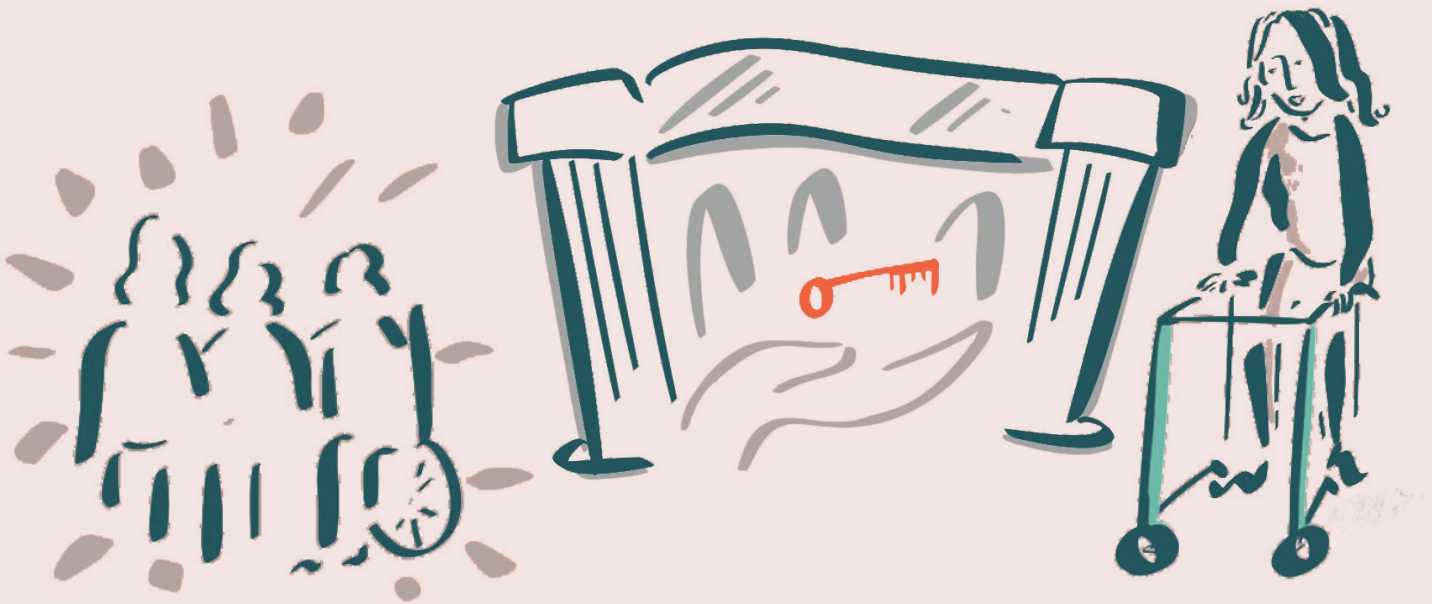




# Building up

**D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent museum professionals thriving in role.**



**Guidance, reflections and actions on the induction, retention and career development of D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse museum professionals.**

**Summer 2023**

**Authors  
Esther Fox and Emily Goff**



**Art Fund\_**

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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.



