information can be vital to the enjoyment of a visit and making it lively and interesting will enhance the visitors experience.

Contact the National Library for the Blind: www.nlb-online.org/

In summary

In order to promote services and events:

- consider why people do or don't attend your venue and develop a creative marketing plan
- develop links with local contacts
- use local radio and talking newspaper services and also specialist national publications
- ensure services are promoted to visitors at your venue
- consider developing an access guide.



8. Welcoming visitors with sight problems

Many people involved in the research and consultation for the Talking Images project commented positively on the customer service they received. Some blind and partially sighted visitors, however, reported that members of staff did not seem confident speaking to them. Others noted that members of staff were not aware of what services were available at the venue. Even if a venue has excellent services for blind and partially sighted people, no one will enjoy a visit if they do not receive a positive welcome from staff and the building itself.

This section looks at:

- points to remember when welcoming blind and partially sighted customers
- how to develop a programme of visual awareness training
- the adjustments that can be made to a venue to aid the navigation of people with sight problems
- how to provide information on the layout of your building.

"I have been in situations when I've stood at reception and people haven't said anything. I didn't know people were there and they were probably expecting someone to make eye contact with them. I'd say most of the time people at reception are either quiet or very nervous." **Auditor**

"These places provide a public service, so people on reception, the first reaction should be, 'Hello, how can I help?'" **Auditor**

Some points to remember when welcoming people with sight problems

Every visitor is different. When welcoming a blind or partially sighted visitor, the most important thing is to ask that visitor what you can do to make their visit more enjoyable. There are some common sense points to remember when welcoming people with sight problems:

In general:

- talk naturally and don't search for substitutes for words like "look" and "see". These are part of everyday language, used by sighted people and people with sight problems alike.
- say who you are and speak directly to them rather than to their companion, if they are with someone. Don't walk away without mentioning that you are going
- always offer to help but don't be upset if your offer is refused. Some people don't need any help but you won't know unless you ask.

When guiding someone:

- allow them to take your arm
- tell them when you are approaching steps or a kerb and say whether the steps go up or down
- mention any potential hazards and say where they are
- when guiding them into a seat place their hand on the back of the chair to help them orientate themselves.

"It would be useful if the steward in each room were to approach a visually impaired person and say 'Hello if I can be of any help ask' or 'Hello I'm just over here and I will do my best to answer questions'." **Auditor**

As mentioned in chapter two, the majority of people with sight problems are older people, many of whom may not perceive themselves as being blind or partially sighted. Many older people have limited mobility so providing sufficient seating in galleries or exhibitions may be helpful. Also remember that one in three older people with a sight problem also have a hearing impairment.

For factsheets on communication with deaf and hard of hearing people, refer to the RNID website: www.rnid.org.uk

Sense is the UK's leading organisation for people who are deafblind or have associated disabilities: www.sense.org.uk

There are currently around 5,000 guide dog owners in the UK. Guide dogs are highly trained and disciplined and should be admitted to all parts of your venue. Never separate the owner and the dog as this will leave the owner less independent.

Remember that guide dogs are working animals, not pets. They should not be fed, patted or distracted when they are working. Keep a bowl available so that the dog can be supplied with fresh water if required. When organising events, such as lectures and workshops, it is also helpful to allow extra space for the guide dog to lie down by the owner's chair.

Sight problems, provides an introduction to blindness and what it is like to live with sight loss, **How to guide a blind person,** gives detailed information on guiding techniques. These are both available from RNIB who can also provide information on specific eye conditions.

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association website can be found at: www.guidedogs.org.uk

Visual awareness training

In order to develop staff confidence in welcoming visitors with sight problems, it is important to develop a programme of visual awareness training. This will help members of staff to develop the confidence and skills to make blind or partially sighted visitors more welcome. There are a number of sources of training including local groups or societies for blind and partially sighted people, independent trainers or RNIB.

