

The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation Access and Education Programme: Phase II Second Year Report: April 2018 – March 2019 Submitted April 2019

Summary

The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation has generously supported an access and education programmes at the British Museum since 2014. In September 2016 the Foundation awarded the Museum a grant of £90,000 over three years to support Phase II of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Access and Education Programme, 2017 to 2020. Leading on from learnings in Year One, in Year Two the programme began to embed the most successful activity elements into the Museum's permanent programming.



A relaxed gallery talk: adults from partner organisations collaborate with artists during an Explore More relaxed workshop, 'Talking Textiles'

This second annual report on the Museum's work with children and adults with learning disabilities and/or autism from 2018 to 2019 reflects on the ongoing offer of activities and workshops across these two strands:

- **The Museum and Me:** In Year Two, this strand considering how best to diversify the Museum's digital and printed resources to build confidence of children with autism and their families when visiting the Museum. For the first time, the Museum and Me strand piloted a volunteer placement for young people with autism within the Museum's Coins and Medals Department.
- **Explore More:** Working with adults with learning difficulties and/or autism, this strand considered how best to embed Year One's trialled activities into the Museum's core provision. Relaxed talks and a participatory event to mark the International Day of Disabled Persons were piloted in collaboration with partners from the Advisory Group, and Autism Awareness training for Museum staff was introduced.

Feedback from participants, families, support workers and Museum colleagues helped to assess both projects' suitability for inclusion in the Museum's core programming. This report provides a summary of achievements and learnings in Year Two and considers how the successes and challenges inherent in both strands will shape activity in the final year.

From April 2018 to March 2019, the programme was managed by Orlagh Muldoon. Orlagh started maternity leave, and so the role of Access & Education Manager will be covered by Holly Wilson from April 2019. Holly comes to the Museum with significant project management expertise and a thorough knowledge of working with adults and children with learning difficulties and autism from her time at Barnet Mencap.

The Museum and Me

Programme Aims and Objectives

In Year One, the Museum developed its Museum and Me activities for school-age children, teachers and support workers. Through consultation with Museum Learning staff in Year Two, it was decided that this strand should focus on enhancing resources specifically for autistic children and their families. It was felt that the Programme has successfully embedded practical activities and resources for SEND schoolchildren, but that the Museum continues to receive requests from families caring for autistic children for quiet gallery spaces and online activities. Drawing on learnings from continued evaluation, an emphasis on sensory experiences has always underpinned the Access and Education Programme, from sight to smell, touch to sound. Leading on from the activities trialled in previous years, in Year Two the Museum and Me's core objective was to plan and begin designing online resources for children with autism and their families. These would be made freely available to all SEND learners visiting the Museum's website before a visit with their school or family.

The success of Year One's digital story - when the British Museum partnered with students in Harrow to produce a film exploring the Museum - was also key to developing the Museum and Me's Year Two goals. Website resources would aim to make spaces and objects in the Museum as welcoming and inclusive as possible to younger people and their families. Working with different departments on design and delivery, this would include an online sensory map, soundscapes of the museum and materials detailing the family back packs' contents.

A volunteer placement for young people with learning disabilities and/or autism was also piloted in this second year (a target audience of 18 to 25). Placing this within the Museum and Me strand allowed the Museum to fully engage with the individual's needs, assess workplace challenges and consider whether this placement could be made permanent long-term.

Project Delivery

In Year Two the Museum began planning and creating an online provision for autistic children and their families, and developed a voluntary curatorial position. Through engaging with autistic children in previous SEND activities, it had become clear to the Learning Team that while the Museum is a stimulating place, that public outings to large busy spaces with autistic children prove challenging, if not overwhelming, obstacles to family enjoyment. The objective was to create accessible, clear resources to help families with additional access requirements visualise the Museum environment and plan before they entered the galleries. These would be offered free to download via the Museum's Access page for families.

