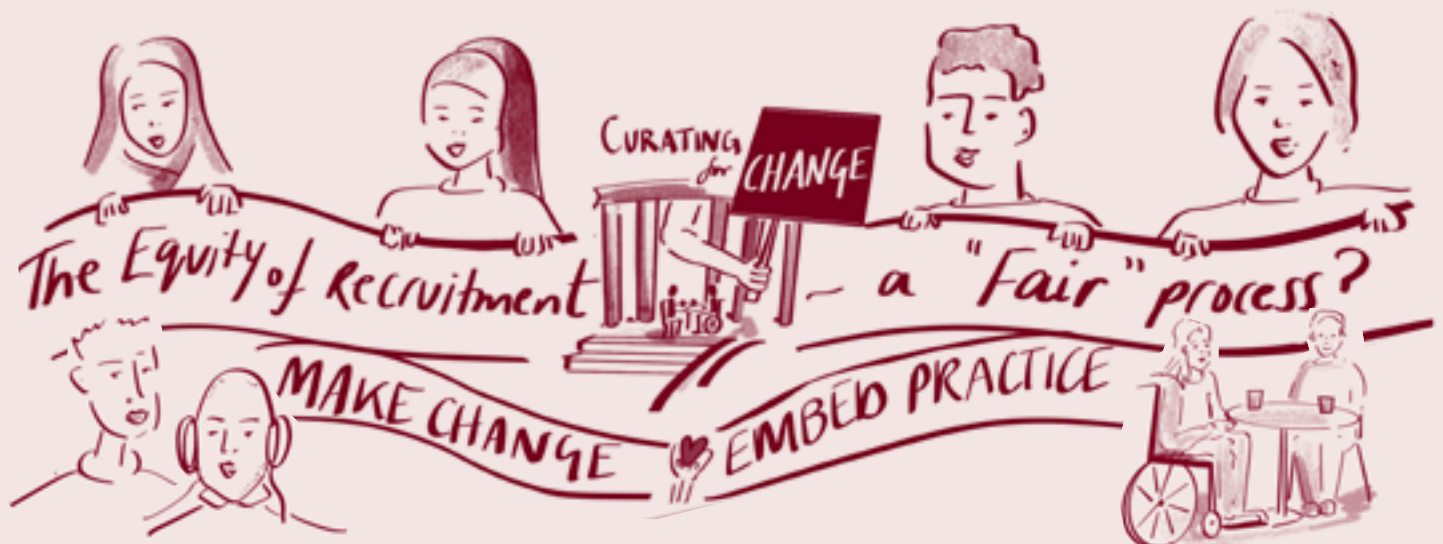




We Are Not All The Same

Guidance, reflections and actions
to encourage more equitable
recruitment practices.



Based on research and experience
from the Curating for Change
Programme, with evidence
gathered from D/deaf, disabled and
neurodivergent people, museum staff
and wider sector organisations.

Autumn 2022

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Art Fund_



Contents

3 Foreword

Practical Steps

- 5 • Advertising and pre-application materials
 - 7 • The application process
 - 8 • Developing A Person Specification
 - 10 • Assessing Applications
 - 11 • The interview process
-

13 The Results

14 Call to Action

21 With Thanks



Foreword

Esther Fox

Why do we even need to rethink recruitment? Hasn't there already been a lot of work done around equal opportunities, and with schemes like disability confident, are we not giving disabled people a fair chance and perhaps, even more favourable odds? If that is the case, why isn't it working? And it clearly isn't working. Arts Council England statistics show that only about 6% of those working in the arts are disabled, despite forming 21% of the working age population. (February 2020)

Treating everyone the same from the outset is often the key concern for HR departments and those who are recruiting to roles, who may believe this is the fairest most equitable thing to do. Unfortunately, these well-meaning intentions miss the point of equality. That you may have to treat people differently in order for them to compete equally. This is recognised in employment law and often falls under what is termed "reasonable adjustments". A 'reasonable adjustment' is a change that must be made to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to:

- an employee's disability when doing their job
- a job applicant's disability when applying for a job

However, the word 'reasonable' always implies a degree of relativity, so who decides what is reasonable? Also, the very premise of 'reasonable adjustments' places the onus of responsibility on the



disabled candidate to inform employers and ask for adjustments. This immediately creates an unequal scenario between candidates who have to ask for "different treatment" in order to compete equally, which may unconsciously or consciously, affect the way employers treat candidates, even before they get as far as interview.