"Guides appeared to have a lack of disability awareness training particularly guiding techniques." **Auditor**

"Staff did not offer any assistance. They appeared very nervous and unsure in front of a visually impaired person. I do feel that visual awareness training is needed." **Auditor**

Training can be tailored to meet the specific needs of an organisation. It should be part of an access policy and will be an opportunity to ensure that all members of staff are aware of the range of services available to blind and partially sighted visitors. It is important to make the training available to all members of staff and to ensure that new staff receive training. It is also a good idea to run refresher courses from time to time.

From September 2003, the websites of the Regional Agencies for museums, archives and libraries will hold regional databases of disability auditors and trainers. The databases are being developed in collaboration with Resource.

Ensuring buildings are welcoming to people with sight problems

Display text and labels

People with sight problems will benefit from clear, large and uncluttered display text, with good colour contrast between background and text.

"Some of the information boards had displays in front of them which makes it difficult to get close enough to read." **Auditor**

"Some of the writing on the information panels is in green and red which are difficult colours to see for a visually impaired person." **Auditor**

It is essential to consider viewing distances and positioning when producing labels and exhibition panels. Make them as large as possible; some good panels have text with font sizes of 30 point or more. Upper and lower case letters give words a shape, which can help partially sighted people. When providing information in braille, consult with blind and partially sighted visitors as to its best location. Labels could also be produced in hand held braille and large print formats.

"The location of room numbers, which are in braille, in several places are incorrectly placed. These were impossible to find and once located, were in positions that made them impossible to read other than by lying down." **Auditor**

In the Resource survey of provision for disabled users of museums, archives and libraries, 39 per cent of museums have large print notices.

Signage

Signage is an important element in enabling people to use buildings and can make a significant difference. With care signage can lead to a more accessible environment for everyone. Signage can also be considered an auxiliary aid under the DDA 1995.

Signs should be easy to find, contrasting against their background, easy to read, preferably upper and lower case, with a simple font and at a sufficient size to be read. If close enough to touch manufacturers are now producing braille and tactile signage which appears as if it is a normal sign, the 'One Sign for All' approach.

It is also important that signs are simple, concise and consistent.

These are just some of the important principles that can be overlooked when designing environments leading to the exclusion of a significant proportion of potential users of your service.

Contact RNIB Customer Services to purchase copies of the **Sign Design Guide**: 0845 702 3153

Lighting

Lighting needs of individuals vary greatly depending on their eye condition although there are some general principles. Lighting should be level and uniform to avoid pools

of light and dark, which can disorientate. Subtle changes, however, can be used to highlight different functions of buildings, such as a reception desk. Lighting should be positioned so that it does not produce glare from surrounding material or dazzle building users, fittings should be above head height.

"In places the lighting was very poor (this is to create mood) which made it very difficult to spot the numbers for the audio guide, even my sighted guide had problems. Stairs were not sufficiently lit or marked" **Auditor**

Good lighting levels will benefit many visitors with sight problems. When this is felt to conflict with conservation requirements, it might be worth considering raising levels for short periods of time, or using lighting that can be controlled by the visitor. When placing labels and signs, consider lighting levels and try to avoid situations where the label will fall within the reader's shadow.

Building design

This guide does not aim to be a comprehensive examination of building design. However the following overview may be relevant for some organisations:

- It is easier to form a mental picture of an environment if it is simple and logical in its **layout**. Common problems in layouts are confusing corridors, obstructions in circulation routes or hazards such as the underside of staircases which people can walk into.
- When **decorative finish** is used well it can highlight features and shapes aiding blind and partially sighted people to orientate and navigate within it. Using different wall and floor finishes can aid mobility by identifying different areas and uses. Tactile surfaces with specially designed profiles can give distinct messages, such as hazard ahead.
- **Entrances** should be clearly sign-posted, illuminated, sheltered from the prevailing wind and easily distinguishable from the façade. An adjacent side hung or sliding door must supplement any revolving doors.
- **Reception areas** should be located in a quiet part of the building near the main accessible entrance, providing a good environment for verbal communication. The reception desk should be provided at two heights with overall good tonal contrast and should be fitted with an induction loop and mini-com and text phones.
- **Stairs and lifts** need to be examined for their accessibility. Tactile warning surfaces to define an area of landing at the top and bottom of each flight, whilst step nosings should be highlighted to contrast in colour and tone with the

tread and riser. In addition to having appropriate space requirements, lifts need to have audible announcements for more than 2 floors, whilst call buttons need to be tactile.