As in previous years, this strand was carefully planned by the Access and Education Manager in consultation with the Museum’s wider Learning and Visitor Services teams, and activity was continually evaluated to consider successes and challenges. Using the senses as an overarching theme, the following resources are in the design stage:

- **Sensory Maps:** a map which highlights areas of the Museum which autistic people may find triggering due to light, smell and noise levels, as well as pointing out spaces and times across the Museum which are particularly crowded. It is likely that the final design will utilise colour and simple symbols to identify sensory stimulating areas.
- **Family backpacks imaging:** the Museum currently offers families backpacks full of resources – from activity sheets to quizzes and colouring pencils – which is located at the Families Desk in the Great Court. By uploading photographs of the materials available to the online Access pages, families of autistic children can consider whether this resource is suitable for their child and prepare accordingly.
- **Visual Museum Tours:** a route based on strong visual images will help families familiarise themselves with the Museum’s complicated layout. The tour starts from the moment that families approach the entrances, go through security and access the cloakroom, as well as illustrating where accessible toilets and cafés are located. Families can then decide which quiet gallery route is appropriate for their child(ren).
- **Museum soundscapes:** to help children experience what the Museum will sound like before they enter some of the noisiest, most populated spaces – such as the Great Court – soundscape recordings are being developed by the Digital Team.



Clear visuals: an example of Simon Green’s timetable during his volunteer placement

The Museum also piloted a placement for Young Volunteers with learning disabilities and/or autism. The first placement took place in the Coins and Metals Department from 16 October to 20 November 2018, one day per week over six weeks. Simon Green's family had contacted Tom Hockenhull in the Department (Curator: Modern Money) to express Simon's interest in the history of money. It was decided, through a meeting prior to the placement, that Simon would focus on scanning images of *notgeld*, a type of emergency German banknote dating to the First World War. This required Simon to line the object up on a scanner, obtaining images of both front and back, and then upload images through an automated system and link it to the object's digital database record. In total Simon scanned 300 objects, producing 600 images.

Before starting at the Museum, Simon and his family were consulted to ensure his experience went smoothly. A support worker accompanied Simon every week and the Museum sent Simon a clear visual timetable (pictured on the previous page) demonstrating who and what volunteers could expect to encounter and achieve during their placements.

Project achievements and impact for participants

In Year Two, the Museum and Me strand has succeeded in establishing its key focus for permanent programming going forward: developing provision for autistic children and their families. The Museum and Me has succeeded in engaging both prospective and new audiences who may not traditionally consider visiting a museum environment, and staff from across the organisation. Using the expertise of staff from Visitor Services to create online resources like the sensory map has meant that the Museum can embed access resources and ways of understanding Autistic visitors into the organisation's wider ethos.

The strand also initiated a successful voluntary placement scheme, in consultation with the wider Museum's website, interpretation and curatorial teams. Following the six week voluntary placement, Simon and Tom were asked for their feedback on this trial activity. Both concluded it had gone very successfully:

'I experienced what it's like to have responsibility and to be on time as well I learned about many new things... I intend to open a museum and my perseverance has improved,' Simon Green, volunteer in the Department of Coins and Medals

'[Training the volunteer] takes a little more time, but not more than I was expecting – Simon is very capable and reacquainted himself with the task easily,' Tom Hockenhull, Curator: Modern Money

The Museum's Learning and Volunteers teams are now keen to implement the placement into its wider offer to young adults with learning difficulties requesting experience of working in museums. Following feedback from this first trial, future placements will ensure designated quiet spaces are set aside for volunteers, and will establish face-to-face meetings between the volunteer and their Museum curatorial supervisor before the project starts.

The Museum and Me: Plans for Years Three

The key objective for Year Three of The Museum and Me is to permanently integrate processes and activities trialed in Years One and Two viably into the Museum's programme for autistic children and their families. As well as embedding a regular voluntary opportunity, Museum and Me in Year will aim to:

- Complete and upload online resources for families with children with autism: this will involve Learning and Visitor Service colleagues trialling different design approaches with autistic children and their families, and using front-of-house staff to communicate these new resources.
- Run an early morning breakfast for children with autism and their families, to encourage participants to learn about the collection and give the Access and Education team feedback on the types of resources and support they would require. This would involve collaboration with the wider Learning team, and departments such as Marketing.
- Purchase enabling equipment, such as noise-cancelling headphones, to avoid sensory overload in certain gallery spaces.

Explore More

Programme Aims and Objectives

In Year One, the Explore More strand aimed to heighten the learning and wellbeing of adults with access needs through creative engagement with the Museum's collection. In Year Two, activities sought to broaden this impact through a sustainable public offer, piloting programmes which offer adults with learning disability and/or autism the opportunity to build confidence in this environment. Having already welcomed adults with diverse learning needs from partner organisations into the Museum to advise and trial creative sessions, the key objectives of Explore More in Year Two were now to further develop the Relaxed Gallery Talks, to pilot Autism Awareness training for all Museum staff in partnership with the National Autistic Society and to trial a large event run by disabled artists.