# Foreword

## Tony Heaton OBE

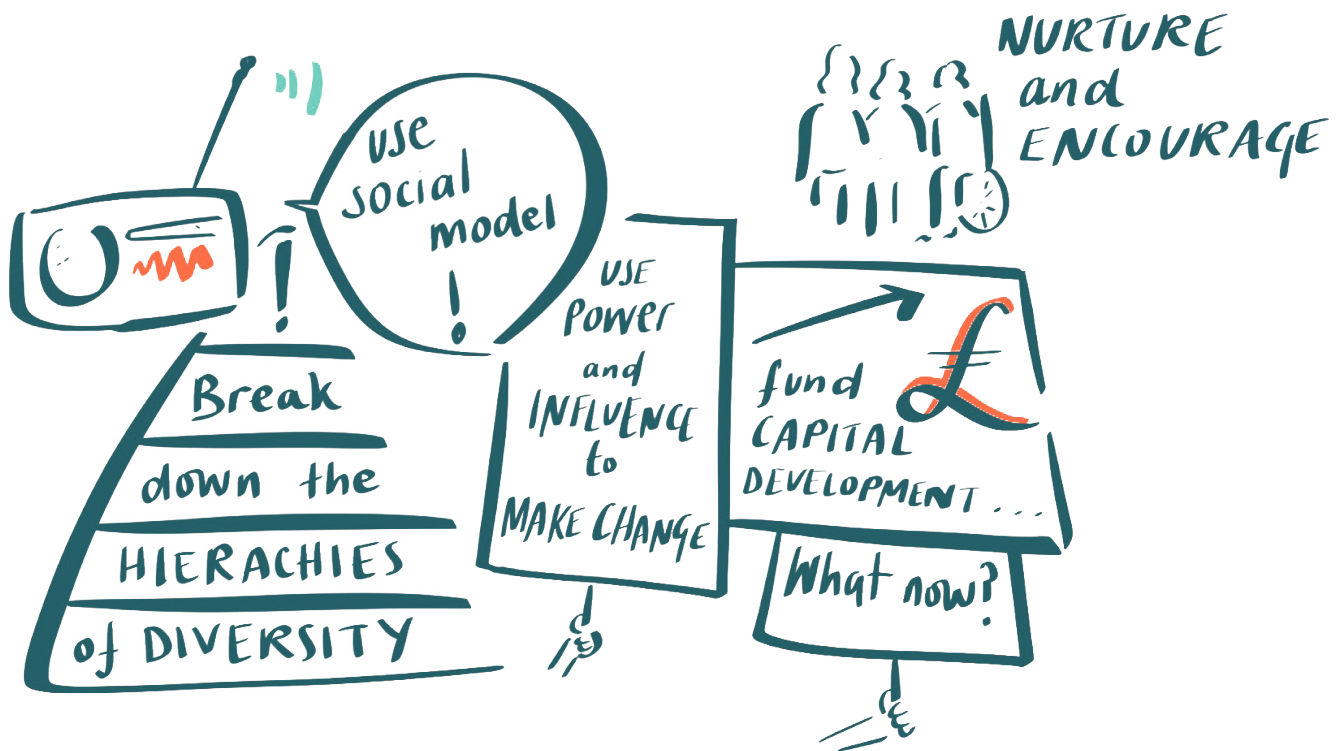
If you ask anyone in the cultural industries if it is important to have disabled people in the workforce, and represented in museums and galleries, I would imagine just about everybody would say yes. And that it's vital to bring new disabled people into the sector and to keep them because they are a rare resource. But what stops them, and what can we do to remove barriers and promote inclusion into our sector?

I think once you accept that there is no such thing as a typical mind or body, you can begin to see beyond the stereotypes and the norms that we are constantly fed by a dominant ableist mainstream media. Challenging ableism, in the way that we challenge other forms of discrimination, such as sexism and racism, is therefore essential.

We will not see more disabled people, particularly those active in our sector until we see inclusion properly supported and funded just like any other investment in the sector. Unless we have disabled people in places of power and decision making, then ableist group think will never be challenged.

It takes a lot of courage and self-belief to make potentially radical proposals as the only disabled voice in the room. It can be a lonely place when all your peers around that table are dismissing your assertions.





Sometimes you will need to change the way you do things. But embrace the change. Others will certainly benefit as a result.

Do remember that not all disabled people who work in the sector, want or should be asked about disability issues, particularly if it is not part of their role.

However, we do need to talk about disability and disabled people and if we don't talk nothing will get done.

When anybody talks about diversity, just see if disability is included when they preface what they think diversity is.

Disability is often left off the diversity list and there seems to me to be a hierarchy within the notion of diversity and disability. If mentioned at all it is almost always an afterthought. This needs to be challenged. How do we tackle the ableism that inherently see disability as a deficit? But instead sees disabled people as having talents that need nurturing in order for them to ultimately take on leadership roles? How do we also encourage disabled people to see the value they offer at all levels in organisations? Perhaps, only then will ableism really be tackled and we'll see a sea change in our cultural organisations.