All our suggestions in this report relate to fair and equitable recruitment practices and could be classed as making 'reasonable adjustments'. However, what we are proposing is a different approach and ask employers to re-consider treating everyone in a "one size fits all" approach, until a candidate expresses that this is inaccessible to them. Instead, we ask recruiters to consider giving several options for candidates from the





outset, recognising that everyone is different and may require a variety of methods to be able to give the best rendition of themselves. Whether these different options relate to the application process itself, or in the way interviews are conducted.

Change is possible, and things don't always have to be done the same way. We saw the need for responsive, flexible and innovative approaches during the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 was hugely devastating for disabled people, but in contrast, it also offered a moment of potential change. The invisibility and isolation that disabled people had been experiencing for years was suddenly a common experience for all. There were big shifts in working cultures, previously when working from home was not an option, it was now necessary for all who could, to do so. This was also the case in terms of online interviews. Requests for reasonable adjustments that disabled

people had been making for years, were now becoming the norm and suddenly no longer out of bounds or stigmatised. Now felt like a moment where anything was possible. It is this flexibility and ability to think differently that keeps cultural organisations vibrant and viable. This guidance includes practical approaches and is based on research undertaken by the Accentuate programme during the development phase of [Curating for Change](#).¹ It also is informed by the recruitment process employed by Curating for Change with 20 Museum partners from February – June 2022 and from our Sector Forum, '[The Equity of Recruitment: A Fair Process?](#)' which took place in October 2022.²

We believe the underrepresentation of D/ deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people in our museums isn't just a problem for disabled people, but for the museum and heritage sector as a whole. This hinders it from telling authentic disability stories with insights from the inside. It also makes it more difficult for museums – even if committed to access – to properly understand practical barriers for its visitors. This is why we need to tackle the recruitment problem, to enable a more diverse work force, essential for museums to remain relevant for themselves and their communities.

- 1 <https://screensouth.org/events/curating-for-change-report-launched-disabled-people-leading-in-museums>
- 2 <https://screensouth.org/events/the-equity-of-recruitment-a-fair-process-a-curating-for-change-sector-forum>



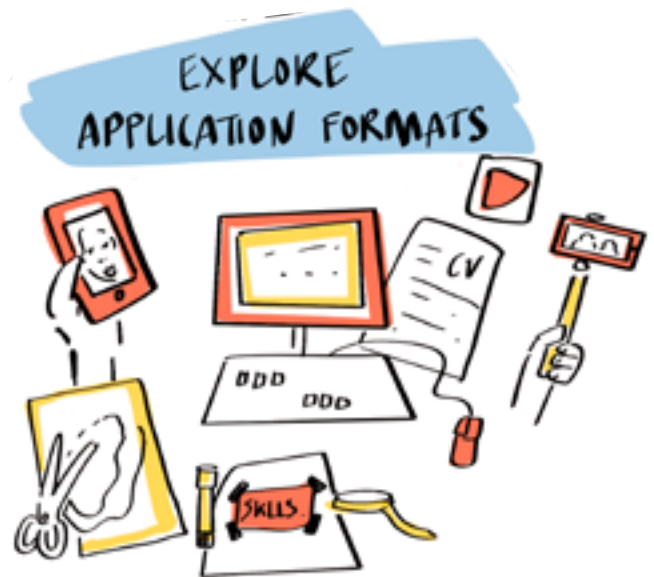
Practical Steps Advertising and Pre-Application Materials

Before a candidate will even make an application to an employer, there are a number of barriers that may determine whether or not they decide, or are able, to apply. During our consultation period with D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people we discovered that only providing written applications could be a barrier, specifically if people had to navigate complex online portals. Completing these forms can also be incredibly tiring, particularly when applicants are making multiple applications.