- Accessible **toilets** are used not only by wheelchair users but by an extremely wide range of disabled people who should not have to travel further or make more effort than other users. Toilets should be located on accessible routes and be clearly signed.
- It is important that you also develop a **fire egress** policy. For staff, a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) can be written and rehearsed in consultation, but for visitors hypothetical plans will need to be developed for different types of disabilities with the fire officer and local access groups.

In the Resource survey of provision, only seven per cent of museums use colour coding to indicate movement between areas.

Information on physical layout

There are two basic ways of providing information about the layout of your venue to any visitor, whether they have sight problems or not:

- static, in-situ maps or plans
- portable, hand-held maps or plans.

Static, in-situ maps and plans

The information given on static, in-situ maps and plans needs to be very simple and straightforward as people need to remember information once they have walked away from the map or plan. The main benefits of large static maps or plans are that they give a good overview of a venue along with simple orientation information, which is of particular benefit to people who have sight problems.

Very special consideration has to be given as to the siting of these static maps or plans. They must be located at a suitable height to give accessibility to people in wheelchairs and people with sight problems, and must be positioned where they can be read in comfort, for example not in the middle of a busy entrance.

Static maps and plans should be inclusive in their design, enabling as many different people to read them as possible and preventing the necessity to have more than one map, for example RNIB has been developing a new inclusive design concept called the "Map for All". This combines visual and tactile elements by using good colour contrasts, different textures along with braille and print text which is also raised, enabling the map or plan to be read by sight, by touch or by sight and touch combined.

Portable, hand-held maps and plans

The information given in portable maps and plans can be much more detailed than on a static map or plan as they can be referred to constantly. However, a mechanism is needed to get them into the hands of visitors, consequently, they may not be suitable at unstaffed sites.

The ideal would be to provide both static and portable maps and plans so that the visitor can start with the static version to get a general understanding of the whole venue and then refer to a hand-held version to get further information. If this is not possible, then a decision must be made based on what is most useful at a specific venue. Overall, hand-held maps and plans usually come out on top because of the level of information they can convey.

A quarter of the venues surveyed for the Talking Images project have a tactile map for blind visitors; less than 10 per cent have a large print map for partially sighted people.

Maps and plans in accessible formats

Maps and plans can be produced in a number of ways:

- tactile format with braille labelling
- tactile format with audio description
- audio description alone
- large print.

Not all people will find maps and plans easy to use. Therefore, the way they are conceived, designed and produced is extremely important to ensure the best results possible.

The inclusive approach to maximise usage, keeps costs down and to try and eliminate the need to identify people with special reading needs. For example a large print venue plan could be used by both sighted and partially sighted visitors.