# What is Curating for Change?

Curating for Change exists to create strong career pathways for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse curators, who are currently seriously under-represented in museums.

With funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Art Fund, we were able to create eight, 40-day Traineeships and eight, 18-month Fellowships, for aspiring museum professionals with lived experience of disability.

Our Trainees and Fellows have undertaken research of collections that have largely remained hidden or misunderstood and are producing exhibitions, events and blogs exploring disabled people's histories – while gaining skills for careers in the sector.

This Sector Action Plan focuses on the lessons learnt through the Curating for Change project in the induction, retention and career development of these 16 Fellows and Trainees with guidance and reflections from collaborators involved in two sector forums held in April and June 2023.



Curating for Change is being delivered through Screen South's Accentuate Programme, one of Screen South's major programmes. Accentuate designs and delivers landmark projects for disabled people to participate and lead within the cultural sector.



# Practical Steps

## Onboarding: Access Riders

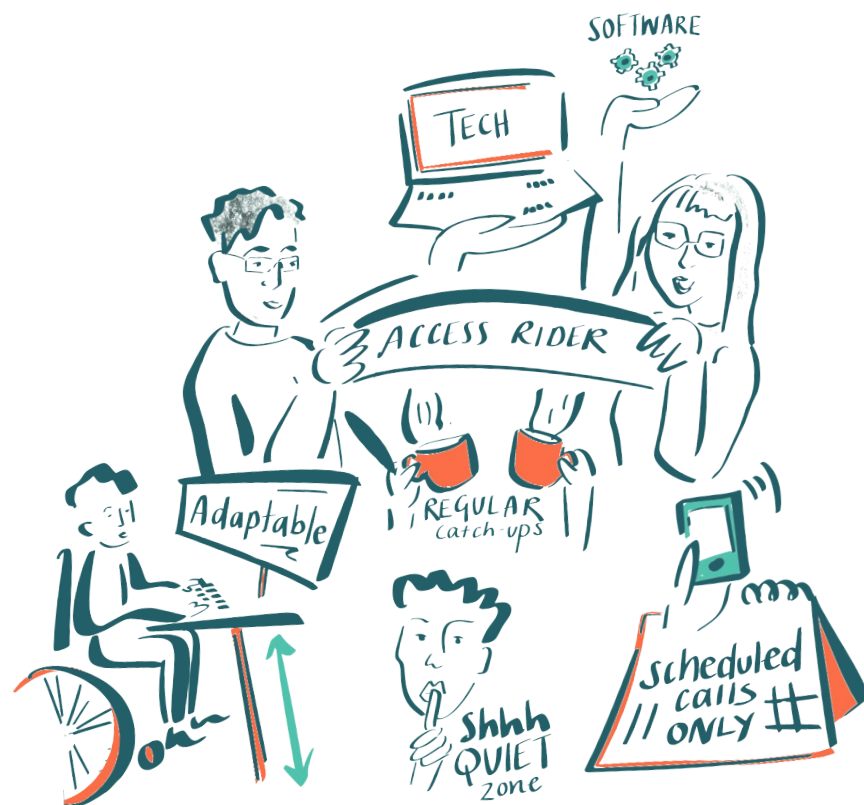
### What we did...

#### Access riders

One approach we used to ensure Fellows and Trainees access requirements were fully explored and met at the onboarding stage of employment was to complete an 'access rider'. An access rider is a document which explores adjustments to the working environment that can enable an individual to fully engage with their role. These can be physical changes to the working space or recommendations for communication methods preferred by the employee.

***"I found the access rider meeting and process to be very beneficial... because it allows you to put that conversation about access first and your needs first, and doesn't put the onus on you as an individual to have to navigate that conversation alone."***

Kyle Jordan, Curating for Change Fellow, Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers Museum



The table below gives an example of what could be included within an access rider. An access rider template to use within your own organisation is attached as Appendix A.