Explore More participants using multisensory tools and instruments to narrate the story of King Solomon during the Museum's PURPLELIGHTUP day on 3 December 2019

Project Delivery: *Explore More*

As in Year One, Explore More was advised and shaped by an advisory panel of 15 adults with learning difficulties and/or autism, representing four London-based organisations (Coral, Action Space, Heart n Soul, The Tower Project and RIX Research and Media). The Panel met twice across 2018-19 to engage with the Programme's objectives and discuss the challenges encountered by disabled people at the Museum. These organisations brought different perspectives to the group, contributing to the direction of Explore More in Year Two:

- **12 April 2018:** the Panel first met with British Museum representatives. Participants met at the Museum to get to know each other and discuss initial ideas. The session involved storytelling and music sessions around the collection themes with artists and breaking into groups to evaluate previous activities and plan future events.
- **12 September 2018:** in this second Panel day, the group focussed on planning for the participatory event (see below) on 3 December. The session followed a similar structure to the previous Panel.

Attendees and their support workers were consulted over the programme's structure ahead of time, including information on passing through Museum security, disabled access parking and lift locations to ensure the group felt comfortable from the moment they entered the Museum.

As a result of these discussions, creative solutions were piloted and evaluated. The key outputs were 15 relaxed gallery talks, a 'PURPLE LIGHT UP' large participatory event and the Understanding Autism training for staff. PURPLE LIGHT UP is a global movement designed to encourage institutions to talk about disability, held on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December) each year.

For each element, the Museum worked with the London-based partners who attended the advisory panel, and advertised both within the community groups and externally using social media. The relaxed gallery talks ran every second month, from May 2018 to January 2019, lasting for one hour each:

- **May 2018:** Three relaxed gallery talks based in the Rome and Greece galleries and including sessions on music, storytelling and drawing.
- **July 2018:** Three relaxed gallery talks exploring themes in the newly-reopened Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South East Asia. These included an interactive workshop on Indian music (see above images), drawing sculptures from Sarnath and the narratives of travelling storytellers from Bengal.
- **September 2018:** Three relaxed gallery talks based in the Korean galleries, focussing the Four Heavenly Kings stories and the techniques of ink painting. A particular highlight was the collaboration between Curator Eleanor Hyun and musician Luke Crookes. Eleanor and Luke used sections of music to explore objects within the Sarangbang (a traditional Korean house), whilst participants responded with a collated sounds poem.

- **November 2018:** Three relaxed gallery talks based in the Museum's Enlightenment Gallery. Themes ranged from a session on The Natural World, exploring objects through sound in a Rhyme and Reason workshop, and a relaxed storytelling session on the history of Sir Hans Sloane and The King's Library.
- **January 2019:** Three relaxed gallery talks focussed on themes related to the Anglo-Saxon and Viking Gallery. Activities included sketching treasure and quiet storytelling.



Sitar sounds: an Explore More relaxed gallery session in the newly-opened Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia, July 2018

The Museum's inaugural PURPLE LIGHT UP day on 3 December 2018 was developed and facilitated by disabled artists from the Wolfson Project Advisory Panel. A series of events took place across in the Great Court between 11am and 1pm, and engaged with 225 participants overall, from families, schoolchildren, young people and adults over 24:

- **'Create' in the Great Court:** Artist Thompson Hall from Action Space - a key member of the Advisory Panel since Year One - used his artwork to engage visitors. Participants were asked to respond creatively to two statements: what they thought of when they considered '21st Century Britain' and 'Accessibility for Disabilities'.
- **'Sensory Boxes' in the Enlightenment Gallery:** Run by participants from Reading University and RIX Research and Media, boxes filled with specially-selected handling objects representing areas of the collection were placed in the Enlightenment Gallery.
- **'Storytelling' in the Islamic World Galleries:** Run by the Tower Project, this group worked closely with the Access and Education Programme Manager and storyteller Olivia Armstrong to co-develop a story about King Solomon. Using multisensory approaches to communicate elements of the story to the public in the gallery, this was the first time participants from the Tower Project had delivered a storytelling session.