“When you do have limited energy, you do not necessarily want to be filling out the identical form every single time. Can we not just upload our CV and covering letter?”

Curating for Change workshop participant, 2021.

Participants in our consultation workshops noted that they appreciated being given information about the practical elements of the role (e.g. working hours, workspace, etc.), the organisation and its working culture in the recruitment materials, allowing them to understand whether the position is a good fit for them before they go through the lengthy process of making an application.



What we did

- Created short films about the project, what was involved and what we were looking for
- Each host museum also created a short film introducing their teams and their museum collections
- Produced Easy Read information about the roles and how to apply
- Produced British Sign Language (BSL) versions of all written material
- All films were BSL interpreted and had subtitles





Andrew Permain, Curating for Change Trainee, Imperial War Museums, Duxford explained the value of the films:

“The videos of the museums were really helpful for me, first of all it gave me an insight into what the museum was, and possibly where I would be working and an idea of the collection. Then I could tailor my application...a bit more on those grounds. Secondly, it was important for the interview process because I wasn’t going into a room with a group of people I’d never seen before. I knew what they looked like, had an idea of what they sounded like, so when I went to the interview I felt more relaxed. Because I felt like I’d already met these people. So, it is one less thing to worry about and one less thing for my brain to focus on.”

Curating for Change Recruitment Online Forum, October 2022.

Kate Parry, Head of Partnership, Cumbria Museum Consortium described her concerns about making a film about their museums. For them there were particular challenges of working in a rural setting across multiple sites, and she was concerned about how to bring everyone together in a short timeframe to make the film, so opted to make her film via zoom interviews.

“You could really over think this, and you need to just sit down and do it. Don’t over complicate it, these days it is quite easy to do.”

Kate Parry



Practical Steps

The Application Process

Based on consultation we undertook with disabled people during our development phase of the Curating for Change programme we heard that people found standardised processes often inaccessible to them. They were keen to be offered a range of options to be able to make an application that would best show off their particular skills.

What we did

We offered a range of application options:

- A written application of up to 1000 words
- A film of up to 7 mins length
- A visual collage, 1 collage per question (4 in total)
- An audio recording of up to 7 mins length

“The video application allowed me to show how I’m different, what I can offer, and the value I can offer to the sector. My life experience doesn’t look good on paper, that’s a fact. If it was a paper application I probably wouldn’t be here today.”

Karl Mercer, Curating for Change Trainee Colchester and Ipswich Museums. Curating for Change Recruitment Online Forum, October 2022.

“Hearing him talk made me want to see him more than the paper candidates.”

Natasha Podro, Interpretation and Digital Content Manager, Ashmolean Museum. Curating for Change Recruitment Online Forum, October 2022.

“I didn’t know what a difference it (film) would make, I actually found it made the application process much easier. So, I learnt what a valuable tool that was. I think it should be incorporated into part of the application process...It gets across more than the information they are talking about, you can see if somebody is used to handling objects, talk engagingly, are passionate.”

Zena McGreevy, Exhibitions and Special Projects Officer, Pitt Rivers Museum. Curating for Change Recruitment Online Forum, October 2022.

Although we are advocating for welcoming video applications, this is not at the expense of written applications as an option, as some candidates may not feel comfortable on camera and will prefer to apply in writing.



Practical Steps Developing a Person Specification

What we did

We did not ask for any specific qualifications or skills that might be excluding for disabled people, such as an ability to climb ladders, lift heavy objects, have good manual dexterity or the ability to drive. Instead, we worked with the museum and successful candidate to identify any access barriers that might exist that might affect their ability to do the job to the best of their ability, and supported them to get appropriate equipment or put in place working practices that would enable them to fully participate.