<b>IT equipment</b>	<b>Furniture and working space</b>	<b>Working arrangements, accommodation and travel</b>	<b>Communication</b>
Software: Dragon TextHelp  Headset  Laptop, light enough to carry and move. Requires a backpack style laptop bag.	Quiet working space required to use computer software.  Ergonomic chair with headrest.  Natural lighting.	Hybrid working arrangement – 2 days at the museum, 3 days working from home.  On site parking required.	Supplement meetings with written notes.  Prefers email correspondence.  No unscheduled telephone calls.

An access rider should not be a static document and should be regularly reviewed. Access requirements can be amended as an employee's needs change or if there is a change in their working environment.

For example, an employee might change office space or have a different commute to work, which may then mean they need additional or different support to fully participate.



## Access riders continued



You may have concerns about collecting personal information from your employee. It is important to remain mindful that you are asking for adjustments which will enable your employee to fully participate in the workplace, not information about personal medical conditions. Therefore, you will not be holding any sensitive information. It is always best practice to ensure your employee is involved in the decision-making process of how, with whom and when it is appropriate to share items from the access rider with others.

***"It has always been my decision [to share my personal experiences], for example, when I was receiving object handling training I disclosed that I have quite a few problems with spatial awareness...I can't perceive things which are behind me, if I can't see it it's essentially not there. So, I had to explain this as part of the training I was receiving, because we were working with [museum] objects."***

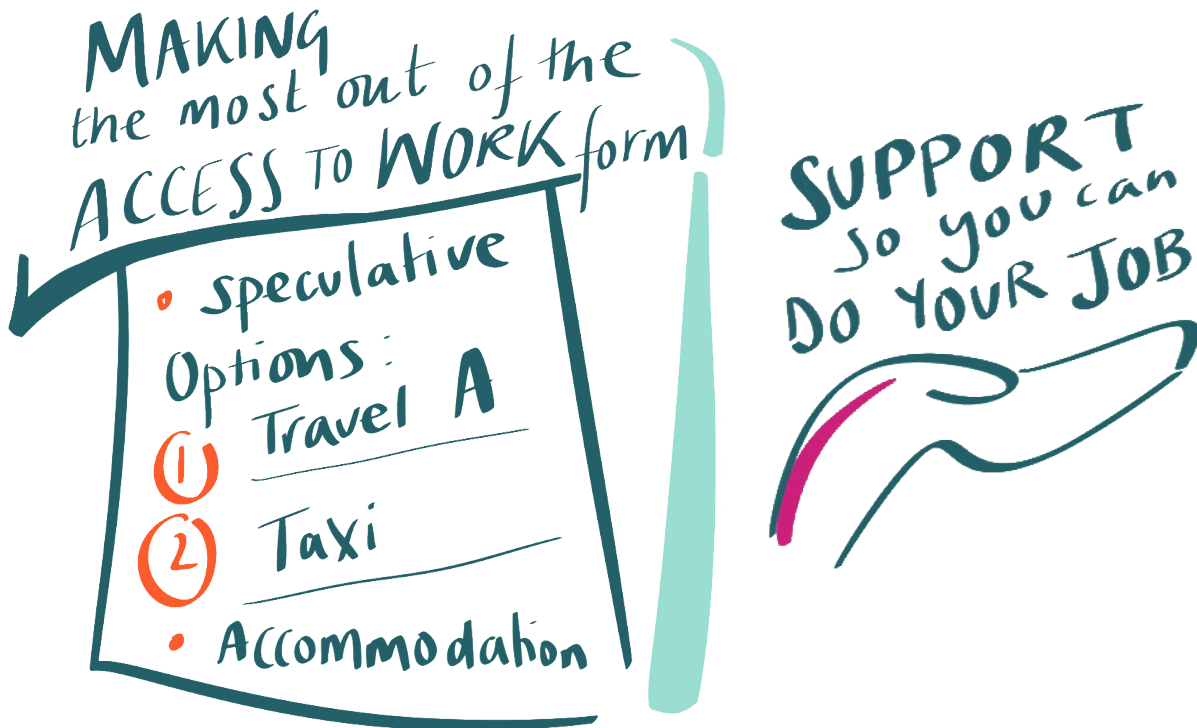
Iris Sirendi, Curating for Change Fellow, Museum of Liverpool





## Practical Steps

# Onboarding: Access to Work



Once you have completed an access rider with your new employee, there may be items which require additional funding to help meet needs. In this instance you could approach the Department of Work and Pensions, Access to Work for assistance.