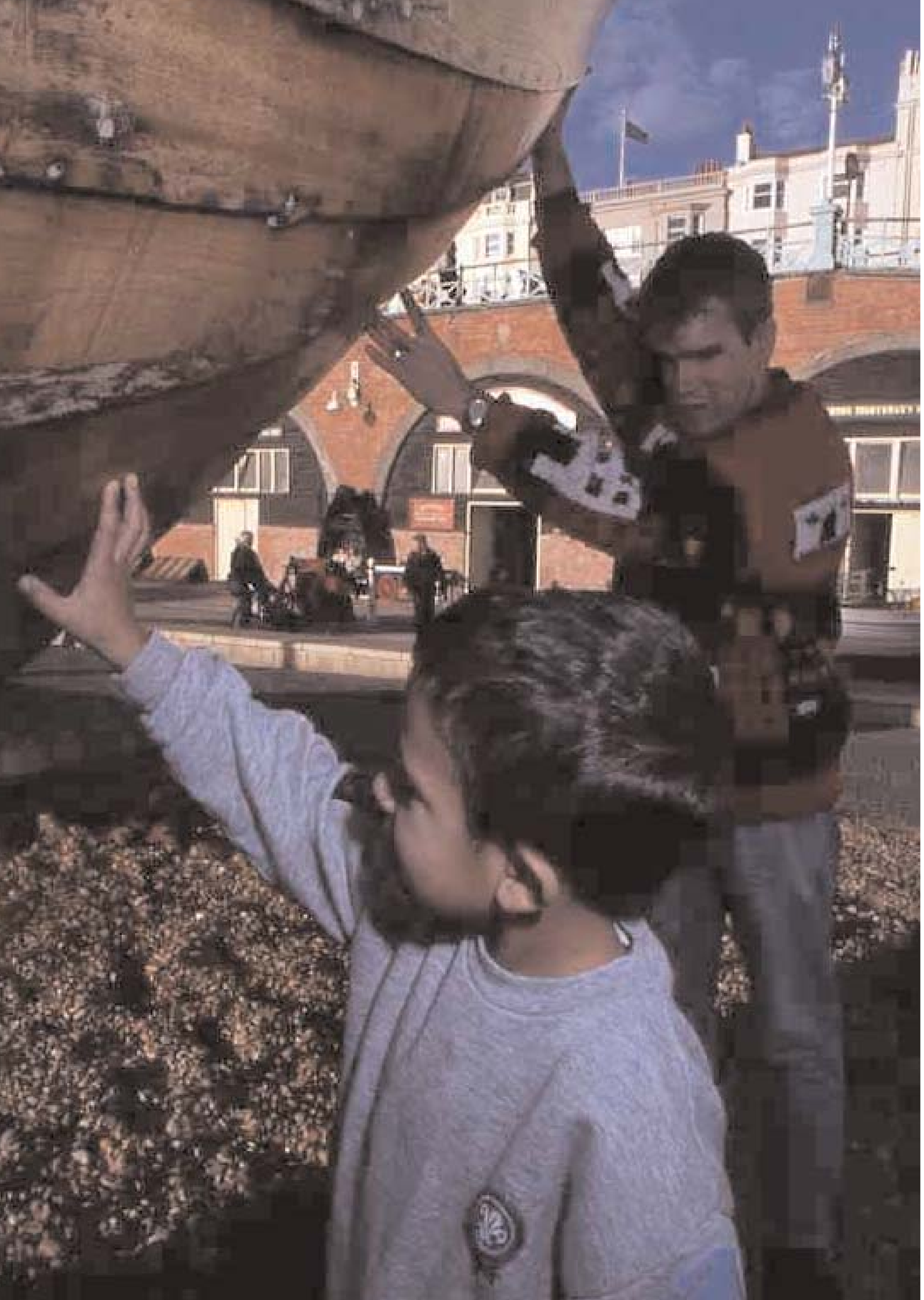
Contact the National Centre for Tactile Diagrams to discuss tactile maps: www.nctd.org.uk

More information about the **Map for All** concept and hand-held maps is available from RNIB.

In summary

Ensure that people with sight problems receive the best welcome possible at your venue by:

- developing a programme of visual awareness training for all staff
- ensuring that your premises are welcoming to blind and partially sighted people
- providing information on physical layout to ensure that people can visit your venue independently.