“Due to chronic illness (as well as financial issues), I am not able to apply for and complete a postgraduate degree in Archives, Library Studies, or Museum Studies. Applying for such a program has been my plan for several years, but due to worsening chronic illness and the ensuing need to put my health first, I have had to put those plans aside.”

Curating for Change survey respondent, 2021.





“If you want to be a gallery assistant or something like that, pretty much all of those jobs that I have looked at in the description says that you have to be able to stand for eight hours straight. Even if you want to start at that level, it is very difficult for people with mobility issues or chronic illnesses to even get in at that level. Because your stamina is prized as one of your skills or abilities when going for those kinds of jobs.”

Curating for Change workshop participant, 2021.

“Being somebody who cannot drive because of my disability. Something that I would really like to see change is organisations understanding of access to work. Access to work can fund your mobility... Organisations do not really seem to understand that. One thing that really bothers me is because I enjoy a lot of co-production and community engagement when you are specifically saying that you need a driver. You are cutting out a large part of the disabled community sometimes.”

Curating for Change workshop participant, 2021.



Practical Steps

Assessing Applications

What we did

We asked four specific questions;

1. Which museum are you applying to and why?
2. How do you meet the person specification? (which we provided)
3. What is your favourite object or item in a museum collection and why?
4. Why is it important to have better representation of D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people in Museums?

We marked all applications against how well candidates had responded to the questions, regardless of whether they had responded via film, written application or collage. We did not have a minimum score for each criteria, so it was possible for a candidate to score not so highly in one area, but much better in another, and therefore get through to interview rather than being dismissed immediately if one area was weaker.



Practical Steps

The Interview Process



What we did

In advance of the interview we asked if anyone had any access requirements that they might need support with, and gave examples of the sort of support we could offer, such as BSL interpretation or someone to meet and guide someone to the interview location. Probably the most significant, but small offer, was providing all candidates with interview questions one week in advance of the interview.

“Trying to prepare for an interview when I didn’t know the questions, sometimes I would produce pages of possible questions I could get. Then I’ve spent days trying to read through them and remember every aspect of them. Then I don’t get asked them, but I get questions I hadn’t thought of then it throws me...(with questions in advance) I can get my best answers across. I know what I’m wanting to do, what I’m wanting to say. And it’s another thing to make me feel comfortable, one less thing to think about...I can then get the passion for the role across more easily, because I have written passionately about it”

Andrew Permain, Curating for Change Trainee, Imperial War Museums Duxford.
Curating for Change Recruitment Online Forum, October 2022.



“In recruitment some adjustments made for individuals may in fact be useful for many more people that have not asked for them, may not be aware they could ask for them, and indeed would benefit from them as well. So, rather than wait for people to ask, why not simply give them without waiting to be asked... We really noticed a difference. Everyone appeared more relaxed and had more to say. We still got a sense of who the better candidates were, it was clear that there was a more level playing field... I don't think giving questions in advance gives non-neurodivergent people or people who don't need that access adjustment any superpowers that pulls the wool over your eyes”

Matthew Cock, CEO, VocalEyes.
Curating for Change Recruitment
Online Forum, October 2022.

Another simple yet important consideration for interview is being very clear about who will be on the panel and where the interview will take place. If possible, allocate resources to enable someone to greet candidates and put them at ease before going into the interview room. We also offered the option of online as well as in person interviews. This was a common occurrence during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, but has become less common since restrictions have been lifted.

We believe it's important to offer a remote option as disabled people particularly might find travelling more challenging, disadvantaging them from the beginning. Also, as health conditions can fluctuate, someone might not be having a good day and travelling to get to interview might amplify pain or low energy levels, again meaning the candidate may not be able to give the best rendition of themselves at interview.