Fellows employed through Curating for Change sought the following provision through Access to Work:

- Computer software
- Training opportunities for staff working directly with the employee – for example, Disability Equality Training.
- An administrative support worker.
- Installing automatic door openers.
- Contribution towards accommodation for working a distance from home.
- Accessible travel provision to get to work – for example, a taxi.



## Practical Steps

# Onboarding: Access to Work



Access to Work prefer liaising with the individual for whom the access provision is for, your employee. The first step is to complete an online assessment outlining their access requirements.

As an employer, it is important you set a start date and complete any contracts for employment as soon as you can. We then recommend contacting Access to Work up to one month before they start in role. With enough lead time a caseworker should be attributed to your employee and ensure any access provision is agreed before their first day.

Curating for Change also processed Access to Work claims for our 40 day paid traineeships. This was a useful exercise because trainees were then able to take their signed off resource onto their next role, so they have a better understanding of what provision they require in the workplace.

For more information about Access to Work, Disability Arts Online have produced a digital guide which can be accessed through their website: [disabilityarts.online](http://disabilityarts.online)



# Practical Steps Induction

The first few days in role can often be extremely overwhelming. You meet a lot of new people, you are getting used to the commute into the workplace and trying to understand the systems and conventions of your new office environment.



## What we did

Feedback from our Fellows and Trainees have highlighted these challenges, but also identified practical adjustments which worked well for them to navigate this time:

- Hybrid inductions – with some online meetings taken at home mixed with in person introductions on site.
- Short meetings of one hour maximum, with a scheduled break afterwards.
- Written notes prepared in advance where possible.
- Online pre-recorded onboarding and training sessions which can be completed at their own pace and at home.
- One to one induction sessions, as opposed to undertaking training as part of a larger group of people.

***“My job specific training, like records and image management and object handling, was very well done because it was done to my personal access rider and my needs.”***

Iris Sirendi, Curating for Change Fellow, Museum of Liverpool



## Practical Steps

# Training and Development for employees and line managers

D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse colleagues often have been actively excluded from the workforce, especially within the museums sector.

Disability Equality Training for Line Managers and host museums offered by Curating for Change ensured a reflective approach was taken to enabling Fellows and Trainees to succeed in role.

When looking to engage a training provider it is worthwhile remaining mindful to work with providers who have a lived experience of disability.



***“The museum also offered training which was outsourced to an external organisation which created these online workplace training modules...the downfall was that because it was so generalised the more “practical advice” that it gives applies very much to non-disabled people”***

Iris Sirendi, Curating for Change Fellow, Museum of Liverpool

### What we did

For D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse employees often confidence and self-esteem are low, and we found it beneficial to undertake Mental Health First Aid training and hold confidence, resilience and impostor syndrome training for the team.



# Practical Steps

## Mentoring and networks

Being the sole advocate for a change of practice within an organisation can be a difficult position to be placed in. Too often disabled museum professionals may be asked to consult on a range of accessibility programming across the organisation from the position of their lived experience. Within our sector forum we invited Tate to share their insights into running the DisAbility network, a network for peer support. They shared reflections of how the membership of the network increased as the culture of the organisation changed to welcome the lived experience of disabled employees.