9. In summary: developing services

> "My dream in terms of accessibility would be you turn up, unannounced, and there is somebody there who could show you around. Then, there would be the option of an audio guide that would have a description of every object in the whole place. The person who guided you round would know, and be enthusiastic about, the venue and its background, and they would be interested and willing to answer your questions." **Auditor**

There are many blind and partially sighted people who enjoy visiting museums, galleries and heritage sites. The Talking Images project aims to raise the standards of access to museums, galleries and heritage venues for blind and partially sighted people, and to positively influence the practices of all key stakeholders.

It is hoped that this guide will help those who work in the sector to enable visitors with sight problems, current and potential, to access as wide a range of collections and historic environments as possible, with as much independence as possible.

This may take some years to achieve. The ideas and resources presented in this guide are designed to support venues, and the organisations they work with, in achieving this aim. Some of the ideas are low cost; others require sustainable resources.

The following actions should help you consolidate and further improve access for blind and partially sighted visitors.

- Develop a disability action plan that mentions how you will meet the needs of blind and partially sighted people.
- Obtain endorsement at a senior and Board/Trustee level for this plan, communicate it to all staff and regularly monitor progress.
- Consult and ensure that time and resources are available for well-planned consultation. Consultation will be beneficial in helping you promote your work and create local links.
- Promote services to existing and potential visitors.
- Evaluate services in collaboration with blind and partially sighted people.
- Network and discuss ideas with colleagues, local organisations and organisations such as MAGDA.

RNIB, along with many of the organisations mentioned in this guide, is willing to discuss ideas and projects, and to provide advice on the issues contained in this guide.

10. Further information

Publications referenced in this guide

Access Prohibited? Information for designers of public access terminals, Dr John Gill (2000)
Available online: www.tiresias.org

A Guide to Inclusive Design, Disability Right Commission (2002)
Available on the Disability Rights Commission website: www.drc.org.uk

Art Beyond Sight: a resource guide to arts, creativity and visual impairment, Art Education for the Blind and American Foundation for the Blind (2003)
Available from the RNIB Research Library: 020 7388 1266

Code of Practice: Rights of Access – goods, facilities, services and premises, Disability Rights Commission (2002)
Available from HMSO: 0870 600 5522 or online at: www.drc.org.uk

Leisure and the DDA, RNIB/ILAM (2000)
Available from RNIB: 0845 702 3153

Magical Mystery Tour, University of Bristol Disability Unit (1999)
Available from University of Bristol Disability Unit: contact Paul Sullivan paul.sullivan@bristol.ac.uk

Partnerships for learning: a guide to evaluating arts education projects, Felicity Woolf, Arts Council England
Available on the Arts Council England website: www.artscouncil.org.uk

Painting from a New Perspective, RNIB (2001)
Available from RNIB: 0845 702 3153

See it Right pack, RNIB (2001)
Available from RNIB: 0845 702 3153

Sign Design Guide, Sign Design Society, JMU Access Partnership (2000)
Available from RNIB: 0845 702 3153

Survey of provision for disabled users of museums, archives and libraries, Resource (2001)
Available on the Resource website: www.resource.gov.uk

Talking Images Research. Museums, galleries and heritage sites: improving access for blind and partially sighted people, RNIB and Vocaleyes (2003)
Available from RNIB: 0845 702 3153

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)
Available online at: www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT

What Colour is the Wind: insight into art and visual impairment, National Society for Education in Art and Design (1992)
Out of print but available in the RNIB research library: 020 7388 1266

Contacts

Contact details are correct at time of going to press and are not exhaustive.