“It has annoyed me quite a lot that now all the (job) interviews have been done over the phone with Covid, on Zoom, or Skype. Before that, there was that ‘ableism’ as some people call it, in that interviews over the phone are not good enough. Just a month or two later after that happened, everything was done over the phone and I lost an opportunity just because that employer didn't understand that I didn't want to be in bed for three days because of the sensory and motor issues of doing a six hour train ride!”

Curating for Change workshop
participant 2021.



The Results



Before we launched Curating for Change we were told by many Museum Partners that they rarely received applications from D/ deaf, disabled or neurodivergent candidates.

“this is demonstrating what good practice looks like”

comment from Curating for Change candidate, 2022.

Our Experience

- We received 89 applications from D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent candidates for just 8 Fellowships. Many of these applications were extremely strong and the positions could have been filled many times over.
- We conducted 40 Fellowship interviews in partnership with host Museums
- We received 79 applications from D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent candidates for just 8 Traineeships. Again, the applications were of an extremely high standard and there was a real challenge turning strong candidates down.
- We conducted 38 Traineeship interviews in partnership with host Museums

“this was the first application that I have found to be truly accessible”

comment from Curating for Change candidate, 2022.

“I’ve never felt more comfortable or understood during an interview process.”

comment from Curating for Change candidate, 2022.



Call To Action

We have shown what is possible through our recruitment processes for Curating for Change, but there are still a number of institutional, structural and wider external barriers that we recognise might mean that the process of change within museums is indeed, a process.

We asked delegates at our recent recruitment forum what they felt needed to change within their organisations. We also asked our colleagues in the sector why and what needs to happen. Together, supporting each other and by taking steps however small, change is possible and necessary. However, steps do need to be taken, not just pledged, for the longstanding issue of underrepresentation of D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people to be addressed.

Our Pledges and Actions

- Go beyond enacting legislation
- Work out what your script is
- Tell the stories. ALL stories
- Signpost to resources
- What is your sphere of influence?
- What will make this stick?

Live illustration by Esther Springell @EstherSketches

Log... Arts Council... A... Arts Council... Art Fund... Heritage Fund



What in your opinion is required to make change in your organisation?

Highlights from Google Jamboard created on 13th October 2022 at the Curating for Change online forum 'The Equity of Recruitment: A Fair Process?'

Changes that are backed by our centralised HR and recruitment systems - any change has to be for the whole organisation and there is a lot of resistance

Better understanding of the impact on people - why it is important for people to have different recruitment practices on a human level. Would help to address broader culture issues

Recognition that a museum may need a different approach to the rest of the organisation (museum is only one part)

Sense of urgency and accountability

This exactly. Some advocacy notes which could be used with our HR teams would be really useful, and how practices could be incorporated within online recruitment system

Support from senior management. Trying a new approach to recruitment for a traineeship has been welcomed internally & externally, and hopefully should be rolled out for all future

If we remove any kind of qualification from job specs, do we risk taking on employees who may then become overwhelmed and feel out of their depth - how can we support this?

Resources to make the change

Money for travel/other interview expenses

Improve pay scales. Cost of living is higher for disabled people

Training and advocacy for equitable recruitment practice.

Recruitment of trustees needs to be more equitable and diverse to start with!

Provide part time roles and at higher levels





“Getting inclusive recruitment practice right is essential to ensuring deaf, disabled, neurodiverse and learning disabled people take their rightful place in the creative workforce. Curating for Change has embarked on this vital task in the museum sector creating job opportunities in our major cultural institutions and ensuring the next generation of disabled talent don’t keep experiencing the same ableist barriers.”

Andrew Miller MBE, Disability Champion and Cultural Commentator.

“As an HR person it is interesting to hear that HR is seen as a barrier to changing systems. Let your HR person know your views, wish to change practice, and express this as a business need that is vital in terms of your strategic plan and operational objectives. Offer to work with them to be a small pebble pilot testing that best practice that will ripple right across the organisation.”