***“Quite often you are a lone voice working, against other colleagues and barriers, trying to raise awareness around access support and sometimes it not always being acknowledged and recognised.”***

***“[The staff network] was a way of providing that peer sort of support for colleagues who maybe did feel isolated in some of the work they were doing and the departments.”***

Alison Jones, Programme Manager: Public and Community Learning, Tate Liverpool



### What we did

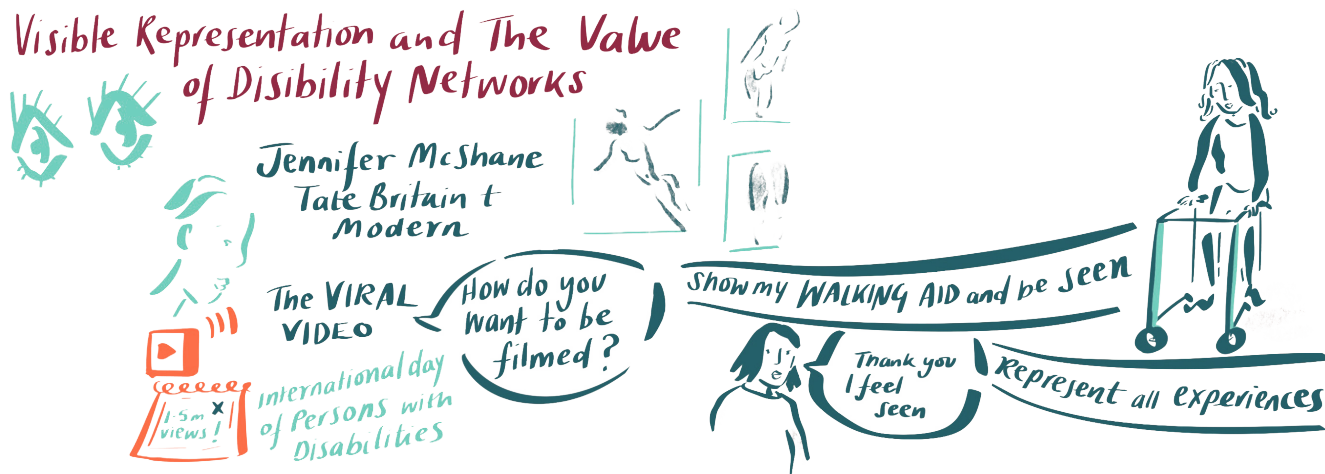
Our Curating for Change Fellows were each paired with a mentor who has significant experience within the museums sector, but also crucially the lived experience to fully relate to their position.

***“I thought it would be useful to come at it from different perspectives, different life experiences, and maybe I can get the perspective of somebody who has a completely different disability from me as well.”***

Amelia Silver, Curating for Change Fellow, Thackray Medical Museum



# Call to Action



Our toolkit, 'We Are Not All the Same', recommends equitable recruitment practice for the museum sector to follow. But how do you then retain, nurture and develop the valuable resource that is a D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse colleague in role?

***"Tate asked me: How do you want to be filmed? I use a walking aid around the galleries...it's something that is one of the great things that I use and also one of the things I'm very insecure about at the same time. My first reaction, even though I identify as a disabled woman was to be filmed sitting down in a chair. Because then you don't see my walker you just see me. But upon reflection, I thought it's***

We recognise the impact of ensuring disabled colleagues are visibly present and supported within your organisation. This should be in discussion with those individuals and based on mutual consent.

***not a realistic representation of myself as a disabled woman. I realised I had to be honest, and I wanted to do it for other disabled people because I realised then that the reason I have my own insecurities about showing the walker on such a public platform is because I don't see it a lot. We normalise what we see."***

Jennifer McShane,  
Editorial Content Producer, Tate



## KEEP the PERSONAL PRACTICAL



Without the appropriate workplace culture, training and guidance disabled colleagues can be regularly overlooked by non-disabled peers. It is often an isolating experience speaking up for your needs as a disabled museum professional, so mentoring opportunities and staff networks can support.

***“It is so important to see disabled colleagues in similar roles but also in positions of leadership. Seeing disabled leaders in the museum and culture sector will not only encourage others to feel a sense of belonging but will also help to transform the culture of organisations into more diverse and relevant spaces. But we will only see more disabled people in positions of leadership if we nurture and support disabled talent and enable people to progress and thrive in role”.***

Esther Fox, Head of Accentuate.