- **'Dance' in the Japanese Galleries:** Run by Corali, a leader in dance created by artists with learning disabilities, this session developed and performed a dance piece - in collaboration with musician Luke Crookes - in response to objects in the Japanese Galleries. Corali artists collaborated with the audience to explore why they had chosen the poses they did and which objects each pose related to.



The British Museum's first PURPLELIGHTUP day. L-r (clockwise): Thompson Hall in front of his statement artwork in the Great Court; participants narrate the story of King Solomon in the Islamic Galleries; children produce collages helped by Explore More partners; sensory boxes in the Enlightenment Gallery.

Each session was advertised through the Museum's networks with partner organisations and publically via the website, social media and 'What's On' printed brochures.

The final element of Explore More was trialling a training session for Museum staff, 'Understanding autism'. Developed in collaboration with the National Autistic Society, the course aimed to provide Museum staff – particularly those who may come into contact with visitors or colleagues with autism - with current thinking around autism and discuss basic strategies for best practice in the workplace. A pilot half-day training session ran on 12 March 2018; after the success of this pilot training, two further sessions were held in October 2018 and January 2019.

Explore More participant breakdown, by session:

Participants (Year Two - 01.04.18 – 31.03.19)	
Session	Approximate number of attendees (participants, not including support workers and associated staff)
April 2018 - Advisory Panel	20 participants
September 2018 – Advisory Panel	20
May 2018 - 3 Relaxed Gallery Talks	75
July 2018 - 3 Relaxed Gallery Talks	75
September 2018 - 3 Relaxed Gallery Talks	75
October – November 2018 - Volunteer Placement in Coins and Medals Dept.	1
November 2018 - 3 Relaxed Gallery Talks	75
December 2019 - PURPLELIGHTUP event	225
January 2019 - 3 x Relaxed Gallery Talks	48
March 2018 – January 2019 – 3 'Understanding Autism' training sessions	37
Total participants	651

Project Achievements and impact for participants

The British Museum was successful in piloting and delivering a large number of evaluation sessions, relaxed activities and training initiatives including a major participatory event in Year Two of Explore More. Given the popularity of these - in particular, the PURPLE LIGHT UP day - it is likely that some elements will be embedded permanently into the Museum's programme.



An example of how social media was effectively used by the Explore More partners for the PURPLE LIGHT UP day on 3 December 2018

Feedback was collected following each activity – including social media interaction - and was both positive and constructive. Analysis from Advisory Panel participants of how they engage with the museum, and the success of activities in Year One, helped shape how the Year Two Relaxed Gallery Talks were structured:

“People who haven’t visited before feel a combination of feelings - excited, worried, anxious and sometimes butterflies as it’s a big building. The museum can be very echoey and frightening; the Great Court bright and white,” Anonymous evaluation feedback, Advisory Panel, 12 April 2018



Participants respond to a ‘Create’ activity on PURPLELIGHTUP day – making speech bubbles that reflect their thoughts on ‘21st Century Britain’ and ‘Accessibility for Disabilities’

Following one of the Relaxed Gallery Talks structured around Korean music, one of the Museum’s curators taking part emphasised:

“...how great I thought the talk went and what a wonderful programme this is... the entire programme was interactive and had level of creativity that I would not have been able to conjure up on my own. I was so very glad to have the opportunity to participate in this programme and if asked again would agree without any hesitation”, Eleanor Hyun, Curator: Korean Collections, British Museum

The PURPLELIGHTUP event encouraged both those who had purposely signed up to celebrate International Day of Persons with Disabilities at the Museum, and interested members of the public, to engage with the creative activities. The event therefore attracted useful feedback:

“I enjoyed, and was surprised by, the activity today. I feel that accessibility is a hot button issue in Britain at the moment and I feel really pleased to take part in a movement that is trying to increase accessibility,” Sarah, Surrey

This emphasis on including audiences and staff members who make not ordinarily have regular contact or training in interaction with those with learning disabilities fed across to the evaluation for the ‘Understanding autism’ training course. Feedback from these staff participants included:

“As a departmental volunteer coordinator it will help me to adapt my own management skills, to educate colleagues, and to adapt the physical surroundings so that we are better equipped to take on people who are autistic for work experience placements,” Curatorial staff member, British Museum