Participant at The Equity of Recruitment sector forum October 2022





“If you do any hiring you are in the position to effect these changes and it is your responsibility to do so. If you aren’t, it doesn’t mean you have no power, instead you can take a critical eye of your own organisation and ask questions internally, make suggestions for change using the plethora of evidence from the many published resources. And embed good practice in your own mind for when you are in a position to make those choices for yourself. What equality means for me, is that one day everyone will be taking action to ensure the sector is more equitable and Fair Museum Jobs won’t need to exist.”

Louise McAward-White, Co-Founder, Fair Museum Jobs.

“To remain relevant museums must attract the best talent. We need to create the conditions for success, where everyone can see themselves within the existing workforce; see stories and collections shared that are meaningful and represent their experience. Inclusive recruitment is the key, by rethinking our practices everyone is better placed to perform, realising both their and the sector’s potential.”







Tamsin Russell, Workforce Development Officer, Museums Association



Call To Action

Recruitment Action Checklist







Based on our consultation and experience of running 16 recruitment campaigns with over 20 partner museums, Curating for Change makes the following recommendations to recruiting organisations:

-  Advertise entry level roles beyond the usual museum sector websites. This may include advertising on local jobs pages, but also through community and disability sector organisations.
-  Don't ask for qualifications unless they are absolutely necessary to the role. Qualifications should only be required if there is no other way for specific experience to be gained or evidenced.
-  Don't ask for abilities that are not absolutely necessary to the role, particularly if they can actually be met through Access to Work or other support. This includes the need for a driving licence and/or the ability to lift objects.
-  Provide recruitment materials in accessible formats. These might include Easy Read versions, or BSL interpretation and ensuring that website accessibility settings can be changed.
-  Offer a number of different ways to apply and avoid application forms. Think about how people with a range of communication methods might best demonstrate their skills (e.g. video, collage, etc.), while ensuring the application process is clear.
-  Don't close applications early, as disabled people may be balancing their fluctuating health needs or medical appointments when planning their time.



Call To Action

Recruitment Action Checklist

-  Allow flexibility for the role, where possible, and ensure this is expressed in the job advert.
-  Give information on the role and the organisation upfront. This helps D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people imagine themselves in the role and decide whether this is a good fit for them.
-  Provide candidates with interview questions one week in advance. This provides candidates with additional processing and answer formulation time to best express their relevant skills and experience.
-  If interviewing via Zoom or similar, post questions in the chat function. This will support information processing.
-  Offer flexibility during the interview process and ask candidates whether they have any access requirements. Remove access barriers by offering remote interviews as an option where at all possible. If the interview has to take place in person, ensure you have given clear instructions about where the interview will take place, who they will meet and if possible, have someone greet the candidate when they arrive to put them at ease.
-  Arrange Disability Equality Training for the organisation. Ensure all staff involved in the recruitment process understand those barriers that might exist and how to remove them, as well as the risk of unconscious bias.



With Thanks To...

Those who contributed to our sector forum **The Equity of Recruitment: A “Fair” Process**

Karl Mercer

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Our Museum Partners

National Railway Museum
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Museum of Liverpool
Black Country Living Museum
Ashmolean Museum
Pitt Rivers Museum
Bristol Culture – M Shed
Hastings Museum and Art Gallery
Thackray Museum of Medicine
Royal Historic Dockyard Chatham
Cumbria Museum Consortium
North Hertfordshire Museum
Nottingham Museums
Horniman Museum and Gardens
Imperial War Museums, Duxford
Museum of English Rural Life
Colchester + Ipswich Museums
Kettle's Yard
Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences

Curating for Change Team

Curating for Change is a project which has been devised by the Accentuate Programme. The Accentuate Programme has been running for 13 years, providing opportunities for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people to participate and lead in the Cultural Sector. The Accentuate programme is based within the organisation Screen South, and is one of Screen South's portfolio of major programmes.

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**Find out more about
Accentuate and
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<https://screensouth.org>**

**Find out more about
Curating for Change here:
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