Partner organisations

Vocaleyes
(Nationwide audio description producers)
25 Short Street
London SE1 8LJ
Telephone 020 7261 9199
www.vocaleyes.co.uk

Royal National Institute of the Blind
105 Judd Street
London WC1H 9NE
Telephone 020 7388 1266
Contact: Talking Images Arts and Heritage Officer

Contact for RNIB products, publications and factsheets:

RNIB Customer Services
PO Box 173
Peterborough PE2 6WS
Telephone 0845 702 3153
Minicom 0845 58 56 91
Email: UK customers – CServices@rnib.org.uk
Overseas customers – exports@rnib.org.uk

Funders and advisors

Arts Council England
14 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 3NQ
Telephone 020 7333 0100
Textphone 020 7973 6564
www.artscouncil.org.uk

Cadw – Welsh Historic Monuments
National Assembly for Wales
Cathays Park
Cardiff CF10 3NQ
Telephone 029 2050 0200
www.cadw.wales.gov.uk

Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH
Telephone 020 7211 6200
Email: enquiries@culture.gov.uk
www.culture.gov.uk

English Heritage
Customer Services Department
PO Box 569
Swindon SN2 2YP
Telephone 0870 333 1181
www.english-heritage.org.uk

Historic Scotland
Longmore House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh EH9 1SH
Telephone 0131 668 8600
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Museums & Galleries Disability Association (MAGDA)
Guy Purdey, (Chair)
c/o South East Museum Library and Archive Council
Kent and Medway Office
Garden Room
Historic Dockyard
Chatham
Kent ME4 4TE
Telephone 01634 40 50 31
www.magda.org.uk

Resource
16 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AA
Telephone 020 7273 1444
www.resource.gov.uk

Other charities and organisations

Action for Blind People
14-16 Verney Road
London SE16 3DZ
Telephone 020 7635 4800
www.afbp.org

Audio Description Association
Adrienne Pye, Membership Secretary
c/o Arts Marketing Hampshire
Mottisfont Court
Tower Street
Winchester SO23 8ND
Telephone 01962 84 69 60

Audio Description Association (Scotland)
Caroline Brophy, Chair
c/o Edinbrugh Festival Theatre
13/29 Nicolson Street
Edinburgh EH8 9FT
Telephone 0131 529 6000

Disability Rights Commission
DRC Helpline
FREEPOST
MID02164
Stratford upon Avon CV37 9BR
Telephone 08457 622 633
Textphone 08457 622 644
www.drc.org.uk

The Group for Education in Museums
Primrose House
193 Gillingham Road
Gillingham
Kent ME7 4EP
Telephone 01634 31 24 09
Email: gemso@blueyonder.co.uk
www.gem.org.uk

Guide Dogs for the Blind
Burghfield Common
Reading RG7 3YG
Telephone 0870 600 2323
www.guidedogs.co.uk

Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management
ILAM House
Lower Basildon
Reading RG8 9NE
Telephone 01491 87 48 00
Email: info@ilam.co.uk
www.ilam.co.uk

Museums Association
24 Calvin Street
London E1 6NW
Telephone 020 7426 6970
Email: info@museumsassociation.org
www.museumsassociation.org

National Library for the Blind
Far Cromwell Road
Bredbury
Stockport SK6 2SG
Telephone 0161 355 2000
www.nlbuk.org

The Partially Sighted Society
Queens Road
Doncaster
South Yorks DN1 2NX
Telephone 01302 32 31 32
Email: info@partsight.org.uk

RNID
19-23 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8SL
Telephone 0808 808 0123 (freephone)
Textphone 0808 808 9000 (freephone)
www.rnid.org.uk

Sense
11-13 Clifton Terrace
Finsbury Park
London N4 3SR
Telephone 020 7272 7774
Textphone 020 7272 9648
www.sense.org.uk

International organisations

Art Education for the Blind
The Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens
829 Riverside Avenue
Jacksonville
Florida 32204. USA
Telephone (904) 356 6857
www.arteducation.info

Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission
www.hreoc.gov.au

Audio guide producers

This list of producers is not exhaustive and the inclusion of a producer does not constitute a recommendation from the Talking Images partners.