**T**rust  
**H**old responsibility  
**R**eview regularly  
**I**ntervene when necessary  
**V**oice concerns  
**E**nvironment

Michèle Taylor, Director for Change, Ramps on the Moon

*“There were a lot of colleagues who were super helpful, and then maybe some who were not so super helpful. But, I think probably people were confused by a visually impaired person who was working in the visual arts sector. But, of course, they didn’t know my background as a visual artist before I lost my sight. So, I had a lot of experience within that field.*”

*It was sort of isolating being the only disabled person...in the department. And there were probably other disabled people, but they probably did not disclose their disability or impairment but maybe that’s more about the environment they were in that they felt they couldn’t disclose that.”*

Alison Jones, Programme Manager: Public and Community Learning, Tate Liverpool





# Call to Action

## Induction checklist:

Based on our consultation and experience of onboarding 16 D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent individuals into museum roles at 18 partner museums, Curating for Change makes the following recommendations to organisations:

**Use an Access Rider to have a conversation about access requirements with your newly recruited member of staff as soon as possible.**

**Use the Access Rider to plan for their induction to the museum. Can you, for example, arrange online or short one-to-one introductory meetings with notes sent in advance?**

**Look beyond your organisational networks to connect with mentors, networks and other colleagues with lived experience.**

**Don't ask your colleague about their medical conditions – this will not help you provide the practical adjustments they require in the workplace. Ask them what they need.**

**Contact Access to Work for support in funding any adjustments to their working environment up to one month before your colleague starts in role.**

**When looking for training providers to deliver training for your team, work with a facilitator who has a lived experience of disability. They will offer more practical tools and advise for your employee.**



## Appendix: Access Rider template

### IT equipment

Action for employer:

Date actioned:

Ongoing review required?  
Yes/No

### Furniture and working space

Action for employer:

Date actioned:

Ongoing review required?  
Yes/No

### Working arrangements, accommodation and travel

Action for employer:

Date actioned:

Ongoing review required?  
Yes/No

### Communication

Action for employer:

Date actioned:

Ongoing review required?  
Yes/No

Action for employer:

Date actioned:

Ongoing review required?  
Yes/No

Action for employer:

Date actioned:

Ongoing review required?  
Yes/No

Action for employer:

Date actioned:

Ongoing review required?  
Yes/No

Action for employer:

Date actioned:

Ongoing review required?  
Yes/No

# With Thanks To...

Those who contributed to our sector forums, whose reflections are included within this Sector Action Plan:

**Re-framing induction processes for D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse staff, April 2023.**

**Supporting D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people to thrive in role, June 2023.**

**Amelia Silver**

Curating for Change Fellow,  
Thackray Museum of Medicine

**Iris Sirendi**

Curating for Change Fellow,  
National Museums Liverpool

**Kyle Jordan**

Curating for Change Fellow,  
Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers Museums

**Jessica Starns**

Freelance Cultural Consultant

**Tony Heaton OBE**

Sculptor

**Michèle Taylor**

Director for Change, Ramps on the Moon

**Alison Jones**

Programme Manager: Public and  
Community Learning, Tate Liverpool

**Yasmin Khan**

Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Tate

**Jennifer McShane**

Editorial Content Producer, Tate

**Peter Blach**

Klip Films

**Esther Springett**

Illustrations

**BSL interpretation for April 2023 and  
June 2023 sector forums provided by:**

Marcel Hirshman

Lynne Bateman

Liana Lloyd

Michelle Wood



# With Thanks To...

## **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.

### **Esther Fox**

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### **Cait Boyt**

Marketing and Social Media Officer, Screen South



# With Thanks To...

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Art Fund, who have supported the sector forum and support our Museums Strategic Disability Network.

Arts Council England, who support the Screen South team to deliver Curating for Change.

## Our Museum Partners

National Railway Museum  
(part of the Science Museum Group)

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

The 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



Find out more about  
Accentuate and  
Screen South here:  
<https://screensouth.org>

Find out more about  
Curating for Change here:  
<https://curatingforchange.org>

Follow us on Twitter  
[@Curating4Change](https://twitter.com/Curating4Change)

Designed by  
Patrick Fry

Illustrated by  
Esther Springett



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