Acoustiguide

188 Sutton Court Road
London W4 3HR
Telephone 020 8747 3744
Email: info@acoustiguide.co.uk
www.acoustiguide.co.uk

Advanced Thinking Systems
1 South Lane
Clanfield
Waterlooville
Hampshire PO8 0RB
Telephone 023 9259 5000
Email: sales@advances-thinking.co.uk
www.advanced-thinking.co.uk

Antenna Audio
J 307-309 Tower Bridge Business Complex,
100 Clements Road
London SE16 4DG
Telephone 020 7740 1155
Email: info@antennaaudio.com
www.antennaaudio.com

Audio Visual Consultants
107-111 Whitehouse Loan
Edinburgh EH9 1AT
Telephone 0131 447 6211
Email: les.bushby@avc-edinburgh.co.uk
www.avc-edinburgh.co.uk

Black Box AV Ltd
25 Aberafan Road
Baglan Industrial Park
Port Talbot
West Glamorgan SA12 7DJ
Telephone 01639 76 70 07
Email: info@blackboxav.co.uk
www.blackboxav.co.uk

The Dog Rose Trust
83 Greenacres
Ludlow
Shropshire SY8 1LZ
Telephone 01584 87 45 67
Email: information@dogrose-trust.org.uk
www.dogrose-trust.org.uk

Fieldsman Trails
Colin Antwis
Fron Deg
Clayton Road
Mold
Flintshire CH7 1SU UK
Telephone 01352 75 62 02
Email: colin@adams-consulting.co.uk
www.dialspace.dial.pipex.com/town/parade/ni30/fieldsman/

Flexleigh Audio Guides
Scotlands House
Warfield
Bracknell
Berkshire RG42 6AJ
Telephone 020 733 7999
Email: flexli@netcomuk.co.uk
www.flexleigh.co.uk

OPHRYS Systems
BCM Ophrys Systems
London WC1N 3XX
Telephone 0800 028 1308
Email: ophrys@ophrys.net
www.ophrys.net

Producers of tactile images, maps and models

The Dog Rose Trust
83 Greenacres
Ludlow
Shropshire SY8 1LZ
Telephone 01584 87 45 67
Email: information@dogrose-trust.org.uk
www.dogrose-trust.org.uk

Living Paintings Trust
Queen Isabelle House
Unit 8, Kingsclere Park
Kingsclere, Newbury
Berkshire RG20 4SW
Telephone 01635 29 97 71
www.livingpaintings.org

National Centre for Tactile Diagrams
University of Hertfordshire
Hatfield
Herts AL10 9AB
Telephone 01707 28 63 48
Email: info@nctd.org.uk
www.nctd.org.uk

RNIB Tactile Images and plans
Sue King
Customer Liaison Officer
RNIB Peterborough
PO Box 173
Peterborough PE2 6WS
Telephone 01733 37 07 77

Accessible environments

Centre for Accessible Environments
Nutmeg House
60 Gainsford Street
London SE1 2NY
Telephone 020 7357 8182
Minicom 020 7357 8182
www.cae.org.uk

JMU Access Partnership
105 Judd Street
London WC1H 9NE
Telephone 020 7391 2002
Email: info@jmuaccess.org.uk
www.jmuaccess.org.uk

National Register for Access Consultants
www.nrac.org.uk

Accessible information

Confederation of Transcribed Information Services (COTIS)
67 High Street
Tarporley
Cheshire CW6 0DP
Telephone 01829 73 33 51
www.cotis.org.uk

RNIB Transcription Services
105 Judd Street
London WC1H 9NE
Telephone 020 7391 2341

RNIB Web accessibility team
105 Judd Street
London WC1H 9NE
Telephone 020 7388 1266
Email: webaccess@rnib.org.uk

Talking Newspapers Association of the UK
National Recording Centre
Heathefield
East Sussex TN21 8DB
Telephone 01435 86 27 37
www.tnel.co.uk or www.tnauk.org.uk

Inclusive Design

Sensory Design Services
RNIB Peterborough
Bakewell Road
Orton Southgate
Peterborough PE2 6XU
Telephone 01733 37 52 80
Email: sds@rnib.org.uk
www.sds-uk.org